

Interview with Ens. Ben Tappan, USNR, 1981

BPW This is a copy of the, uh, Kelly's log book...

BT Got you.

BPW ... and it shows that, uh, all, all of this stuff, but in particular that the Doolittle take-off was on the 18th...

BT April?

BPW ... of April..

BT Yeah.

BPW ... and Mitchell said that as soon as they had taken off, he and Kelly and maybe some others, he wasn't sure about that, immediately took off on patrol.

BT I don't think so.

BPW Well, all right.

BT I don't remember... We didn't launch anybody because we were trying to make as little noise as possible around then.

BPW I'm sure, but here... How do you account for this? .. and that's what Mitchell said without having seen this.

BT Well he should know, yeah.

BPW He must have known. He, I don't know why that was. The account was in the log. I have excerpts or from the Hornet's log. Apparently there was a pretty good breeze blowing.

BT There was. There was a gale blowing at the time.

BPW And it helped them get off presumably.

BT Oh, there wasn't any question about it. They were, they could have been airborne half way down the deck.

BPW Is that right? Wow!

BT The only problem was that it was blowing so hard and of course we were going into the wind to launch the ...

BPW Yeah....

BT ... they, they got a very, a big pitch on the ship.

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT And, in fact, it was so big that my friend, Lefty Horner and I were up watching it up by, near the bow.

BPW Yeah.

BT And then we went in one of the gun tubs out there and we couldn't quite see over the deck. It was too deep down...

BPW Oh, yeah.

BT So we just waited for a pitch and the farther down we'd give a little jump and we could see everything 10 feet in the air.

BPW You jumped or the ship fell out from under you?

BT We watched it (inaud) was going on.

BPW Well...

BT (inaud) meeting, I'd forgot all about this because we were on the deck to get launched and we weren't. No, none of those guys. I guess the only ones they launched and makes sense is the fighters.

BPW Must have been a couple of fighters, yeah. Let me, let me ask you something.

You see these character flight designations?

BT Yeah, you'd have to have a key.

BPW Mitchell couldn't help me with that at all.

BT Well it might change. It might be entirely different in different air groups but see, I don't even have my log book.

BPW This had to be... If this was a combat patrol, okay. This looked like a "Z".

BT Looks like a "Z", yeah. I don't know what that is.

BPW And a "N", what would an "N" be?

BT I don't know.

BPW Well look at these. Two tenths with a "T" designation.

BT That's no time at all, is it?

BPW No. Now, you know, Kelly...

BT Awful lot of... look at the dates here.

BPW Yeah.

BT We turned around right away after we launched and went...

BPW Right.

BT ..and went..

BPW Well you were back at Pearl.

BT .. straight back to Pearl.

BPW on the 28th and 9th.

BT Yeah.

BPW Oh, that's what he did. He must have flown...

BT Flown ashore.

BPW .. ashore. That's what he did.

BT Two tenths...

BPW Fast flight. Very fast. No, there was one other thing that happened. Smokey Stover had a book written about him. Do you remember Stover?

BT Yeah.

BPW I don't know whether you know about it but down in, he's from South Carolina, and the Yorktown was, they got her and put her in down there in permanent, made a permanent monument.

BT Oh, yeah, I've read about it.

BPW Yeah, and there's a book about it and in one of the accounts he, he was with Kelly and he, he tells about Mark going over, off the bow of the ship and going right in the drink.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW He was concerned about it and told a little bit about it and he saw him, he was on the side of the ship. And he looked over the side and saw this figure swimming like crazy.

BT To get away from the ship.

BPW So he had made it somehow.

BT I didn't really... That was Mark that went over the side that.. on launch?

BPW It was, there were two guys the same day that did it and one, Kelly was one. I don't think, I think the other was, was one of the SBDs.

BT Well I went over the side but it wasn't off the Hornet but it was on a recovery and it was right off Pearl Harbor.

BPW Oh, I see. Well...

BT You might be thinking of that but as far as I know there wasn't a fighter that went in that day.

BPW Well, maybe not, you know, not that day. Maybe it was... No, it was not you that Stover was talking about. I'm positive of that. I, I can't recall the name but it was not you.

BT I was pretty groggy. I'm trying to remember.

BPW But the Alwyn picked up both of them, Kelly and the other, the other fellow. Well, what I was thinking was perhaps that two tenths might have been that incident but the time, the date isn't... and that seems to be a duplication, too.

BT It is.

BPW It seems to be a strange..

BT **The same airplane and everything.**

BPW ... strange kind of a thing, yeah.

BT **And I, these things were usually kept by a yeoman...**

BPW Yeah.

BT **... and they get in a hurry sometimes.**

BPW Yeah.

BT **You never knew. I, I don't have mine anymore because when the ship was sunk my, my book went down with it.**

BPW Mmm-hmm.

BT **Had to start over again.**

BPW Mmm-hmm. Well, this was May and again we have the N and the Z designations and then they were coming back aboard on at least one of them.

BT **Mmm-hmm.**

BPW Maybe that was into Ford Island or something, yeah.

BT **That means carrier**

BPW .. landing, right. And that was his last one. That was the end, that was the 28th of May so his last entry in the book is this one. Which I suppose probably shouldn't be there, he not having returned.

BT **Might have been, yeah.**

BPW That's in it anyhow.

BT **It ought to be there. He was launched.**

BPW Right.

BT **Right. It doesn't show how long it was.**

BPW The duration, the duration is good for four hours...

BT **I don't, I don't see how it could... This is the darnedest book I've ever seen. I don't see how he could... He couldn't fly for 4 hours, I don't think, in an F4-F.**

BPW Well, now. We're uh, that's the longest entry, of course, in the book.

BT **Yeah.**

BPW Because there was a three, that, that one right after the Doolittle launch, though, was the longest other one. That was 3.7 so they could stretch it out presumably to about that.

BT **Yes, they did it on some... I'd forgotten that if we'd of made any launch at all then. We, we thought we were going to go hit Marcus Island or something like that afterwards.**

BPW Yeah.

BT **But we never did.**

BPW Well actually you went back to Pearl and then immediately went south.

BT **Yeah.**

BPW Is that not right? Uh-huh and, and then got down to...

BT **Well that, we were in, yeah, we were Pearl for a couple of days, several days.**

BPW Uh-huh.

BT **We, we was supposed to be in the South Pacific anyhow, see?**

BPW Yeah. Well, you didn't get down to the South before, quite before the...

BT **Coral Sea?**

BPW ... Coral Sea was over.

BT **No, we missed that because we had to launch the marines.**

BPW Right.

BT **We had a flight deck full of them but we did that, as I remember, we did that before the Battle, Battle of Midway. We took the....**

BPW Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

BT **We took them and ..**

BPW Sure.

BT **..we had to keep going long enough to get them in range of an island...**

BPW Right.

BT **... where they were going.**

BPW Right and then turned around and hustled back, back to Pearl.

BT **Well it took us a week or two to get back.**

BPW Right.

BT **We didn't fly coming back. We just had classes on recognition and what certain ships looked like and everything...**

BPW Oh, yeah.

BT **So...**

BPW Is that right? So, in other words, really in anticipation of the action.

BT **Oh, yeah. It's going to all come out. It's all come out now but we, we knew what ships were going to be... we didn't know exactly where...**

BPW Yeah.

BT **..or exactly when...**

BPW Yeah.

BT **...but we were pretty close.**

BPW Yeah. Well, well, well the last thing then, actually, there's no way to decipher these, these character of the flight designations other than ... he was a... he took a.. had a few in an SNJ and stuff like that.

BT **(inaud) probably.**

BPW Yeah, but OCV and so on. SNJ is D flights, whatever, uh...

BT **It may be standard but as far as I know they're not. We got to the point during the war where we kept our own log books...**

BPW Yeah.

BT **...too, which could get very confusing.**

BPW Yes, yeah. I don't think that happened with Kelly apparently.

BT **No it didn't, no. Because he was.. when we were right on a carrier the, somebody else always...**

BPW Too easy to...

BT **took care of it.**

BPW ... take care of everybody at the same place I guess.

BT **I'm thinking more about the second time I went overseas. We didn't have very many carriers then. We got land-based in the Solomon's which...**

BPW Oh, were you?

BT **... lot more activity going on.**

BPW Yeah, yeah. Well, I was at Bougainville for awhile.

BT **Where Pappy was?**

BPW Uh, well, yes, uh, I was there later in... I was there in '44.

BT **Uh-huh.**

BPW And I'd just flown out a couple of times. Flights out and back but I was stationed there in '44 and let's see...

BT **That's about when I left there.**

BPW Now the next thing that happened was McArthur, McArthur landed at Tacloban and we had to lug some stuff all the way up there.

BT **I'd left by that time.**

BPW Pain in the ass, yeah. Well, Piva, both the Piva strips were...

BT **Piva Uncle and Piva something else.**

BPW Yolk.

BT Yeah.

BPW Uncle and Yolk.

BT Yeah.

BPW And then the strip. What was the strip there at Torokina? I guess it was just Torokina. Uh, but we never landed there. That was a...

BT That was a fighter strip.

BPW Fighter, Torokina, fighter strip, yeah... Uh, what was your outfit then?

BT In Bougainville?

BPW Yeah.

BT I think it was VC-38.

BPW VC-38?

BT They changed the number of the darned thing. It was 34 at one time and then they changed it to 38. I can't...

BPW I've got...

BT .. be sure when they changed it. That was a long time ago.

BPW Yeah, it was.

BT VC sort of confuses things, too because it means composite squadron and what it meant in real terms that the composite squadron was really two squadrons. One of them were, were the fighters. No, that had to.. the fighters... The VC-38, one of them was the torpedo bombers and the other one was the dive bombers.

BPW Yeah.

BT And then we had a fighter squadron that went with us, too and it was a composite air group like thing.

BPW Uh-huh, uh-huh... Well were you, were you attached to the Marines then?

BT We were flying right with them.

BPW With them?

BT We weren't attached to them.

BPW VMF-153 was there. Must have been...

BT Probably.

BPW ...of the Marines.

BT I don't remember that number.

BPW Well, it's neither here nor there but... Mitchell signed all these, so he, he must have been the...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... the head of that fighter group from the, in such, at...

BT Yeah, he was. He was the, he was the, uh...

BPW Yeah.

BT Only thing that they changed for was somebody either got killed or lost or got transferred.

BPW Right.

BT Some of them got promoted and went to other jobs.

BPW Right, right. He even got back.... I'll show you some funny things in a minute but he, he even, he got picked up and they flew him back to Pearl Harbor and then, lo and behold, SCAT, which was the outfit I was with..... uh, picked him up and flew him back to someplace where he picked up the Hornet again. I don't know where it was but he was back on board at Santa Cruz and...

BT That's a bad time to be back on board.

BPW And went back in the water again.

BT I was on board then but I didn't get in the water. I was, went right down the

cargo net and got on the deck of the destroyer.

BPW Well, I'm not, I'm not sure whether he was just speaking, you know...

BT Yeah, uh, categorically?

BPW ... categorically or not but, but he did get back on there and lost...

BT Well, that's, yeah, that's reasonable because like you said before, we, we, after the Battle of Midway we didn't waste too much time spending it in Pearl

Harbor. We went right back to the South Pacific.

BPW Right, right. Oh, yes, well she, the ship... There's a fascinating story that's come out of the logs and things like that about her last, that, that battle because the Northampton apparently got her in tow twice.

BT Yeah, and we talked about that on the phone.

BPW Yeah, well what actually happened was this. As I make out the story and I've got the logs and stuff and I think it's.. and Mitchell pretty well verified it. They, they got a line on board her and had worked her up to about, from the Northampton, they got a tow line and had worked up to, I don't know, two or three knots or something and reading between the lines, you could just say well, if we could do two or three knots, maybe we could do five or six knots....

BT Think that's what broke the pelican hook, huh?

BPW That's what broke that pelican hook sure as hell because...

BT Well those guys weren't used to towing it, either.

BPW No, of course not and....

BT There's no give on that kind of a rig....

BPW Oh, my, it's just murderous. Just every, you know, and the force is....

BT I saw that line when we were rigging it and I, I didn't see them break it but I could feel it.

BPW About a three inch line.

BT About that big...

BPW Yeah.

BT ... and it was solid steel.

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT It wasn't, it wasn't rope or anything.

BPW It wasn't woven.

BT No.

BPW Is that right?

BT It was steel.

BPW Good God!

BT As I remember it, that, the first one that they took was, had, when let out through the bull nose...

BPW Yeah.

BT ...and then back along the side of the ship where it wouldn't be in anything's way and then, and then tie it in with little stops. Tie it in to hold it there and then all they had to do was put a piece on it and take off and take off a few stops and you get more line.

BPW Let it out. Yeah, I see.

BT And they got it secured on the stern of the Northampton. My (inaud) was on there.

BPW How in the hell did they take it over to the Northampton? She didn't come along side.

BT I think she did.

BPW She did?

BT Yeah, and I think they had a line to it. To the end of the cable and threw it

over to her and said manhandle it over there.

BPW And then she wenched it, wenched it in, I suppose.

BT They put it on the, well, they put it on the pelican hook, aft.

BPW Yeah, yeah. I see.

BT And then cut the rest of it loose.

BPW Uh-huh.

BT But the most amazing thing was after that happened, then the, they hand, manhandled another cable out of the number 3 elevator well all the way forward. Up through officer's country, right up, up onto the bow of the Hornet and manhandled it into position and they were actually getting going on that.

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT And then another attack came in.

BPW Yeah.

BT The Japanese, just a couple of airplanes came over and they dropped it.

BPW And there was no way of ever picking those up or anything.

BT Had no power on the ship...

BPW No power.

BT ...on us.

BPW Yeah.

BT So we, we couldn't, we couldn't pull it up, the....

BPW Well they got, but, but she got hit again, apparently in that attack.

BT The Hornet?

BPW The Hornet got hit again.

BT The second attack?

BPW It was the second attack.

BT No, as I remember this, I think that was a miss. One of them dove on us. You could see it coming down...

BPW Yeah.

BT ... but he missed.

BPW Missed, uh-huh.

BT And then they shot him down when he was going away if I remember it....

BPW Why, why didn't the Hornet, uh, the Northampton come back?

BT But she did, but she couldn't get any of that cable up.

BPW Couldn't get..

BT And that was.... they were out of cables.

BPW When you transferred, did you transfer right to the deck of a destroyer?

BT Maybe that was the first thing. We went right down the, uh...

BPW What destroyer was it? The Alwyn? Mitchell was...

BT Seems to me it was the Benson.

BPW Benson.

BT Was it the Benson?

BPW Could have been. Could have been.

BT Or the Russell?

BPW They were both there.

BT Would you remember?

BPW They were both there. I, I can't tell you which one.

BT I should remember because she'd picked me up once before. I think it was the Russell.

BPW Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BT I'm not positive but that time I went over the side up near Pearl....

BPW Do you know what happened to the, to the plane? To the engine? Do you know

why it happened?

BT Why I went into the drink?

BPW Yeah.

BT Yeah, because we found out later that the, the SBDs which I was flying, had a tendency to burn a hole, the exhaust manifold was too close to the side of the...

BPW pistons..

BT ...uh, why, yeah. The exhaust manifold was right next to aluminum that made the cowling...

BPW Oh, oh yeah.

BT .. forward part of the airplane.

BPW Yeah.

BT And what would happen was it wasn't getting enough cooling in there and would burn through the exhaust manifold and then through the, the side of the airplane and then you get all this, these, I knew it had some kind of gas....

BPW Geez...

BT ..toxic with me.. but we didn't find out until later what was happening.

BPW Uh-huh.

BT Things like that.

BPW What, how, uh, had you just taken off? I mean, were you right in the process...

BT No, we were flying back and forth. We had been on, in Pearl...

BPW Oh, oh, I see, coming back, yeah.

BT We were going out there for about a week's exercise. It was the 8th of August. I remember that. And, uh, we were just going out for a week's exercise.

BPW I see.

BT I spent a week on a destroyer.

BPW How did you get back aboard?

BT We went into port and I just walked over there aboard.

BPW I see. Well, well, Kelly and this other fellow, I don't know whether, I don't have that with me, they got a ride, a, on the bosun's seat.

BT Well that was when we were... Yeah, I got a, I got a...

BPW Did you get a ride on that?

BT Went from the destroyer over to the Northampton on a breeches buoy.

BPW Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

BT The other time I was talking about was just getting out, pulled out of the water because I made a lousy landing on the Hornet. Went over the side...

BPW I see. Well, they, it must have been a rather harrowing thing on take-off if you lost your engine on take-off. Boy, how in the hell you ever turned out of the way of that ship is...

BT Well, you turned out of the way whether you're losing power or not every time you took off.

BPW Every time, right.

BT But that's why you... just routine, you turn left.

BPW Yeah, yeah. But the ship didn't vary in any way.

BT No.

BPW She just kept plowing right ahead.

BT Well they would stop engines. Emergency stop if they couldn't fast enough but if you went off, right off the end, dribble off the end, they couldn't possibly have a chance to stop engines...

BPW No, no. Let me ask you this other thing. Getting back to the, to the flight that we're really concerned about. How was it decided which ones were to stay back and

which ones were to go?

BT I have no idea.

BPW On the first flight?

BT You just, it probably, it was the first flight, probably most all, most all of the senior people, they left one or two of them back....

BPW But most of them went.

BT Most everybody went that had, seniority has it's privileges so they went.

BPW Right.

BT Everybody was gung-ho to go.

BPW But was there a designation? How did you know that you were going? How did you know that you were going?

BT Oh, I didn't know until I, we got up there and got briefed on what was going to happen.

BPW All right, now, at the briefing...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW .. were you told that you were to go...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... or did you look at a piece of paper and see. A written....

BT Oh, you had a...

BPW ... assignment..

BT ... schedule up on the board and you're briefed in there, in the ready room. The ready room is all set up so that, so that you could get all the information you needed, which was a lot.

BPW Right. And you just saw it right on the bulletin board.

BT Yeah, you copied...

BPW Your name was on there.

BT Yeah, I was scheduled to go out. I think I was flying with Gus Widhelm. He was the exec. of the squadron at that time. I used to fly..

BPW wing?

BT .. wing on him most of the time.

BPW All right. All right. Now, that's fine and presumably your, whoever your, who was... Who was your flight group leader or section leader? Now I don't mean Ring. He was the leader of everything.

BT Oh, uh, Gus Widhelm.

BPW Widhelm was.

BT Yes.

BPW And then he would have been the one who made up...

BT No.

BPW No. Who would have made up that...

BT The ops officer, flight officer....

BPW Flight officer would. And who was that? Who was the flight officer?

BT It was probably Davis.

BPW Davis? What was his first name?

BT Ray Davis.

BPW Ray Davis?

BT Yeah.

BPW Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

BT We used to call him Davie Davis.

BPW What was his... Was he a flying officer or not?

BT Yeah.

BPW Yeah, he flew too.

BT Yeah, he was probably on the flight, too. I can't remember exactly whether he was or not.

BPW All right. Well, we'll get to that in a minute. But he would have made up, he would have made up the roster of the people that were to go on that flight. Is that right?

BT Yeah, well, with skipper's approval.

BPW Yeah, oh, subject... Right, right, right, I see.

BT They didn't make a big thing of it.

BPW No.

BT We took turns doing it as a general rule. Later on, Benny Moore was the flight officer and he, and I'd lost my roommate in one of the fiascoes that went on in the South Pacific so he and I, he was my roommate.

BPW I see.

BT But he was pretty senior.

BPW Yeah.

BT Seniority goes in those days.

BPW Well would the fighters have been controlled in precisely the same manner?

BT Very similar, yeah, not precisely.

BPW And who would, but Davis would not have been the one who, who'd made up their roster or would he....

BT No, no.

BPW Who would?

BT He made up ours.

BPW Who would have made up theirs?

BT Uh, probably the flight officer for, for Fighting 8.

BPW But you don't know who that was?

BT No, I didn't even know who was in the squadron except for Mark Kelly. He's the only guy I knew personally in the...

BPW Oh, is that right.

BT Yeah, that's why I had.... See, we hadn't been together that long.

BPW Had you seen Stover? Oh, I see, yeah, yeah.

BT And the squadrons all stayed in their own ready rooms pretty much.

BPW Uh, now, there were about 36 in Scouting and Bombing 8, right? ... that went on that flight, 35 or 6, something like that. I have a whole list of them but...

BT Two 18 plane squadrons, I guess.

BPW Yeah, that's what it was, I think. Now ... and you simply went to the ready room, were briefed and that was it. Went to the airplane to.... Do you remember the number of your plane?

BT No, no. There wasn't... we lost that log, too.

BPW Yeah, I don't mean, I don't mean the, I don't mean the number here. I mean isn't there another number on the airplane? Wasn't there another large number on the airplane?

BT You mean large in writing or...

BPW Yeah, large in writing.

BT Yeah, that was the squadron number.

BPW The squadron number. What was the squadron number?

BT Well, I don't know. It would have been 8, something....

BPW A? S?

BT S8, yes, that's it.

BPW Yeah.

BT And the other would be B8, for Bombing 8.

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT And then a... And then an A number, up to, numbering from one 'till 12, probably.

BPW Yeah, I see.

BT I'm vague on this because they change the system on that a couple of times, too.

BPW That's right. That's right. All right. Okay.

BT They... You see, our normal routine was all centered around the ready room and each squadron....

BPW Right.

BT We... We didn't see the other guys. They were right next to us in Bombing 8 because sometimes we had to merge to do everything together.

BPW Sure.

BT They almost made one big squadron out of that.

BPW Right.

BT The did exactly the same function and did it most, pretty much the same way.

BPW Right.

BT But they lost their skipper pretty early in the war too...

BPW Who was that?

BT ... in Bombing 8. His name has slipped me right now.

BPW I have some...

BT He went on a search.

BPW I have some things that might sort of refresh your memory a little bit. But let me, uh....

BT Do you want a cup of coffee?

BPW Well, I could stand one, I, uh, if you have any around. I got started a little bit early this morning, morning, but.... Do you have.... Is it made? Don't make it up. Great.

BT Hot. It's just sitting there waiting for you.

BPW I appreciate it, sir.

BT I may not join you because I've had too many already.

BPW No? All right. He's going along fine.

BT If that's too strong I'll put some water in it or make you some new.

BPW No, no, this is all right.

BT It's been brewed for a little while. Just sitting there keeping warm.

BPW That's all right. Let me... One of the things that was a little disconcerting with my talk with Mitchell was his lack of recollection with respect to the people that were with him. Now you were in Scouting 8, right?

BT Right.

BPW Okay. Now....

BT Our skipper was Walt Rodee at the time of Battle of Midway. Gus Widhelm was the exec.

BPW There we go. Lieutenant Commander Rodee.

BT Yeah, and he made, he made commander very ... at that same time.

BPW All right, now.

BT And he took care of the whole air group. In other words, he relieved, relieved Stanhope C. Ring.

BPW Right. I see. There are some names that should look familiar to you.

BT Yes.

BPW That's the whole list of them.

BT There's Lt. Davis, Ray Davis....

BPW I see.

BT He was the flight officer. You asked me who made out the schedule...

BPW Sure...

BT ... he's the guy.

BPW Right there. Made up the schedule.... flight officer....

BT That was his job.

BPW ... made up schedule. All right, now. You say that Fighting 8 had one too but you don't know who it was. Is that correct?

BT Yeah, that's right.

BPW Think hard on that. All right, let me throw you some names. Guy by the name of O'Neill, E.J. O'Neill, Ruehlow...

BT Yeah, I remember all...

BPW Palmer...

BT .. those names.

BPW Harwood, Gray...

BT Gray I remember.

BPW French, Jennings...

BT Gray was a long, tall.... yeah, he might have been....

BPW Gray was 6'2.

BT Yeah.

BPW Do you think it might have been Gray?

BT Who? Could do what?

BPW Flight officer. Who was the flight officer?

BT Oh, might have been.

BPW Think who was the flight officer. It had to have been one of those top guys.

BT Yeah.

BPW Surely.

BT It should have been number 3 on your list there. They've got it in the right....

BPW This is how it is. Mitchell, O'Neill and Ruehlow. Damn it, Ruehlow's...

BT Ben Ruehlow?

BPW No, Stanley.

BT Stan Ruehlow.

BPW Yeah.

BT Yeah.

BPW S.E. Ruehlow.

BT They didn't have much seniority, did they? Stan Ruehlow was a....

BPW He was a lieutenant.

BT He was?

BPW Yeah. These are all lieutenants. Uh, O'Neill, do you remember O'Neill?

BT Yeah.

BPW Ruehlow, Palmer, Harwood, Ford and Gray. No, Gray was a JG. Gray, French and Jennings were JGs and that was it.

BT When you read me the names, I remember their names. Some of them I remember what they looked....

BPW Try to remember that flight officer. Who the hell that would have been. Had to have been one of them.

BT Well it was probably the third. Whoever made this list, list up, they would use the same system and they... Waldron and (inaud)

BPW All right, who was Waldron's flight officer?

BT Larson, probably. Him and Limpson (?) were third order. I would take the third guy. But I don't know. They can vary from these things but I doubt if they did. Ours was Davis, yeah, then Sexton....

BPW How about in bombing? Who was in bombing? Who was the flight officer in

Bombing 8?

BT Uh, let's see. It, it should have been the guy that took over...

BPW No, don't look at it. Tell me without looking. Guess at it and then we'll see if it's the third guy on that list, yeah.

BT Oh, I know who it was. Uh, Mo Boast.

BPW Boast, all right. Where is Boast on the list, here.

BT He should be your number 2 on this list.

BPW No, he should be three if your theory is right.

BT No, you, I thought you...

BPW Davis is 3 on, on...

BT Well now wait a minute. What did you ask me....

BPW Boast is 3. You're right. Your theory is right. Your theory's right.

BT Boast took over the squadron later on because we lost....

BPW Look here. Davis is 3. 1, 2, 3, okay?

BT Yeah, yeah.

BPW Look where Boast is. 1, 2, 3.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW So that makes 1, 2, 3, Ruehlow the guy, damn it. All right. Ruehlow's gone. Okay...

BT Who was... It wasn't Ruehlow that made that landing. Let's see... I thought Ruehlow was about my seniority but it, I guess I'm mistaken on that.

BPW No, no, no. He was ahead of you. He was ahead of you. Had to have been ahead of you. You were an ensign then.

BT Yeah, I know.

BPW Raw-boned ensign.

BT I was an ensign until, almost until we came back.

BPW Were you in the, did you go to the academy?

BT No.

BPW No, uh-huh. That's another thing. I think Ruehlow was in the academy.

BT Yeah, might have been.

BPW And I know Mitchell was. Mitchell was a Class of '27. Geez...

BT Is that something?

BPW I... Well, I don't know what happened to Mr. Mitchell but something must have happened.

BT 27?

BPW He retired at 57.

BT Well, it's not hard. Anything can happen.

BPW I'm sure.

BT (inaud) his career.

BPW I'm sure.

BT There's an interesting thing on this list. Wait....

BPW I've got lots of interesting things here for you. I, can I drop this off? I seem to be getting warm.

BT Sure.

BPW My God, I don't how to dress these days. One minute...

BT Well, you can see I dressed in...

BPW Hot as the devil and the next minute....

BT I got out there working until about 6:00.

BPW Oh, gosh.

BT It was about 7, I guess.

BPW Well, okay.

BT See, Widhelm took over the squadron right after the Battle of Midway and Walt Rodee was our skipper.

BPW Yeah.

BT And about, he took over the air group. He, and made commander and, and uh...

BPW Was anyone left after...

BT Stanhope Ring left.

BPW Ring left?

BT He disappeared, yeah.

BPW You mean he didn't...

BT He just...

BPW He was lost?

BT He just...

BPW Oh, just went out.

BT Nobody ever saw him. He didn't say good-bye or anything else as far as I know. He wouldn't have paid any attention to me anyhow.

BPW I see. Let me... All right... Let's, let's, let's go back a little bit. Let me get you into it a little bit more.

BT This... I remember him. I got him off the ship when it, the day it sank.

BPW Uh-huh.

BT He was all burned.

BPW Uh-huh. There are only five men left and maybe only four of the fighters that I know about that there's any possibility. I want to try to reach these guys, you understand? And let me run down the names...

BT Okay.

BPW ... if I may. Maybe they'll ring a bell, maybe they won't. Maybe you'll know something about them, maybe or whatever. One is a guy by the name of Tallman, T-A-L-L-M-A-N, Tallman?

BT Mmm.

BPW Have you any recollection at all of him after the Battle of Midway?

BT Not particularly.

BPW Not particularly? Your paths never crossed any more.

BT They might have but I don't remember it.

BPW Yeah, okay. How about Talbot, T-A-L-B-O-T?

BT Yeah, I was going to say there must be another one's name was something like that...

BPW Yeah...

BT ... because I had that impression, but I don't remember either one of them...

BPW Okay.

BT ...very well.

BPW All right. Okay, now, how about Magda, M-A-G...

BT Yeah, Johnny Magda?

BPW Yeah.

BT Yeah, I remember him. He, I think he was the leader of the Blue Angels later on.

BPW And was lost.

BT Yeah, I guess, I guess he was.

BPW In Korea or Vietnam or some place.

BT Yeah, it was, was one of the other... It had, they made a squadron out of what was left of the Blue Angels and I think it was the Korean War and he, he was, he was commanding officer of the squadron and he got shot down and Ben

Riley was his lieutenant, uh, his executive officer, I think....

BPW Ben Riley?

BT Ben Riley was Johnny Magda's exec., not, I'm talking about after...

BPW I understand...

BT ... World War II.

BPW ... yeah, I understand. Okay, I got you. But he was shot down in Korea.

BT Yeah.

BPW Magda was.

BT I had forgotten that Magda was ever on the Hornet until you brought it up.

BPW Magda was the lucky one. He got picked up with Talbot and Tallman and Jennings. Remember a JG, M. F. Jennings?

BT No.

BPW That's very funny.

BT Wait a minute. Are you sure he wasn't in Torpedo 8?

BPW I'm positive.

BT Huh?

BPW No, I think there wasn't.... Wait a minute. There might have been another Jennings in.... No, there wasn't. Uh-uh, no. M.F. Jennings, he was a JG.

BT Well his name sounds familiar but I don't place it.

BPW Don't place it. All right. So we have three, four and the last one is Gray, R. Gray.

BT I remember him slightly.

BPW I guess that was Richard, I think.

BT When you read these names, I remember that, I saw these guys on liberty and I talked to them, maybe near them in the ward room but I didn't really mix...

BPW No, I understand. I understand. It was a hell of a lot of people. Ye, Gods!

BT Well, you stay pretty much with your squadron.

BPW Sure, sure, I'm sure.

BT But incidentally, that, every one of those guys went in the drink that were launched off the Hornet that went on the strike. Not the ones that stayed back on CAP. In other words, we launched...

BPW Oh, I know. We'll get to that.

BT ... whole air group.

BPW All right. We'll get to that. Listen, by the way, okay. When I've imposed on you enough, please just tell me, Ben. Kick me the hell out I, I, I'm very much indebted to you.

BT No, indeed.

BPW I don't want to impose on you.

BT It's fun for me because I'd forgotten most of these people.

BPW I, I, I'm trying... I'm not writing a book. I'm not, I don't have any ulterior motives. I don't anything. I had an impression when I was talking to Mitchell, I didn't, uh, I, when I got down to the point where I would ask him something and he couldn't remember it or he, I sometimes had a feeling he was, thinking that I was... afraid, I mean, he got afraid of me. I..

BT No.

BPW He was thinking I was asking too much or something like that. I don't want that. I defeat myself when I get that. You either have to tell me straight or it's no use even talking about it. You understand what I'm saying?

BT Yeah, I'll tell you....

BPW All right.

BT ... if I don't want to answer you, I won't.

BPW That's exactly right. That's exactly right and I, I never know what I'm doing next,

see? So I don't know what in the hell I'm doing to be honest with you but...

BT It's not a simple operation, carrier operations aren't.

BPW No, indeed.

BT A lot of people can't understand.

BPW There's just no question about it. And, even, even reading the books about it, you know, you'll read one book and, and its, comes off as a pretty precise kind of a military thing, operation and all that and you read another book and Christ, it sounds like a Chinese fire drill or some damn thing. Particularly those planes from Midway. Geez!

BT Well that was confusing because...

BPW Oh...

BT .. they never couldn't get it straight.

BPW God... Well, I haven't... Lord did, did a credible job, I thought. But, well, there's some funny things.... Let me tell you what Mitchell said, for instance. Mitchell said that before they launched, before they started, he went up and saw Mitscher, the captain of the ship.

BT Who did?

BPW Mitchell went up to ...

BT See Mitscher, all right.

BPW ... Mitchell went up to see Mitscher...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... the captain of the ship.

BT Uh-huh.

BPW And said, this is what Mitchell told me. Said that he thought the fighters should accompany the torpedo bombers.

BT Uh-huh.

BPW And...

BT Fly high cover for them, huh?

BPW And fly high cover for the torpedo bombers but specifically for the torpedo bombers.

BT Uh-huh.

BPW Mitscher's reply seems to have been, "No, don't change anything at this point and your orders are to protect...

End of Tape 1/Side 1

Tape 1/Side 2

BPW Now, where were we?

BT Well you were talking about Mitchell went up and talked to Admiral or Captain Mitscher...

BPW Yes.

BT .. and the captain said that he wanted him to protect Ring.

BPW That's right.

BT Sounds like Ring as a person. Didn't he mean he wanted the fighters to protect that one particular airplane with Stanhope C. Ring in it or did he want, did he mean he wanted them to protect....

BPW That's it.. yeah, the whole squadron.

BT ... the squadron.

BPW Well, it came off as Ring. He specifically mentioned it twice. I came back to it an hour later in the conversation and he again said Ring, the commanding officer of the

air group commander.

BT Yeah.

BPW So, that's how that seemed to be and I was a little surprised at that.

BT I think what he probably meant was he wanted the fighters to stay with Ring or stay with the air group.

BPW With the dive bombers.

BT Yeah, all that means getting up high, I think...

BPW Yeah...

BT .. the torpedo bombers were down a lot lower than we were running in there and then when they left us, they, when they turned right and left us and (inaud) they didn't have too far to go down where they got into...

BPW They were right in it right then. I'll show you on the plats how close they were to the Japs. They were not far.

BT You mean when they left us?

BPW When they left you.

BT And when he went to... and we turned back.

BPW Yeah, you, if, if, it's incredible how you missed. It's incredible how McClusky missed.

BT Well he almost ...

BPW You were so close.

BT .. but he didn't miss it.

BPW Well, oh, he missed the first go through.

BT Yeah.

BPW He missed them.

BT Well it's like...

BPW Same as you did.

BT Well, he flew to the same point we did. There wasn't any Jap fleet there.

BPW Right.

BT And...

BPW Right.

BT And then he made the right guess. He turned to the right and bored out there and then he could see something on the horizon and that was it.

BPW Right. He just started on a vector search or, or not a vector search, a box search. That's all he started on apparently.

BT The first leg was the right one.

BPW The first leg was the right one, otherwise he'd of run out of gas, whatever, and, but let's go back for a moment to the take-off time. Now, the first thing that happened was, uh, there was one other fighter lost on June the 4th that was not in the group that went with you all. And that was a guy by the name of Groves, Shady Groves, obviously. Now he was lost on...

BT On CAP?

BPW On CAP and...

BT I didn't know that.

BPW Yeah, and further more, he wasn't lost until about 1400 hours in the afternoon.

BT Oh, well how did he get lost? Did he...

BPW He, well he got lost in a dog fight, apparently. He, when, when they were attacking the Yorktown. He slid over there.

BT Yeah, he should...

BPW And, well, there was a big flap about, you know, about him going and Spruance didn't release him apparently or whatever, there was some question about that.

BT Well nobody else told him what to do and he saw...

BPW Right, right.

BT .. airplanes and went after it.

BPW That's what happened.

BT Yeah.

BPW That's just what happened. But, but he had some trouble before that. He had a deferred emergency landing.

BT Oh.

BPW And, at 9:30...

BT Uh-huh.

BPW Now what had happened was this. The CAP planes apparently took off first before anybody else at all.

BT Yeah.

BPW Even, before anybody else and he was one of them. Groves was one of them. He had some trouble but couldn't get back on.

BT Well now, wait. He took off first before what?

BPW Before anybody else at all.

BT Before the strike

BPW Yep.

BT .. and everything.

BPW Before the strike...

BT In other words, he was in the original CAP that was on station when we took off and rendezvoused.

BPW That's correct.

BT That's normal.

BPW That's correct. Right, right, okay.. He had trouble, though, and apparently couldn't get back until you, you were through.

BT They didn't want to take them aboard.

BPW They wouldn't take them aboard.

BT They just didn't want an incapacitated ship and this thing....

BPW That's right. Right.

BT Long as he had gas, he should have stayed up there.

BPW That's right. Well, that's what he did until 9:30.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Now what happened with you all? Now you think back to that morning. CAP had taken off. Now apparently the fighters were next off.

BT Yeah.

BPW Is that your recollection?

BT That's normal.

BPW And that would be normal?

BT Yeah.

BPW Right?

BT One reason is they, they had less flight deck.

BPW Right.

BT They had more power so they could get airborne quicker.

BPW Right, okay, right.

BT And we...

BPW And they had to go higher, so they...so they started climbing as soon as...

BT (inaud) in the air. We might get an attack any minute.

BPW Right, sure. When you took off, you turned left and circled counter-clockwise, so to speak, looking down from above. Is that correct?

BT You turned left, yeah, normally, and you, coming down, on a down wind and

we, we were climbing all the time and the, I don't think we made too many turns. Just one probably...

BPW Yeah.

BT ... and then we were out on course and, and made a cruising, you'd understand, a sort of a cruising climb...

BPW Climb, yeah.... I see. Well, but not that morning I don't think.

BT Well I don't remember how many circles we made or anything.

BPW The fighters, no, no, and maybe not you, well...

BT We got rendezvoused. I'm sure of that.

BPW All right. Okay, okay, all right. How does this, uh, how does this sound to you? The fighters took off and if they didn't circle they, we'll say, went a short distance and then climbed...

BT Now which fighters are you talking about? The ones that are going to be on CAP or the ones that are going on the strike?

BPW No, CAP's gone. Let's say, let's say CAPs, they're, they're on station, out of the way.

BT Okay.

BPW Now, your, your fighters climb to 18,000 feet.

BT That's all right. They were covering us from, for high cover.

BPW That's right. Now, they went off first and they start climbing and they're off at 7:00, five minutes after seven. Early...

BT That, well, it had been daylight quite some time.

BPW Yes, yes. You'd have had daylight for an hour. Over an hour.

BT That's unusual.

BPW Right. Well...

BT Well, they got unusual later on.

BPW ... that's what they decided. You know, what's his name decided to launch... right. What the hell, everybody's groping around. So, uh, but where the rendezvous was is a question. Where did they sort of wait for you?

BT Well anytime they made a turn..

BPW Yeah.

BT .. they, the first one's off that, the one's that were going to get all together (inaud) The escort CAP, the escort fighters, they went right with us. Fly up here sort of try to keep track of us while they get higher so that, that's the advantage, so they can attack the Japs...

BPW Okay, all right.

BT .. when they come in. But the other...

BPW Where did you cruise?

BT Well, we, we got all the dive bombers together pretty good formation for it's size and then down quite a bit lower was Waldron and his torpedo bombers.

BPW Yeah.

BT But he could see us. We weren't right in the same formation.

BPW Did you ever see him?

BT Yeah, but he just...

BPW He kept, kept easing off to the starboard.

BT Yeah.

BPW And he kept more and more...

BT That's when I could see him, yeah.

BPW You actually saw him? You're sure?

BT I could see, well, yeah, I thought...

BPW Well, I mean, you, to the best of your knowledge.

BT I could have made a mistake.

BPW Yeah, right.

BT It might have been dive bombers but I thought it was the torpedo bombers.

BPW All right. Okay.

BT And...

BPW But you, where...

BT They were down quite a bit lower.

BPW Where was your relative, uh, position with respect to where you were going? Was he leading you? Were you...

BT No, no.

BPW .. leading him?

BT No, Stanhope C. Ring was leading.

BPW No, I don't mean that. I mean physically ahead. Who was...

BT He was.

BPW ... foremost? Ring was?

BT Yeah.

BPW Ring was. All right. And the fighters were with you then. They sure as hell were then.

BT Yeah, they were above us..

BPW Now, therefore Waldron was.. Waldron had to be slightly behind you. Where was your, your personal position in the flight?

BT Uh...

BPW Were you in the middle?

BT I'm not sure.

BPW Were you in the back?

BT No, I was flying wing on Gus Widhelm.

BPW And he was a section leader, right?

BT Yeah, he was a...

BPW So you would have been sort of, sort of...

BT Yeah, I don't think Walt Rodee went on that flight because they didn't want to risk both...

BPW Yeah.

BT .. both of them. So he was leading. Gus Widhelm was leading the Scouting 8 (inaud).

BPW Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BT And so we would have been up pretty close to ...

BPW You would have been up pretty close with Ring.

BT Yeah, we were probably right next to him or just behind.

BPW Yeah.

BT As a matter of fact, I used to fly wing on Ring, too, because they didn't have any permanently assigned wingman.

BPW Oh, they did not have?

BT No, not for....

BPW All right. How, how did you fly along? In sections of three?

BT Yeah.

BPW Sections of three.

BT Three, mmm-hmm.

BPW Right. Did the fighters do the same thing to your knowledge?

BT I don't think they did. They had an entirely different mission and concept. They were, they would have had to be a lot looser.

BPW I see.

BT I don't know whether they really did or not but if they didn't, I would be very surprised because, you understand....

BPW Yeah, let me tell you a funny thing that happened when I was talking to Mitchell. It sort of took me back a little bit. He said that. He said, "Yes, we had three sections." He and Ruehlow and Gray.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW And then I said to him, "Well, what section had four planes in it?" And he, he was, he was nonplused about the whole thing.

BT Yeah.

BPW He...

BT Well (inaud)

BPW He said three...

BT Anybody could do, I mean any flyer could fly any formation they wanted to.

BPW Yeah, well, but, you see, that was a question that I shouldn't have asked him, I think. Because it upset him it seemed like.

BT He probably wondered why you needed to know.

BPW Yeah. You see what happened was this. I kind of tried to lead him along the same way that I'm talking to you. Pretty much the same kind of thing so that you get the feel of it and to remember better, look at the name and all that kind of... But I got to the point about when they were running out of gas.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Mitchell, Ruehlow and Gray were the last ones that ran out of gas.

BT That's reasonable.

BPW And his explanation was they didn't have to monkey around keeping station and all this, that and the other thing.

BT They don't move their throttles as much.

BPW No. Right, okay, that's fine. He said that they turned off before either Scouting or Bombing 8 did.

BT And came back? They had to.

BPW And headed back.

BT They should have because, and then they didn't turn soon enough because they...

BPW And they didn't turn soon enough.

BT ... didn't get back. They should have gone back before. We didn't have any opposition anyhow. Out and out sector fights.

BPW Right. Do you personally remember seeing Kure?

BT Seeing who?

BPW Kure. It's the name of a little island to the west of Midway.

BT No, I don't. Uh-uh.

BPW Let me ask you this. Do you remember seeing any other airplanes?

BT Yeah, while I was flying, yeah, a whole lot of them.

BPW Right, okay.

BT And the bombs, where they let go of their bombs and some of them were mad because they almost hit the ones under them.

BPW Apparently there was some little problems about arming those bombs or something.

BT Yeah, one of them I think was armed. It made a big noise when it hit, anyhow.

BPW Well, do you remember seeing planes that were outside of your squadron? Other airplanes, any other airplanes? Any of the Jap planes or any....

BT No, we didn't see any Jap planes.

BPW Or any of the planes from Midway?

BT No.

BPW None.

BT I didn't see them. I was pretty busy keeping track of just flying formation.

BPW I'm sure.

BT Making sure that he was right.

BPW I'm sure. And you didn't even see the fighters, is that right?

BT No, I don't remember seeing any of them.

BPW After, did you ever see them?

BT I don't think I ever did.

BPW Never did.

BT See, they were flying high cover.

BPW Oh, yeah, that's right. I don't see why you would. I don't see why you would have. Well, when they turned, when the fighters turned, Mitchell told me that he turned over the lead to Ruehlow and he said, "We had radio silence. So, I just motioned to him like this, and number one..."

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW "... and he understood and took over the lead and he fell back." Mitchell... and I said to him, "Well you fell all the way back to the rear." He said, "Yeah."

BT Why did he turn over the lead?

BPW That's what I asked him. He said, "Well, my radio wouldn't pick up the homing signal."

BT Oh, he had a bad YE-ZB, I guess.

BPW Apparently. And when he turned it over to Ruehlow, Ruehlow took it and that was okay.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW All right. Now, I had my hopes up at that point when he got that. Mind you, my whole aim, intent and purpose is finding somebody that says I saw Kelly go down.

BT Nobody did as far as I know. I don't remember anybody ...

BPW The next thing I, I got off of it and then I came back to it again with Mitchell and I said to him, who...

BT Wait a minute, there were two of them that went down at the same time. Was Mark with somebody else when they landed in the water?

BPW No. There's no evidence yet of it. There were only two that were not rescued, Hill and Kelly. Guy by the name of Hill. G. R. Hill, Jr.

BT Doesn't ring a bell.

BPW All right. I asked Mitchell, then I asked him, when he said he fell back to the rear and I, and then I, I got off it and came back to it, you know, and I said, "Listen, which one was the first fighter that went down? You were running out of gas." "Oh, yeah, Christ, we were all concerned about it, running out of gas." And I said, "Which one was the first one that went down?" He said, he thought for a minute and he said, "Hill".

BT Hill, Barney Hill?

BPW Well his name, I don't know what his name was. It's G.R. Hill, Jr.

BT That was another one.

BPW It's just, this one right in here. Hill.

BT G.R.? I don't know.

BPW I thought, God, here I go. I got my hopes up. I said, "Okay, who was next?" Silence.

BT He probably couldn't remember or didn't see him.

BPW Right. I, I....

BT If it was up in the lead they would have gone off...

BPW Yeah, but he had fallen back, see. You told me he had turned over the lead and had fallen back.

BT Okay. But he was still leading his, his division, I imagine.

BPW Well..

BT He should have been.

BPW ..to get back to that a minute, when I asked him about who had, which section had four planes in it...

BT Uh-huh.

BPW .. and it kind of discombobulated him a little bit and his reply was sort of evasive and he said, "Well, we had different formations and we some, and we had something we called the Thach Weave..." Remember that?

BT I didn't think we'd started that yet. We went to four set, four plane divisions, they were. Later on in the war it was standard operating procedure and that was the Thach Weave.

BPW Oh, is that right? Oh, is that so?

BT But Mitchell is, he's forgotten that didn't happen until later on in the war.... The reason was we used, we used two planes that support each other and they had two sections and they could weave back and forth...

BPW Right.

BT ...and they always had somebody covering the other guy's tail.

BPW Right, I see, I see.

BT We had... As far as I know, he didn't have, they hadn't started that yet and, in Fighting 8, I don't think.

BPW I think that it's highly doubtful from the reports that I have, that I've read, however, Lord mentions it.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW And Thach, of course, did lead a six plane contingent off the Yorktown.

BT Six. For CAP?

BPW No, uh-huh, no. Ten went off... Was Thach on the Yorktown or was he on the Enterprise? Do you remember?

BT I thought he was on Enterprise but I'm not sure.

BPW Enterprise, all right. Well, maybe he had ten with him then. One of them had ten, one of them had six.

BT Well, you'd better not count on mine, my answer because I'm not sure.

BPW No, no. No, no, no, no, no. It's all down. I have it all. I just, I just can't remember which one he was.

BT I thought he was Enterprise.

BPW But they were... Oh, well Gray was the other guy. Now which one was Gray?

You don't, you don't... Was Gray.... I don't mean this Gray. I don't mean this Gray.

Jim Gray. There's another Gray and he, uh, he was on the Enterprise. No, Thach was on the Yorktown. He must have been on the Yorktown.

BT Oh, he was.

BPW Gray had ten fighters and he, he covered Waldron all the way into the damn thing and did nothing. Did nothing but circle all the time that they were just tearing Waldron's ass up completely. And he ran out of gas and he left at 10:00, or shortly before 10:00 and went back to the carrier. He never got in the battle at all. He didn't know what the hell to do. He was looking for McClusky all the time and trying to get him and never got him, of course. So...

BT They probably had orders to cover the dive bombers.

BPW They had orders to cover the dive bombers. All right.

BT But so did, apparently..

BPW Now Thach...

BT So did Fighting 8, according to what Mitscher told Mitchell.

BPW No, what he told him was, "You're to cover Ring." The dive bombers, oh yes, they had, that's correct, that's correct, all right. Now, Thach led six fighters off the Yorktown. That's my recollection and they got their asses swamped. They lost three, three got back but they were just chewed up. They got the bull... ran into a hornet's nest - dog fights and that was their, they just, that's all they ever did and they were lucky to get back at all. So that's what happened to the fighters. The Yorktown fighters all got back and had done nothing. The Hornet's fighters all splashed. They had done... The Yorktown, only six fighters and they got their asses chewed up. So that took care of the fighting. That's how it was, but now, so when Mitchell, I mean, yeah, Mitchell told me that, I asked him which was the first one of the squadron to go down. I'd asked him, I think, before that also. I said which, oh, no, no, It wasn't. He said Hill. The first one to go down was Hill and I said, "Which was the next one to go down?" "Oh" he said. "I don't know."

BT He probably couldn't remember.

BPW He said, "I don't know." I said it would have been very difficult since it wasn't the leading planes, to know who it was.

BT Especially since he went down too.

BPW And then I said,... well, he wasn't until the last to go down, he was the very last to go down and he was working the (inaud) and everything else and he said he was sweating it. But anyhow, I said, "Well, how did you know...", when we came back to it, I didn't get any answer about the next one or anything so I went on and then came back and I said, "How did you know it was Hill that was the first one to go down?" "Well," he said. "Hill was flying wing on Ruehlow." And I did know that.

BT Mmm-hmm. He probably knew where everybody was if they were in the position where they were supposed to be but they were... I doubt they were doing any weaving.

BPW That's right. They weren't doing any weaving. You know damn well they weren't.

BT They were saving their gas.

BPW And this is what was disconcerting. The next thing that happened was disconcerting to me with Mitchell because I then asked him who was in his section.

BT Mmm-hmm. He couldn't remember.

BPW He didn't know who was in anybody's section.

BT Oh. Well, that's not too surprising after this much time and the man is 78 years old.

BPW Well, yeah. But he's, you know, he's as sharp as you or I, I'll tell you, seemingly. And I, I, and then he said that he, I said, "Well didn't you see them all fall." You know, I had the impression that he had dropped way back. Well he then changed that and said, "Well, no, I didn't drop that far back", which is logical. "I just dropped back, Ruehlow take over the lead, that's all."

BT Yeah.

BPW See. So I, then I asked him if he'd see others go down. Yeah, he saw others go down but he didn't, couldn't identify them.

BT He didn't see them land in the water.

BPW Didn't see them land in the water.

BT That would take too long, been back too long.

BPW That's why... They had come down. They had, by that time, however, they had come down to 8,000 feet.

BT Mmm-hmm. Well he was probably making a very low ...

BPW They, from then on, from the 8,000, they leveled off at 8,000. They, they apparently, the, you fellows must have come down in altitude, too...

BT Well we made a...

BPW .. after while.

BT ...decreasing altitude, very low power, with it leaned out so bad it was coughing.

BPW Yeah.

BT And we, we, all of us that, that started back, came back.

BPW You all got back to the Hornet.

BT Except the ones that started, went into Midway.

BPW Right, the bombing, bombing group.

BT Yeah. But all our squadron...

BPW Let me ask you this, what was, what was your, what, on, when you started off, what was your speed?

BT Gee, I don't remember.

BPW Does 110 knots sound right?

BT Yeah...

BPW 110?

BT ... something like that, yeah.

BPW It was, It was, uh, 155 miles, 248.... how... Did you pay any attention to your compass or did you just follow?

BT No, I paid, uh, I always plotted with the guy that... because he could go the wrong way.

BPW Right on. You had a little plotting board, huh?

BT Oh, yeah.

BPW Like that...

BT Flight, uh, that's exactly right. I had a plotting board. And later on (inaud) saved my skin.

BPW Yeah. Uh, I wonder if I could use the bathroom.

BT Sure, let me show you where it is.

BPW Okay. Now, where were we? Let's see.

BT We were along with who was dropping out of formation.

BPW Yes, yes, yes. Let me ask you this. You were supposed to have gotten down at the Jap fleet at about between 9:20 and 9:30, somewhere along in there.

BT About two and a half flight out....

BPW No, you did not leave, seemingly, or at least you did not have, from all reports, you did not have clearance until... although the first fighters took off at 7:00.

BT I thought we did too very shortly after that.

BPW And you took off right after them.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW But you were not given the okay to start on the mission until five minutes after eight. An hour later.

BT Yeah, I'd forgotten about that. I guess there was a big delay in there.

BPW There was a delay and that's why I visualized it as seeing the fighters, you know, climbing up to 18,000, taking a few minutes to do that and then you all going also climbing up before you took off.

BT I think there was, there was supposed, some way up top echelon, wound up getting some additional word before he put them out on the schedule.

BPW Right. Oh, yes, they were desperately trying to get a better position on the fleet.

BT Never should have held us over the ship....

BPW No, no. Well, I don't know whether that's what happened. Is that, Do you think that's possible? Is that....

BT I don't think it... I don't think it was that long because... But here I am, I'm just flying formation up there...

BPW Right, right.

BT ... essentially...

BPW You're just following the next guy...

BT .. I certainly knew, would know that we hadn't gone out there for an hour or something and I don't remember that but I guess, I remember there was some delay.

BPW Yeah.

BT A little bit of delay.

BPW Yeah, well McClusky was raising hell.

BT Yeah.

BPW And he, he went off early, see? He went off ahead of you. He was, he was down there before, before anybody else was.

BT I didn't know that. I thought we'd already gotten down there and turned around before he got there.

BPW No, sir. No, sir. McClusky left a good 20 minutes ahead of you all. Now, where you really were, who the hell knows, but, but I'm talking about Spruance didn't clear him to leave or, or whoever was the skipper, or whoever did the clearing, didn't give him okay to leave the area and start on the mission until 7:45 and that's, that's when he took off. Now the torpedo bombers had not gotten off yet.

BT They were usually last, that's right.

BPW And also the Hornet torpedo bombers had not gotten off. They were last off.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Waldron was last off.

BT Mmm-hmm. That's because they...

BPW But it came closer to being a coordinated attack. The Hornet's planes as a mass group came closer to being a coordinated attack than the Enterprises.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... but what happened was that the fighter planes, by, under Gray, and there were 10 of them under Gray, just like the Hornet's 10, uh, was covering both the Hornet's TBDs and the Enterprise's but what happened was that Waldron drifted on off to the right and Gray went with him. Gray covered him because he thought that they were the Enterprise's TBDs and they weren't.

BT I never knew that. I thought that they didn't get out there to the scene of where the, we were supposed to be going. I didn't think they got out there until we got back.

BPW No, no.

BT (inaud)

BPW Well it's a curious kind of thing when you plot the whole thing of each, you can see where... but, and Gray covered Waldron and he should have stayed with his own TBDs.

BT Waldron...

BPW Because they had a, something going between them that he was to be called down or something and he never heard the word to be called down. So he thought everything was going okay and he was looking for McClusky so that's the reason why he never went down and finally when he was ready to run out of gas, turned around and went home and had had... He was the first unit to report the exact position of the Jap fleet back to the carriers.

BT Yeah.

BPW So... But in any event, when you got down there and had, and uh, had to make the decision as to going right or going left, was there any talk on the radio?

BT Yeah.

BPW Oh.

BT Yeah, you could hear it.

BPW What was going on? Do you remember anything that was said? Tell me a little about what was said.

BT I couldn't...

BPW Who was talking? Ring, was Ring talking to the carriers or between the section...

BT Ring and Waldron were talking.

BPW Ring and Waldron were talking.

BT That's what I always thought.

BPW Yeah.

BT And they didn't, there wasn't much going on except they said, uh, he was going to turn left and which way should we go and Ring said he was going to go left and go towards the, uh...

BPW Midway.

BT Midway. And, and Waldron said no, it wouldn't be that way and Ring insisted that he was going to go left and Waldron said, "Well the hell with you, I'm going to go off to the right myself," or words to that effect.

BPW Yeah, huh.

BT I may have just heard that that's the way it happened and I didn't hear it myself but I think I heard it...

BPW I see. Well, you're honest about it anyhow.

BT It's awful hard, it's funny how much you...

BPW I'm sure. But you did hear something.

BT Yeah.

BPW You heard some, so you heard some yakking on the radio and the reason that I'm, I'm curious about that is this. Mitchell was very much, uh, when I talked to him, very much preoccupied with, and very certain to tell me that, there was radio silence and nobody broke radio silence.

BT That's true but then there comes a time that you do break radio silence.

BPW Yeah, when you're ready to go swimming.

BT See, if they had, down below, the guys from the Yorktown, if they'd broken radio silence to us before, they would have had a much more...

BPW Right, right...

BT ...reasonable (inaud) on the attack.

BPW Right.

BT There is a time when you're supposed to break radio silence and it's a difference between adequate leadership and non-adequate leadership.

BPW Well, Ben, there's no, there's no report on the accounts I've read, Morison, Fujita, Lord or whatever, uh, that verify what you just said.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW So that that leads me to believe, well, hell, maybe that's the way it really was. You understand? So maybe you did hear that.

BT I thought so.

BPW You think you did. Now, do you know... How long, you had, you had a given, I'll say 9:30 was when your intercept was to take place. You were supposed to be right over the Jap carrier at 9:30, okay, theoretically or say by the numbers... When you were there and there were no ship there, okay, uh, how long did you fly before you

changed course? Have you any idea about that? Was it 10 minutes? That must have been the period when this chit-chat, chit-chat between Waldron and Ring took place.

BT In the meanwhile, we were going over...

BPW You must have been going straight past the line. That's right.

BT We were going west (inaud).

BPW Right. Exactly right.

BT And, uh, yeah, then you have to make a decision because you can see maybe 100 miles ahead of him from that altitude. It was perfect weather.

BPW Nothing.

BT And somebody had to make a decision what to do.

BPW Right, right.

BT Which is reasonable. So anyhow, that's, that's why Waldron was going by himself and his squadron.

BPW Now Waldron, it wasn't, it couldn't have been 10 minutes after Waldron turned that he saw the ships.

BT Is that right?

BPW It was at 9:20.

BT Light on the water and everything might have made a big difference.

BPW Waldron got it, picked them up at 9:20.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Twenty minutes later, he was done. Everything was gone. He was flashed out completely. That meant that you all must have been so close to him it was just incredible. That all those, now McClusky was ahead of you. He'd gone on through a little bit...

BT That's amazing...

BPW ... ahead of you. You all were very close to Waldron. You had hardly any distance ahead of him. Very little.

BT Yeah, we were right (inaud) formation with us...

BPW Mitchell, Mitchell figured that, that you, you were, you were caught up with him.

BT To Waldron?

BPW To Waldron.

BT He was in the, just, he ...

BPW And, just barely....

BT .. he was underneath us the whole way out.

BPW Oh, yes, I don't mean...

BT .. same formation but it doesn't mean snuggle right in.

BPW No, that's right. That's right. No, no, but you apparently weren't in sight....

BT At that time, I don't think we were.

BPW At that time you were not in sight.

BT Yeah.

BPW Now he was only at 1500 feet and you were, you 14,000 or some damn thing...

BT I think about 12, probably, I don't know...

BPW Yeah, 12.

BT .. for sure.

BPW But you were on oxygen, okay?

BT I guess. We should have been if we were over 10,000 but I don't remember whether we were or not.

BPW Well, okay.

BT Later on we took the oxygen out of those airplanes so we could go higher.

BPW I see.

BT I'm not kidding. We really did.

BPW That's a riot...

BT Not on the Hornet, we weren't. That was a way later tour.

BPW Well I, I remember we used to, occasionally, we went up to 15,000 one time without any oxygen.

BT Yeah.

BPW And in one of those crazy old DC-3s, ground it's way finally up there but we were trying to get out of a hell of a storm.

BT Well we used to do it every day and strike and we were land based in the Solomon's and (inaud) nose over and I could get 250 knots. Some of these numbers are coming back to me.

BPW Yeah.

BT But we, uh, we got above 250 knots and coming in...

BPW Is this in SBD now?

BT Yeah.

BPW Yeah.

BT And they couldn't track us with their anti air....

BPW I see.

BT ... anti-air guns.

BPW Yeah.

BT They couldn't (inaud)

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT But I know when I was on the Hornet I didn't know all these little deals.

BPW That's pretty good. Well, all right. Now, so you held your course for a little while but you couldn't see a damn thing and you could see for a hundred miles it was clear, apparently to, straight ahead of you. Is that your recollection? And off to your right, apparently, there must have been some cloud.

BT There might have been some haze or something like that.

BPW Yeah.

BT But you couldn't make it out as anything different.

BPW Yeah.

BT You though you were seeing when you probably weren't.

BPW Yeah.

BT We were that close at the time.

BPW Right, right.

BT So...

BPW All right, now, so how long do you think you held on through? What time... What's your best guess on when you turned south, or to the left, I mean?

BT See, I don't know what the time was but I, I think we milled around a little bit but I don't think we really milled around, maybe went probably 10 minutes past there and then, and then you had another difference in, of, opinion where the Bombing 8 wanted to go to Midway, they thought, didn't think we...

BPW Yes, but that was a little... Oh, all right, go ahead.

BT Yeah, they didn't...

BPW Was that... Was there discussion then about that?

BT I think there was but I don't remember personally hearing that. It was... I knew they'd gone towards Midway so I either saw them heading out that way or heard them say they were going.

BPW Yeah.

BT But they, they didn't quite all of them make it to Midway. A couple of them went...

BPW That's right.

BT ... and got lost...

BPW That's right. Well now, what happened was this, according to Mitchell. The fighters left very soon after the turn...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... to go back.

BT Oh, they'd already turned, I think, to go back but they didn't turn soon enough.

BPW When do you think they turned.

BT I don't know, maybe 10 or 15, 20 minutes before we turned back.

BPW All right.

BT Something like that.

BPW Well, now, let's, let's, wait a minute on the turn business here.

BT There wasn't anybody... but we got straightened out on the leg back, going back to the ship and there wasn't anybody else around except the...

BPW Right.

BT ... the Scouting 8.

BPW All right. Refer to this... Refer to this a second. Here...

BT Let me put my glasses on.

BPW Yeah, all right, okay. Here is a general picture of the thing. Here's Midway. Here's Kure, which is just a flat atoll.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW It's very little. Here's, here are the Japs coming down the pike here, okay, on this heading to Midway...

BT These are ships?

BPW These are the Jap ships coming down this course.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Now, this is the farthest penetration south that they made at 9:17. They were right here.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW All right, now. Here is all us and here you come right down the pike here.

BT Mmm-hmm, little bit too far left.

BPW All right, now. You were at 239, 155 miles. The intercept was to be between 9:20 and 9:30. You were doing 110 knots, says right there in the book.

BT You know more about it than I do.

BPW Okay. Well the intercept should have been a little longer. But at any rate, you either turned left here or you turned left here or you turned left there. Somewhere you turned left here.

BT Their ships hadn't got in, in range.

BPW They had not gotten to there.

BT My visual range.

BPW Oh, yes. You're well within visual range if all is clear. Remember now, you're at 12,000 feet, okay? 1.32 times the square root of your height is the distance that you can see, theoretically, to your...

End of Tape 1/Side 2

Tape 2/Side 1

BPW All right, now. This shows you how the thing, it amazes me the figures are just incredible, uh, when you look at it but that's, it's how it was and I was sure that you'd

be surprised to see that. Now look, even more, see now, remember now, you can see, theoretically 1.32 times the square root of your height. Okay, you're 12,000 feet so you're going to be able to see way over 100 miles, theoretically.

BT Yeah.

BPW That's your theory. All right, now, so....

BT Sometimes you think you can see and everything looks like it's perfectly clear but the angle of the light and then maybe some haze...

BPW No question.

BT .. or something, you can't see it.

BPW No question. No question. I've done it a thousand times, the same thing. I know I've looked for those little islands until I was green in the face, too. I can...

BT Have to look for the cloud build-ups...

BPW Right.

BT That's what to look for.

BPW But, but what I want to try to do is to, is to try to go back and the books say, okay, that Ring knew he, they'd make a statement like this. After he'd turn and he came down within sight of Kure and saw Kure, he knew that he'd turned the wrong way. Well...

BT Ring did? No, Ring knew he was, if he was going to turn this way at first, it's because he thought we were running out of gas that, which we were. We, we couldn't of, if we'd of gone down...

BPW No, no. Go back to the time when the conversation with Waldron. It was a question of which way to turn, okay? Now at that time he decided he's going to go left, Waldron says, "The hell with you, I'm going to go right".

BT Yeah.

BPW Ring turns left.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Everybody follows along.

BT Yeah.

BPW All right. Now that had to be along in here somewhere. Pretty close to around in here.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW He turned left and he turned right down this direction.

BT And then we went about five minutes.

BPW How long did he go?

BT I think it was about five minutes. It wasn't long because I remember being anxious about, gosh, if this guy keeps on going this direction, we're never going to get back to the ship.

BPW Perfect, okay. You remember being apprehensive. That's when you were starting to really be apprehensive about it. Is that right?

BT Yeah, I kept my eye, always kept my eye on the gas needle.

BPW Yeah. And you, you didn't think, and you think that it's only five minutes?

It must have been more than that.

BT It didn't seem to me it was very long because I don't remember making any treks towards Midway at all. We, we turned and, and instead of just turning, trying to go for Midway, we, we turned back to the ship right then because...

BPW All right.

BT ... I think Stanhope C. realized that if we were going to get back to the ship, we'd have to go right then. He was right on that.

BPW Did you ever see Kure at all?

BT No, I never did.

BPW All right. Who in the hell saw Kure?

BT I didn't know anybody had. I'd never heard that before.

BPW That's the story. That's the official version.

BT Hmmm.

BPW You didn't turn until they saw Kure and knew that it was wrong. That's what Lord says and Morison says it and Lord may follow along with it.

BT No because with the Bombing 8, when we turned left, Bombing 8 had made the decision that they were going to go to Midway and not go back to the ship.

BPW When.. Your, your second left hand turn, you mean.

BT Well, I think he did, he decided right then on, when we turned left he, he knew we were heading for Midway.

BPW I see. I see. Bombing 8 headed for Midway. Scouting 8 headed right straight back to the ship.

BT Just about.

BPW Within five minutes.

BT Yeah, that's right, I think.

BPW All right, now. Here's the sixty-four dollar question. Do you have any idea, Mitchell says that the fighters were the first ones to turn around and head back for the ship.

BT I'm sure they were. I thought they were all along.

BPW Now why do you have that impression, Ben?

BT I think there must have been a radio transmission.

BPW All right.

BT But I don't remember exactly.

BPW Do you remember at all... Do you remember hearing anything about where the fighters with Ruehlow talking to Ring or anything like that?

BT Uh, there was some discussion on these things, but I don't remember really, whether it was discussion at the time or after we got back to the ship.

BPW I see.

BT And that sort of thing. It's hard for me to sort out what I heard...

BPW Sure.

BT .. and what I remember.

BPW Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure. It'd be very difficult. Forty years ago. After all it's only forty years ago. My God!

BT Unbelievable.

BPW Okay, though.

BT They must have been talking to each other because there was an argument and what he's arguing about, (inaud) There's always discussion if you're going to fall out of, if you're going to turn out of formation that's being led by your boss, you don't do that without...

BPW No. Well...

BT But the fighters should have turned back before they did. They, they should have known their gas consumption and which they did and they, they should have know how far it was back to the ship and

BPW They, they were really the ones that were, they didn't have a snowball's chance in hell. Mitchell said to me that, he said, "Well, I guess I could have been criticized..."

BT For not going back...

BPW ..." for not going to Midway."

BT Well, he couldn't... He would never have made it to Midway.

BPW I said, "You didn't have a snowball's chance of making Midway."

BT No, he couldn't have made Midway.

BPW I said, "You couldn't possibly have made Midway."

BT He did the right thing. Only he did it to late. That was the only problem there.

BPW Well, the truth of the matter is, if he, see what had, what, this is what really killed the fighters, I think. That delay in getting started.

BT Yeah, I think so too.

BPW That's what killed the fighters because they never left until 8, five minutes after 8, according to the Hornet's log and every other damn thing. There's an awful lot support on that.

BT Yeah.

BPW There was a delay. You, you remember a delay.

BT I vaguely remember that there was...

BPW There, never mind what...

BT I don't remember how long it was or anything.

BPW Right. Well I think the timing pretty well establishes. It looks like it is.

BT Probably why we had such a good formation.

BPW Yeah, I guess. You had time to form it up. Well, but they had been flying, some of them, for an hour.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW At that time, see. Now, Mitchell was, he said they, that the fighters turned around before anybody else did. In other words, that would have been before Scouting 8 did.

BT Mmm-hmm. Yeah, they did.

BPW How do you know that?

BT I'm not sure whether I heard it happening ...

BPW That's just it.

BT ... or whether I was told about it later.

BPW Yeah, yeah. But you can't remember any other conversation? The one, the conversation that you apparently remember hearing, or you feel most certain about, is the one between Ring and Waldron?

BT Yeah.

BPW Is that true?

BT I'm pretty sure I heard that one.

BPW Yeah, I see. Did, who was the leader of Bombing 8?

BT Uh, that was Tucker. E.B. Tucker.

BPW Tucker? Johnson? Johnson? Well Johnson was the commanding officer...

BT That's what E.B. Tucker was.

BPW But Tucker was second.

BT Okay, he was exec.

BPW Yeah.

BT Is that his... Is that Tucker?

BPW That's Tucker.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW That's Tucker.

BT All right, Johnson...

BPW Not a very good copy of...

BT Well Tucker was the skipper right after this. I thought he was skipper then.

BPW Well, he could have been. I don't know.

BT Yeah...

BPW But let me ask you this. Did.. There must have been some conversation with Tucker and Ring. That's sure as hell.

BT Well, yeah.

BPW Well Ring... Did Ring command Scouting 8?

BT No.

BPW So Ring was just air group commander. That's all.

BT Yeah.

BPW He wasn't...

BT That's the way with all those air groups. They had a air group commander...

BPW I got you.

BT And then each squadron had a air commanding officer.

BPW All right, but, and Widhelm was the one who was commanding ...

BT Well the exec. He was the exec of our...

BPW No, I mean he was exec but he was commanding your section, your ...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... or Scouting 8.

BT Yeah, he was in tactical control ...

BPW Of Scouting 8.

BT Yeah. He was, later on he was the commanding officer of Scouting 8. He relieved Walt Rodee.

BPW Yeah. And Tucker was, was...

BT He was the exec, I guess.

BPW He, he was the exec but he was in command at that, of Bombing 8 at, at, on that flight, apparently.

BT Yeah, well maybe we done changed command. We just control....

BPW All right, control I mean.

BT Yeah.

BPW That's the word. Excuse me, uh, he was in control on that flight.

BT Yeah.

BPW Now there must have been some yakking in between...

BT No, they were pretty quiet until we got out... Once somebody opened up and...

BPW Yeah.

BT .. that was probably the conversation between Ring and Waldron.

BPW Ring and Waldron.

BT Once that happened...

BPW Yeah.

BT ... then there's no more radio silence.

BPW Right.

BT But all, there wasn't any yakking or anything except those people thought it was pretty important what they were talking about and it was.

BPW Well did you hear Tucker say anything about going to Midway?

BT I don't think so.

BPW Or anybody else?

BT Yeah, no, I don't know. I can't remember whether I knew that they'd tried for Midway or not. I found it out as soon as I got back on board the ship...

BPW I see.

BT ... but I don't know whether I knew it before that or not.

BPW I see.

BT I can't remember. See, I had some good friends in Bombing 8 because I could... those two squads are sort of, almost in the same ready room so...

BPW Oh yeah, yeah.

BT .. I knew them much better.

BPW Yeah.

BT Grant was the one that got killed after Midway.

BPW Huh?

BT I think it was Grant got killed going, trying to get into Midway on that...

BPW Well he wasn't killed, I don't think. He was fired on but apparently wasn't killed. Was he a, oh yeah, there he is. He's an ensign, right?

BT Yeah, he was.

BPW An ensign.

BT I thought he got killed on... Who is the guy that didn't make it into Midway. Landed in the water and they...

BPW Oh, well, one went into the... One went into the lagoon and one went down right before on the outside and, according to Lord, had a tussle with a sea lion. He came to the shore over the reef but... crazy story, but, and, they apparently were fired on but very quickly....

BT Jumping people on Midway, that's not unusual.

BPW Uh, jumping, but no they weren't killed. No one was killed there as a result of it, apparently.

BT I always thought there was. Thought it was Grant.

BPW Well, I stand to be corrected on that but I don't, I don't, oh, Grant, wait a minute. Let's see something. Here's a copy of the short-snorter bill that we got when Mitchell was picked up.

BT Hmmm.

BPW Damn.

BT That's too bad.

BPW Now I don't have... I stand to be corrected on that but I don't think I...

BT Well somebody was killed in that...

BPW Somebody was killed there at Midway or lost?

BT Yeah.

BPW All of the, there were only 14 that went, now that's another thing that happened. That's another thing that happened.

BT The ones that went into Midway?

BPW There were 14, only 14 that even tried to get to Midway. The other 4 went back with you guys and got there.

BT Yeah, there were something like that. I think maybe there were.

BPW Right. There were either 13 or 14 that attempted to get....

BT I think there were.

BPW .. to Midway. Now...

BT (inaud) was one that went back. I'm not sure but I think there were some that decided they couldn't make it to Midway so they exercised the general credential rule and went back the way they could make it. That was a....

BPW See, the ships were coming down here. The...

BT That night they went the wrong way, I remember.

BPW They came down here a little way and then they went down, they zigzagged and went back the other way so they didn't, they should have come on down here, but they didn't. They only came down here for an hour and then turned south and the zig... Here, I'll show you what, I'll show you what they actually did.

BT They should have closed on the fleet in other words.

BPW Yes, that's right.

BT And they didn't.

BPW They did not. They did for about, see, here's what they...

BT But they didn't know what they had. They had no air groups left to speak of.

BPW Here's where they were. We'll say this is your launch area. This was the.... and, uh, he calls it, uh, course of point option 240, okay. Well, what happened was, they,

this was at 9:00, you launched up in here.

BT Yeah.

BPW So then they followed for a little while and then they went like this, and there they go. So when you came back, you came back from here. You came back like this.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW And found them up in here, somewhere. I don't know what time you got back.

BT 11:30 it says there. There's....

BPW You'd have gotten back around, around...

BT This fleet was there. Ten thirty, must have been two hours here...

BPW 10:30....

BT About 12, about noon.

BPW 9:30, 10:30, no. No, you would have been there before that.

BT Should?

BPW Sure. You were down there. Well, let's see. You fooled around until around quarter of ten. Let's say you didn't start back 'til quarter of ten. It's only an hour and a half. Quarter of 11...

BT It was? How do you know...

BPW Yeah, you'd about, 12, about 11:30, you'd of been back in here about around 11:30. That's about when you would have made it. Now, what happened was that the fighters....

BT We were going down hill but we weren't making any fast speeds...

BPW No great headway, no.

BT We were saving gas.

BPW I'm sure of that, right. The fighters went down. Mitchell's uh, all right, this short-snorter bill says he went in at 10:30 and he says no, it wasn't 10:30, it was later than that when he went down.

BT I don't remember.

BPW He, Ruehlow and Gray were the last three and Ruehlow and Gray went down almost within moments of each other and then and Mitchell was running out of gas and so he just went down wind and went down and never got his life raft out.

BT No, that... Yeah, that happens sometimes.

BPW Ruehlow and Gray, well he said, you know, they, the ship, he hadn't fired any ammunition or hadn't fired any.... so the whole thing was full and it just went down like a rock he said and uh, and he, Ruehlow and Gray were right there and they paddled over to him. They had, each one of them had theirs out and he said that Ruehlow... Mitchell's a short guy...

BT Yeah.

BPW .. a little guy but Gray was 6 foot 2 or something and much...

BT A little hard to fit him into one of those little life rafts.

BPW Very difficult indeed. So they said, Mitchell said that he and Ruehlow spent most of the time together and Gray, they put Gray in one by himself because they couldn't sit in there with him. But it says here that when they were picked up, the wind was 32 knots. So I, I said to him, "My God"...

BT (inaud)

BPW I said, "That sounds like it was very..." I said, "How in the hell did you, the waves at 32 knots, of any kind of sustained wind, would have been very tough to keep the life boat upright or anything else."

BT You couldn't land one of those sea planes either.

BPW And one of those PBYs. Well, he said, you know, he didn't know what it was, of course, but he said it was rough as hell. He said and the reason that I'm doubly, remember doubly sure about it is when they took off...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... they broke one of those bubble windows in the side of that damn plane.

BT Oh, they did?

BPW Yeah. So...

BT Must have been rough.

BPW ... that means it must have really been rough.

BT Yeah.

BPW It had to have been really rough. But he said that he remembered that. Oh God, they were, they, they were apparently, that was something. I mean, and it must have been something to pop that window.

BT I can't remember any weather that would make that.... Well, that was several days later, wasn't it?

BPW All right. Oh, that was.. Oh, that was a week later. That was, uh, on the, this was 9:30 on the 9th. Five, five days later. I don't know anything about where, okay, now this is, here's another inconsistency.

BT Yeah, you find a lot of them, I guess.

BPW Look at this thing. This short-snorter says Mitchell's picked up there.

BT Wind 32 knots, 190 true. (inaud)

BPW Now how in the hell could he have gotten from here all the way over there. I, you remember...

BT Well he was going down and trying to get back to the ship...

BPW Yeah, that's right. It's, it's in the right direction, all right, but he....

BT He started at 18,000 feet.... I think he must have come down.

BPW No, no. He was down, he said that he was down to 8,000 feet. Now when was...

BT Well, that's after they turned back.

BPW ... 8,000 feet.

BT That was after they'd turned back.

BPW All right. Now let's go back to that time of turning. You say you turned within five minutes.

BT I think so.

BPW You made your second left hand turn...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... to get back to the carrier and, and Mitchell verifies it and you feel that the fighters had already turned.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW So they never really turned left at all then. They turned around.

BT Who, the fighters?

BPW The fighters.

BT They had already.

BPW So in other words, the fighters must have turned around about 9:30.

BT Well, I wouldn't want to put any times down on it.

BPW No, no, but...

BT (inaud)

BPW .. it had to be. It had to be. This is where you were at about 9:30. That's, it's, you had to be very close to there. Now they must have turned around and if you turned left and then turned, within five more minutes, or 10 minutes, say, turned left again to go back...

BT Yeah.

BPW Then the fighters had already done it. The fighters, the only conclusion we have is that they turned around as soon as they, as soon as this chit-chat about where the hell the fleet is....

BT I think...

BPW ... they turned around then, or before maybe.

BT I don't think... They should have had it as, as standard operating procedure on that flight that the fighters were going to escort us going out there and if we got to the point where the, they were supposed to, the fleet was supposed to be and we hadn't found them, they should have gone back. They should have, that should have been predecided before because otherwise they couldn't make it and, and they were going too far then as a matter of fact.

BPW Right, right.

BT If they, if they'd gone to where the Jap fleet was supposed to be, they would have been out of fuel before they got back to the ship. They couldn't have had a fight or anything.

BPW No way. Having wasted an hour in the air anyhow...

BT Yeah.

BPW Okay, now. Let's go back to the ready room. What the hell in the brief did they say, if anything, about fighter cover.

BT I don't know. The, oh you mean..

BPW In the ready room. Your ready room.

BT All I...

BPW What'd they say you guys... What did they say. Never mind the fighters. Tell me everything that was said in there if you can. What, any, any glimpse of anything what was said in there. What did they tell you.

BT Let's see. They were mostly worried because they weren't sure where the fleet was.

BPW All right.

BT And I, we just, we had never been out on a group, group where the whole air group, most of them hadn't...

BPW Right, right.

BT ... gone out but we did know, I don't know how we knew, but we knew that, we had to know it. How many planes were going so we could look out for them.

BPW Right, right, okay.

BT We knew that from the briefing but that's about it I think.

BPW Now you knew the course and direction, I mean the course and distance...

BT Yeah, we knew where we were going to go and how far it was.

BPW Where'd you get that? Where'd you get that?

BT In the ready room. In the...

BPW Yeah, but was that told you or was that...

BT Oh, yeah.

BPW ... written?

BT Well, I...

BPW Was it on the bulletin board or was, were you told that?

BT See, there was an automatic thing that everybody could see and that, that changed, and the information on where you're going to go and what position's there and where the point option's going to be and where, it all comes out and you copy it right off. I don't think it was told to us, I think it was told to us...

BPW And you put it right on your...

BT .. by typewriter.

BPW You put, put it on your plotting board.

BT Oh yeah, uh-huh, and... Well you'd have to know...

BPW Did you write it on your plotting board or did you put it down somewhere else.

BT I don't know. I would have put it down where I could see it on the plotting

board, yeah.

BPW Right.

BT And know what the, uh....

BPW Well, wait a minute, now. Did you take...

BT .. plot the course.

BPW When you got out, oh, you didn't fly the same plane every time.

BT No, I...

BPW You took whatever plane was there.

BT That's right. Whichever one we were assigned to.

BPW And that assignment was made at the same time you were assigned to fly.

BT Yeah. Well, you might know the night before that you were going to go on a hop tomorrow, see.

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT But you didn't know what airplane you were going to get until, 'til just before you manned the airplane.

BPW But you didn't know that this time, did you?

BT Do what?

BPW You didn't know that on this flight, did you? You didn't know that you were going to go the day before.

BT Yeah, I think I did.

BPW You did.

BT Mmm-hmm, probably. It would be normal, normal that you'd go, you'd know.

BPW Yeah.

BT And they didn't have enough airplanes for everybody to go.

BPW Certain, so in effect, it was known before. You knew it before you got to the ready room. That was really a confirmation of it.

BT Yeah, that's right. That's normal procedure.

BPW Yeah.

BT I don't remember whether it worked that way or not because it didn't mean anything...

BPW Yeah, yeah.

BT ... particularly.

BPW Yeah. There was no element of a call for volunteers.

BT Hell, no.

BPW I can't imagine.

BT Some of them might have let their desires be known and probably did. It was so long ago.

BPW Oh, yes.

BT (inaud)

BPW Right, right.

BT Where ever they decide the first ones to go in the pen like that, it's up to the squadron commander.

BPW Right, right, I see. All right. So if the fighters, and I am inclined to understand and agree with you, that damn near everybody turned around as soon as you didn't find the fleet.

BT That's right.

BPW You turned south but you didn't go very long. Is that right?

BT All of us knew...

BPW Except Bombing 8. Bombing 8, 14 of them kept on going.

BT Well they didn't keep going, they, they turned left when we turned left.

BPW Yeah, but I mean then they kept going.

BT Yeah, they just...

BPW They kept going on to Midway.

BT Yeah.

BPW Bombing 8 turned left again in five minutes or 10 minutes and went...

BT Scouting 8.

BPW Scouting 8...

BT Yeah.

BPW Turned left again and went back to the Hornet. And already the fighters had turned, your impression is.

BT Yeah.

BPW Do you have any idea why you're sure of that except maybe second hand.

BT Well, there are two reasons. For one thing, they knew they couldn't get even out to where they were supposed to go and get back to the ship. So they went as far as they could go and then they probably turned around when they hadn't seen the ship. If they were... If they'd... Normally the ships, the Jap ships were, by that time, okay, then they would have sacrificed themselves and gone on into cover probably. They, They disguised themselves anyhow by going too far in the first place.

BPW Yes. Now...

BT Maybe we should have done that...

BPW Now...

BT ... in my opinion.

BPW Yeah. Well, right. Now let me ask you this. When you turned around and headed back for the ship...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... did you just simply use your reciprocal of your heading going out?

BT I don't know. You wouldn't... You'd have to... You would have already figured out about what the wind was and from observation..

BPW All right, but you had no, you had no wind. You had damn little wind. You only had three or four knots on take-off, nothing. It was one of the problems.

BT Yeah but we had... I don't know what we had higher up. You can usually figure out what your drift...

BPW All right.

BT ... some, not like you do on the...

BPW You didn't have a drift meter.

BT But you did have a window you could look through.

BPW Yeah, okay.

BT And you could see some of your drift and get an idea. Just a, just a guess.

BPW I got ... I got... I got you.

BT Probably a good guess.

BPW All right but it wouldn't have been much anyhow, probably.

BT No, probably not.

BPW Probably not. There was no indication of any wind really, of any great amount of wind. So it would have been a, a very small... So that it wouldn't of been more than a, a couple, two, three degrees off of that though, maybe five.

BT Yeah, it wouldn't be much off.

BPW Couldn't of been more than five.

BT This gets you within visual range of the...

BPW Right.

BT ... of the ships when you turned back.

BPW When you turned to go back to the ship, did you personally turn your homing device?

BT I don't think we even had them.

BPW You didn't have them.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Mmm-hmm.

BT In those airplanes.

BPW It was only, it was only, only the flight leaders or the section leaders or something that had them.

BT It may have been that. Maybe they'd had them in the fighters and not in the SBDs yet.

BPW All right.

BT We had them the next time we went overseas...

BPW All right, all right.

BT ... but and they...

BPW You don't remember.... You don't remember them in the, in the, uh, on that flight.

BT No, no, and I don't, didn't think we had anything except navigation and visual.

BPW Yeah, right.

BT But here again I could be wrong but I don't remember using... Of course we hadn't done a whole lot of flying out there yet.

BPW Right.

BT Later on when we did use them, uh, yeah, we had them then. That's right, because we could, we learned how to bracket the things, the Japs could do the same thing.

BPW Sure, sure.

BT But...

BPW Well...

BT See, we had them but I don't remember using them on that flight.

BPW Do you think they were on the plane?

BT Yeah, I think they were.

BPW Oh, you think they were?

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Uh-huh.

BT When I think about... because I remember later on, on the cruise, long after the Battle of Midway...

BPW How about down at Santa Cruz, did, were you flying down there?

BT Yeah, no, I was on the ship that day.

BPW All right. Excuse me, go ahead, what did you start to say about Davis?

BT Uh, we came back aboard, it was after dark one, at night. That's what time they lit up the ships somewhat...

BPW Yeah.

BT ... for all the men.

BPW Yeah.

BT And they had put the wrong code on the YE-ZB. The thing that tells you where, how to go home. They were a big help, see? They had, they have so many letters and...

BPW Yeah, oh yeah.

BT Big secret but you... and you know the numbers, the letters so that when you hear one of them you can normally go within 30 degrees of it and go that direction.

BPW That's right.

BT Well, they had the wrong thing on. They, they'd given us the wrong YE-ZB code, so everybody was going the wrong direction that was paying any attention to it but Ray Davis had figured out a way to, to bracket the thing.

BPW I see.

BT It was supposed to be impossible.

BPW I see.

BT It was no good anyhow. It wasn't even.... normally, it wasn't any help, it, it'd be, it couldn't even help the Japanese.

BPW Did they, did you all have an IFF then?

BT Yeah, I think it YE-ZB, IFF... no, uh, yeah, I think we did.

BPW You think you did?

BT But that's all we had. It was passive.

BPW Yeah.

BT Completely passive.

BPW Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well that, that stayed on for a long, long, long time because we had that, uh, just sitting in that, in those...

BT Well, it did give you a bigger balance, uh, bigger signal to get back to use... I don't guess we did have IFF then. Just the expensive airplanes had IFF.

BPW I don't know about that. Oh, no, I wouldn't say that but I'll tell you... Why I know that, it was a very unfortunate kind of a thing that happened one day. We took off from Bougainville and were, I don't know, it was a kind of a mail run or, you know, one of these damn things and we were going all the way up to the Philippines, you know, this was very....

BT In a DC-3 from Bougainville?

BPW DC-3, yeah.

BT That (inaud)

BPW Oh, God. Well, what happened was we split it. Well anyhow what, what we.... We land... We took off and landed up, went up to Green Island and I think we delivered the mail there and then went on up to.... And we were flying up past Kavieng and, and there was still a few of the Japs around. Every now and then they'd crank one out of the woodwork somewhere and, and so, but over at Manus and at Emirau, we were going into Emirau...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... and it had been taken over by some Aussies in F4-Us. They were at the field.

BT Had F4-Us?

BPW Yeah, yeah, and what happened was, all of a sudden, we're just flying along fat, dumb and happy... one of these old, Christ, it was a, one of the old Capital Airlines' DC-3 that the Marine Corp. had got a, gotten somehow but, God, all of a sudden, here come two of these F4-Us, zoom, zoom. Really making runs on us, see?

BT They weren't shooting, though, were they?

BPW No, they weren't shooting but scared us to death...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... and...

BT They'd do that. Those guys, uh, the New Zealanders in the P-40s were the ones that used to worry me.

BPW Yeah, well they did and they fired but they weren't shooting at us but they fired ahead of us. We could see them.

BT Oh, they did?

BPW Yeah, they did.

BT (inaud)

BPW Oh, Christ, well then, we opened up on the radio and they said your IFF's out.

BT On?

BPW No, is out or that's what they said.

BT You left it off.

BPW And it wasn't working. No, we, it wasn't, it wasn't, it was screwed up as it turned out. So, well, we identified, we're going into Emirau and okay, well, okay, all right...

BT They didn't know who you were. They sure knew when they saw you.

BPW For God's sake, they knew what the hell we were when they saw us. But anyhow, when we landed, we landed first and rolled down, all right, and we were getting ready to take-off again when they came in and one of them landed and everything and it was a, it was a little cross wind blowing but not much.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Christ, the second one comes in, ground loops, hits the damn side of a (inaud),

BT Oh, dear.

BPW ... boom, kills the guy right on the goddurned spot. Really an unfortunate thing. It was just, man, I never got over that quite. I, that was a hell of a thing. Just because that damn fool IFF with that, they would never have been, you know...

BT Wouldn't have been flying...

BPW Flying down there, but it, uh, but, so I remember that...

BT That, those would ground looped pretty easy, I ...

BPW Oh yeah, I guess so.

BT What would really give you... If you poured the coal to it too fast it would ground loop to the left. It had a wild fork in it.

BPW Is that right?

BT You couldn't, You couldn't get it full gun.

BPW What did they have... Did they have... What, what power... were they, were they (inaud) windows in that?

BT I think so. Might have been. Well, they had several different models of F4-U's.

BPW Yeah, oh yeah, I know they did. God they....

BT Later on they got a high altitude with a lot of super charges on it. It would go faster than some of the jets when they first came out.

BPW Is that right?

BT Yeah.

BPW God, well, uh, anyhow.... This, you see, now if the plane was turned around, they would have just taken the reciprocal. What the hell else... They couldn't have had any other course, they couldn't have been thinking anything else.

BT Well that would be about right.

BPW Isn't that true?

BT Yeah.

BPW All right.

BT Well you, you know, you wouldn't take the exact reciprocal. If you'd flown five minutes out here, you'd have to figure out...

BPW All right, okay, okay, all right...

BT .. I would have replotted a course back.

BPW But, but, you would have, but remember now....

BT I was flying formation.

BPW ... the fighters didn't do it.

BT Yeah. Didn't do what?

BPW We said the fighters, they didn't hardly turn left at all.

BT Oh yeah, that's right. They was still in the track out from the ship.

BPW Yeah, so they turned right around.

BT Yeah.

BPW That would have been the logical assumption.

BT Oh yeah, I think so and then did their navigation while they were heading back.

BPW And Mitchell said, and Mitchell, in effect, verified that in that he said, "well, we turned, we... by the time those guys turned, we had already turned well ahead of them. We turned first," he said. There was no question about it. So what he really said was that he turned around, period.

BT That's right.

BPW There's nothing else he could have done.

BT That's right. Should have done it sooner.

BPW Now... He should have done it sooner. Now, look what happens here. Here, he's picked up down here, all right? Now, and yet, let's get this thing in it's proper perspective. Here we are.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW That's about, that's about... There it is, all right? Now, here's the, here's the, here's... Well, no. This was five days later. He, we're saying, started back like this and he flew for an hour....

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... and fifteen minutes or so. So he damn near got back.

BT Well how far was he out when he....

BPW He was 155 miles out.

BT From the ship?

BPW Before he turned around. That's right.

BT Oh, is that all?

BPW That's all.

BT Then they wasted a lot of time around the ship then, didn't they?

BPW They wasted a hell of a lot of time at the ship.

BT And they made it climbing... and I wonder if they can't...

BPW Climbing all the time.

BT Yeah, yeah.

BPW Further more, he must have turned around. He must have come down to 8,000 feet...

BT To escort the...

BPW ... before he started, before he started back. He was at 8,000 feet when they started back.

BT Oh, he was? He didn't come down to it. Well you see, that's why he used so damn much gas. Fooling around at the ship part of the day...

BPW Sure. That's where, that's where he blew it. That's where he blew it.

BT Yeah.

BPW He could have damn near made it, looks to me. Because he had an hour and 15 minutes from, from right down here and that would have been 130, we'll say 30, 35 miles and he was only 155 miles away.

BT Yeah, they lost...

BPW Or ...

BT ... they were climbing too much. They were doing too much fiddle faddling around the ships waiting to get permission to go. They went up high, all right, but then stay up there. If you start going up and coming down, then climbing out and then, again, you're going to use, if that's what happened, they're going to use up your gas.

BPW You remember, did you have in your life raft those neat little... we had some, were the neatest little life raft charts. They were like silk and they were real pretty and they were colored and they had.....

BT Japs probably made them.

BPW Huh?

BT The Japs probably made...

BPW Probably made... that's right. But they were impervious to the water or anything and they were really nice charts and they had, in particular, the wind and the current in the boxes set out like that, yeah. Did you have those that you, do you know?

BT No.

BPW Did not have them at all?

BT I, I don't know. I never really looked to see in the life raft what was in there but I don't think we had any because I would have seen them at one time or another.

BPW I would have thought so, yeah.

BT I guess we might have had some charts in the life rafts but I don't remember seeing exactly what they were.

BPW I doubt if you would have had them. That wasn't until some time later that I saw those things.

BT This was pretty early in the war. I doubt if we...

BPW This was very early.

BT They would have given it to the bigger airplanes first anyhow.

BPW Yes, they, they were rather small scale, large area.

BT Mmm-hmm. No, they wouldn't have been much use.

BPW No, but, but they were made of very nice, they like silk cloth. You could fold them down until they were the size of a handkerchief and man, it covered a hell of a territory in the water.

BT I was wondering what you were going to do with it in a life raft.

BPW Well, as a matter of fact, they were used several times...

BT Yeah, to wash them out.

BPW ... by guys down, yeah... We had, down at Cherry Point, I was at Cherry Point, you know, operational training thing down there. I used to teach, I was in, in navigation. I used to teach for old man Weems before the war, see?

BT Yeah.

BPW And so I had to do with that and we, I had some funny kind of things... One day the old man down there at Cherry Point called me and said, "Weisheit, we've got a, we have a, you've got to teach a new course." I said, "Oh, what's that?" He says, "Survival". And I said, "What the hell? I don't know anything about..." Hundreds of books, you know, that kind of stuff. Anyhow, I did see some of those charts that had, the one that I'm talking about, and I caught up with them somewhere but we had a couple of guys, a couple of planes that went down. PBJs, B-25s, you know, out there and guys made fairly good use of those...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW There was one guy in particular that was practically a legend because that sucker had a lot of trouble. He was a co-pilot and the pilot, when they went in they smacked in pretty good.

BT The B-25s?

BPW The B-25.

BT Yeah.

BPW And one of the crewmen got out and the pilot and the co-pilot got out but the pilot was all messed up. Died the first night and then the other guy died within a day or

so.

BT They must have hit.

BPW They hit. They really hit. They really hit.

BT That's like those Doolittle bombers. All those were B-25s.

BPW They were all B-25s, same plane.

BT They didn't have too much luck landing those things, I wouldn't think, in the water.

BPW Oh no. Oh no. Uh-uh, no. Well, anyhow, this guy got out and he had this, he made very good use of that chart. There was a chart in, in that plane that I'm talking about.

BT Mmm.

BPW And he got to the island and he got rather... It came to my attention because he did everything right.

BT Mmm.

BPW And he even got to an island....

BT They must have had a sail they could rig on there...

BPW There was. There was. It was a... Well, it was a sail and a cover also. These were, I think, three man life rafts. They were still little as hell.

BT They could collect water...

BPW Oh yeah, yeah.

BT and what do you call it, a sailboat?

BPW There was a bucket too and you could collect water and, but anyhow, he got to an island and so help me God, after three days there he...

End of Tape 2/ Side 1

Tape 2/ Side 2

BT DFC...

BPW You had a DFC?

BT Yeah.

BPW And you got a hit on, which one was it?

BT That Mogami cruiser.

BPW Yeah.

BT I headed forward on a port bow. A paint scraper did it.

BPW Uh, huh.

BT Right down the side and blew it, a hole in the side and blew up... You could see the railings and people and everything going up in the air but they, you didn't hit him direct...

BPW Oh, God. Well that was the one that sank.

BT No, they got him back finally, I understand.

BPW Oh the Mogami got back to the Mikuma or something.

BT Whatever it was. I've lost track of which one was which.

BPW That one was the one that was sunk.

BT They got...

BPW Uh, how about, how about against the, the, what's the fourth, Hiryu, Hiryu, uh, the fourth Jap carrier.

BT Hiryu, Soryu and, I think, I don't.... I never saw a carrier at the Battle of

Midway.

BPW I see.

BT That's the truth.

BPW Well, you must not have...

BT By that night they had them all knocked out. That was the thing.

BPW Yeah.

BT And we were the only squadron left on the ship.

BPW Oh, I see. You were the ones, you were the ones that had gone out and had gotten back and then did not go out again that day, of course.

BT Well, I don't know...

BPW I presume...

BT It seems to me we were in a small strike but there wasn't much left to run the strike with. Just one squadron.

BPW You know, let me throw something out at you about... At Santa Cruz, the Hornet took, what was it, five? Two, three and four, it took. Two planes came aboard, crashed. Three torpedoes hit it and four bombs hit it...

BT Hit what?

BPW The Hornet at Santa Cruz.

BT Oh, yeah. I know that.

BPW Two, three and four, according to the reports, all right?

BT Yeah.

BPW Now, and all kinds of goodies. The planes had those incendiary pellets with them and...

BT They did?

BPW Oh yeah. It was a beauty.

BT One of those planes went right into, it bored a hole right, it hit my room and it cleaned out everything except the, right down to the deck. I had notes. I was writing a book and so...

BPW Oh, gosh...

BT .. it went horizontally, right through into the number 1 elevator well and the pilots, some of the men came and got me to come see what to do about this and I went forward and looked at it and it, these guys were, the pilots, the crew and whatnot, were in the suit of 1000 knots, they said they called it. It was really a, it was... They were all bandaged up with bandages. They looked like they could take more G's or more punishment or something that way.

BPW Oh, oh....

BT But they were dead as doornails, I think. They couldn't have lived through that.

BPW No. I couldn't see how. But the point that I'm making is that the ship didn't sink then.

BT No, that's right. We had full watertight integrity on.

BPW That's right.

BT And...

BPW Not only that but, you know, we fired several torpedoes in her when we left.

BT 16.

BPW 16, okay.

BT From what I understand.

BPW Yeah, I mean it was right. It was a bundle.

BT Yeah.

BPW I don't know whether they all hit or what but anyhow, she was still afloat when the Japs...

BT The next morning she was still afloat, on her side, I think, still afloat.

BPW And the Japs put her down.

BT I don't know whether they did it or whether it just sank.

BPW According to Dull... According to Dull's history, uh, the Jap side, they said they put two more in her and down she went. All right, now the point I'm making is this. Morison and Lord and these other historians make a big, great to-do about the Jap carriers sinking themselves.

BT The Jap carriers?

BPW Yeah. By blowing themselves up.

BT But not on purpose.

BPW Not on purpose.

BT Yeah...

BPW No. The dive bombers did the trick. There's no question about that...

BT Yeah.

BPW but, uh, two bombs hit the Akagi which was the fleet, the flag ship. Two bombs.

BT Yeah.

BPW Three hits to the Soryu and four hit Kaga and then four hits Hiryu. But on the first three carriers, the Akagi and the Kaga and the Soryu, I don't know if that's how you pronounce them, but...

BT That's good.

BPW They were loaded with planes, okay? They were loaded...

BT That's what sank them.

BPW .. to the ears with planes and that, no doubt...

BT They could have been hit by a cigarette lighter or...

BPW That's right it would have sunk them with a cigarette lighter. That's right. But, now that all sounds good and that is true but what I'm saying is this. There were no planes left from the Hiryu.

BT No, there weren't any. No, that's right.

BPW There was no planes left.

BT Yeah, because they, they were all up flying when the....

BPW They only had a half a dozen fighter planes left and that was it anyhow.

BT Yeah, I know...

BPW Now she sank...

BT Not only that, that was, those, those Jap planes and pilots and stress pilots, the ones that were lost, they lost in the Battle of Midway... That wiped out the Japanese air force.

BPW Oh yeah, that was the, that was probably the biggest...

BT It took a long time to train the replacements.

BPW You're right, that's right. No question about it. But the thing that I'm... The point that I'm really making is that I think our carriers must have basically been better designed or ...

BT Yeah, we had better integrity...

BPW Must have had. Much, much better....

BT But also, we, we were, they'd take chances. They had had all the... They knew they might get attacked any minute and they had all this gasoline pressure up and they were fueling planes and arming planes right away and that's one reason, probably, that we had, we were so slow getting going on, on our attack that we've been talking about. We had, you have to, you would go on up ahead of time so you can get secured and you don't get...

BPW Yeah.

BT You have any attacks coming in while you're gassing or while you're fueling

the airplane. While you're putting on ammunition.

BPW Yeah.

BT And all these, these things that are, you try to maintain safety on it and it slows you down considerably and I think that had a lot to do with the tardiness of the airgroup in getting out toward the target.

BPW Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. That follows. It certainly does. There's no doubt about that. The, but the Yorktown, you know, the Yorktown, she, my god, she had a 17 degree list, got it back to seven, then got her flooding ballast, uh, ballast flooded or whatever, got going and cranked herself back up to about 15 knots or something.

BT Yeah, she was doing all right for awhile out there.

BPW Yeah, but now that was when it was apparently in the second attack on the Yorktown, that Groves got it.

BT Oh.

BPW ... somehow.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW And uh, I don't have any account of it except that he was definitely on CAP and that was it.

BT He just got shot down, I guess.

BPW He just got shot down and that was about how it was.

BT I may even remember that, at all.. but like I say, I didn't know Groves....

BPW Mitchell, Mitchell didn't know it either.

BT He didn't?

BPW He thought Groves, Mitchell literally thought that Groves, until I showed him the record, that Groves was with him. Mitchell really confused me sometimes because I couldn't see how in the hell, how could a flight leader not, not know who his own wing people were.

BT That's the commanding officer of the squadron. That's a little unusual.

BPW It sure is unusual to my thinking.

BT I, maybe, maybe that dope you got on... Where'd you get that dope on Groves, Gray, Groves, yeah....

BPW This? A half a dozen sources.

BT Really?

BPW No question. No question about it. No question about it. What I want to do is this. What I started to say is this about this business of where Mitchell was picked up. Down here....

BT Yeah.

BPW Now, then, now the, now our.. and our fleet was here. Well, no, not by then. They'd in the meantime gone over and come back but, well, the question is, if he was picked up here on the 9th, where, where the hell did he go down?

BT Where could he... Well, he was, let's see...

BPW Wind, all right, we got two things and that's, and that's all he had going with him. He had wind and water.

BT Well it looks like he moved about 100 and, maybe 100 miles or a little over on, after he was in the water.

BPW Do you agree with me that he damn near got back?

BT Well, I don't know when he turned around. I don't have any information on that.

BPW All right. Yes, you do, too. And you supplied it.

BT Well...

BPW Listen, let's review this a minute, Ben. You had to be there at damn near 9:30.

BT Yeah.

BPW It had to be.

BT Uh-huh. That's what it says right here, 9:20, 9:30.

BPW That's right and that's how it works out and this is how it all figures out. I've got plenty of supporting data for everything on here.

BT Uh-huh. Now he turned back before we got to here, though.

BPW Now, let's suppose you flew on...

BT I guess.

BPW ... through a little way.

BT Yeah, he must have.

BPW Let's say you flew on through a little bit. You did, that would be logical.

BT Yes.

BPW And let's say that...

BT While they were arguing on what to do.

BPW While they were arguing, Mitchell says, "You guys can argue all you want about turning right or left, I'm turning around."

BT Yeah, he did it then or he...

BPW Right.

BT ... should have done it sooner.

BPW Right. Now, so he turns around, let's say at 9:30 or something like that.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW He was in the water at quarter of 11. So 10:30, an hour and 15 minutes.

BT From the time he turned back, yeah, he should of been... going down hill.

BPW So he should have gotten very close back there.

BT Yeah, he should have unless we had an unusual wind or something that day.

BPW And the distance to there and to Midway is damn near...

BT 150.

BPW It's more.

BT Is it?

BPW No, right here.

BT Yeah, I was figuring this. It's about 120, 150...

BPW So there's no assurance that he would have made Midway, really, is there?

BT Oh, no. He wouldn't have made Midway. Midway was harder to make than getting back to the ship.

BPW That's what I say.

BT Yeah, mmm-hmm.

BPW All right.

BT I think the first choice was to go back to the ship. The second choice was Midway and the third choice was in the drink. No choice.

BPW All right, now let me ask you this. Lord and Morison both say, and I don't know what their sources are, but Ring did not, sort of, relinquish command in the situation or cut everybody loose and put them on their own or whatever until he saw Kure.

BT Oh.

BPW And knew the Japs were no longer, there was no possibility of the Japs being between him and Midway.

BT Yeah, well there's no...

BPW Now how....

BT Is there a fighter strip on Kure?

BPW No. There's nothing there and it's a very low sand atoll that you'd have one hell of a time seeing from 20 miles away.

BT I don't remember...

BPW You were....

BTanybody even mentioning Kure. They should have and it's been 40 years, I'll grant you that. I certainly didn't see Kure Island but I didn't even know it was in existence or had any bearing on any of this.

BPW Well, that's the official line that I don't like because there's no way to jibe it.

Now Mitchell was very...

BT Well, they should have briefed us on it... but, it was the nearest land to...

BPW You...

BT ... where ever the Jap ships were and the nearest land to us and there's nothing.. nearest land to the fleet, is it?

BPW Yes, no, not to the fleet. Midway might have been a little bit closer to the fleet. Might have been a little bit... Oh, here, here's the fleet... So, well, Midway...

BT Maybe a little but not much.

BPW ... maybe just nothing, nothing, no, no...

BT But it would have been the closest land to where we were when we got into dire straits.

BPW No question about it.

BT And, uh...

BPW No question about it.

BT The point of no return for the fighters was way back in here somewhere. That's where they... Once they passed that they couldn't get back to the ship..

BPW That's what happens.

BT ..or, or Midway.

BPW Now Mitchell was very, he was... Lord quoted Ruehlow as saying this. There's another very incon... thing that seems inconsistent and Mitchell verified this, and you understand inconsistent. He said, first of all, in Lord's book, Lord quotes Ruehlow as saying when they went in, as he ran out of gas and was getting in, going down into the water, he looked off to his left and he saw smoke and he realized that we had, you know, that this, Japs had been attacked.

BT Somebody's been...

BPW Yeah.

BT Mmm-hmm. That was McClusky.

BPW Yeah.

BT That's what it was.

BPW And also the guy on, from, from the Yorktown.

BT Yeah.

BPW They hit at the same time, within three, four, within five minutes of each other.

BT Yeah.

BPW They left an hour apart in time and they got there at the same three minutes. Can you believe that one?

BT Well, apparently got hung up in the same delay that we got hung up in.

BPW Yeah, that's something.

BT They must have.

BPW No, no, no. The Yorktown had planes, scouting planes out that they had to recover.

BT Oh.

BPW And that's why they were late taking off. Their gang, their gang, their whole gang was, the whole bunch was late taking off.

BT Oh.

BPW And that's why they were... But the curious thing about them, they each one of their elements, fighters, dive bombers, torpedoes, flew straight to the Jap ships exactly

straight. They didn't use the same heading at all. They flew directly right straight to them.

BT That just their best guess or had they gotten some more information.

BPW No, well there's no way. I don't know. There's... I don't know but that's what happened, in any event, and that's why they got there at the same time that the, uh, the Enterprise planes got there.

BT Probably went in a straight line.

BPW Yeah, they finally went in a straight line but...

BT Well, I don't know. I'm glad I wasn't leading that flight.

BPW Well, what was I starting to say... Um.. Oh, Ruehlow was quoted by Lord as saying that he saw the, the, the smoke on the horizon and knew that they had the black smoke, and knew that they had to have been hit...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ...see? Mitchell, I didn't say anything about that at all and Mitchell said when he was going down, he saw the Jap fleet.

BT He did? That's just a difference in light, I think and we could have seen if we looked in the right place and looked hard enough if he saw it. If he saw it.

BPW Yeah.

BT We could have seen it too.

BPW You were within sight of that fleet.

BT We must have been.

BPW There's no question about it.

BT But why couldn't we see it? Nobody in our flight saw it.

BPW All right, now let's think of something. Which way are you looking?

BT Well, that's it, we're looking down sun right ahead of us.

BPW You're looking down sun...

BT .. and...

BPW Now wait a minute. What time, it was in the summertime. All right, the sun's 23 north, where the sun was directly behind you.

BT That's right. See, we should...

BPW Directly behind you.

BT They should have just popped right out but they didn't so we were...

BPW So curious...

BT ... well they're off to the side, I think, and we're getting some kind of obstruction of vision.

BPW There had to be clouds OR there had to be...

BT Some mist or something that was there that maybe...

BPW Had to be because not only you, you see, you could, you could say, well, okay, this one flight missed it but McClusky missed it. Missed it cold, too. He was ahead of you and a little bit even closer to them.

BT Yeah. You know one thing, we were flying a lot higher altitude than we usually fly at. Most of the time we spent...

BPW Yeah, that makes a big difference, too.

BT And maybe they didn't realize that. Also we, that way your vision is actually impaired by, by altitude, lack of oxygen (inaud) They might have all had little, little bearings on it.

BPW Yeah.

BT Nobody saw it though.

BPW And yet you were looking like crazy. McClusky even had binoculars with him, looking like crazy.

BT Yeah, he did. That's right. He just died not too long ago. About a year ago.

BPW Yeah.

BT In Baltimore.

BPW Yeah, that's right. Oh, I knew him. I met him.

BT He knew my father and my step mother but I didn't... I had met him. I'd met him a couple of times but I didn't really know....

BPW Yeah, he's had an unfortunate time with his kids. Well, if you could have told me that 75 airplanes could have gone charging by that thing like that and never seen a whole fleet, 25 miles away, I'd have said you're crazy, you know? But that's what happened.

BT I've seen some funny things in lighting. Light can play an awful big (inaud)

BPW On the water, particularly. No doubt about it. There's, there's just no doubt about it. See what happened was, they came down here. This was where they were at 9:17 and made, they came back the 30 degrees so the normal to 90 degree turn away.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW And then they even turned up a little bit farther and they were hit up in here. McClusky got to them about right here.

BT Yeah.

BPW Uh, somewhere along in, about right there. He had, He had gone through like this, come up like this, and then come back like that.

BT McClusky had?

BPW Yeah.

BT Yeah.

BPW And the Yorktown people had gone (whistle), right like that.

BT Right through it, yeah.

BPW Right through it.

BT You know, its interesting because somewhere about this time, right after we'd gotten back to it and on the ship, a Jap, I don't know how many airplanes there were, not very many, maybe two or three or so, flew right over us and apparently never saw us.

BPW Is that right?

BT Yeah, but we weren't the only ones.....

BPW Scouting planes...

BT .. they were, they went over and attacked somebody else. I think they attacked the Yorktown.

BPW Oh, oh, the Yorktown, yes.

BT Yeah.

BPW They went over the Hornet?

BT Right over us.

BPW Oh, God!

BT So, so they were having trouble too. And they were lower down. We could see them. I didn't. Somebody else did.

BPW Well their first attack was, their first attack was by dive bombers.

BT On the Yorktown?

BPW Yep. And the second attack was by torpedoes.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW So they should have been a little higher. I mean they, the dive bombers should have been...

BT They should have been higher.

BPW Higher, a little higher. Oh, before I forget about it, the, your remark that Kelly landed downwind.

BT Yeah, I heard he did. I don't, I didn't ... I never knew (inaud)

BPW Now where in this world would you have heard that, Ben?

BT Well, Clark Barrett said the same thing.

BPW All right.

BT Do you know Clark?

BPW He did, yeah.

BT He said he heard it. I don't think he knew whether he, uh, landed or not.

BPW Uh-huh.

BT But, and where else have I heard that? I've forgotten.

BPW Well...

BT That was, that was the standard thing at the time. We wondered why Mark hadn't been picked up but if he landed down wind, he hits a hell of a lot harder than if he'd.... depending on the strength of the wind but he hits a lot harder than if he's into it....

BPW Well, the only source of that could have been somebody that saw him, makes any sense.

BT It must have been somebody that.. Yeah...

BPW Okay..

BT That saw him and came back.

BPW Now Gray didn't see him.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Because Gray was up front. Might have been Magda. There's no way of knowing that because Magda's gone. You... Therefor, it was only... There are only maybe three possibilities.

BT It'd have to be somebody in the, in this Fighting 8 that was on that flight, I'd think.

BPW Right. Well, Magda was.

BT Yes, I know.

BPW There are only three left, then, that saw Kelly go down. There are only three possibilities that saw Kelly go down that are left. And those three are Tallman, Talbot and a guy by the name of Jennings, who was a JG.

BT Yeah, that's not "Boots" Jennings, is it? Might be. I didn't think he was on the... No, he wasn't in Torpedo .. in Scouting 8... I don't know what he was in.

BPW God, we're down to three. I've lost another man to know. Gray could not have seen him. There's no possibility. Gray was a section leader up front with Ruehlow.

BT Have you talked to Clark Barrett?

BPW Unless he was flying wing on... Unless he was flying wing on.... No, I haven't talked to Barrett. No, I mean, you know, like this. I've talked to him on the telephone.

BT There's old McNerny. I remember him. A great, big fat guy, McNerny.

BPW Mmm-hmm.

BT And he and somebody else were next to each other in the life raft. I guess they went in and landed next to each other so they could get mutual assistance.

BPW Who is that now?

BT McNerny...

BPW McNerny?

BT .. and somebody else. I don't know who it was. McNerny was, would pat himself on the stomach and gloat because he'd tell the other guy, why, he says, "A long time after you're gone, I'll still be here eating ...".

BPW Oh, now McNerny. I've missed McNerny. I see. Okay, McNerny was on the flight too, then.

BT Yeah, apparently he was. He was in the water sometime, then, with

somebody else that we're talking about.

BPW Tallman, Talbot and McInerny.

BT I'm not sure it's the same flight but somewhere along the line...

BPW (inaud)

BT Because that was the end of... That was the end of Fighting 8 is, apparently, all most. For awhile it was.

BPW 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 10, yeah, McInerny was on that flight. Furthermore, McInerny, Tallman, Tallman and Talbot and Jennings.... No, not Talbot. Talbot was picked up by himself.

BT Did they ever get any... Did anybody go in the water at the same time that Mark did?

BPW That's just it.

BT Accompanied him or anything?

BPW That's just what I'm...

BT Yeah.

BPW There are only now... I'm down to only three possibilities...

BT Not quite.

BPW ... that I can verify it.

BT Oh, mmm-hmm.

BPW They're living, there are only three possibilities of somebody being alive that saw him.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW They are Tallman, Talbot, no, I mean four. McInerny and Jennings.

BT Yeah, it's four.

BPW Now how in the hell am I going to find them?

BT Uh, I don't know. How did you get leads on the others?

BPW Well, all kinds of curious ways. Admiral Eller, I have here... Do you know Eller...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... by any chance?

BT Eller?

BPW Were you still around?

BT The, the guy that run the museum?

BPW Yeah.

BT Yeah, I almost was set to go... I almost went to work with him one time.

BPW Well, there's a letter that Herb, one of my... he's the President of the Foundation, got from Eller and I think I'm about to go back to see him now that I know what I really want to.... He can find out what the Navy has with respect to those people, if anything.

BT They were never (inaud) I don't think. I don't know.

BPW Well, they would have something. They would have information about them. He gave me the lead on Mitchell, see.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW Let me... There's one other thing that is... is, has confused me a little bit. I said to Mitchell, "Did you see any other airplanes?" "No other airplanes except the dive bombers. Own dive bombers."

BT Yeah.

BPW Didn't see any at all. I sort of pressed him on the point. The last planes back from Midway, Japanese planes back from Midway...

BT That's air strike on Midway, yeah.

BPW Air strike on Midway. Here, look at this once.

BT Had enough of these?

BPW Yes, sir, I have indeed. They're delicious. Was.. They landed at 9:17 right at that spot. Now you could have been... You could have been, you know, we'll say right here at 9:20.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW 25, 28, 30 miles away.

BT Mmm-hmm. We should have seen them.

BPW At that time they had been attacked...

BT No, they hadn't been yet.

BPW They had been attacked four times.

BT Well, we would have seen them because they were...

BPW Three, three or four times by B-17s, B-26s and the people out of, and the people out of Midway.

BT Well that wasn't this force, was it?

BPW That force, exact force, that plane, that's where the Akagi was at that moment.

BT No, I'm talking about the, you know, the other, the Japanese force that, where they'd been attacked by the B-17s and all that.

BPW Oh, no, no, no. They were the transports. They were way down here.

BT Yeah.

BPW I'm not talking about them at all. They were... They were attacked even the day before.

BT That's right. I...

BPW On, on the ...

BT But I didn't think there were any B-17s and that, all, all that involved out in here.

BPW Oh, yes.

BT There were?

BPW Oh, yes. Yeah, there were. They didn't do a damn thing. They, they went over 20,000 feet and they dropped 50 tons of bombs and, and shook up the fish.

BT But they should have... Did they give us a position? Did they make a position report?

BPW Nothing.

BT No.

BPW No, they hurried back to Pearl Harbor and told how they'd sank the, the Jap fleet.

BT Yeah, we, we got those reports a week, about a week later.

BPW Right. But now, the point that I want to press here is this. There were a lot of airplanes in the air.

BT Right about that time.

BPW Right at the time you're there.

BT Yeah. Something's funny.

BPW All kinds of airplanes, Ben. Theirs, ours, everything else. Now if the fighters that we're talking about. Kelly's fighters, Mitchell's fighters had come through a little and then turn around and go back, he's there for a little while. He's there for 20 minutes in the neighborhood. He's got to be there.

BT Yeah, there's something wrong because, well, we didn't get right out of there. Right. We made a sort of a turn around like that.

BPW And here he, and, and here Ring, and Ring hears Waldron say, "Well, I'm going to the north." You know damn well he's going to look that way and he's got 10 times as much height as Waldron has and Waldron sees him within five minutes after he... within three minutes, almost after he turned.

BT Hmm. There was something obstructing the vision.

BPW There had to be.

BT It wouldn't have popped up that fast.

BPW There had to be clouds.

BT Uh, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if this position doesn't take into account the fact that the Japanese fleet turned around and went away from Midway, somewhere right along in...

BPW Here it is. Right here, see. This is their turn.

BT Oh.

BPW This is their turn at exactly that time and exactly that place, they turned this way.

No question about it. They were sunk right here. So it's very close. You know...

This, this is the best information that I have.

BT That's amazing...

BPW You know....

BT .. well that would sort of bear out the fact that Waldron didn't see it. Nobody could see it and he went just a few miles, really...

BPW Just a very few miles and instantly was

BT ... and then they were, then they went way out away from him and they were right there.

BPW Right there.

BT There was obviously some kind of an inversion or ...

BPW Something.

BT .. temperature or something that was, was making an obstruction division which is very possible. All you need to do is have a marked change in temperature or something.

BPW Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, and it was early in the morning and so to speak and so it's possible all right.

BT Of course, that was a long time ago and people didn't know that much about changes in temperature and the air, division through the air and stuff like that.

BPW That's right. But it just seems so incredible, sort of, to me that there were that many airplanes in the air. You see, what happened, what the Japs did was this. They saved half their entire fleet. They only sent one-half of their fleet to Midway. They saved one-half of all their airplanes back on board the carriers.

BT Yeah, but they didn't have anybody to fly them.

BPW Well, no, no. They had the pilots there and everything. They...

BT (inaud)

BPW They say, right, I mean not the attack on, on Midway.

BT Yeah.

BPW They only sent half their planes.

BT Uh-huh.

BPW They kept half on back.

BT Okay.

BPW Now what happened was this. Pretty soon the planes at Midway took off at about 5:45.

BT Yeah.

BPW Something like that and...

BT In the morning.

BPW In the morning and for the Jap fleet. Now, what happened was while the Japs were hitting Midway, they had flown by and there was some contacts.

BT Yeah.

BPW And all that, but, a number of our planes came on through. The B-26s, the four B-26s got through on the... There was some 17s. There was some, there was the squadron of TBFs.

BT Yeah.

BPW Henderson had the squadron that was supposed to be on the Hornet.

BT It was the other half...

BPW Yeah, they, they got through.

BT ... of Torpedo 8.

BPW Right. They got through and there was some, uh....

BT They lost everybody that wasn't there.

BPW Yeah, yeah, oh, they got murdered. And then, then those other, those other dive bombers. What were those called, those other kind? Sikorskis? What were they?

BT Well they had, fighters, they had Brewsters that all got shot down...

BPW They were all... But the point, the point that I'm making is that the Jap fleet was attacked by those planes and there had to be one... What they did was this. They used up their fighter planes. They sent their fighter planes off.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW The other planes, they were having a big... They'd make a big to-do about them changing from bombs to torpedoes and back to bombs and aren't any others because of the, they didn't, there was confusion about whether they were going to hit Midway again or whether they were going to go for the American fleet and all of this, that and the other thing but the fact of the matter was that they had several dozen fighters in the air, uh, shooting all these planes down. That's why Waldron got massacred before he could do a damn thing and he was only ten miles away from the fleet.

BT You know, I can't understand that.

BPW And, and it was because, there were 50 airplanes, zeros, on him right now. I mean that's, that's...

BT Yeah.

BPW ... that's why it was. Now, okay, so they had to be out there picking him up and that made him very, very close...

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW ... to you guys.

BT Must have been. I can't understand it except, except for the obstruction of vision, visibility.

BPW Well, all right. I can, I can see it on the water but still why are we seeing one airplane. Not a one airplane. You say you never saw an airplane. Mitchell says he's never saw an airplane, nothing.

BT We didn't. Didn't hear anything until our own people opened up.

BPW Isn't that incredible! You talk about a near-miss, boy, that's about as near a miss as you are going to get.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW With the number of airplanes in the air.... Now, there was another thing that we're so... a little disconcerting. Mitchell, I, I, when he said it once, then I went around and came back to it again. I said Ruehlrow said as he was going in the water, he looked up to the north and he saw smoke.

BT Yeah.

BPW Mitchell said, "I saw the whole fleet."

BT He did?

BPW Yeah. That's what he said. He said he saw the fleet. I said, "Well, you mean smoke?" "No, the ships."

BT Didn't know what he saw? Apparently ships just as he was, just as he was dunking in the water. Probably did and didn't recognize it. That's all I can...

BPW You know, now that, that makes a hell of a sight more sense then, then....

BT Well, that's probably what happened because he, he hadn't seen any ships

from that high, that angle anyhow.

BPW At that time, when he was going in the water, for God's sake, he, he was very close, he was back, he was damn near back to his ship.

BT That's what I mean. He almost made it.

BPW He almost made it and that's the ships that he saw. He saw his own ships.

BT That's what he saw, yeah. You'd better not tell me that. That might add... they might take away a couple of years from him or something...

BPW God, you know that's the truth. You know when you put this thing down and diagram it all out, then it looks a lot different, doesn't it?

BT Yeah, it does.

BPW Huh?

BT It sure does.

BPW That's certainly something. I, I couldn't... See, there was some inconsistent things in, in the picture that he gave me and there still are. I don't know what the answers are but he seems to think that.. and yet he didn't say it, and I tried to get him to say that he saw Kure.

BT Mmm-hmm.

BPW But it kind of came out....

BT He wouldn't say that (inaud) they knew it was there.

BPW ...yeah, it kind of came out that, that either Ruehlw saw it or somebody said they saw it or something...

BT Well, that's the trouble. You get a bunch of aviators together all telling lies to each other after one of these things. You don't know what's facts and what's fiction.

BPW But what happened was that if he saw Kure....

BT That would surprise me. That's hard to see. You can see it...

BPW You... My God, an atoll. Oh, geez. Nothing but a little old sand spit.

BT That's all you see. You see the breakers breaking on the sand spit and if you look, if you know what to look for.

BPW Very tough. Very, very tough.

BT That's right.

BPW No, I have a hard time... And yet, and then saying that as he was going down, he saw the Jap fleet and I said well, you mean... Ruehlw was very clear. He said he saw smoke, black smoke. Didn't know that?

BT Yeah. That name sounded familiar to me and I think I remember now what I'm thinking about.

BPW Yeah.

BT There, when the Yorktown was hit, when she was, they were looking for a place to do something so they could save her so she wouldn't sink, they could repair enough to get it back into port somewhere and they were thinking for a while they could beach it on part of Kure Island.

BPW Oh, is that right?

BT I think that's right.

BPW Yeah, well, now here's the, here's the, here's a little bigger section of the same thing, you see, and Honolulu's, Hawaii's right on down, down the road here. It's a thousand miles from Midway back to Honolulu.

BT Yeah, I know. It's a long ways. There's Kure.

BPW Yeah. Now, so the action is up in here and up.... this, I just took this off of, off of those.

BT That's still a thousand fathoms deep.... put it in a shallow spot.

BPW Oh yes. Yes, these are.... That's right. Here's a larger scale yet. They're the

same. This is a new (inaud) Midway and Kure. Now Kure has a strip now.

BT Hmm?

BPW Kure does have a strip now, see?

BT Yeah, I see it.

BPW It didn't at that time.

BT A lot of space out there.

BPW It's a big ocean. It's a big ocean. There's no doubt about that.

BT You'd better keep this with the other.

BPW Here, here's one that will look familiar to you.

BT Yeah, that looks familiar.

BPW I've got one here that will even look more familiar to you.

BT See we were, where we were hitting all the time. Right up in here.

BPW Yeah, that's right. Dear old Rabaul.

BT We'd come right up along here to near (inaud) and then we'd head right over to St. George, right the same way. Then bring it around and lose...

BPW Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm.

BT I used to lead those strikes.

BPW Oh, did you? Uh-huh.

BT I didn't have any seniority but I had a lot of rapport...

BPW I see. So you were elected.

BT No, I wasn't elected. I was just detailed.

BPW Yes. Wait a minute. I've got one here I want to show you. (inaud) See here is (inaud) Isn't that interesting? Shows, shows the elevations.

BT Yeah. There's Torokina right next ...

BPW Yeah. You're looking kind of... You're looking kind of east, northeast, toward the mountain.

BT Yeah.

BPW Those are the old... These are the old British Admiralties charts. These are, they're Marine, they're (inaud)...

End of Tape 2/ Side 2