

Interview with Orville Moderow

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Central Minnesota Historical Oral History Collection

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Interviewed by David Overy

Overy ([00:00:00](#)):

You were born in North Dakota?

Moderow ([00:00:02](#)):

North Dakota, and I was drafted. I took all the cadet tests and passed the written and everything and I flunked [inaudible 00:00:11], so then I was drafted. And I was in the Air Force, the payroll. I had to type. And so I went through basic in Selfridge Field.

Overy ([00:00:21](#)):

Where is that?

Moderow ([00:00:22](#)):

That's up in Michigan. And from there, I was sent down to Dyersburg, Tennessee and I was a payroll clerk. I was typing and whatnot, and I still wanted to fly. And I had a very congenial CO, and I said, "Can I go down and take another physical?" And then I went to Memphis. He let me go for a day off, and I went down and I passed the physical. So I got into cadets, and from there, I was in a Southeast command. Most of the people from this area lived down in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas. Well, because I didn't get in until I got down there, I was in Southeast command. And I went from there to Nashville, flew to Nashville to preflight in Montgomery, and our group, 44A, actually was made up of most people who are already in the service. See, I

had already six, eight months in the service and many of [inaudible 00:01:21] come back from overseas. But we were the old brunch, if you want to call it. We were not just out of college, and so many of them are held in college to wait til they have room for them. Well, we didn't have that. So then in Nashville, we went through pre-flight, and from preflight, I went down to Georgia. Douglas, Georgia, and flew to primary train with a BT13, and from there, I went to Macon, Georgia, and I flew the BT-- [inaudible 00:01:50] The PT17. And that was at Macon, we flew the BT, which is a Basic Trainer 13, and then from there, we went over to [inaudible 00:02:02] Georgia and flew the AT6, which is the Advanced Trainer. And then from there, we spent a few hours down in Tifton, Georgia. There, they had some more road weary P40s and we flew those. We all thanked the heaven or the good Lord that we got down each time, because they were just very, very bad condition, but that's the situation. And from there, I was sent all the way to Richmond, Virginia to RTU, as we call it. We got into P47s. That is one of the planes they were flying during the war that wasn't obsolete.

Overy (00:02:45):

Tell me a little bit about what your training was like.

Moderow (00:02:48):

Well, let me put it this way. As far as the pilot training, it was strict. And everybody in it, first thing they wanted to fly or they wouldn't be there. And they kept a heavy cloud over your head, and if you didn't act up and study and do this and this and this, you'd be washed out. And a good amount of them were washed out. Either, and many times, not their fault, they couldn't get flight, they'd get sick, or didn't have the grades in school or whatever. In other words, they were washed out, and this is the worst thing that could happen to a cadet, I mean to be washed out. Well, anyway, but in training, I had no complaints. They were strict, we marched and you were in good

physical condition and I might mention this, and this is a sideline, I read General Jaeger's book, and it makes me very unhappy when you read a book like that, where all they were doing is partying and this kind of thing. This is not the way it was in the normal. Now, he may have done that. I'm not saying that, but what made everyone else look bad is the way he acted up, and I think he should be admonished for it, but anyway. But all through training, we had good food, good training. We had rules and you abided by them, if you didn't, you paid the price. I had no fight with that at all on my end. Like I say, when you were getting ready to go overseas, when we were in Richmond, we went down to Norfolk. We had gunnery practice over the ocean. In other words, you would follow a target and you'd have to pull a target now and then and get shot at, but nevertheless, that is the training down there.

Overy ([00:04:51](#)):

Were there quite a few accidents in training?

Moderow ([00:04:53](#)):

Let me put it this way, yes. Now, in the training up until you graduated and became an officer, they were minor accidents. I can remember my first flight in a P47, we had a single engine, but we were catching up to the runway, and here comes one in with a dead stick, and clipping off the pine trees, and of course, this was a big airplane, let me tell you. A big one for a fighter. He just cut the pine trees right off and he just went on skidding and it really made you think a little bit. Here you're taking off for the first time. In fact, they did ground them for a little while because we had a problem with gasoline. In fact, we had a number of accidents, not fatalities, but accidents, where they'd get up there and flying around, all of a sudden the engine would cut out. And so they grounded them. They found out they were using too low a octane gas rate. They were using, I'm going to say 87, it should have been 94 or whatever, but anyway, I think the map

in the States, I can't say of any great amount of casualties. We had accidents, but not casualties. But one thing, we're going on from Richmond and we're ready to go overseas, and we'd get put on a list. They normally had 30 on the list, but then you have four alternates. Well, my grandmother passed away and my mother was very ill, so I got emergency leave so I was taken out of this list and put on the bottom as an alternate. I had all my flight suits for England and everything ready to go, all packed. I came back, no one got sick, so that group went overseas to England. I had to turn it all back in and get khakis, and we went to South Pacific. I had some of my dear buddies over there. I can think of one I went all through school with. He had 100 missions in Italy, and they needed pilots yet, and so he signed up for 10 more, and 108th, he got it. Dear friend of mine. But anyway, this is what you were trained to-- Okay. So we went overseas. They flew us over.

Overy ([00:07:10](#)):

This was about when [inaudible 00:07:12].

Moderow ([00:07:15](#)):

This was in '44. In June of '44.

Overy ([00:07:16](#)):

I see, and you were drafted in?

Moderow ([00:07:18](#)):

In '42.

Overy ([00:07:19](#)):

In '42.

Moderow ([00:07:20](#)):

This was June of '44. I graduated in January of '44, then we went on to RTU and the P47s and the P40s and so forth. Going over, being flight officers, you're always on the bottom of the list.

Overy ([00:07:36](#)):

Excuse me. I've never heard this, flight--

Moderow ([00:07:36](#)):

Flight officer?

Overy ([00:07:40](#)):

Flight officer, yeah.

Moderow ([00:07:44](#)):

Okay.

Overy ([00:07:45](#)):

What do you have a chevron or stripe?

Moderow ([00:07:45](#)):

No. You've seen a warrant officer.

Overy ([00:07:46](#)):

Warrant officer? Yes, yes.

Moderow ([00:07:47](#)):

Okay. Ours are identical to that except ours are green. Theirs is kind of orange or red.

Overy ([00:07:53](#)):

And you were considered kind of an officer?

Moderow ([00:07:56](#)):

Actually, we were-- What would be the word for it? We were considered an officer to other people, but in rank, we were below an officer, and there's a word for it, that you were a special person. We could fly, but we didn't have officer's rank.

Overy ([00:08:20](#)):

Did you have some of the privileges? [crosstalk 00:08:21]

Moderow ([00:08:21](#)):

Oh, yeah. We'd go to officer's clubs and all that, no problem other than the fact that when you go overseas, you got an extra 5% pay, like an enlisted man or an officer that filed, I think those men got 10 for overseas. And then when they promoted you, they couldn't lower pay so we got more money than they did. So that's some of the pluses. Going overseas, like I say, we were on the bottom of the list as you'll notice there. So all of them went over from Crisco, flew over. We had to wait, there wasn't enough room on the one plane, so we flew over with a group of large earth moving tires, the four of us. But anyway, we got over to Port Moresby, is where we landed. We got to what we call repo depot and replacement depot. We sat there for, I want to say two, three weeks, and then it got to the point where they were going to start this new squadron. And then we were picked, which I was told we were handpicked, but I think it's a little amiss that they just took a list, because all of them that were on there plus some more went into that. And we started our squadron at Nadzab, which is from Port Moresby, it's over the hills to Nadzab, which is an old Japanese base. And there is where we formed the squadron, done some flight training as far as squadron flights and echelon. All the different types of flying. And one thing about our CO, after we got our planes, and I might mention this, if you look at the record, we never had new planes. In other words, the P47s, later they had a bubble canopy. We had what we called the old

Razorback. Ours were I think the Ds. Cs or Ds, and we never did get new P47s. We had patch upon patch. But anyway, our CO, we had our training and we were about to move up to Noemfoor, which is another island, because we couldn't fly very far, our fuel capacity, and we followed right behind the frontline. And one day, he said, "Okay, we're ready to move. Now, each one of you take a plane up." And he'd take the four of us up, and there were 16. We normally had 16 plane take a flight up. He said, "I'll see you back here in a half hour. If you don't come back, we're not going to look for you. And you'll move out and you can find out what that plane does. You can do anything you want to with that plane, but we're not looking for you." And, of course, some boys came back with limbs in the bottom of their plane and they done everything that they weren't supposed to do prior to that. In others, but you found out what your plane would do. In other words, it gave you the opportunity of pushing it to a limit.

Overy ([00:11:10](#)):

And you'd flown a 47 before? [crosstalk 00:11:13]

Moderow ([00:11:13](#)):

Oh, yes. We had training in the States, and now we're overseas with these 47s. It wasn't a new plane to us, but we never were restrictive in doing this and restrictive in doing that. You never buzzed, if you were doing the right thing. So everybody came back, but they all came back some of them a little green when they came back, because they scared the life out of themselves. So then we moved up to Noemfoor, which was kind of a staging ground, getting ready for going into Leyte, which was in the Philippines. And while we were there, we had our first bombing by Japanese, and when we landed, it's a coral island, coral ground just like concrete. And they said, "We want everybody to dig fossils outside of your camp." Well, we started digging where we could. The next morning after the air raid, we all had fossils. It was a staging ground there also,

where the B24s were going to [inaudible 00:12:20], which is a long ways, and they couldn't have any fighters because fighters didn't have the fuel capacity to go there, and I can remember one night, coming in. It was cloudy. I think every one of them were shooting red flares, landing on passing strips, any place they could land. It was really a bad raid they had, but that was our first touch, you might say, of what could happen. And then going up to the Philippines, I didn't get to fly up there. Our squadron went up, but see, we had some extra pilots. We had about four extra ones, so we were carted up with a C47 on the way, and on the way in, now this was bad. On the way in, one of our boys was shot down by a P38 pilot. See, we were the first single engine plane coming into the Philippines, and a P47 with a big radial engine, and your zeros have radial engines. If you get far enough away, the big one looks small. Well, anyway, and this wasn't found out. In other words, we counted noses when they landed, and Mack wasn't there, and nobody-- Because we were all green except for flight leaders. You're scared of death and all that kind of stuff, so we didn't know really what happened until about three weeks later, another pilot that was down with the guerrillas down there, he saw what happened, and he reported that a P38 or a P47 down. At that time, the man who shot him down, it was an error. Human error. He was ranking right with Bong at the time. In other words, he was-- I'm trying to think of his name right offhand, but I can't. But he admitted then that he did it, and about two weeks later, he was shot. And I'm trying to think of his name, but he had 30 some missions credit and so forth. So when we landed at Leyte, there was only one strip. And we fighters were on it, and transports could land there right out on the sandbar. So we were right behind, in fact, right after we landed, a couple times when we took off, people were shooting at us on takeoff. I mean, that's how close it is.

Overy ([00:14:45](#)):

When the jungle is--

Moderow ([00:14:46](#)):

Right from there. And one time, they got word through intelligence that they were going to make a raid. They weren't kamikaze then yet, but they were doing the same thing, and they setup, but they didn't have any aircraft guns on the ground. So they setup a couple mortars on each end of the runway. If we were going to crash land a plane, we were going to get them before they got there. But anyway, we flew a lot of missions out of there, and the thing that I enjoyed about my time overseas, we weren't the glory boys. In other words, we had some mission where we escorted 24s, like over tar fields and so forth, but we were out looking for nips. We worked with the Army, and that made us feel-- It made me feel that we'd done a lot of ground support, about 100 or more missions or more are ground support. Dive bombing, napalm, strafing. So we'd take off and you have four channels. You'd take off, and then you had the first channel, the [inaudible 00:15:56] was talking to you, telling you about take off. As soon as you got off, you switched to another channel, and then they'd give you your mission. We knew about where we were going, but they'd give your mission unless it were to change, and then the Army would take over, and they would call in and we would do the job for them and land. so I got, I think, one mission, 50 minutes. Just take off, drop, and come back. Well, anyway. As you know, the Army and the Air Force normally didn't get along that well, but our squadron, not our group now, but our squadron which was only 16 or 18 planes, we got a citation from the Army general there, because we worked so close with them. That made you feel good. You know what I mean? As soon as we'd get done with our mission, dive bombing, the guys would call in, "Come on, give us a couple slow rolls." And we worked with them. And later on, all that is in Leyte. And we stayed there

until we got up to Subic Bay, was our next base. In other words, it was not at Subic Bay itself, but I'm trying to think of the name of it. But it's right north of Subic Bay, it was a ground strip there. By the way, going back to being at Leyte, and turning our channels. This friend of mine, Vince [inaudible 00:17:25], I was flying at his wing, and a P47 always had a-- It's got a turbo supercharger on its tail. And sometimes, they would malfunction, they'd blow out black smoke and whenever that happened, you always flew in twos. You never flew alone, you flew in twos. So I called Vince, his was smoking. I said, "We better go and land." So we stayed on that channel, and when they all got off, we were going to land, I said, "Well, it disappeared." He said, "What was catching?" So we switched to the other channel, and we were supposed to go up to northwest corner of Leyte. That's where we were going to go up there, and they heard there was some activity up there, just to look around. Well, in the interim, when switching channels, the squadron was sent over to Ormoc to the west side, the Army needed some help over there. We didn't know that. So we flew up to, and I'm trying to think of north or in Leyte. And we got about 12,000 feet and, "Oh, there they are." There's 12 planes flying over here. So well, let's join them. We were about 13,000 feet, and so we started slipping up on them and there's the Japs. Well, they had bombs. They were coming over to bomb our-- Well, Vince pulled behind the one and put some in. And then he had more speed and he peeled off and I came into the second one, so forth. In the interim, they dropped their bombs and the Jap can climb faster than we could, because we had a heavy plane. So we what we call split S, get out of there. Now there was 12 to two. But in doing such, we were over a cloud cover. We came right across the Japanese Russian Sea Navy, but there was some destroyers, transports, and one out there unloading troops. We came—Well, practically hit their mast. So we were moving. And we got shot up a little bit too.

So we stayed under the cloud cover and followed the river back to [inaudible 00:19:39], and on the way back, I said, "Vince, you got one. You got a hit." He said, "No, I didn't hit." He thought it was, "Are you hit?" So actually, we never got credit for even a probably, either one of us, but so be it. Over there, the only one that had film in their camera were the CO's. We didn't have film. They used barrels to lift the planes up and sat them on. We didn't have all the things under the palm tree, but anyway. We came back, and we had flown that morning, I believe on that day, and I'd look it up, I think we had flown three or four missions that morning. That's how busy we were. So they wouldn't let Vince and I go back up there, because they knew there was going to be a lot of activity. Our squadron, the ones that didn't fly that morning or at least Vince and I had flown three missions, they went up there and they got 11 hits. My little buddy, he got two and almost got shot down, but nevertheless it was a real battle.

Overy (00:20:46):

These Zeros?

Moderow (00:20:47):

Zeros, yeah. Anyway, pertaining to that, you remember I mentioned about not having any medals and not getting anything, we were too busy fighting the war. After the war, at one of our reunions, where Vince passed away already, his wife came in the reunion. She said, "Oh, it's either you and Vince." They sent her, and I never received this so I can't use it, but they sent her orders that he got the DFC because they started writing up some of these missions, because the ETO coming over with all these medals. They thought they would pick out some of these guys that had some time. And so we both got the DFC for that mission. They rolled it up after time, but anyway. From there, we went up to Subic Bay and at that time, we changed to P51s. Now, the [inaudible 00:21:46] and so then we got new 51s, brand new shiny ones. Of course, now

remember, we were flying P47s or 2200 horsepower or radial engine. I think it's eight ton or something like that weight. Now a 51s like a feather. You got a radial engine and 1,500 or 1,200 horsepower or whatever.

Overy ([00:22:05](#)):

Let me ask you, excuse me a second. I'm curious about your feelings about the 47. Did you trust it? Did you like the plane? Did you have confidence in it?

Moderow ([00:22:21](#)):

I'm just going to allude to it. You have that many missions in a plane that's brought you back, you were very self-confident. You know it's going to bring you, but shoot it up, I can remember a few times when we were shot up, it always brought us back. So now we get 51s, that's an in line engine. One little [inaudible 00:22:39] bullet could bring it down. You hit the coolant and within 30 seconds you were out. So after we got the 51s, you had one eye on the coolant and one looking for something else, because it was a wonderful plane but you didn't trust it like you did the old 47s.

Overy ([00:23:02](#)):

What were the limitations of the 47 that you were aware of in combat or in--

Moderow ([00:23:02](#)):

What do you mean the limitations?

Overy ([00:23:06](#)):

What were things that didn't [inaudible 00:23:08]

Moderow ([00:23:12](#)):

Well, the one thing about it, with that being a plane, you could die, no one could catch you or you pointed the nose down. No one could catch you. I don't care [inaudible 00:23:22]. But in

climbing, you normally would fly a little higher. It's a high altitude plane, but we never got over 10,000 feet, or 15 at the most. Over there, we didn't have to. In Europe, we were flying 30,000. So you always were high enough so you could dive at them, and then regain your altitude, or split ass and get out of there. Where on a 51, now we've got to pickup, you got to go, but you couldn't dive as fast because you didn't have the power. You see what I mean?

Overy ([00:23:56](#)):

Was the 47 pretty responsive to your controls?

Moderow ([00:23:59](#)):

Oh, yes. Very. In fact, that's the one thing about especially in landing. I'll get into that. Well, P47, anybody could fly it. You'd land it, let it bounce once, and you straighten up. You got a big tail back there and everything, that's fine. For a 51, until you've got out of the cockpit, you aren't done flying it, because it was like a feather. You'd blow wind and do this to it. So you had a different feel for it. We were, or I was, and most of the fellows, were fortunate. We had, in advance training, an AT6, which was almost by North American, which made the B51. So the reaction was very similar. Small tail and you had very little control at slow speeds. So we already had a little background on it, but nevertheless, that was the difference in the thing. How would you put it? If the people say, "Oh, the 51 had a beautiful--" It was. Everything was right, I enjoyed it, I am happy I flew it, I flew the airplanes I wanted to fly, I didn't want to fly a P38, but you still had the love for the 47. Even with the old one, the old planes. It still brought us back. So now, when we got to Subic Bay or north of Subic Bay, we changed over from-- By the way, we went to-- When we had leave down in Sydney after-- Well, we all had leave, but combat leave, whatever you want to call it, for 10 days. Went down to Sydney, came back, and then we had a transition into 51s. So we flew our 47s down to [inaudible 00:25:45], which is where they put the

51s together. So we flew down there, we were going through one of the worst storms I ever went through. We were on alert, our IFF on but we all got there. In fact, when we got to Morotai, my friend and I, we had to layover a day. My MAGs had to be checked out, and they took the MAG cover off and I had a cup of water, and this is supposed to be dry. That's how much the typhoon we went through in a 47. But anyway, we got there. When we got there, they had the 51s with two wing tanks, full gas, which was stupid. You read the tech orders on it and they said, "Okay, take it up for 15 minutes, come in tomorrow, we're leaving." We didn't have any training whatsoever. I mean, you could read a book, but reading a book is not training. And one of our boys didn't make it. Matter of fact, he lived, but he never flew again. See, he didn't know how these planes landed. No one knew, but this was different. And with two full wing tanks along with-- And they just ground out, they had a heel, and they just leveled it off in the middle, and of course, they have the heel on each side. And he came in for a landing, and he wasn't doing it right, and so he gave up the gun and the engine coughed once, and then when it did catch, and he cartwheeled down the road. But anyway, he's alive, and he's been to one of our reunions since then.

Overy ([00:27:16](#)):

Was he pretty badly broken up?

Moderow ([00:27:19](#)):

Well, he was. And then first the war was kind of winding down. I suppose he was in the hospital for at least a year, and the war was over. But then we went back, and we had our 51s, and then when we were still working with the Army. Like when MacArthur landed coming back to-- Okay, our squadron covered that. And no one dare fly around there when MacArthur was walking around the water. I'll tell you, it was a big thing.

Then we took Manila, of course. We went on up all through the Philippines. Oh, there's a lot of funny things that happened. We were moved from Lingayen Gulf, which is north of Subic Bay, over to Clark Field, because it got muddy and on takeoff there, we had three squadrons there then, and it was so muddy when we took off, the last fellow took the control tower out. You'd point your plane this way, and it had enough twerk that it dragged you this way and he just took the control towers. A bunch of wood, that is. A couple funny things that happened. We lost a number of boys over there to ground fire because we were doing a lot of strafing, and we were at Ipo Dam, which is north of Manila, which furnished water for Manila. The Japs had both ends of it covered, and they wanted us to take that out. They had the guard posts and whatever. So we go up and one of our friends, Mick, his radio went out and he didn't want to miss the mission so he said, "I'll just follow the rest of them." Well, after we were in the air, they gave us some more instruction. "Do not hit the dam." In other words, strafe the ends and all that but the dam was to be preserved. He didn't hear that. He peeled off, grabs his bomb and here was the dam, and one bomb on each side. Didn't hurt the dam at all, but he almost got court marshaled over that. But anyway, that's the way it went. Then we moved up from there, up to Ie Shima, which is right off of Okinawa, where Ernie Pyle was killed. It's a little island, but it was too small to have bombers land on it, but they made fighter strips. They made three fighter strips on it. And then we flew missions over Japan. In fact, I can remember when the atom bomb was dropped. We had intelligence lieutenant call us all in and made a big red circle. No one, no one flies in this area now. Well, anyway, that's just about like saying, "Here's an apple, but nobody eats it." Well, anyway, I know we were up there and I didn't see the bomb or anything, but we flew over it when we weren't supposed to. I mean, at 25, 30,000 feet to look it over, and at that stage of the game, see, the war was almost done, and I was a flight leader and I was just showing the boys

where to fly and what to do and whatnot. I know just before the war ended, Okinawa, which was a big bomber base and whatnot, bigger base. You know how they have taxi ways and [inaudible 00:30:45] They were jammed with 24s, 25s, 26s. You couldn't land or you couldn't taxi because they were head to nose. That's how close they were to ready to jump into Japan, and then of course, the war ended, which was good for our boys and really good for everybody. I mean, it's awful to say people were killed and it was terrible and all that, but the lives saved were how many times we don't know. Of course, we were starting to get a lot of people, or we already had them from the ETO. They were bringing boys over that didn't have enough missions or they were staying in and whatnot, and they brought in-- Again, introducing a new plane, a A26, which is like a B26, only it's faster, bigger engine, single tail. And we were flying around one day with my recruits, if you want to call the new boy. I said, "Well, let's just make a pass at them." Well, the 51 was pretty fast at the time, about as fast as you had. We had to open it up at full throttle to catch them, that's how fast the A26 was. It was just a fine airplane. it was an attack bomber too. But I never did land in Japan. We were sent, in fact-- One of our last missions over, they were getting some jet plane factory over there. In other words, they were not operational but we were up there to dive bomb it. To get there, we'd take one wing tank and one bomb to get the mileage. We got shot up pretty bad. In fact, I had a wheels up landing with another fellow bailed out and so forth. That afternoon, and I'm not going to name any names on this, but that afternoon, there was another flight up there. And this one gentleman, who was in our squadron, he was a fine gentleman but he was a boxer and just a very athletic type person, but he saw what happened to our boys so he said that he had a headache. The CO knew. Not the CO, but the flight sergeant knew and everything. So Mick and I were supposed to fly ahead. I said, "We're not going to fly for so-and-so. We're ready to go home, we got our missions in, we're just putting in time."

Well, anyway, we were refusing to fly. Which is not the thing to do. So he was going to court martial us, but all of the old boys, who were in the squadron when it started, they went up to the group CO and said, "Now, wait a minute. You can't call it yellow with 158 missions." Well, anyway, we went and we flew, and flew the mission. But then he transferred Mick and I over to 5th Air Force to keep us from going home. We got over there, they said, "We don't need you, go back to your squadron." So we were delayed about a week in getting down to Manila, but that's some of the bad side, but I guess when you get that many people, and our CO at that time, I'm not going to mention names again, but he had-- Well, during World War II, we weren't all integrated anymore yet. The blacks and the whites. And he was at Tuscaloosa running the group or training base there for black pilots. And of course, when he said jump, they already were six inches in the air, and when he came over to us, he wanted us to salute and all, and we were in fighter planes. Of course, our ground crews, they were our friends. They were our buddies, they kept us going. We didn't salute. It was hi, whatever, and whatnot. I was called Little Mole. I didn't even know my name, mine was Mole. But anyway, he came over and he wanted them to salute and you got on the plane and ride out, and we just wouldn't put up with that. So he wasn't very popular. Well, anyway, that's another thing. In other groups, in other squadrons it might have been different, but ours, when you went to chow, unless you were on the ready room and ready to fly, you got in line right with the mister man, and I like it that way. In other words, no, we were all into doing the same thing to get the job done. I know when I came back on the ship, they had a white line and they had officers come through, we never heard of those kind of things where we were. We were in the mud with the rest of them. But in fact on Ie Shima, I've got pictures some place, not here. Where the Japanese that flew to Manila to write the initial treaty, they landed at Ie Shima with three Bettys. They're painted white with the red crosses on. They

landed and then they were put into our planes and flown to Manila, and signed a preliminary peace treaty, then came back. Well, when they landed there, the airmen wouldn't get out of the plane. They thought we were going to shoot at them. They just were scared to death, but they finally got out, and then when they tried to tow the plane, their planes-- See, ours, we could tow them. They had brakes that even when the plane wasn't running because we didn't want to run them, theirs didn't and we got one mired down deep in the mud because we couldn't stop it, but anyway. The war ended, we went down to Manila and came back by boat. I stayed in the reserve when I came back and when I was in school at Grand Forks, Korean War came along and out of 15 of our squadron up there, this is reserve squadron, at least six of them were called. And I had just bought our house, my wife, I said, "Well, hon, looks like I'll be going." Because the P51s, they were still using them. All they had to do was put me on and give me a few hours training, and I never was called. I did go down to Minneapolis. They had P51s down there in the National Guard. No, the Air Reserve down there. I went down. I flew an AT6, which is the training plane that I had for a few hours down there, then I thought I'd get back in the 51, because I enjoyed it. I landed that AT6 ready to get into a 51 for a little flight, and CO came out and said, "Where do you live?" See, I was going to university in North Dakota at the time. And my dad had a farm in Minnesota, so I gave that address thinking that Minnesota and Minnesota area. Well, he said, "That's too far. You have to be within two hours of the base here." So I never did get into a 51 again.

Overy ([00:37:59](#)):

Were you pretty much ready to go again?

Moderow ([00:38:02](#)):

Here's the thing. We were still young. When I say ready to go, I'm the type of person and I'm going to say 99% of the people that were in the reserve, there were some that weren't, as you remember, but if you signed up for, that's it. In other words, they need you, you go. And that's the way I felt about it, and I was very irate when some of these fellows that were in the National Guard or whatever, and didn't want to go, but they wanted to get the money. Well, we never got paid a penny under reserves. And the reserves, we were in with inactive reserve. Not a dime, not a thing, but we could deduct-- We had to change uniform from the pinks to the blues, we can deduct it in our income tax, but that is all of it. So when you say were you ready to go, I had a little boy at the time. I wasn't as anxious to get on the mission, but I would go, yes.

Overy ([00:38:58](#)):

Why? Out of sense of simple duty?

Moderow ([00:39:00](#)):

Right, right. In other words, you signed up for it, and of course now that I look back at it, I'm happy that I stayed in the reserves. That's my mad money now. It's not that much, but I really think the Air Force was in error, our reserve unit in town here especially, we have [inaudible 00:39:27], George McDowell. I can just name people who have potential beyond words, and they didn't use that potential. They just went to meetings where they couldn't use it. But that's all behind us now.

Overy ([00:39:43](#)):

You were talking about not-- What were the rules about not going on a mission?

Moderow ([00:39:53](#)):

Well, first thing, if you were ill, you didn't have to go. If you had a head cold, and you're going up-- That's a different volume. But we had doctor, Sir what do you call him? Flight--

Overy ([00:40:09](#)):

Flight sergeant?

Moderow ([00:40:11](#)):

Flight sergeant, in our group that he was not only that, he was a psychologist too. He knew when you didn't. So you very seldom heard that, but there was another instance, another gentleman, we were on a mission and we had a bad mission earlier that morning and we were on a second one.

Overy ([00:40:29](#)):

Catching ground fire and stuff.

Moderow ([00:40:31](#)):

See, when you'd go down to dive bomb, they were ready for you. And they would just set up a bunch of flack and you'd fly through it. Well, anyway, this one gentleman who was on this mission, about halfway there he said, "My brakes are out." Can you imagine? Your brakes are out, you're already in air, you're only going to land once. And he just peeled off. He didn't get permission. Another gentleman, they always went in twos that I mentioned, the other gentleman went with him home, and he got shot up badly on the way home. The other gentleman, he was put on duty to haul us there to the flight line for about a month then he got so dusty that they had to take him off of that. But that's the only two incidents that I can say. Well, what can you say? Maybe they were different makeup than you and I. Maybe things bothered them more. I don't know. When you look at it, you think it's terrible, but maybe there's more to it. But 99 out of 100,

when they said go, you went and you didn't do it out of following orders. I would say pride and whatnot.

Overy ([00:41:50](#)):

And what your buddies would think.

Moderow ([00:41:51](#)):

That's exactly right. There was enough peer pressure there too.

Overy ([00:41:54](#)):

I want to make sure that we don't run out of tape here.

Moderow ([00:42:06](#)):

Yeah.

Overy ([00:42:07](#)):

So you said the morale essentially was very high [inaudible 00:42:11]

Moderow ([00:42:12](#)):

We fought to get our missions. We went to China a couple times from the Philippines. You have to look in there, but I think it's six some plus hours. And we fought to get on that. We only made it once because we had to turn back a couple times, weather or whatnot. In fact, when we did go over, we went and flew to Hong Kong. The pathfinder, which was as B25 with no gun, they would lead us over just so far and then they'd turn around and we went on. He got lost, and he said, "I don't know where we're at. I'm going home." And we said, "We'll go another 15 minutes." Then we found the island, which was-- We were on course, but he didn't-- But anyway, and while we were over Hong Kong, we were covering some B26s down there. And we were up about 20,000, and they said-- P51 has a supercharger that kicks in a certain time, kind of preset but it could be at 18,000, it could be 16 or whatever it was set at. And they said, "They're

shooting at us." And just then my supercharger cut in and the engine cuts out when that cuts in for a moment. I said, "God, I got hit." But it all worked out. First, when we went over there, they gave us a lot of Chinese money and one of our boys had a bad engine, he was starting to inland towards friendly territory but we caught him, we got back all right. But one of them came in, just made it with his gas because that's how close we were on gas, and we always had silk maps. I was going to bring one, I couldn't find one. I got a bunch of them, silk maps. But in fighter planes, you can't fold the map out. You got this much room, and you're sweating all the time and the paper maps would be all wet. So we had silk maps for all that. But we were being strafed at [inaudible 00:44:14]. We were ready to takeoff, and here comes four planes strafing our strip. The strip was only so wide, so we chopped engine, started running, and Mick was my closest friend. We dove under whatever we thought we were diving under and here it was a gas truck. Cas didn't get out quick enough and he got shrapnel in his nose and they said, "You son of a gun, you got a Purple Heart because of your nose." But we had a couple boys badly wounded on that strip. We were at the point where-- Well, I guess they got the frontline because of our capacity of going, but only they couldn't carry enough gasoline, we used too much. I might mention, while we were over there, Lindbergh came over. And a lot of people have bad words about him and I can say nothing but good. He always was low key and he came over and showed us how to fly our planes. Our P47s, which were the gas hogs. Well, if you wanted to go faster, you needed more gas. And if you're on a long flight and in formation, you're slipping back, you'd give a little more gas and catch up. Well, he taught us how to change our cockpits but use, in other words, a little more bit to catch up and change your cockpit back and you could get maybe 10, 15 minutes more out of your gasoline. And so that's one of the things he taught us when we were over there. I mean, he was not only a good pilot, but he was almost an engineer of what the reaction of a

plane is to what it does. The story has it that he has one or two nips to his credit and he didn't mean to, but he was flying from one place to the other and he was attacked, but that I can't confirm. I don't know. But it was good to see him over there, and then another thing that I, again, we all like glory. Let's not kid ourselves. But see, Bong was over there, he flew a P38. And nothing against Bong, but at the end of the war, they had some high numbers over on the ETO. So practically if they saw a nip up there, "Don't shoot him, stay away now, we're sending Bong up to get him." So that he would build up the numbers. [crosstalk 00:46:47]

Overy ([00:46:46](#)):

Basketball game when somebody else shoot.

Moderow ([00:46:49](#)):

That's exactly right. Which is kind of too bad, but that's the way it is. See, our CO I think had 16 nips, but Kirby, who got a congressional medal, he was the head of our group way back before I got over there. Well, everybody should be proud of their group. If they aren't, they shouldn't be it.

Overy ([00:47:12](#)):

You were talking before we turned on the tape about the Black Ram squadron. Tell me about the kinds of things you were telling me about your squadron there on when you began.

Moderow ([00:47:20](#)):

Well, okay. The original squadron, see, normally, a group has three fighter squadrons per group. And of course, they have certain ranks all the way down. We never, ever got to the rank we were supposed to be. I should have been a captain and I was a flight officer. During that, when we were getting ready to move into the Philippines, they didn't want to build a lot of rank on top. They wanted people to work. And so they just added another squadron to the 348th, which we

were the fourth squadron and that's why we chose the name Black Rams, because we would have said Black Sheep because we were black sheep, but they already had that. In fact, I didn't bring our insignia along, but it was a black ram head. And that's how we came into being, you might say.

Overy ([00:48:14](#)):

And you were talking about circumstances when ETO people began coming over?

Moderow ([00:48:21](#)):

All right. See, we were fighting a war and like I mentioned before, our CO was one of the finest pilots, but he was not a good office manager. So when this ETO came over, if you read any of the articles about the ETO fighter, they had different missions than we had. I don't argue that. They're high altitude, ours were short. But, anyway, every time you took off, you were behind enemy lines [inaudible 00:48:50]. But they came over, and I think they had five missions over the channel and they would have an air medal. Well, with a 158 missions, how many air medals did I have? Well, the idea of this, we were aware of it but didn't give it much thought until they came over, there was all this rank along with the medals they have and that's when we had a new CO then. The other one was moved up in the group and they started giving out medals, but we got one for every 100 hours. Well, my average, I had 158 but my average mission is two hours. You see what I mean? So you can see how it worked out. But anyhow, that's how I found out about the-- What am I trying to say? Not Air Medal, but Distinguished Flying Cross. I don't it, but Vince has got it, and I told her to send it to me, but it hasn't come around to it. So that's where it is.

Overy ([00:49:57](#)):

Why do you think there was that distinction between the European [crosstalk 00:50:01]

Moderow ([00:50:00](#)):

Well, did you ever see anything about the South Pacific in the newspaper? They had a newsman behind every person. See, that was the big war. We were just a stalling war. We were a war just to hang on fellas, hang in there until this gets done. Now we'll come over because we don't have enough for both of us. So we were the weak sister, if you want to call it that way. That's why we didn't get supplied, we didn't get film for our cameras, we didn't get new airplanes, we didn't give replacements. And of course, they had to make decisions too, and they did.

Overy ([00:50:37](#)):

How did you from the Pacific Theater get along with these fellows?

Moderow ([00:50:42](#)):

Oh, we got along fine. They were just regular guys. [crosstalk 00:50:46] There was a couple of them that were a little arrogant til they found out that they were new in the area, and they respected that. The problems we had were minimal.

Overy ([00:50:58](#)):

Were they being asked to do different kinds of missions with Pacific than they had done in Europe?

Moderow ([00:51:02](#)):

Well, different because it was a different war over there. Their war was-- I think I saw 100 planes in the area that went over Clark Field. They had 100 planes on some small mission. See, that was the big war. Ours was just a toy war. And of course, in fighters over there, a lot of high altitude. Like I said, I think the highest I got over there is 15,000 feet. Why go up to 30 when there's nothing up there? Why even do all the waste of gas?

Overy ([00:51:39](#)):

Tell me about what it's like to fly close in grounds.

Moderow ([00:51:45](#)):

Well, the one thing, you could see what's happening. If you were up 30,000 feet, you can see a little past the smoke. Down below, you can see people, you can see what you're doing. Well, you'll come over here, many times the boys practiced with the roof off, so you knew how close you were. And of course, that almost gives you a thrill. The speed and the power and whatnot. The other side of the coin, the nice thing about flying, in most cases, you didn't see the dirty war. If you saw it, it was quick. Which of course, was good for us. See, when we were over there, at last when we had 51s, we were getting very close ground support. The enemy would shoot up some smoke bombs. They'd shoot it over to our [inaudible 00:52:40]. So finally, we'd be forced, so we wouldn't bomb them and dive bomb and whatnot. We would send one fellow through, and they would confirm that it was okay. You follow what I'm saying? Then the rest would come on down, because otherwise, you could be bombing your own people. And at last, it got so tight over that I know I spent a week with the Army, the infantry, because we knew what the airplane would do, what it wouldn't do, and we stayed right with them and we directed the ground support, not have an Army man do it. [crosstalk 00:53:15]

Overy ([00:53:14](#)):

So you had somebody on the ground with them?

Moderow ([00:53:17](#)):

In other words, we stayed right and another week, somebody else. Now, we were the old timers, you might say. We had a little insight of that. I can remember the first run that they made. Under the wing, all the spent shells come out the wind. And I was sitting there watching and, bang, one

hit my helmet. Another time, when I thought I had it, but nevertheless, the good part was one of our buddies got shot down, ground fire, and they called up and said, "Give us four hours, we'll have him back." This is how close, and they knew in fact one of the things that distinguished us when we were in the Philippines to start with is we were on Tokyo Rose a couple times, to get on the big radio station from Tokyo, and they called us the Black Ram, we had black tails. And the Black Rams, "Don't you come down anymore," or whatever. So that was a badge of distinction to be on there. And then we were called Mocos. Word came that we had a little monkey that we took with us. We called it Moco. And that's what our call word was, Moco. When Tokyo Rose came on, she said, "Okay, Mocos." So then we had to change our codename, because they picked it up and they knew the background. It was a distinction, but it had to be changed. I can't think of too many others.

Overy ([00:54:55](#)):

What did they normally do then? When you were-- Did the ground troops that did normally mark the enemy positions with smoke-- [crosstalk 00:55:06]

Moderow ([00:55:08](#)):

In other words, here's a line and here's a line, or they had a pocket of them over there and they had them pinned down, they're up on a hill and they were down here. So they'd shoot a smoke phosphorus bomb in there to give us a direction. They tell us, but just to pinpoint it. And then we'd go in, and of course, we normally would like to go in this way so we could come back out and land in friendly territory if we had to or got shot down. See, sometimes you couldn't do that, but like I say, they're not done either. They had people who could understand us, and they'd shoot a smoke bomb. And one time, it was a close call as far as dive bombing our own troops, and that's why we, from that point on--

These are things you learn. In fact, I got the squadron history. One of the guys went to Denver or some place, and I didn't realize all the things that was in the squadron history. This is back in Denver. I brought it here and I was going to have him make a copy of it, and the guy said it's too slippery a paper. My daughter in law worked for Xerox so I sent it to her and she uses special paper that the machine wouldn't eat it up. You know what I mean? But anyway. Like I say, we were young and we were not bloodthirsty to want to kill people, we were really fighting a basketball game and we wanted to win, and like I say, in the clean war, other than one of my friends that was flying my wing over Clark Field and he had a bomb and he got a direct hit and I looked a second time, he wasn't there. And his very closest buddy was sent home.

Overy ([00:56:56](#)):

He broke up over him?

Moderow ([00:57:00](#)):

And like I say, we had other fellows that-- Another friend of mine who was one of the finest pilots I knew, and he was practicing with a 51 to make a slow roll on takeoff. Well, that you shouldn't do, you don't have power. So, he'd take one off every time they needed a test flight [inaudible 00:57:20]. He'd get up at 10,000 feet, drop his wheel, drop his flaps, and give it full bore and only bothered him two times out of 10 today, but he got it later on. But he was that good a pilot. Well, he never did do it on takeoff. Well, let's see.

Overy ([00:57:47](#)):

I was just thinking as you were talking about maps and things, you must have been awfully busy to be your own navigator. Plus flying a plane.

Moderow ([00:58:00](#)):

Well, you see, with a fighter plane, you were the bombardier, you were the gunner, you were the navigator, you were the pilot, you were the copilot, and you were the gunner. Yes, you were busy, and yet, before you took, you knew your compass ratings or where you were going, and you knew your wind drift and then you had some spots along the way that if here was the island you were supposed to go over and you were over here, you had to make a little correction. And see, our flights, like I say, say the one that was six hours, and three hours each way and that one was all water, and by the way, I can't swim. 90% of my flights were over water. But anyway, that was the only one where you definitely flew the compass. Otherwise, you generally had pinpoints and you flew it a couple times, it's amazing how observant you are. This is here and that is here and so forth. Yes, you were busy. With a thing like the old P47, mostly it'd be press a button and bombs dropped. On the old 47, you had to get down here and manually pull them, so you couldn't see out the top when you were doing it, but that's the old planes.

Overy ([00:59:11](#)):

And so you'd drop both bombs and [crosstalk 00:59:14]?

Moderow ([00:59:13](#)):

Well, you'd drop one or two. Normally, you try to drop two, but we carried thousand pounders. The bigger load we'd carry was thousand pounders and a 500 under the belly, and you could hardly get off the runway. We'd balance it. And then napalm was-- We used a lot of napalm, and that was heavy. We used wing tanks. 165 gallon wing tanks full of napalm, which is heavier than a thousand pound bomb. Normally you want to take both of them off at once, because you see what that'll do to a plane.

Overy ([00:59:43](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Really over balanced. Exactly.

Moderow ([00:59:45](#)):

In fact, that's one time I thought I had a two, and we were flying a P47 in Tanawan, which was right down from [inaudible 00:59:55], with bombers moved in so we had to move to a littler strip, and they had them out at the end of it. You land this way and you takeoff this way. Well, an airplane always supposed to go into the wind. Well, we couldn't. Anyway, one of my missions, we had wing tanks and I couldn't drop it. It wouldn't feed it, it wouldn't suck it out, so I had a full wing tank, and I came in and the wind was the wrong way, and just at the end of the runway, I was sitting right on my wing like that. I got it out, I made another pass, I couldn't make it because I had to come in this way, we were over the Navy. So finally, I made a straight in approach, and the CO was on my wing as soon as I landed. He said, "What--" I said, "I got a full wing tank." He said, "Oh." But 165 gallon wing tank on one side. See, when you come this way, this wing loses all the lifting power. If you came the other way, it'd be better, so you could have had the lift, but we couldn't do that because of the Navy. You didn't circle over the Navies.

Anyway--

Overy ([01:00:59](#)):

Wow, that must have been a lot of things to think about.

Moderow ([01:01:00](#)):

Well, like I say, those are the things that stand out in my mind, and a lot of things happened I think. Like at Finschhafen, where we flew into there a few times, where wasn't our base.

Actually, the runway was a metal mat and a C47, you know what that is, a twin engine, they couldn't land there. It wasn't wide enough. They just cut down enough trees and put a mat down

and we could land, but they couldn't land from the trees. So we landed on metal mats many times. In fact, most of ours were metal mats, except Ie Shima, they leveled out the coral, and that was kind of concrete [inaudible 01:01:42]. But we didn't like coral because the 51s had that air scoop on the bottom. And they'd get stuffed into your air scoop.

Overy ([01:01:49](#)):

Picked up bits--

Moderow ([01:01:50](#)):

Yep.

Overy ([01:01:56](#)):

What did you do when you weren't flying?

Moderow ([01:01:56](#)):

When we weren't flying?

Overy ([01:01:57](#)):

Yeah.

Moderow ([01:01:58](#)):

Well, there wasn't a lot to do. We played a lot of cards, not poker. That's one thing. In fact, we had a general [inaudible 01:02:04] who was a card shark. We'd never play-- You'd play for fun. Never for money in our squadron. You could at other squadrons. When we were down in New Guinea, we'd go out in the jungle and we had our 45s, and we'd target shoot. I know my 45 and a lot of other ones did it out of spare or broken up plexiglass. They had a brown handle I took and put plexiglass and made it to fit the handle, and then when you filed it, see, plexiglass will scratch. It was white. Then you'd sit with toothpaste. We didn't have toothpaste, we had tooth powder. We'd polish it with tooth powder, and then of course, I had my girlfriend's picture

underneath it and all that kind of stuff. Other than that, see, we were either-- How would you put it? That's about all we could do. Well, we played volleyball, a few things like that, but we were pretty busy while we were there. We always took off earlier. I remember when we were in the Philippines, our job was to takeoff in the morning when it's dark, and cover the Navy, which is maybe a flotilla of planes out here until daylight and then they'd takeoff. And then we'd go out in the evening and cover them and they land, and then with dark, we'd come in. And that's another one, when we were coming back one time, we had a red alert and they turned all the lights off. We were out of gas. We got in all right, but it was--

Overy ([01:03:49](#)):

Did they turn on the lights?

Moderow ([01:03:50](#)):

No. [crosstalk 01:03:52] It was kind of dusk, so we did get in. And we had a little problem with the Navy a couple times, where they took a pop at us. So when they'd take us, we'd say, "We got our guns on. We got eight, you got six." That's when we had 47. They didn't do it intentionally, but everybody's a little trigger happy.

Overy ([01:04:19](#)):

Did you have mail come in all right?

Moderow ([01:04:22](#)):

Let me put it this way, when we hit the Philippines, we had a blackout for weeks ahead of time. My mother passed away while I-- She passed away December 5th. A day before we went into Philippines, but I didn't know it for 25 days before I got word that she passed away. So there was about a 30 day wait there in the Philippines. It was a blackout. Everything went out. The Red Cross sent word wondering if I could come home because it was-- But of course, that time,

everything was out. It wasn't like now. You get on a jet and you're here. When you think of the time involved just to get back from there, from here to here to here to here, if they would even let me go, see.

Overy ([01:05:10](#)):

Did you feel pretty well taken care of when you were there?

Moderow ([01:05:13](#)):

Oh, yes. Of course, we were blessed. We had a cook in our squadron. He could make dehydrated potatoes and dehydrated milk and things like that taste tasty. He'd add a little cheese to it and he would actually-- You'd have some people go down to a restaurant today and the food could be good, but it isn't the way mom made it for them, and they'd complain to high heaven. But be thankful you had food. No, we were taken care of well. I have no complaints on that, other than the weapons they gave us, like the old planes and that. That's the part that I feel badly, but there was a reason for it, but nobody could do. When we were in the Philippines, we hired the Filipinos to wash our clothes, otherwise we had to wash our own, and on a fighter plane like that, you know how you have your shirt? You have the double thickness there. That'd be the only part that might not be wringing wet when you come down, because you're sitting in a greenhouse, and there was no air conditioning at the time.

Overy ([01:05:13](#)):

Sun beating down.

Moderow ([01:06:29](#)):

And hot. In fact, on a 51, next to Clark Field there, you'd actually check your MAGs on the way out because you didn't dare stop and check them, otherwise your engine will overheat because it may be 115 on the runways. We wouldn't be able to takeoff. So it was hot. But I like it hot. In

fact, when I came back, they used to give us for Atabrine for malaria, I would just yellow as that when I came home.

Overy ([01:07:05](#)):

Did you have any sickness yourself enrolled?

Moderow ([01:07:07](#)):

No. They thought I might have had malaria and they pulled me off for a day, but it was okay.

That took care of it, but some people didn't get yellow, but some people, their metabolism or whatever. I was just yellow-- It took about a month before I waited out, if you want to put it that way.

Overy ([01:07:25](#)):

Did you have much contact with the native peoples when you were there?

Moderow ([01:07:30](#)):

The Filipinos, yes and no. When we were at, not in New Guinea, first thing, you would have had no need to have contact. In the Philippines, they were a little more civilized, let's put it that way. I heard some pretty gory stories from some of the people. We had one fellow make our tent rack. Take a big bamboo and they'd cut it and they'd wrap it and put our tent over it. There, when you moved in, when we were at Tanawan, [inaudible 01:08:03] to start with, they would wash clothes for you if you gave them some soap. Later on, you had to give them soap and pay them. Then it took them about two weeks to do that. No, they were-- Of course, these are friendly natives. But you always were a little leery, but in most cases, it wasn't like I understand in Vietnam and whatnot where you wouldn't know who was on your side. I would say 99 and 99, 100 were on our side that were there. You know what I mean? So we were not that worried.

Overy ([01:08:38](#)):

So there's much more contact in the Philippine that you did in New Guinea?

Moderow ([01:08:41](#)):

Oh, yeah. Yeah. New Guinea, you're dealing with some pretty--

Overy ([01:08:45](#)):

Yeah. They're primitive peoples.

Moderow ([01:08:47](#)):

Pretty primitive people, right.

Overy ([01:08:54](#)):

When you were undergoing training in the States, how did they train you to, say, be in aerial combat with another plane? What did they teach you to do?

Moderow ([01:09:08](#)):

Well, to start with, the first three stages, primary, basic, and they were really training you to fly airplanes, and they were giving you more power. Each one was bigger and you were tracked, four wheels and whatnot. And then in advanced training, we had gunnery training. That was basically, they actually had trap shooting. You'd go out and trap shoot. You'd be up on the stand and they'd shoot out. What they were training you there is to lead the target and whatnot like you would do in any trap. And then of course, the big thing is knowing the capability of your plane. In other words, they taught us in the South Pacific, if a Zero would turn inside you, if you went around this way, he could go inside of you and he'd be on your tail. Okay, we knew that. So we dove, dove, but we didn't try to turn him. And of course, they couldn't get away from us going down because we had more power than they had.

Overy ([01:10:11](#)):

You probably had a starter aircraft too.

Moderow ([01:10:13](#)):

Right. And see, theirs was not armor plating and all of that. They had very little, if any. And the latter part of the war, their Georges, their George plane, which just come out the end of the war, looked like a P47. There was a radial engine. I mean, if you'd seen the two fly by, you're like, "Gee, that's a little 47." It looked so close. The Zero was a very-- In fact, if you ever looked at the Zero, they streamlined that where two pieces of metal come together, they counter socket, it was smooth. Ours, they just riveted one over the other and whatnot. Just like their cars today, they were well built, but it didn't have the power and they didn't put the value evidently on life that we did. But I know ours, the armor plating in the front and the back was there, and it would take a 50 caliber. I don't know about a 20 millimeter, but it would take a 50 caliber. And of course, ours had self-sealing tanks that didn't always seal them, but they had things like that. And of course, in our case with the 47, we had 850s and they had six, at the most sometimes four.

Overy ([01:11:40](#)):

The 51 had a cannon too, didn't it? No?

Moderow ([01:11:43](#)):

38s had cannons.

Overy ([01:11:44](#)):

38s had cannons.

Moderow ([01:11:46](#)):

The 51 had 650s, and like I say, it was a good plane. We devised some things, I know, when we were running into a lot of ground, we were doing ground support, and we weren't doing enough

with just a bomb. And so our armament chief, which was unique, and it was written up in our history, they had cluster bombs. He hung them, he made a rack. They hung about that far from the ground. If the tire went out, it'd been dragging, and they were hanging. We used those in a couple cases in the Philippines where they were holed up, they had an advantageous spot and our Army couldn't go forward, and they told us their problem and the armament chief-- He's quite a guy. It was really tricky though. I mean, takeoff, you better be smooth, because if you slap it against the-- Because they were right outside of the wheels and the struts. But we used those a few times, but normally, it was just bombs, but this was a special occasion. Now, when we were at-- There was an island right in the middle of the entrance to Manila Bay. Caballo Island, that's the name of it. And the Japs were holed up there, and there was no way that they tried, they were amphibious, and they were sitting-- A ship had come in and they had rolled out this gun, then pull it back in again. But anyway, our job was to knock that out. It took us about a week, if you imagine a little island. And finally, we put a short fuse. In other words, you can set different fuses on bombs. Five seconds, 10 or whatever. We'd go in, and you didn't dive this way because we had to go over, so it was a lotto. We'd guess. You'd come so close at a certain speed and drop it, and we'd try to get the trajectory to go into this cave. We did get it, finally. And I shouldn't say this, but one time, I went too low and the bottom of my plane was all blown out.

Overy ([01:13:56](#)):

The bottom of your plane was what?

Moderow ([01:13:58](#)):

All holes, all the way, the bottom of my plane. Everything was fine, but they had to a lot of repair jobs, some more patches.

Overy ([01:14:04](#)):

Bullet holes?

Moderow ([01:14:05](#)):

Well, no, from concussion. The bomb.

Overy ([01:14:08](#)):

I see.

Moderow ([01:14:08](#)):

They had a short fuse bomb and I thought it was longer, see. I got into [crosstalk 01:14:14]

Overy ([01:14:13](#)):

You just about blew yourself up.

Moderow ([01:14:14](#)):

That's about it. There's so many things that everyone can talk about. I know at our reunion, one day we were all talking about something and they were making heroes out of themselves, like we all do, and I said, "Gosh, I must be a hero too because I was there." But there were a lot of funny things happened. Like we joined in the Japs that time. This is unheard of, but that's the funny things that happened.

Overy ([01:14:46](#)):

Were you scared much at the time? When you were in the plane.

Moderow ([01:14:48](#)):

Well, I'm not going to sea. Air, I think [inaudible 01:14:53] I mentioned, when we joined them and they started twelve of them after us, I was thinking a little then, like when his wing tank didn't empty. I think things like that, mechanically things, were more on your mind than-- See, being ground support, and we were on-- The war was moving backwards. So, we didn't see as

many aerial planes as our flight leaders who were down in New Guinea and they were downtrodden then. Now, they were the downtrodden, see. So we didn't see that many. I would say the maximum, in the air, if I saw 80 nip planes in the air, I'd say that'd be the maximum, because I already had 12 in that one group. But you'd see one or two reconnaissance planes or that type of thing. But no. The Navy seen more because they moved in behind OT. Some of the bombers seen a lot of them because they had more range than we had, so they were putting a desperate stand against the bombers, we couldn't even help them because we couldn't get to them.

Overy ([01:16:14](#)):

At least in your experience, did you ever see men that you had killed on the ground? When you see the movies, you see the strafers coming down, you see everybody running. Did you see anything like that?

Moderow ([01:16:25](#)):

Let me put it this way, yes, when you strafe and you're coming down pretty fast, you can see people running and taking off, but you're going at maybe 300 miles an hour. I'm sure I did, but I can't say I did. You understand what I'm saying? But they were there. I know one time, this was in Luzon. The Japanese Army came down and the word was that there was a lot of civilians and they all were dressed in white, so we'd know them. Well, they had changed places with them, and they were coming down. Then finally, word got back and of course, that didn't take long to overcome it, but they weren't all dumb. You know what I mean? They were good. But I never seen any Japanese in-- Well, I shouldn't say that. When we were going into the Philippines, remember, I said, I didn't fly in? I rode there. So we went to an island east. We didn't follow the same route, and we layover one night, and we were in a chow line there. This is a repo depot. In

other words, we were just transferring people. And we were lined up, and here comes a Jap with a [inaudible 01:17:52]. He came right in line. Of course, they captured him then, but now that he was-- Now, these are the funny things that happened. He wasn't trying to kill anybody, just needed food. Like I say, we were right behind the frontlines. I was never shot at on the ground. You know what I mean? Other than strafing.

Overy ([01:18:21](#)):

What feeling did you have about Japanese when you were in that region?

Moderow ([01:18:25](#)):

Well, they had us brainwashed just like anyone else that they were terrible, and they did a lot of terrible things, but our boys were not all holy either. But they did things to the families that normally our, when I say our boys, from what I understand and hear and read, that mostly they were after women more than anything, where they were after families to subdue them. They would kill this person to make dad do this. That type of thing. Submission I guess is the word. And so we heard a lot of that. I seen a lot of it. I know there's one general [inaudible 01:19:10] he mentioned, he said, "Well, they came to our house and took my daughter and they had us stay there and I screamed when I found her the next day down the road." But things like that.

Overy ([01:19:27](#)):

But you don't think you fought out of hatred for the Japanese? Did you have that?

Moderow ([01:19:31](#)):

In our case, it was more like machines were fighting machines. But one thing I did read, there is a Samari. There's a soft cover book written by a Japanese ace.

Overy ([01:19:44](#)):

Yeah, I read that. Samurai.

Moderow ([01:19:45](#)):

Oh, Samurai?

Overy ([01:19:45](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Moderow ([01:19:47](#)):

They were flying off of some of the same places as I did, and that was terrific. Now, there's a different outlook on it. I'm glad I read it.

Overy ([01:19:59](#)):

I thought it was interesting, that book when he made his estimates of American planes. Wasn't that fascinating?

Moderow ([01:20:06](#)):

And they were trained or they were in a sense like we were, only I think even more so. Because they'd disgrace the family if they didn't make it. We didn't have that type of thing. But that was a real-- I still got it. I gave a lot of my little books away that I read about this. Did you read the Files of [inaudible 01:20:31]

Overy ([01:20:30](#)):

No.

Moderow ([01:20:30](#)):

That's the one about [inaudible 01:20:32]. It isn't that interesting, but it's a little about the Air Force and they lost about nine out of 10 were lost to weather. I know when we thought about flying up there, we didn't want to go that way, because in a fighter plane you got a ball, a needle and a compass. You didn't have radar and all that. But that was a good book, and I still have it. I enjoyed it. I've read it twice, I'm going to read it again I think, just to--

Overy ([01:21:03](#)):

What was there about your military service as you think back that made you be angry? Were you ever angry?

Moderow ([01:21:10](#)):

Well, I guess I was the most angry when I heard my mother passed away. In fact, the day that it happened, my CO said, "Well, you better not fly." I said, "No, I'm going to fly." It was all gone now. But I burned out six guns that day. You see, you should take bursts, because then it gets hot, and if you get it too hot-- And he didn't write me up or anything. He said, "Don't worry about it." You know what I mean? I was just so mad but I had to be there. Other than that-- No. You weren't angry, but loss of a buddy, if you call it anger or unhappiness, I don't know what the right word is, but you can't say you were mad about it. [crosstalk 01:22:06]

Overy ([01:21:10](#)):

Sad.

Moderow ([01:22:06](#)):

Sad.

Overy ([01:22:06](#)):

Terribly sad.

Moderow ([01:22:08](#)):

That's the word. I know just before we left for Sydney, another fellow was going with us. There was four of us went in a group, and he took off and he didn't have his helmet, and he should have a helmet and a gas mask on. Not gas mask, your [inaudible 01:22:28]. He didn't, and there was fire in the cockpit, and he inhaled the flame and burned his lungs, and, of course, he didn't make

it. Things like that, but that wasn't enemy. That was mechanical or human failure, whatever you call it.

Overy ([01:22:51](#)):

What do you remember most about your-- Is there anything you particularly remember the most about your military service?

Moderow ([01:22:59](#)):

Well, I suppose the high points are [inaudible 01:23:01] and a few things like that. Those were the high points. I have no peak, as you may call it. Though the good things stand out in your mind, day out in flying, that's just a routine thing.

Overy ([01:23:18](#)):

Did it cease to be exhilarating to fly?

Moderow ([01:23:18](#)):

No.

Overy ([01:23:18](#)):

It was always fun?

Moderow ([01:23:20](#)):

Always fun. In fact, when I came back from the service, I went back to college, university in North Dakota, and I had myself all set up to do crop dusting. It'd be fun. Whipping it around and whatnot. My wife now and girlfriend then, she said, "If you want to do that, just forget it." And I forgot it.

Overy ([01:23:44](#)):

Of course, crop dusting would be just about what you'd been doing for a couple of years, right?

Moderow ([01:23:49](#)):

Yeah. That's about the only thing with most cases back in those years, the crop dusters were war relics and most cases it wasn't pilot error, they just malfunctioned or something. So it may be a good thing. Like I say, it seemed like a bad dream when you think back at it. And yet like you say, it's the one thing I wanted to do, and I did it. I wanted to be a fighter pilot, I was. In fact, when I was flying 47s, I sent a picture of a 51 back to my folks and I said, "This is my ideal. This is the [inaudible 01:24:32]." But I eventually got to fly that too. Of course, I liked the 47 better now after flying.

Overy ([01:24:39](#)):

Most of the things that I read, some of the things that I've read talked about the 51s, that they're the best thing and everything down the pike.

Moderow ([01:24:46](#)):

Yep.

Overy ([01:24:47](#)):

But I guess 47 pilots don't quite agree, do they?

Moderow ([01:24:50](#)):

That's right. Like I say, I had the opportunity of seeing both. Many people flew one or the other and didn't have the opportunity to see it. I know this, but I asked at a reunion, down at Wright-Patterson. They had a F16 pilot fly in from Luke Air Base and gave us a talk and told us about-- And you can't believe these new planes. I don't know if he told us more than he should, but what they can do and what they can't do, and you're really a computer expert, is what you are. And he said, "But let me say this. The one thing I wish I could do is fly a 51 once." They would just love to get into the 51 and fly it, and of course, all of us fellows there had done that. He left about

five, it was five or six o'clock, and he was like, "Oh, I think I'll go home now." He hops in the thing, goes to Arizona. And he's on his way. But I still go to air shows, my wife won't go anymore. She won't go to reunions. She said, "I've heard these war stories long enough." And I can't blame her. It's hard on the women when they never met each other, and I'll meet with other ladies who are trying to be nice, and it's fun, but to a point. And I can see that.

Overy ([01:26:07](#)):

It's like going back to high school reunion if you and you were didn't go to same high school.

Moderow ([01:26:16](#)):

That's right. I went to my 50th last year. I know this year, we're going to have our reunion out in Washington, and our CO, who is General Dunham now, he can't travel very far, he's on oxygen now all the time and so he's going to be there, so I definitely want to go. I must have been old before my time, because everybody that had ever been to one before, every year another one shows up. They all know me. Everybody else seems to have changed, but they [inaudible 01:26:54]. Like I say, some people maybe don't change as much. It's kind of unusual, but it's fun to see the fellows.

Overy ([01:27:03](#)):

Do you now 40 years later, do you think about the war very much? Just like when some idiot college professor calls you--

Moderow ([01:27:15](#)):

I'll be frank with you. I was hesitant to come for one reason. Just like now it's on tape. It sounds like I'm blowing my horn. I don't mean that at all that way. I'm recounting what happened, but in the same token, you pick the high points, there was drudgery everyday taking off and landing, you don't add that in. You know what I mean? So it sounds like--