

For Hunt Oral History

P.O. Box 1142

Interview with John Wylder by Vincent Santucci and David Lassman, joined 2nd day by

Brandon Bies, Dan Gross, and George Coin

Seal Beach, California

March 12 and 18, 2010

INTERVIEWER: -- Santucci.

JW: Yes.

INT: How are you?

JW: Okay.

INT: Thanks so much for your patience.

JW: Yeah, all right [laughs].

INT: We really appreciate the opportunity to chat with you today, and so what we want to try to do is I have a series of questions and we'll try to go through them just one step at a time. You've got a tremendous story to share with us about your experiences during the Second World War and also specific experience at P.O. Box 1142 [00:37]. And so, as part of our interviews, we kind of go sequentially so we have equivalent data for all of the veterans that we interview. So I'm going to just start off briefly here with an introduction and then I'll start with our first questions. So just try to answer the question and then we'll move on to the next step and it tends to be more of [01:00] a chronologic kind of interview. Is that okay?

JW: Okay.

INT: Okay, I appreciate your time. First of all, I'd like to thank Mr. Wylder for joining us today. This is Friday, March 12th, 2010 and this interview is part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project [01:23] regarding interviews with World War II veterans and their experiences at P.O. Box 1142 [01:31]. Mr. Wylder is being interviewed over the telephone from his home in California and then in the National Park Service we have two

representatives from the George Washington Memorial Parkway. That includes Ranger David Lassman and myself, Vince Santucci the Chief Ranger of George Washington Memorial Parkway. So, Mr. Wylder, appreciate your time. First of all [02:00], can you state your name for us and provide us your date of birth and when and where you were born?

JW: Okay, yeah, my name is John M. Wylder, W-Y-L-D-E-R, and I was born in Kansas City, Missouri [02:18] on December the 17th 1920. Now, it was an interesting date because that's the date the first airplane flew 17 years before. And I lived in Kansas City, Missouri [02:38] and across the street from me was Henry J. Haskell [02:43] who married Catherine Wright, the Wright Brothers' sister. And she used to take me to the store with her and so forth. Now, she was there and she was married [03:00] at Overland, Ohio and Henry J. Haskell [03:04] was part owner of the Kansas City -- and editor in chief of the Kansas City Star, and he was -- he was -- they were married in November the 20th, 1926 and she died March the 3rd, 1929 of pneumonia. And her brother, Orville, was still alive and he says, "Sister, I will never speak to you again if you ever get married." So for 40 years I would go into bookstores to try and find pictures of her and anything. And there never was. In fact, my sister was living in North Carolina and she said at Kitty Hawk there's no picture of Catherine Wright. Now, there's stories about Catherine Wright [04:00], but nothing in there. Well, anyway, finally there was a fellow that he was flying in a B-24 over Kitty Hawk and he looked down and it was during the war and he said, "That's where the Wright Brothers flew the first airplane." And he was on a B-24 radar mission. Anyway, after the war, he was a curator of the aviation section of the Library of Congress [04:34] and it took him 15 years to write this book about the

Wrights and the family and so forth. And there were two pictures in the book. Now, there were five kids. They were -- their father was the bishop and some --

INT: Mr. Wylder?

JW: Yeah?

INT: That's good. We want to try to keep it focused more on the history related to World War II [05:00]. So let me just step back for a second before you get too far. Your middle initial is M as in Mary?

JW: Yeah, yeah, M-A-R-S.

INT: And what is your middle name?

JW: Mars.

INT: M-A-R-S?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay, very good. Really appreciate that. So in terms of your education background, did you go to school in Missouri?

JW: Yes, and then I stayed in the state of Missouri and left when I was 14 years old and I moved to Chicago [05:41]. And I lived in Chicago and went to Northwestern University School of Speech [05:46]. And in my class was Tony Randall [05:50]; he was in all my classes. Now, Charlton Heston [05:55] also went there but he was in class of '43; I was in class of '41 [06:00].

INT: So you graduated high school in Illinois?

JW: No, in Kansas. Yeah, in the -- Illinois, yes, right. At the Sullivan High School [06:11].

INT: Okay, and then you went on to college?

JW: Yeah, just two years.

INT: Two years?

JW: And Northwestern University [06:19]. It was --

INT: What was your area of study?

JW: It's a school of speech.

INT: Speech, okay. Just one other question regarding your family. Your family's background -- were your parents born in the United States?

JW: Yes.

INT: And what is their ethnic descent?

JW: Well, English, Irish, Welsh, French, and German, and Scotch.

INT: Okay. And do you -- do you know any foreign languages? Did you know any foreign languages at that time?

JW: No.

INT: No? Okay. So you primarily -- you spoke English?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay, great. And so, then, [07:00] as we approached the Second World War, do you recall when you learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor [07:09] on December 7th, 1941?

JW: No, I was a manager of a movie theater on Hollywood Boulevard in Hollywood and [unintelligible] Street and I was getting ready to go to work and it was about, oh, 11:30, 12:00, a friend of mine came over and turned the radio on and said they bombed Pearl Harbor [07:30]. Well, we didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was in those days. And then we looked on the map and it's the next stop to Los Angeles. So it was a shock to the people, and in fact a lot of people had big homes that they couldn't sell them. They

moved back east.

INT: And so when you say you were working in a theater in Hollywood, were you talking about Hollywood, California [07:57]?

JW: Yes, right.

INT: So how did you get from Illinois to California [08:00]?

JW: Well, by the train. I came out to California to try to get in the production of motion pictures. But I didn't know at the time that it's a father-son business and it still is. So you don't get any chance. I made one movie with William Holden back in 1940 out in Arizona, but as a skilled photographer's helper I really learned how to take pictures, but that's as far as I got.

INT: Okay, very good. And so, you're working in the theater and the bombing of Pearl Harbor [08:44] occurred. How did you wind up in the military?

JW: Well, I had a low draft number and -- but I wanted to get into the Air Corps [08:58] and [09:00] you had to take a test. And 90 -- I think 98 of us took a test and only three passed. So [laughs], we didn't get in there anyway. What it was is an entrance examination to West Point [09:18] and so the L.A. school board found out that situation so they had a night school in downtown Los Angeles where the professors taught us how to pass the test. And we learned Morse code and we learned math and we learned the history and all the various things that were on the test. And so we went back and my draft board said that they knew I was doing that so they said, "We'll -- as long as you keep going to school, we'll leave you [10:00] out of the draft but you report to us when you pass the test." Which I did and that was in about August of '42. I got sworn in at the Red Car Building in downtown Los Angeles at the August of '42. But they didn't have

any room at Santa Ana Army Air Base [10:33], so I had to wait till March of '43 before they had room for me to go there. And so anyway, went there and I was signed up to be a pilot and I went from there to Thunderbird Field number two in Phoenix, Arizona [10:56]. But I washed out so I had [11:00] -- I was also figured in to be trained as a bombardier, which they let me come back and go in bombardier training. Now, this is interesting. When they classified the people -- the pilot, the co-pilot, and navigator they - - the smart guy was the navigator and the dumbest was the pilot. And the in-between was the bombardier.

INT: Very good. And what was your age when you -- when you joined the service?

JW: I was -- let's see, that was in -- 21.

INT: You were 21 years old and you were sworn in and you joined the U.S. Army Air Corps [11:50]?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Okay, very good. And so, once you joined they sent you to training in Arizona you said [12:00]?

JW: At first they sent me down at Santa Ana Army Air Base [12:05] and that was in California and they had sent us there. They had 125,000 students there and that was for classification. We ran through a batch of tests for physical and mental acuity and that. So they classified what you could be trained for.

INT: Okay, well, very good. So that -- were you married at the time?

JW: No.

INT: Okay, you were single. Excuse me one second. Somebody was knocking at the door here. So you had gone -- did you say it was Santa Ana [12:55]?

JW: Yes.

INT: Santa Ana. And how long were you at Santa Ana?

JW: Oh [13:00], about -- oh, we were there six weeks before we ever got off the base and it was probably, oh, about 10 or 12 weeks, something like that.

INT: Okay. And so, when you were at Santa Ana [13:18], you were talking about you were -- this wasn't your basic training, was it?

JW: No, that was the classification.

INT: Classification -- can you explain what that is?

JW: Well, they send you through a bunch of tests, physical tests, running various machines, and then they -- you would have a battery of mental tests so they could see your coordination and could you do these various jobs that would be required. Now, I was one of 53,000 bombardiers [14:00]. And out of 16 and a half million service people. So that was less than one third of one percent and half of those were killed during the war. They were shot down and killed, so.

INT: So classification basically was to assess you and your skills where you may be able to help the U.S. Army [14:21]?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay, I see what you're saying.

JW: That's what they -- yeah, they had all kinds of tests. They had things that you had to use your fingers, like as a bombardier you had to use your fingers to run the bombsite.

INT: Okay. So you completed the classification at Santa Ana [14:44].

JW: Right.

INT: And then when did you learn that you were going to become a bombardier?

JW: Well, I went in pilot training and I washed out. Now, I could have been a pilot, but I didn't make -- they couldn't [15:00] train me fast enough, they were in a hurry. And so I washed out and then they allowed me to come back because I was classified also to be trained as a bombardier. And then they sent me back to Santa Ana [15:16] and then to Carlsbad, New Mexico [15:21] where I was in the first bombardier class there. And the fella that gave me my wings was the first bombardier in the Army Air Corps [15:31], Colonel Patrick Ryan [15:33]. And they even made a movie about him. [unintelligible] played his part.

INT: Very interesting. That's great, that's interesting. So, you went from -- you actually were classified to potentially become a pilot.

JW: Yeah.

INT: And then you were sent to training? Was that the training in Arizona [15:51]?

JW: Right.

INT: And what -- where did you go in Arizona, do you remember?

JW: I went to Thunderbird Number Two [15:59], that was in Scottsdale [16:00], I believe. And it's still there. Now it's a seven-day Adventist school.

INT: Okay, so you went to Thunderbird [16:10] and so --

JW: I washed out.

INT: Okay. How long were you there?

JW: Oh, about -- oh, four or five weeks I guess.

INT: Okay. Did you have the opportunity to fly a plane at all?

JW: Yes, oh yes.

INT: Okay, and so --

JW: Here's an interesting thing. I had a problem of being -- not knowing when a plane is coming towards me or away from me.

INT: Okay, okay. That was a hard thing for me to figure out.

JW: But anyway, we had to do stalls and spins and all kinds of stuff in the plane.

INT: Okay, so [17:00] as you went forward then, they determined that they didn't want you to continue as a pilot, so they sent you back to Santa Ana [17:10]?

JW: Yeah, and then that got sent to Carlsbad, New Mexico [17:16] to become a bombardier.

INT: Okay, and can you explain to me from your perspective what the responsibility was of a bombardier?

JW: Well, I had an airplane that cost \$375,000 and I had a crew of 10 people including me that cost \$350,000 to take me up to the target and let me run the airplane for about 30 seconds and then bring me home.

INT: Okay.

JW: So it was actually -- when we were over the target, I ran the airplane [18:00]. I steered it through the bombsite.

INT: And is that the normal responsibility of a bombardier?

JW: Yes, right.

INT: Okay.

JW: And then I found out it's the most dangerous job in the war.

INT: Sure.

JW: Because they try to shoot the nose off and kill the bombardier and then the planes couldn't hit anything that was of any value.

INT: And so, how long were you in New Mexico [18:28] for the training?

JW: Eighteen weeks.

INT: Eighteen weeks? And did you fly over the white sands area [18:37]?

JW: Oh, I flew all over the place, yeah.

INT: Okay, all right. And any particular recollection of that training of interest or worth noting?

JW: Well, you go out and you check out an airplane and then they check the mags on the things in those days. And then they try [19:00] the left mag and the right mag and then they'd take off. Well, the pilot took off and we just barely got off the ground. And he was -- we pulled over a barbed wire fence at the edge of the field and he says, "I'll never do that again." Because he didn't go back and get another airplane.

INT: And what type of planes were these?

JW: AT11 [19:30]. They were, I think built by Beechcraft. They were a twin-engine plane with -- carried a couple of -- maybe half a dozen practice bombs in them.

INT: And so, these weren't planes that you were involved in later on when you were in the Pacific?

JW: No, no, I was involved in the B-24 [19:54]. Yeah.

INT: Okay. So these were used primarily for your training?

JW: Training, yeah, just training.

INT: Okay [20:00]. And do you recall roughly the dates that you were in New Mexico [20:05] for training?

JW: Well, I -- no, I know I quit when I got my wings was December the 24th, 1943.

INT: Nice Christmas present.

JW: Yeah, right. And then we got to go home for about a week and it was -- yeah, that was a

good Christmas present.

INT: And so you were on leave for about a week and was home back in California [20:40]?

JW: Oh well, my mother lived in Chicago [20:42], so I went back to see her.

INT: So you spend Christmas in Chicago with your mother.

JW: Right, or a couple of days after Christmas, yeah.

INT: Okay. I just wanted to check -- David, how are we doing with the tape?

INT: We got about 10 minutes on the tape.

INT: Okay, very good. Okay, so now we start [21:00] to get interesting. So after your leave, you report back to what location?

JW: Oh, I reported back to Fresno [21:10], Hammerfield, in Fresno, California. That's where you picked up your crew. Made up a crew.

INT: Okay, and so how long were you in Fresno [21:23]?

JW: Probably two or three weeks.

INT: And did you do any training with that crew?

JW: No, no. We -- but then we were sent from there to train. And we trained at Muroc [21:41], which is now Edwards Air Force Base [21:43].

INT: And that's in California [21:46]?

JW: Right, yeah.

INT: Okay, so you trained with this crew in Edwards Air Force Base. Did you have any idea where you might be going either to the Pacific or to the European Theater [21:58]?

JW: No, we didn't know, no [22:00], they didn't tell us.

INT: Okay. And so how long were you at Edwards [22:07]?

JW: Oh, I guess maybe about 10 weeks or something like that, training.

INT: And during that 10 weeks, what aircraft were you involved with?

JW: Flying in a B-24 [22:24].

INT: B-24.

JW: Now, this is interesting. We were in that first group that ever completed overseas training in B-24s [22:37] that didn't kill anybody. So Hap Arnold [22:24], who was the commanding general of the U.S. Army Air Corps [22:47] sent us home for two weeks before we went overseas. We thought everybody got to go home for a couple of weeks before you go overseas. We were the only ones that ever did, and nobody ever did [23:00] before that and nobody ever did after that. We were the first group that didn't kill anybody in the B-24 [23:07]. Now, this is an interesting thing that we found out in the B-24, that the pilot would take off and if he hit the button to call the tower -- it was on his steering wheel -- when he hit the button, that turned on a convertor, which was on what they call a flight deck. It was above the bomb bays and that's where all the fumes from the airplane, gas fumes when you took off went up there and it ignited a spark and the plane would blow up. So, what we did, we left the bomb bay doors open, maybe cracked them [24:00] over about a foot and aired the airplane out before we ever smoked or did anything. Yeah.

INT: Okay.

JW: That saved our lives.

INT: That's great. Okay, so -- let's see -- and so, can you describe what a normal B-24 [24:23] crew consisted of?

JW: There's a pilot, the co-pilot, the navigator, and the person section -- four officers -- pilot, co-pilot, and navigator and bombardier. And there's the first and second engineers and

then there is the radio operator where also they were waist gunners and then there was the ball turret gunner and the tail gunner.

INT: Okay [25:00]. And did you all train as a team?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay. And you had simulated exercises, flight exercises?

JW: Yes, right. We'd fly to various places, yes. Now a very interesting thing that we'd take off. And one night we took off from Muroc [25:22] and we -- it was clouded over and we were flying, and about an hour and a half later we came out of the clouds and we were flying below a mountain that was -- a snowcapped mountain that was probably 1,000 feet higher than we were and it wasn't on the map at that altitude. We checked the altitude, the baromatic pressure, and it was not on the map. Now, the maps in those days weren't that good [26:00] so the guys used to -- one of my friends that was a trained at Tonopah, he'd sit up there and play cards and see the gasoline come down the side of the hills where the planes cracked into the mountains. Because they -- and my co-pilot said he was -- he and his buddy always flew 1,000 feet higher at night than they told him to and they lived and his buddies got killed. So the maps weren't very good in those days.

INT: During your training exercises at Edwards [25:22], did you have training as it related to your responsibilities as a bombardier?

JW: Yes.

INT: And would you do practice bombing?

JW: Right, yeah. We did a lot of practice bombing, yes.

INT: And would you use live ammunition?

JW: No, it was a practice bomb, which [27:00] was filled with sand, and then it had a black

powder charge in the back so when it hit it made a flare and you could see where it hit.

INT: Okay.

JW: Now, our bombs is very interesting. They were these practice bombs, and our crew, we weren't that good so I threw bombs all over the desert. Some of them I don't believe ever hit the ground they were so far out. But when I got overseas they would check you out again. And I was in the Pacific at the Guadalcanal [27:43] and the guy that checked me out, he says, "You're going up and drop five general purpose bombs -- real bombs -- from 15,000 feet." And he looked in there and he says, "There's 15 bombs there [28:00]," and he says, "I never land in an airplane with live bombs so you're going to drop all 15 bombs at 15,000 feet." So I got up there and we dropped the bombs. He says, "Drop down a bomb at a little coral reef from 15,000 feet." And he hollered back, "500 feet error." And I looked down there and it's a direct hit. Oh, he says, "I'm sorry, I want you to bomb the bigger coral reef." So we went around and I dropped all 15 bombs and the farthest -- I got three direct hits and the farthest out was 80 feet. And when he got out of the airplane he looked at me and he says, "Where in the hell have you been bombing? Nobody bombs that good." And [laughs] I said, "May be compensating errors." But anyway, in all the bombs I dropped overseas in combat were excellent [29:00]. So we were -- everything was tweaked up better in combat than it was in the city -- in the states.

INT: Okay, and then would your crew also do any sort of training as it related to defense against attack from enemy aircraft?

JW: Yeah, we were training all the time.

INT: Okay. Was there any other kind of training that you did that would be of interest to us to note?

JW: Well, we were called to go to bomb a Japanese Navy. And this is when Bull Hallsey [29:46] was chasing after the Japanese Navy and they tricked him. And the general came down and he says, "Well, we've been looking for [30:00] the Japanese Navy. Now we know where their Navy is we can't find our own." So, anyway they said, "You're going to go out and sink them at 8,000 feet." Which is ridiculous because a B-24 [30:15] is only designed to bomb a stationary target, not a moving target. So anyway, we got up there and they said, "Go up to the southern Philippines [30:27] and to a little island called Bohol [30:29], and we'll tell you where the Japanese Navy is and then you go get them." Well, anyway, we got up there and circled around and they said about 250 miles away at 292 degrees there are 18 ships, three battleships and rest were assorted cruisers and destroyers. So I looked back through the astrodome and I could see the pilot and co-pilot's face [31:00], and they were both white as a sheet. So anyway, we're looking and looking. It was a real dark day. The ocean was dark, the sky was dark, and all of a sudden I'm looking, we're looking, and all I saw was a wake of a ship and I said, "There's a PT boat, let's go over and drop our bombs and get the hell out of here and go home." Well, the look -- we had one airplane that had a radar scope on the thing and they looked over there and there were two ships and the one I saw was a -- was a destroyer running around and there was a Japanese cruiser -- light cruiser -- sitting dead still in the water. So, we went over after that and on the way over the -- we were dropping bombs [32:00]. And what happened was we were bombing on the lead bombardier and when somebody would holler out, "Bombs away," you would drop your bombs and we'd put a pattern over the plane -- the ship. Well, when we're going up there, we're at 8,000 feet and here the decks are turning red with the turrets firing guns at us. And the -- the whole

decks would turn red and then the last turret would fire. And then another -- they'd all turn red and fire another one. So we didn't know where the stuff was coming, it was coming up at us.

INT: Mr. Wylder, could you hold on for one moment, please? I'm going to flip the tape over.

JW: Okay.

INT: And, so this activity --

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

INT: -- Mr. Wylder, in regards to some of the kind of training exercises. So we want to go back to the Edwards Air Force Base [00:14] in terms of any sort of training and activities there. At what -- at what point at Edwards did you learn about where you were going to be heading -- either to the Pacific or to Europe?

JW: We weren't told there at all.

INT: Okay.

JW: We were sent to Hamilton Air Force Base [00:38]. That's north of San Francisco [00:43].

INT: Okay.

JW: And that's where -- then we were there and we got on the plane and we still didn't know until we were up in the air for a half hour that we could open up our orders and we found out [01:00] we were going to the 13th Air Force [01:05], [laughs] which nobody had ever heard of and it was in the South Pacific. It's called the Jungle Air Force [01:11]. And I flew overseas in Eleanor Roosevelt's airplane. A C-87, that was a B-24 [01:20] converted into a passenger plane, and she had -- Franklin had four of them and they were

having trouble so he let her fly it all over South America. And then Churchill had a couple of them. And oh anyway, we broke the record flying from San Francisco [01:46] to Hawaii to Hickam Field [01:48]. I think it was about 18 -- 11 and a half hours and that was good in those days. That was the fastest that anybody had ever made because these big [02:00] China clippers and so forth that take 25 hours to get there.

INT: Okay. All right.

JW: Now, you probably want to know how I got involved with MIS-X [02:14].

INT: Well, not quite yet.

JW: Oh, okay.

INT: Okay, so you --

JW: [inaudible] before I went overseas.

INT: Okay, so you opened up your orders and you found out that you were heading off to the Pacific.

JW: Right.

INT: And where did you arrive? Where was your destination on that flight?

JW: We went to -- we went first to Canton, a little island there, they just have a runway. And then we went from there on down to Guadalcanal [02:48].

INT: Okay. And so, when you went to Guadalcanal, do you know the approximate date?

JW: No, it was -- it was in [03:00] May of '44.

INT: Okay. And so the Americans had already taken Guadalcanal [03:11] and established their air base?

JW: Yeah, right. Right.

INT: Okay.

JW: We landed at the famous Anderson Air Field [03:20] and they had already taken it back. We thought that after hearing all that stuff we put our ammo in our 45s before we landed, but there wasn't anything going on then.

INT: Okay. And so, how long were you at Guadalcanal [03:42]? Was that your base of operations for a while?

JW: Well, it was when we were training and then they moved us up out of there to -- the Admiralty Islands [03:54].

INT: So, when you were at Guadalcanal [03:57] --

JW: We did fly one [04:00] -- we flew a mission to Rabaul [04:04].

INT: Okay.

JW: To give us an idea of having somebody shooting at us.

INT: Sure.

JW: And -- but not to kill us.

INT: Okay. When you were at Guadalcanal [04:15], I'm sure you had an opportunity to assess the conditions of the site after the battle that had gone on there.

JW: No, not really.

INT: Okay, so you didn't have time to do that? Did you see the American gravesites that were at Guadalcanal [04:33]?

JW: No, I never saw any, no.

INT: Okay. So, from Guadalcanal, you had one mission. You did some more training, and then from Guadalcanal [04:44] where did you -- where did you go?

JW: It was the Admiralty Islands [04:47].

INT: Okay, and so you were stationed at an air base in the Admiralty Islands.

JW: Right, yeah.

INT: And did you know approximately when this would be?

JW: Oh, let's see [05:00], we were in Guadalcanal [05:02] for D-Day [05:03] in Europe. That was June, so it was probably, -- I don't know, four or five weeks. We moved -- I was over there eight and a half months overseas and I moved five times in eight and a half months.

INT: Okay, okay. So, you went to Admiralty [05:23]. Where did you go from Admiralty?

JW: To a little island called Wadke [05:30] off of New Guinea [05:23].

INT: Can you spell that?

JW: W-A-D-K-E, I think it is.

INT: Okay.

JW: One little island off of the -- just off of New Guinea [05:45]. In fact, we'd stand in a chow line and see the fighters go over and bomb and come back and land and we could see them bombing.

INT: Okay. All right [06:00]. And then -- so, as you went forward, where were you stationed prior to getting shot down?

JW: Well, we were stationed in Noemfor [06:14], N-O-E-M-F-O-R. Noemfor, that's a little island off of New Guinea [06:24].

INT: Okay.

JW: The northeastern side of north -- the far eastern side and south of New Guinea [06:37]. New Guinea is over 1,000 miles long.

INT: Okay. And so, had you been there for a period of time?

JW: Yes, and we flew the longest mission in the world at that time. We flew 17 hours and 35

minutes to Borneo [06:56].

INT: Was that for a mission?

JW: Yeah, right [07:00], that was a mission. Yeah, that was the -- that was all the oil for the Philippines [07:10] and 30 percent of the oil for the Japanese. And MacArthur [07:15] said it had to be knocked out before we landed in the Philippines. And we were going to send 2,000 of us up there, that's 20 B-24s [07:25] with 10 men in each one. And I mean - - and there were 2,000 service men. He said, "If you all get killed it's worth it." That gave you -- you knew you were doing something rough. And they said, "Nobody's going to come pick you up. If you get down over Borneo [07:48], you just take care of yourself" because the idea in those days was Golden Gate in '48. They didn't think the war was going to end until '48 because nobody knew anything [08:00] about the atom bombs.

INT: So that was a very long mission. Did you refuel anywhere on that mission?

JW: No. We had to have -- we took off with 10,000 pounds above the maximum load limit on the airplane and we had extra -- we took extra in the bomb bays instead of taking a full load of bombs. We took extra gasoline, extra tanks in there for the gasoline.

INT: Okay. And so, going forward then, the mission that you were shot down, can you describe that? Do you recall the date and the circumstances upon which you were --

JW: If I had a chance to pick the easiest mission that would have been it. Now, we were told to bomb [09:00] the Alicante air dome [09:04] that was in the northern end of Negros [09:08] in the Philippines [09:10]. And it was -- it would be like flying from San Diego to Santa Barbara, dropping bombs on some supplies in the woods and coming home. Easy -- easy, easy thing. In fact, we'd moved from Noemfor [09:27] and they said,

“You’re taking off tomorrow.” We said, “You’re out of your mind.” And we don’t even have our camp set up or anything and they just dumped everything off the side of the road where we were -- and so we slept in the -- on the tables in the mess hall and we took off at 5:00 in the morning. We got up there to the target, and it was clouded over so we dropped down 1,000 feet and here were [10:00] about 20 kamikazes. They had just started the kamikazes then. It was on first of November 1944. And so they took us on [laughs] and I dropped 40 100-pound bombs, general purpose bombs 50 feet apart and nothing moved after my bombs went down there. But they were shooting at us all over the place and they shot the engine right outside of my -- the left thing and it was spouting oil and everything. The pilot feathered that thing and the engine and then they kept shooting the other ones out. In fact, the guy flew shooting the next one out, I could see his face [11:00] as he went by.

INT: Okay, can you go on with the circumstances that went forward?

JW: Well, we were -- dropped the bombs and started on the way home. And me -- we were losing altitude and losing speed and my -- they shot three of the four engines out and my nose gunner said, “Let’s get out of here.” I couldn’t see. I was up trying to check with the intercom and it got shot out. So he said, “Let’s jump out.” And we jumped out and we jumped out in the -- oh, in the worst shark-infested waters in the western Pacific. And when we got down [12:00] I only had one charge of the -- in my Mae West and I checked it out. Because it was a milk run, this easy thing, so who needed an extra CO2 thing in there. Somebody probably took it out to make charged water for drinking. But anyway, floating in the water and nobody out there and the shark grabbed me by the leg. And I thought it was a sea turtle but I know that a sea turtle hasn’t got a mouth big enough to

grab the calf of your right leg. So I guess the shark didn't like the taste of my uniform and I kicked him and he took off. But there were sharks all around us. Now, the -- my nose gunner was -- oh [13:00], quite a distance away, but finally he came over to me and we got together. He had a one man life raft, I didn't have anything. I didn't -- the g-forces were so great in the dive that I couldn't hook it on. I got it within six inches of my harness and it -- I couldn't get it on so I had to jump out and out under the nose wheel door. I had enough strength when you need it to pull the handles and only one side opened and then the -- I could have torn that little one off with my bare hands but I got it out and got out. Jumped out and there's absolutely no feeling -- if you've never jumped out -- there's no feeling of falling. In fact, I would have flown up with George Bush, the old man and gone down the one -- my wife says [14:00], "Not on your life." But anyway, there's absolutely no feeling. But when I pulled that rip cord you thought your teeth were biting your toenails off because it gave a -- well, we're going over 150 miles an hour and to stop down the 26 miles in a fraction of a couple of seconds. That's a hell of a jolt. And then I hit the water and finally my nose gunner guy got over to me and he looked at me and he said, "Well, you're the big officer." He said, "If you had been a bastard I'd leave you here and nobody would know about it." He had had a rough civilian life and so -- but anyway, he took care of me and we got together, and we're two of us in a one man life raft with sharks going all around us and the [15:00] -- it was like Daniel I guess, in the lion's den. But they weren't biting us that day. And two Filipinos stood up in an outrigger canoe and waved at us and I waved back and I hollered, "Americano." And they came over and picked us up and put me in the front seat and the other -- my nose gunner in the back. I said, "Jones, what do you think of these guys?"

And he said, "Well, the guy in the front looks okay, but the fella in the back had a Japanese aviator's helmet on." And he had a horrible look on his face. And he said, "I don't know about him." And well, and so I had said, "What do these people speak?" And he said, "A little Spanish." Well, all I know was enchilada [16:00] and tortilla, senorita and that was about it. So I pointed to where we were going and I said, "Japanese?" And he shook his head and then I pointed to another place where I knew where the Japanese were. So finally he says, "Sir, I've only been to the fourth grade but when I get you on shore the military guys have been to Stanford and they speak English." I said, "I don't know if we know if they speak English at Stanford, but we're going to find out." So we got up there and then they came out and we waded out in the water and as the people came out and shook our hands and said, "Happy new life." And I said, "You're damn right happy new life, I'm alive." And so anyway, they took us to shore and I said, "Where are the Japanese?" And they said, "Fort Columbus [16:54] over the hill." I said, "Where do we hide?" They said, "Why are you going to hide?" Well, I said [17:00], "They'll kill you, we're \$10,000 dead or alive." And so they said, "If you come halfway around the world to save our country the least we can do is die for you. We will all die before we let you be captured." Well, that was a pretty heavy jolt to your system because they really meant it and they took care of us. And we were there on this little island, we were picked up -- the fellow that picked me up, his name was Salvador Lopez [17:34] and he's a multimillionaire now and I tell the story among the Filipinos and they all know who he is. And then they took us the next day in the canoe -- in the sailboat and we were inside but we could see the Japanese soldiers walking up and down the beach [18:00]. And then they took us across to a place called Iloilo [18:04]. That's a big city in

the island of Panay [18:09] and they --

INT: Mr. Wylder, can I interrupt you just for a second?

JW: Sure.

INT: Okay, so before we get too much further, do you know what happened to the rest of your crew?

JW: Yes, well -- my pilot and my co-pilot and my navigator and my first and second engineers were all killed. Now, I think one of them -- the only one that they found was the co-pilot and they buried him on a different island than where we were and the -- well, and then another fellow who was [19:00] a second engineer and he had been wounded. And they caught him in the water and they cut his head and arms and legs off and threw him back in the water.

INT: You're talking about the Japanese?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay. And how do you know this? Did you know this at the time, or did you find this out later?

JW: Oh somebody gave me -- I knew at the time. Somebody gave me his dog tags.

INT: So one of the crewman was actually -- he survived the crash of the plane but then was later killed by the Japanese?

JW: Right.

INT: The other -- the pilot and co-pilot -- they were killed in the crash?

JW: Well, I think some of them were probably killed by the -- in the -- as they were coming down the parachute I think they probably got shot in the parachute.

INT: I see, okay. So how many survived the downing of the plane? It was just two of you

[20:00]?

JW: Well, there was five of us but the other three, we didn't know they were alive, but they were -- we were strung out all over the place.

INT: So there was a total of five that survived?

JW: Right.

INT: What is the total crew number on the B-24 [20:16]?

JW: Ten.

INT: So half of the crew died as a result of this plane going down.

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: And five survived.

JW: Right.

INT: There were two of you in your group and, again, the person that was with you -- what was his role?

JW: He was my nose gunner and armor man.

INT: Okay. Okay, all right, very good. So, this is a really interesting and important part of our discussion as it relates to 1142 [20:51] because this is when you began to escape and evade capture by the Japanese. And so what you've shared with us [21:00] is extremely interesting and that is there seems to be this loyalty to the Americans by the local Philippine people to help you escape and evade capture from the Japanese, is that correct?

JW: Right.

INT: Do you know geographically where you were in the Philippines [21:24]?

JW: I was in the -- I walked across the fifth largest island in the Philippines. There are 7,063

islands and I walked across Panay [21:36], the fifth largest island in the Philippines [21:39].

INT: And so you were shot down just off of the coast of Panay?

JW: No, off the coast of Negros [21:48].

INT: Off of Negros -- could you spell that?

JW: N-E-G-R-O-S.

INT: Okay, and so that's where -- when you came down by parachute you got on a raft for a while [22:00]?

JW: No, well -- yeah, I got in a one-man life raft. The two of us, my nose gunner and I got together, we were in the one-man life raft, and then the Filipinos came in the outrigger canoe and picked us up.

INT: How long were you in the water before you were picked up by the Filipinos?

JW: Oh, about four or five hours.

INT: Okay, so it wasn't even overnight, it was -- it was --

JW: No, no.

INT: Okay. Was it -- was it morning, afternoon, evening?

JW: Morning.

INT: Morning, okay. And so, you were spotted and picked up by the Filipinos.

JW: Right, yeah. And they were looking, they saw us parachute out.

INT: Okay. Did you have a sense that the Japanese were looking for you at that point?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay. And so, you quickly were [23:00] taken by the Filipinos from the water and then what happened from there?

JW: Well, they took us to a little island called Guimaras [23:10], which means Paradise Island and we were there overnight and then we took a sailboat -- we were inside the sailboat and they took us over to Panay [23:25].

INT: Can you spell the small island, the name of it?

JW: G-U-I-M-A-R-A-S.

INT: Okay, so you were there overnight and then you were taken to Panay [23:38]?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay.

JW: Now, we were there and we had dinner with the fellow called Captain Galas [23:49] [phonetic]. He was a mild-mannered Filipino but he was called the Terror of Panay and he took care of us [24:00]. And then the -- and about 1:00 in the night they got us up and said, "Let's get out of here because somebody's liable to tell the Japanese we're there." Because there were 15,000 Japanese about a couple of kilometers away from us.

INT: So were the Japanese looking for you by boat, by plane, on foot, or what did you feel was going on in terms of the search for you?

JW: Well, we didn't -- we didn't know at all what they were doing, but we knew that we were -- they wanted to get any flyers. Now, an interesting thing, I'm still missing in action. Now, when we got shot down they put in the newspaper you're missing in action [25:00] and then you never returned because if you returned somebody helped you. And so then the Japanese would go in and murder some people and say, "Well, you helped some flyers so we'll kill you." So the next guy that ever gets shot down he never had a chance. So I'm still missing in action. They never rescinded that.

INT: Okay, very good.

JW: That was interesting.

INT: Did you see planes or soldiers on ground or boats searching?

JW: No, but there was -- we were at one place we'd walked to and at 5:00 they had both retreat and reveille at the same time. They had two flagpoles, they had one they put a Philippine flag on and another an American flag [26:00]. And they would roll them up and then bring them down -- right down. Well, we were at this place and they had the flags going up and the Japanese airplane came over the hill and flown across the field. And you should have seen the Filipinos scatter in all directions. And I had a big hat on so he couldn't see and I waved at the pilot and he waved back and just kept going.

INT: Okay, very good. And so was that your closest encounter with the Japanese that may be searching for you?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Okay. So, can you kind of explain what had happened next between the time that the Japanese had helped to move you around keeping you -- I'm sorry, the Filipinos helped to move you around. What was the destination [27:00]? Where were they taking you?

JW: Well, they took us some place they called Libertad [27:05] and that was a far -- let's see, it was the eastern side of Panay [27:16] and they -- there was a coast watcher there and he kept sending information back to the Americans and then they would ask the name, rank, and serial number and the conditions of the -- of us. And then they -- finally they told us they would come and pick us up by submarine when the sun went down. But it took us a whole day to put different things on different coconut trees at certain times of the day so that the submariners looking through the scope and they could see what we were doing. So just as the sun went down, and it went black [28:00] as the inside of a cat, the

submarine came up and so then we had to send a boarding party and then they let us come aboard.

INT: So that -- the Filipinos were communicating by radio with the Americans?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay, that's interesting. Were the Filipinos trained by the Americans do you think?

JW: Probably.

INT: And this was American equipment probably given to the Filipinos?

JW: I don't know, yeah.

INT: Okay. So from the time that you were shot down until the time that you boarded the submarine -- how many days was that? Do you recall?

JW: Well, I was shot down on November the 1st and I boarded the submarine on December the 5th.

INT: Okay, so it was just over a month.

JW: Right, yeah.

INT: And so [29:00], during that time I assume they gave you different clothes than your military uniform?

JW: No.

INT: No, you were wearing your military uniform?

JW: No, they didn't have anything to give us. They were reluctant to even get us something to eat.

INT: Okay. What kind of food did they provide for you?

JW: Well, lots of rice and they would take an old Coca-Cola sign and turn it upside down and pour rice on it and brown the rice and make coffee with that and then they gave us sugar

and -- to make coffee. Now, on the Thanksgiving they did kill a water buffalo, a calf, and gave it to us for Thanksgiving. And it was as tough as truck tires, but it was at least the idea [30:00] they wanted to do something for us.

INT: Because you have a different language -- you had a language barrier -- was there any forms of communication?

JW: Oh, yeah, they did -- they all spoke English.

INT: Oh, they did? Okay. Do you recall any of the discussions?

JW: Oh, they were good to us and yeah, they were there -- I liked to bring in the first time I ever heard of -- we were briefed before we went overseas at the Hamilton Field [30:41] in Hawaii. And the fellow that briefed us was Erik Rhoades, E-R-I-K, R-H-O-A-D-E-S [30:51]. And he was a movie actor and he was --

INT: Wait, Mr. Wylder? This is real important. Let's come back to this in a moment. I'm going to make a note to come back to this because I recall that you told us about this before. We'll come back.

INT: This is a good time to switch tapes.

INT: Okay, let's change the tapes.

[End of Tape 1B]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: You live, Mr. Wylder?

JW: I live in Seal Beach, California [00:09].

INT: Seal Beach, okay. I'm just going to do a quick introduction because we put a new tape in. And I just want to start off by saying that today is Friday, March 12th, 2010 and we are interviewing a veteran by the name of John Wylder who lives in Seal Beach,

California [00:36]. John Wylder was a veteran of World War II and this is part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project [00:46]. We are conducting this audio interview by telephone. Representing the National Park Service is David Lassman, Park Ranger, and myself, Vin Santucci, Chief Ranger of the George Washington Memorial Parkway [01:00]. And we were just talking with Mr. Wylder in regards to his interaction with some of the Philippine folks that had helped Mr. Wylder to escape and evade capture after being shot down on November 1st of -- is it 1944?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay. Anything else in terms of your interaction during that little over a month with the Filipinos that you would -- that you would remark on that was memorable?

JW: Well, one of -- one of the fellows that we were with -- we moved from place to place and this fellow, he was one of the first Filipinos to go to West Point [01:53] and he was a mean looking guy, and it was [02:00] Colonel Galas [02:03]. But anyway, he was a sweetheart guy and his wife, they took care of us and we were there for a couple of days and as we left they sent a couple of Filipinos with food and cookies and chickens and everything. And we had tears in our eyes when we left like it was leaving your best aunt and uncle. They were so good to us. So anyway.

INT: And have you ever had any contact with some of the individuals who helped for you to escape since you left for the Philippines [02:47]?

JW: No, but there was a fellow in Los Angeles [02:52] who was taking care of the affairs of Miguel Alazaldi [03:00] [phonetic] who was the sugar king in the Philippines [03:01]. And he had taken care of his United States affairs. And I used to have lunch with him in downtown Los Angeles [03:12] and so he knew all the fellows that helped us so we kept

in touch that way.

INT: Did you have a sense from talking to the Filipinos that they had helped other Americans or British escape and evade capture?

JW: Not necessarily, no. They would if they could though, they were -- they were -- they were "do all they could."

INT: And did they ever talk about the Japanese?

JW: Not too much, no. They had no use for them.

INT: So you had a sense that they were [04:00] -- they did not like the Japanese.

JW: No, no, no they didn't. And they didn't even -- we had an encounter with some Japanese on a patrol boat and they were -- shot a couple of them and they didn't even want to bury them in the islands.

INT: Okay, the Japanese shot the Filipinos or the --

JW: No, the Filipinos shot them and my nose gunner, he got a carbine and he hit the thing and hit a gas tank and the boat blew up and some of the guys jumped overboard. But a couple of them were badly burned but the Filipinos wouldn't -- they didn't want to bury them in their island.

INT: Okay, well this is important to talk about. So there was an encounter between [05:00] some Japanese that were on a boat?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: And was this on the main island?

JW: No, that was on, yeah, on Panay [05:11]. Yeah, right.

INT: Panay. And can you tell us about this -- the time of day, the circumstances, what you were doing, and then when you first noticed the Japanese?

JW: Well, we were -- I was about 200 feet from the shore on a -- in a stilt Filipino house. And we heard this boat going down the -- a little diesel going and it's a fellow from another part of the area there, his schoolhouse we were near. They came and said "the Japanese boat going by and get the hell out of here." So we took off and then my nose gunner grabbed [06:00] a carbine and started shooting at the thing and, as I said, he hit the gas tank, it blew up, and that was the end of the boat.

INT: So you had weapons? You had a carbine available? This was something that was --

JW: Yeah, we did. The submarines would dump off weapons all the time.

INT: Okay, so it sounds like that the local Filipinos and the United States Navy [06:29] had some sort of regular exchange communication.

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Do you think --

JW: Now, people that knew where the submarine came up that they couldn't leave that area.

INT: Okay. So that -- do you think that the location where the sub picked you up -- was that a location that they regularly came to pick up Americans?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay, instead of choosing --

JW: Or drop supplies off [07:00].

INT: Okay, so they were dropping off supplies to the Filipinos. Do you think that the Filipinos received any sort of compensation or rewards for helping Americans escape?

JW: I don't think so.

INT: Okay. They were genuinely doing it because they wanted to help?

JW: That they wouldn't take it.

INT: Okay. All right. But they did take some weapons. So the Americans were helping the resistance fighters against the Japanese?

JW: Right, yeah.

INT: Okay. David, do you have anything before we transfer to the sub?

INT: Just real quickly, you never identified the plane you were on, sir.

JW: It was Li'l Jo Toddy [07:46], all ass no body.

INT: [laughs]

JW: Everybody knew that airplane, and in fact there was a -- where I live, this is a retirement leisure [08:00] world community. There's 9,000 people living here. And there's a fellow that had a book from a -- he was in the 31st Bomb Squad [08:16] and I was in the 23rd Bomb Squad [08:19]. And one of the kids said to his dad, "Dad, what'd you do in the second World War?" And he kept a diary and he was on all the missions I was on, and he wrote the diary and he wrote a book while on one page in there I was killed when the plane went down. Nobody saw us jump out. And the next two pages later I was rescued, so I've died and been rescued.

INT: Do you have a copy of that that we could obtain?

JW: No, but I can get you the information where to get the book at.

INT: That would be great [09:00]. I'll have David follow up with you on that.

JW: It's an interesting --

INT: The second thing is, do you have a photograph of the plane that you were shot down in?

JW: No. But -- no, I don't have one.

INT: We might do a search online and see if we can get a -- find a copy of that and if we do we'll make sure we provide a copy to you.

JW: Can I get a copy of our interview?

INT: Oh, absolutely.

INT: Absolutely, in fact, I already started making a copy of the first audiotape.

JW: Yeah, we'll make sure -- we'll make sure we get you a copy and David will talk to you about that afterwards in terms of what format -- whether you want a tape or you want a CD -- audio CD. And we can provide any of those to you.

INT: A CD would probably be the thing to have.

JW: Okay, great. Thank you.

INT: Okay, so let's see -- so that anticipating that you're going to be picked up by an American submarine [10:00], I imagine you were probably pretty excited about that fact.

JW: Right.

INT: Can you tell me about that anticipation of the sub and then when you actually saw the sub, the description? And then how you got from land onto the boat -- onto the sub?

JW: Well yeah, we were, as I said, the coast watcher was contacted the sub I guess and they're talking back and forth. But we had to make some various signs and put on a couple of coconut trees at different times of the day and they're looking at it through their scope to find out if we were Japanese or not. So anyway, and they said they would be up when the sun went down. And now we were on a sailboat with, well [11:00], 17 Americans and 10 Filipinos but the crew had -- when the sub came up -- just as the sun went down you could see the black big boat or gray big boat come up and then went down. And then everything went completely dark because there's no lights there. Well, I happened to be back by the tiller and I told the fellow to steer towards a certain star in the sky, which he did. And then we got within maybe a block away from the submarine and we had to put

a couple of guys on a little one-man boat or two-man boat and go to the sub and identify ourselves. And then they let us come aboard. And they reached over and we pulled alongside the sub and they said the officers [12:00], forward and enlisted men aft. We went down the conning tower and down into the sub.

INT: Okay, so let me go back here again. It sounds like there was some sort of signal that the Filipinos had to send a message to the sub to know it was okay for them to surface.

JW: Right. It was -- well, it was -- yeah, we had to put signs on the trees at different times of the day.

INT: And what were those signs? Can you recall what they were?

JW: No, I don't know. Something maybe the size of a -- oh, maybe six feet across. I don't know what they were.

INT: I see. But it was some signal to let the subs know that it was safe to come to the surface?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay. And then -- something I didn't ask you is the other [13:00] -- the other airman who was with you from your crew -- do you recall his name?

JW: Oh, Dennis Jones [13:08].

INT: Dennis Jones, okay.

JW: He was a staff sergeant and he stayed in the service. And he retired. He just passed away last November and I thought he was going to outlive me but anyway, he died and they gave him a full military burial and he was in Arizona [13:34].

INT: So that's where he is buried? That's where he lived and died?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Arizona, okay. And so, the both of you were taken to the submarine by the Filipinos on

one of their little boats?

JW: Yeah, right, yeah.

INT: And what kind of boat was that?

JW: Well, it was a sailboat but as I said, it contained 35 -- or 17 Americans and 10 Filipinos plus the crew [14:00]. So it was a pretty good-sized sailboat.

INT: So there were other American prisoners that were with you?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Oh, I didn't -- I didn't realize that.

JW: Yeah, there were 10 Americans and -- oh, 17 Americans and 10 Filipinos.

INT: Okay, and so the 17 Americans came together -- were shot down in separate incidents and then eventually brought to this point?

JW: Yeah, right. To Libertad [14:33], they came there from various places.

INT: Libertad? Okay. And so, were there any other non-Americans besides the Filipinos?

JW: No.

INT: And these were pretty much all American Air Corps [14:51]?

JW: Yeah, well they were -- they were Navy [14:56]. I was in the Army Air Corps.

INT: These were naval flyers [15:00]?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Okay, and so they were shot down.

JW: Right, and some of them were Marines or Navy, yeah.

INT: And so they were all shot down, they weren't captured on the ground.

JW: Oh, no, they wouldn't be alive; they killed everybody.

INT: Yes, okay. And I'm sure they had stories about their experiences they shared with you?

JW: Yeah.

INT: Okay, so there were 17 of you Americans that were taken out on this sailboat, out to the submarine.

JW: Right.

INT: And then --

JW: And ten Filipinos. Eight of them were flyers.

INT: Oh, okay.

JW: And MacArthur [15:36] wanted them back.

INT: Okay.

JW: And two of them needed prosthesis and they were just taken for physical help.

INT: So it sounds like some of these men were probably wounded?

JW: Oh, just the two guys, yeah. But they were -- during the battles in the Philippines [16:00].

INT: Okay, all right. So you were able to get onto the submarine.

JW: Right

INT: You were greeted by an officer?

JW: Right.

INT: And can you explain the process of getting from the sailboat onto the sub and then into the sub?

JW: Well, we pulled alongside the sub and they had the crew members reach down and grabbed our hands and pulled us up.

INT: Okay. And did they search you or did they look for identification? Dog tags?

JW: Oh, no.

INT: They weren't concerned about you at all?

JW: No.

INT: Okay. So they welcomed you in, then you got onto the sub, and then how were you greeted? What happened?

JW: Well, they would call over the intercom, "Chow down, refugees." We were called refugees. And they made sort of [17:00] fun about that. I slept in the forward torpedo room on one of the dirty laundry on the skids -- sub -- I mean, torpedo skids. That's where I stayed. And the enlisted men were in the back.

INT: And were you treated pretty well?

JW: Oh, yeah. Fine, yeah.

INT: Okay. And so I presume they fed you and they had somebody check you medically to make sure you're okay?

JW: Oh, they didn't need to. We're okay.

INT: Okay, so then the sub went back. Where did the sub take you then?

JW: Down to Perth, Australia [17:47].

INT: Could you repeat that?

JW: P-E-R-T-H.

INT: Perth, okay -- Australia.

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Okay. Was there any concerns about being spotted by Japanese [18:00] ships or airplanes during your route?

JW: Sure. We got depth charged the first day off of Tawitawi that was in the southern Philippines [18:12] and that was a Japanese destroyer base and we were depth charged.

But they weren't very close, but you could hear them and that shook the sub.

INT: Okay. So that must have shaken you up quite a bit.

JW: Yeah, and then several days later we were down in the Makassar Straits [18:34], that's like a small Mediterranean Sea and that's between the Philippines [18:41] and the -- and the Java and between the Philippines and Borneo. Down there for lunch and they -- I pulled out -- they said, "Chow down refugees," and I'm in the forward torpedo room so I pulled down the sink and washing [19:00] my hands and the Japanese dropped the bomb on us.

INT: On the submarine?

JW: Yeah, right. And we were at scope depth and the guy is looking to the scope but he's looking the wrong way and the guy came in the other way and dropped the bomb. Well, the lights went on and off, all the coffee cups, and the Navy [19:21] lived on coffee and the deck is all sealed so all the coffee cups shattered and the lights went on and off. And the [unintelligible] started falling down and they -- somebody hollered over the intercom, "Check for leaks." Holy mackerel, I looked at myself in the mirror and boy does that take the color out of you. And so then they said, "Take her down." We were only at 85 feet, we went down to 150.

INT: Hey Dave, Mr. Wylder, could you just stand by a second? If you want to shut that off, David.

INT: I'm not sure what that is.

INT: No, I have to talk to somebody on the other line.

INT: Oh, I'm sorry. Hang on.

INT: [unintelligible] [20:00] Mr. Wylder.

INT: Okay, we had a quick interruption. We're back and we're talking with Mr. Wylder in terms of a bomb that had dropped on the submarine. Do you want to go ahead and pick up, Mr. Wylder?

JW: They dropped a bomb and at the -- shattered all the coffee cups and they screamed out, "Check for leaks." And the lights went on and off. And it was sort of hairy. I looked in the mirror and saw your face. It takes all the color out of you. And then they took it down and we -- being a bombardier all you needed to do is take a calipers to know how far a sub can go in so many days. And they come back and get you tomorrow or the next day [21:00] or the next day because it's all their territory. So fortunately, they never came back. We were down the last time and we were there 16 hours and 35 minutes and we pulled up and we -- at Java going through Lombok Straits [21:19]. And it was an hour and 45 minutes on the surface running a minefield at night. And they -- I watched it on the radar in the south and two Japanese patrol boats were converging on us. We went in between them and then went out the other side and nobody fired a shot. And we couldn't -- it was too shallow though to go through under the surface so that's why we were on the surface. Then we got down in the Indian Ocean, which was rougher on the cob. It was -- we got [22:00] waves there that would be 30 feet tall, come across the sub at about 1:00, and sweep across the whole sub. And then the sub would roll over about 25 degrees and back and forth. And I was on the rear deck of the sub and they'd look back and see if I was still hanging on. Well, then, finally we got down towards Australia and they hollered out over the intercom, "Now hear this, Captain to the bridge, unidentified airplane 16 knots." Then, "14 knots, unidentified airplane. Ten knots." And finally the captain's standing next to me and then I saw the thing and the sub was

rocking [23:00] so much I couldn't tell what it was and it just did that -- Japanese sub Navy all airplanes looked the same. So I said it's either a Japanese bullfighter or a Japanese Betty. So I can't tell you because I couldn't hold the binoculars steady. Anyway, he came up -- the plane did -- and came up and we flashed the light back to him and he took off. He was a patrol boat out of Australia [23:32]. And so we got down to Australia. We got there and the admiral came out to see us and he said, "I guess you fly boys will tell your buddies don't try to sink the submarines, just let the Navy know where they are and we'll take care of them but just leave them alone."

INT: Just one -- a couple quick questions. Was anybody injured [24:00] on the sub during the bombing?

JW: No.

INT: Nobody was injured, okay. And do you recall roughly how long it was -- how many days it was from when you were picked up by the sub until you reached Australia [24:16]?

JW: It was 10 days and 10 nights.

INT: So that you arrived in Australia [24:29] then prior to Christmas?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay. Did you -- did you celebrate Christmas in Australia?

JW: No, because we were there and the Navy had no uniforms. And some -- and the ensign wanted me to -- he's going to show me the town. Well anyway, the only thing they could find was a Navy cap and a Navy [25:00] commander's uniform. It fit good, but epaulets and all that brass stuff. But I did go over and meet a Navy intelligence officer with one of the Filipino flyers. And we brought all kinds of maps out of the things in the Philippines [25:20]. And they wanted to know if we could speak Japanese -- no. But we

gave them information. Then he had been born over with the Japanese -- American Navy fellow and he'd lived all in the western Pacific. So he was quite interested. The next day I got a phone call. He said, "You're leaving tomorrow at 5:00 in the morning." And I says, "You're out of your mind. I'm in Army Air Corps [25:50]. I don't get up at 5:00 in the morning. I'm -- that's the Navy." And I said, "Only except when we fly on a mission." So anyway, he said [26:00] they came out and picked us up and they were there 5:00 in the morning and took us out to a little secret airfield. And there's a little DC-3 there with the engine revved up. And the guy said -- it said U.S. Navy Airport Transport. And he took me, I said, "Where are we going?" He's got a 45 on his hip and I says -- he said, "I can't tell you, military secret." I said, "I'm not getting on that damn airplane until you tell me where I'm going." So he took me back to the tail, dust was flying, and he's looking around like maybe we were getting bugged. And then he says, "I got the greatest thing come out of the war in the Pacific." I said, "What's that?" He says, "You guys. Every day somebody gets shot down, nobody ever lives and tells about it. MacArthur [26:48] wants to see you but he's afraid you'll get killed going back to the Philippines [26:52] so he's sending you back to Hollandia [26:58] and they'll debrief you [27:00] and send the information on to him.

INT: Okay, where were you being sent?

JW: To Hollandia.

INT: Could you spell that?

JW: H-O-L-A -- H-O-L-O-N-D-I-A.

INT: And that's in the South Pacific?

JW: That's on the north side of New Guinea [27:21].

INT: Okay, very good. Before we go any further -- again, this is great. This is wonderful information. When you had arrived and disembarked off of the submarine then, could you explain what had happened just immediately upon debarking the submarine?

JW: When we got off?

INT: Yes.

JW: They sent me with the officers and they went first class. And then they sent the enlisted men to sit with the enlisted men [28:00].

INT: Okay, and so you went with a naval intelligence officer, you said?

JW: Right, yeah.

INT: Okay. And did he -- you said he debriefed you and the Filipino pilot?

JW: Well, what was going on behind the lines?

INT: Did he ask you questions about how you escaped and evaded?

JW: No, no.

INT: What kind of questions did he ask you?

JW: Well, just that -- what's going on and just general questions that you would ask. What's going on behind the lines?

INT: Okay, all right. But nothing specific that you remember?

JW: No, no.

INT: Okay. And so he had debriefed you and a Filipino pilot?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: But did not debrief the gentleman that was with you -- the sergeant [29:00] that was shot down with you?

JW: Just the two of us.

INT: Okay.

JW: Now, we went to -- now, he said that there's an Army officer and he's the only one around here in 1,500 miles and he'll love me. Go see him. I went to see him and he said, "Well, you'll be here six weeks, six months, or six years then somebody will come down and get you." We didn't know that we were going to have to go the next day. So anyway.

INT: Okay. Okay. So there was nothing specific that you remember about the naval intelligence officer?

JW: No, no.

INT: Okay. All right. So you were taken behind the DC-3 and --

JW: He said we were going to go to Hollandia [29:52] and then MacArthur [29:53] wanted to see us. He was afraid we'd get killed going back and so.

INT: Okay. So how many individuals [30:00] were on the plane going to Hollandia [30:05]?

JW: Well, there was the Navy captain and the pilot and a co-pilot and a Navy intelligence officer and my five enlisted men.

INT: Okay.

JW: Now, we were flying in there and it got cold and we went up to -- and the guys -- my GIs are running back and forth. And it was an airplane made for -- with bucket seats for paratroopers. And we didn't have any parachute, but anyway, we landed in the middle of Australia [30:40]. We were flying from Perth [30:45] over to Darwin [30:46] and we landed in the middle and the -- before we got there, the Navy intelligence officer gave this captain -- a Navy captain [31:00] a long leather coat. Something like Rommel would have wore with a fur neckpiece. And it came down to about six inches off the floor.

Well, when we landed there I looked under the collar to see where it was from. It said U.S. Army Air Corps [31:27]. I'd never saw one before, never saw one since. Well anyway, get back on the plane and then we landed in Darwin [31:37]. Well, the Japanese -- I mean, the people in Darwin were so afraid of getting invaded by the Japanese it took us 45 minutes in the Navy plane before they'd let us land because the Japanese had some planes that looked like a DC-3. I saw some of them flying. But so they finally let us land and we landed there and I went to the officer's [32:00] quarters and the enlisted men went with the enlisted man and we were having dinner. And the fellow that's host was Commander Olson [32:17]. He was -- brought the last submarine out of the Philippines [32:19] after we lost the Philippines to the Japanese and he brought women and kids and all kinds of people. And anyway, this -- and navy captain sitting across the table from me. And after a couple of drinks he finally unbended and he looked at me and he had a tear in his eyes. And he says, "Young man, I love my country and I will never see it again." And I says, "Why's that?" He said, "Do you remember the Hornet?" And I said, "Yes." He says, "I was the captain of the Hornet and it got sunk out from underneath me. He said, "You remember the York Town?" "Yes." He says, "I was the captain of the York Town. It got sunk out from underneath me." "Now," he said, "they're giving me the largest landing craft in the world --

[End of Tape 2A]

[Beginning of Tape 2B]

INT: Okay, so you landed in Darwin [00:11]?

JW: Yeah.

INT: And what happened in Darwin?

JW: Well then, we were just there overnight and then we took over to -- flew over the Owen Stanley Mountains to Hollandia [00:29] with the captain we flew over there.

INT: Okay. And the gentleman who was shot down with you on your plane was still with you?

JW: Yeah, well there were five of them, my crew that was left.

INT: Okay, so the five all got back together?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: Okay. Were they all back together that were with you as part of that 17? They got [01:00] on the submarine?

JW: Yeah. Right.

INT: Okay, I see, okay. Very good. All right, so you were only in Darwin [01:08] a short time, you flew than to Hollandia [01:11].

JW: Hollandia, yeah.

INT: Again, I apologize, how do you spell that? Do you know?

JW: Well, H-O-L-L-O-N-D-I-A, I think that's the way it's spelled.

INT: Okay. All right. Just try to look it up on the computer here, see if I can orient myself. So you landed in Hollandia [01:35]?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: And then what happened?

JW: Then we got debriefed by the MIS-X [01:48], my first meeting with MIS-X.

INT: Okay. So then before we talk about that, because we might want to save that discussion for another meeting, there were a couple [02:00] of loose ends that I wanted to wrap up before we started into that part of the discussion. And I think this is a real important one, and that is you said you had some briefing prior to your flying missions and that you had

a meeting with Erik Rhodes [02:19].

JW: Right.

INT: Can you start from the beginning and provide in as much detail as you can everything about that?

JW: Well, we were at the Hamilton Air Force Base [02:32] going to Hawaii, [02:34] going overseas and he was a first lieutenant in the Air Corps or the Navy, or maybe in the Army, but he was a first lieutenant. And he briefed us on -- he had -- about getting shot down and we did have a chance to survive. Now [03:00], he was in the movies, he played with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, and he made a number of movies, and he was always the guy that never got the girl. And he had a mustache and he was quite an interesting fellow. But he was -- that was my first meeting with any briefing with going overseas.

INT: And can you -- can you give me some detail in terms of what Erik Rhoades [03:34] told you in that briefing?

JW: Well, he just said you do have a chance -- that people will help you.

INT: And did he say anything specifically?

JW: No. Not that I can remember.

INT: Did he talk about what to do if you're captured?

JW: Well [04:00], you're supposed to go, you're supposed to give the name, rank, and serial number and that's it.

INT: Did he talk about trying to meet up with Filipinos that might help you to get to safety or anything like that?

JW: We didn't know anything, we didn't know we were going to the Philippines [04:19] at

that point. So we didn't know where we were going. It was just general information.

INT: Did they give you any sort of things like silk maps or button compasses or anything like that?

JW: No, I got that after I got back, in the Pentagon [04:35] building when I came home. Then I got all that stuff.

INT: Okay, so there --

JW: Didn't have anything overseas.

INT: Okay. So, do you remember, was it a very quick briefing by Erik Rhoades [04:48], or did he provide you a very lengthy discussion on what to do?

JW: No, just a short briefing.

INT: Okay. So, how is it [05:00] that you recall him -- if you had a very short encounter with him -- did you -- he wasn't a movie star at that time, was he?

JW: Yes, he was.

INT: He was. Okay. So, you recognized him --

JW: I recognized him immediately, yes.

INT: And did he brief a small group of individuals or a large group?

JW: Well, the two crews.

INT: Okay.

JW: That's 20 men.

INT: Okay. And was there anything that you recall from that discussion that was -- that you thought was helpful or useful to you after you were shot down?

JW: No, other than that people would help you.

INT: Okay.

JW: That you did have a chance to survive.

INT: Okay. All right. David, do you have anything?

INT: I'm good I think. I'm good.

INT: Okay. I'm thinking that maybe this would be a good cut off point. This is a lot of good information [06:00]. And perhaps picking this up the next time that we talk as it relates to your first encounters with the MIS-X program [06:10].

JW: Yeah.

INT: And my understanding is that you really didn't know anything about MIS-X until you arrived in Hollandia [06:18].

JW: Right.

INT: Okay.

JW: Right. I didn't know anything about it.

INT: Okay.

JW: And that's when we signed a thing that we wouldn't have any newspaper articles or interviews or anything.

INT: Okay.

JW: But that was -- that was -- that was not like the one we signed back at P.O. Box [06:41] or Fort Hunt [06:44].

INT: Okay.

JW: That was till death do you part.

INT: Yes.

INT: Actually, I do have one question for you. Do you know the name of the submarine you were on?

JW: Yes, the Hake [06:56], S-256. H-A-K-E [07:00].

INT: H-A -- and it looks like David was able to find a photograph of the Li'l Jo Toddy [07:11].

JW: Yeah.

INT: And so we can print that out and send it to you. It looks like it's a blonde-haired woman that was painted on the airplane and she's seated in a bathing suit, and I'm sure you probably recall that.

JW: Yeah. Everybody -- it was such an unusual name everybody knew about it.

INT: And what was the quote? Li'l Jo Toddy [07:36], and there was another little statement with it?

JW: All ass no body.

INT: Yeah, that's what it says here.

[laughter]

Okay, very good. And is there anything else that you wanted to chat before we depart today?

JW: Well, just that -- oh, what I did when we went to Fort Hunt [08:00]. We had to go there every day. We'd have to go down and at the -- in the basement of the Pentagon [08:10] building and then get in a Chevrolet limousine that had about six doors on each side, and we got in there and then we drove out to P.O. Box 1142 [08:24]. We actually did go to Alexandria [08:26] and then we went on down to Fort Hunt [08:29]. And then when you went to Fort Hunt, there was a berm there, you went over that, then went down below, and you never could see out at all. And so they wanted to see us every day. The reason they wanted to see us because if they wanted to send us out to brief people, they wanted to lay their hands on you. And then some of the guys would take off and go to Seattle

and they wouldn't -- they couldn't get them there till about a week [09:00] and that was too late for what they needed to do so that's why you had to show up every day. That if there's nothing to do we were able to hit the beer chest and we'll wait for the car to go back to the Pentagon [09:17] building. And then we could party all day and all night and come back the next morning. We had to be there about 8:00 in the morning to get on this.

INT: Very good. Well, we look forward to talking with you about this phase of your history because I think that's the part that's most interesting to us. But it was really good to get all of your background so we could set the stage for what you actually did at 1142 [09:45] and once you met with the MIS-X [09:48] personnel.

JW: Well, the interesting things -- the first guy that was on Guadalcanal [09:56] was the -- was the Army officer and it was not the Marines [10:00]. And I met him at -- out there at 1142 [10:06], at Fort Hunt [10:08]. He was the first guy on there.

INT: Very good. Well, why don't we try to reschedule then perhaps for another hour next week or something if that'll work for you?

JW: Yeah, okay.

INT: Is that all right?

JW: Yeah.

INT: Well, David, I guess you can go ahead and shut off the recorder, and we wanted to thank you very much for your help.

JW: Okay.

INT: We really appreciate this. This is an important interview and it's really shedding a lot of light on what we're hoping to better understand. So thanks and have a good weekend and

we'll try to get a hold of you next week.

JW: Okay.

INT: Thanks, Mr. Wylder.

INT: Thank you very much.

JW: Okay.

INT: Okay, bye.

JW: Okay, bye now.

[End of Tape 2B]

[Beginning of Tape 3A]

INT: Thank you, Mr. Wylder. My name is Vince Santucci, and we will be interviewing Mr. John Wylder as part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project [00:20]. Today is March 18th, 2010. This is the second part of the interview with Mr. Wylder. It's actually the third tape and Mr. Wylder will be participating by telephone today from Seal Beach, California [00:35]. The interview is being recorded in Virginia at the George Washington Memorial Parkway and the staff that are involved in this interview include Brandon Bies, David Lassman, myself Vince Santucci and then two of our researchers Dan Gross and George Coin. On the last interview [01:00], we had talked with Mr. Wylder who was a bombardier during World War II and was shot down in the Pacific theater. He had escaped capture and was picked up by the Americans, taken to Australia [01:16] and that in December of 1944 we're going to pick up the story with Mr. Wylder in Darwin, Australia [01:23]. So can you begin from there, Mr. Wylder?

JW: Yes. After we got to Darwin, they decided to send us on to Hollandia [01:39], which was one of -- was MacArthur's [01:43] -- where he'd been before he moved up to the

Philippines [01:47]. And as always, they flew us to Hollandia [01:55] from Darwin [01:56] and we landed there and it was [02:00] one of the things like the service, hurry up and wait, you know? We -- they made us get up early and we were off at 5:00 in the morning. So we got there to Hollandia [02:17], and we were there and we went up to where MacArthur's [02:24] whole headquarters was and where we'd just heard all these wild stories about McArthur's castle and all this kind of bologna, the rumors that were circulating around. If I was the commanding general of the south Pacific I would have a tent that had a wooden floor in it and [unintelligible]. And that was about all I could say. Well, we were waiting there and finally a major showed up. He was with MIS-X [03:00]. And he -- the first thing he said -- he looked at us and he said, "You fellows are going home by the first available transportation." And I said, "What did you say?" And he said, "You fellows are going home by the first available transportation." I said, "Now, say that loud enough so everybody can hear it." And he said it a third time. He said, "All right, I want you to go down to the hospital, the 51st General Hospital [03:39] and report there and I'll be down to see you in a couple of days and debrief you. So went down there and I went in and shook the -- saluted Colonel Rhoades [03:57], I think was the head of the hospital. And he said [04:00], "You're an officer and you can keep your uniform, but your enlisted men have to take their uniforms off and use the hospital pajamas. Well, what he did -- he said, "Now you will be going to this particular private suite in the hospital. You will stay in there. You will talk to no one. You will use the latrine outside the door. Don't talk to anybody until you've been debriefed." So in a couple of days the Major came down and talked to us. And we signed a form that said that we wouldn't have any interviews and we would have no pictures taken or have

anything [05:00] to do outside of our -- that was until -- and then we were to be sent home. We were sent home by secret orders and on your orders in those days it had your name, rank, and serial number. Then it was with a dash R or a dash J. Now dash R meant escaper and R meant you're a prisoner of war. So anyway, we were sent home and -- so that was the first meeting with MIS-X [05:51] and back. I didn't have any uniform and nobody had uniforms. So the major gave me [06:00] his uniform and he said, "You can wear it." It was a winter uniform and he said, "clean it, send it to his wife" who had lived in New York. Otherwise I'd have just come with what I had on, the clothes I had wore for six weeks and that was it. And so anyway, that was our next experience. And we got on a little early out of Hollandia [06:41] and from that we went around to Brisbane [06:46] and unloaded the troops from -- had been fighting in Africa --

INT: Mr. Wylder, can I interrupt you for a second?

JW: Sure.

INT: We're going to go back to your first meeting [07:00] with the MIS-X [07:02] and I think Brandon and others may have a few questions. First question that I had is that when you had first met the MIS-X did you know what MIS-X [07:13] stood for and what that represented?

JW: No. No, I didn't.

INT: And what does it -- what does it mean?

JW: I really don't know, but it was a -- there was a few people involved in that and there weren't many of them and they had a little thing that they -- like the FBI where they could -- it was a thing they opened it up and showed you their identification. That's all they said. And so it was the -- and then from that we went on to come into the states.

INT: Okay, so were the MIS-X [08:00] individuals that you spoke with -- were they in uniform?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay. And they were U.S. Army [08:07]?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay. And did they introduce themselves to you as MIS-X [08:13] or where did you learn that term?

JW: Not until I got to Mason -- Fort Mason [08:27] in San Francisco [08:29] when I got home. That's where I learned the term. But we were told that -- not to talk to anybody but those fellows.

INT: Okay. So you --

JW: You couldn't tell anybody where you were shot down or just say shot down because the enemy was looking at the records every day and if you got shot down, you didn't walk out of the Pacific so somebody helped you and so that they would [09:00] go there and kill a bunch of people and the next guy gets shot down they wouldn't have much of a chance.

INT: Okay. During that first meeting, did you meet with one MIS-X [09:13] person or were there more than one?

JW: Just one.

INT: And I thought you said a name. Did you remember his name?

JW: No, no, he sent me down to Colonel Rhoades [09:24] who was the commandant of the 51st General Hospital [09:28].

INT: Okay. And were there others with you that were meeting with MIS-X [09:34]?

JW: Yes, well, I was the only Army officer and the other was my enlisted men. I had five enlisted men but they were part of my crew.

INT: Okay. And just to go back, do you remember what they were asking you at that initial meeting? Any questions that you remember?

JW: No [10:00], just where we were shot down and that's all -- that wasn't anything special. Just to keep your mouth shut about where we were.

INT: And did they know who you were before you introduced yourself? Did they have information about you already?

JW: I believe they did. He came up and said immediately, he called off our names and then he said we were going to go home the first available transportation.

INT: Okay. Anybody else have any questions? I'm going to hand the phone to Brandon.

INT: Mr. Wylder, I was wondering, the gentleman that you met with from MIS-X [10:47] before you were actually rescued, that first initial meeting -- did you get the impression that he was always in that area? Like he was stationed there in the Philippines [10:57]? Or that he was [11:00] -- had recently just gotten there specifically for this mission?

JW: I believe it was just recently. Now, he told us -- he interviewed the first fellow that escaped from Europe in Washington, D.C. [11:17]. He was at the Pentagon [11:17] building and they had all these generals there in a private meeting and so he interviewed him. I said, "What did he have to say?" Well, he said, "You want me to tell them how I got out of France in one sentence? Or do you want me to tell the story?" And it was a short talk, about every other word was a cuss word but anyway, that was his expression. So he had been there from Washington, D.C. [12:00] and then came out to the Pacific.

INT: Okay. And I think Vince asked this, but again, you do not recall his name at all, do you?

JW: No, I don't recall his name. I knew he was major but I don't recall his name.

INT: Okay. I'm going to see if -- anybody else has any questions. Were there any forms that you had to fill out at that immediate time? Again, processing forms or anything like that? Or was this much more of a quick meeting sort of to get you guys out of the country?

JW: The -- just one single page as I described, that we couldn't have any interviews or write any stories or tell anybody anything -- where we were.

INT: Okay, so basically just something that kind of swore you guys to secrecy per se?

JW: Right [13:00]. You can say you were shot down someplace in the Pacific and that's about it. And that -- you could say you were rescued by submarine and so forth but you weren't to get involved in any definite details.

INT: Okay.

INT: Thank you, Mr. Wylder. One other comment, I think it's worth bringing up again at this point, and I'm asking it just in case this was any part of your discussion with MIS-X [13:37] in your initial meeting. And that is you mentioned to us previously that basically that the U.S. Military wanted to just pretend like you were shot down and you were killed in action. That you had indicated that the American military didn't want it to be known that you had successfully escaped after you had been shot down [14:00] because of other kind of ramifications. Is that correct and can you rephrase that?

JW: Yeah, you're right. We never returned. In fact, I'm sitting here in Seal Beach, California [14:13] and I still have never returned because they didn't want anybody, if they would return somebody else the enemy would go in and kill some people whether they helped you or not. It was quite the interesting -- when we were down in the Philippines [14:33] and they picked us up and -- in a little canoe and they took us to shore. And we had to

walk in the shore waist deep and these people came out, shook our hands, and said, "Happy new life." I said, "You're damn right I got a happy new life, I'm alive." And they came out. And I said, "Where are the Japanese [15:00]?" And they said, "Oh, four kilometers over the hill." And I said, "Where do we hide?" "You don't have to hide. You come halfway around the world to save our country, the least we can do is die for you. We will all die before we let you get captured." That was pretty potent. And you know, when you're important to yourself, you're important to your family. But not more important than all a village of maybe 200 or 300 people. And so that shook us up real good because you couldn't imagine that in America.

INT: Okay, very good. So, the one thing that I'm trying to put into context is when was the first time that you were told that you were to be -- assumed to be dead [16:00]? Was that at this meeting with the MIS-X [16:02] -- initial meeting? Or was it before or after?

JW: Well, there was -- the first meeting with the MIS-X [16:13] major. And that was when we were -- to keep quiet on where we'd come from.

INT: Very good. So, let's see -- moving forward then, you were then transported from this island and where did you go from this point?

JW: From -- we went to -- from Hollandia [16:44] we got on that [unintelligible] which was a [unintelligible] liner, a regular passenger liner back and forth from San Francisco to Hawaii. And we picked that -- they picked us up in Hollandia [17:00] and we went around to Brisbane, Australia [17:08] and to unload a bunch of people who had fought -- they were -- some were Dutch and some were Australian -- that had fought in an Africa campaign and they were coming home. And so we were in Brisbane [17:26] and we could have gotten off the ship but I was so glad to know I was going home I wouldn't

dare step off the ship in case it would take off without me. So anyway, we were there a couple of days and then we went on down to -- from Brisbane [17:50] we went to -- straight to San Francisco [17:54], 14 days and 14 nights and then there's no [18:00] -- any other vessels to protect us. And we could go past and the submarines couldn't tell. We were going all the time.

INT: Okay, Mr. Wylder, just a couple quick questions. So you were on this boat that was going to take you from Brisbane [18:24] to San Francisco [18:25].

JW: Right.

INT: You didn't stop anywhere?

JW: No.

INT: Now, did you have any encounters with Japanese ships or planes along the way?

JW: No.

INT: You didn't?

JW: Nothing. We just went by a few islands of some sort out there, that was all, and nobody was with us at all. There was an unusual thing. We were up on the deck, we had our life jackets with us, and all of a sudden the ship [19:00] -- I was sitting there talking to a Navy nurse -- and all of a sudden the ship makes a violent turn and I says, "Grab your life jacket." And all of a sudden, we stopped. And we were probably two or three days outside of San Francisco [19:22] and I wondered what they hollered out, "Man overboard." Well, what had happened when they went to -- they were painting the ship to get it fixed up before we came into San Francisco [19:36] and they thought maybe one of their crewmembers fell overboard. But it wasn't a crewmember, it was like a psychopathic [phonetic] fellow that when they went to feed him he ducked out

underneath and jumped overboard. Well, when he hit the water, the water sort of sobered him up and he stood there waving [20:00]. So they went out and picked him up. Here's 4,500 people on the ship and there was submarines around and we sit there dead still in the water, which they wouldn't have done that if they had known it was a psycho case. They thought it was one of their crewmembers so they picked him up. So anyway, we took off to San Francisco [20:27] and --

INT: Okay, Mr. Wylder, Mr. Wylder?

JW: Yeah.

INT: Just one other question -- presumably the Australians that were being brought to Australia [20:37] got off the boat, or off the ship, and who got back on? You talk about 4,500 other folks.

JW: Well, they were just fellows that were -- maybe they were already on there. They were just Army personnel or rotating back to the states.

INT: United States military?

JW: Yes [21:00]. It was all military, yes.

INT: Okay. All right, so you arrive in San Francisco [21:05]?

JW: Well yes, at Fort Mason [21:09].

INT: And do you have an estimate of when that was in terms of a date?

JW: Well, it was in late December.

INT: So it was before Christmas?

JW: Yes.

INT: Okay, so go ahead.

JW: No, that was after Christmas, that's right. We were -- yeah, we were in Hollandia [21:49]

for Christmas. And -- because they -- Red Cross came out and gave us little things and so forth.

INT: Okay, so you arrived probably in January [22:00]?

JW: Right, right, yes.

INT: Of '45. Okay, go ahead and talk about your arrival and what happened in San Francisco [22:07].

JW: Well, when we got off the port -- got off the ship, they sent somebody out. They knew we were coming and that fellow came out and he said, "You know, you could be shipped over again?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "Did you know you could be floating in the San Francisco Bay because I'm not going overseas again!" So anyway, and then some fellow with a uniform on from [unintelligible] and he saluted me. And well, I said, "What's that?" And he says, "He's a prisoner of war from Italy [22:46]." So anyway, when -- they took me into the intelligence office and at [unintelligible]. And the Colonel said [23:00], "Where were you shot down?" And I said, "Show me the MIS-X [23:08] seal." He had a wallet, he threw it over at me, and I looked at it. He had everything you could think in there, but I said, "I don't see what I want to see." And he says, "Where were you shot down?" I said, "Out in the Pacific." So anyway, I said, "I can't tell you until you show me." He said, "You're the first one that ever asked to see that, the MIS-X [23:40] seal." He said, "I don't have it. I wasn't here when they handed it out. I was on a vacation or something." And all of the people in the office have MIS-X [23:53] seal. And I said, "Okay, you have them ask me and then you ask them [24:00]." So that was my encounter with the colonel. And then they decided to send me to the Pentagon [24:11] building in Washington [24:14]. They gave me [unintelligible]. I could take a

car, but who would pay for the gasoline. There was a military airstrip, I could use a commercial airliner or a railroad train. But then -- so I took a commercial airline and got to Washington, D.C. [24:45].

INT: Okay, Mr. Wylder, let's stop there and see if there's any questions. And just the first question is that when you were in San Francisco [24:55] did -- you said you did meet with MIS-X [24:59] in San Francisco [25:00]?

JW: Yes, at the base, yes.

INT: At the base. Which base are you talking about?

JW: Fort Mason [25:06].

INT: Fort Mason. And did you meet with one individual or more than one individual?

JW: Well, they all had -- there was a half a dozen I guess, but I -- all they asked me, "Where were you shot down?" That was all. They didn't get into any details.

INT: So that's all they really were interested in is where you were shot down.

JW: Right.

INT: And they -- did they remind you about not speaking to anybody or did they tell you anything else that other MIS [25:39] folks have told you?

JW: Well, no they didn't. We already knew that we weren't to speak to anybody else but the MIS-X [25:46] people. Regardless of name, rank, or serial number. You couldn't even speak to Eisenhower. It didn't matter.

INT: Were you given any sort of orders [26:00] or instructions of what to do?

JW: Well, just in the one page deal, just keep your mouth shut and don't talk to anybody about where you were shot down, how you got out, or anything.

INT: Okay. Does anyone else have a question? Okay, so you had purchased a ticket on a

commercial airlines and you traveled to Washington [26:29] and you traveled by yourself?

JW: Yes.

INT: And did you have instructions of what you were to do once you went to Washington?

JW: Well, I was to go to the MIS-X [26:39] -- the office in the Pentagon [26:43] building.

INT: And so you had a contact, a name, or an office number in the Pentagon that you were to report to?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay. And can you give us a little bit of information then about your arrival at the Pentagon [27:00]?

JW: Well, we went to the office to where I was told to go and they gave me a pass to go to P.O. Box 1142 [27:11], Alexandria, Virginia [27:12]. And that was -- and it was dated March the 19th, 1945. Now, we had to go every day out to -- down in the basement of the Pentagon [27:32] building and get into a Chevy Limousine. It was a Chevy that had about six doors on both sides and you took the ride out to P.O. Box 1142 [27:45]. And the -- you had to sign that you weren't using it for personal use and that was it. There was only about a half a dozen of us went out there every day [28:00]. So the reason that they wanted to see us is because we were sent out to brief people that were going to be shipped overseas and they wanted to be able to lay their hands on us. And when they needed us because some of the fellows would take off and go to Seattle and it would take them six days to ever get back to Washington [28:27] to be sent out and that was too late. So they wanted to see us every day. And that was all that we had to do. We had to go there and then we went to the Fort Hunt [28:42]. And we -- I got to Fort Hunt and the

MIS-X [28:51] guy came over and in a private room and I signed a thing that you would not [29:00] divulge anything about Fort Hunt [29:02] until death do you part. And -- which I understand was lifted about 1970, but that's -- but I never was interested in proceeding to learn any secrets because I figured someday I'd pick up the Reader's Digest, read something and say, "This isn't the way they did it, this is the way they did it." And I didn't look into anything else. So I didn't find any secrets that I didn't know what was going on there. Only do what I had to do and that was it. Just to report there, and if they didn't need it immediately went over to the beer chest and had a beer and then waited for the limo to go back to the Pentagon [29:52] building and then we could party until the next morning at 8:00 to come back out there again [30:00]. Now, another interesting thing, I'm -- you know I'm from Missouri and my uncle was the First Lieutenant in the same outfit that Harry Truman [30:19] was the captain in. So, while I was in Washington [30:24] I thought I'd look him up. Well, the first time I called I got a hold of his wife, Bess Truman, and she said, "He's out of town." And next time I got back into Washington [30:37] I got Margaret Truman, his daughter, on the phone and she said, "Oh, dad's in the Capitol, go over and see him." So, I went over to the Capitol and I said, "How do you see Mr. Truman?" They said, "Give him your card when they have recess he will come out and talk to you." So he did and he talked to me [31:00] and I mentioned about my uncle being with him and he remembered him. And we said a few words and then he introduced me to Colonel [sic] Harry Vaughn [31:11], which is his military aide. And he said, "Take care of Lieutenant Wylder if I'm busy." Well, then he -- then he took off. Well, ten days later he was president of the United States. So I wanted to see the White House and the White House was off limits during the Second

World War. So anyway, I called up Harry Vaughn [31:40] and he said, "Yeah, come on over." So I went to the little treasury shack and they appointed me and they said, "Lieutenant Wylder, you go down this walk and you ring the doorbell and they will admit you." And I went down and rang the doorbell [32:00] and the colored butler came to the door and said, "Lieutenant Wylder, won't you come in and sit down here in the nice chair, in one of the favorite chairs in the White House. I'll get the war report and then see if the Colonel can see you." Well, anyway, I'm sitting there and he comes back, "The Colonel can see you." So we walked down at the -- through the -- where they have their cabinet meetings at a big, long table. Anyways, he was on the phone -- the Colonel was on the phone. And he was saying, "This is the way we feel but you don't print that. This is what you print." One hundred and eighty degrees out of what the truth was. And I said, here I'm where it happened and I find out we don't know what's really going on. So anyway, he got off the phone and he said, "What can I do for you [33:00]?" And I said, "Well, can I -- can you find me a good job? Because I can't go overseas again." And so anyway, he said --

INT: Mr. --

[End of Tape 3A]

[Beginning of Tape 3B]

INT: Okay, you can go ahead.

JW: Anyway, I said to the MIS-X [00:17] before I went to the White House, I said, "Suppose I run into Harry Truman [00:22], can I tell him anything?" He said, "Tell him anything you want to tell him. After all, he's the President, he can find out anything." But he said, "Tell him to keep his mouth shut." Can you imagine me telling Harry Truman [00:37] to

keep his mouth shut? But that was my laugh for the day. And anyway, I did run into him and the Colonel said, "Don't get any help from the White House [00:53], otherwise the service will kill you. So just go back to your outfit [01:00] and let them take care of their own." Anyway, I went back to the Pentagon [01:06] building, looked up the telephone directory and started from the 5th floor down and went all around from office to office to say, "Colonel, do you need a Lieutenant who can't go overseas again?" And you can't -- with the Geneva Convention [01:29] -- which the enemy didn't pay any attention to, but if you were caught overseas again you would be shot as a spy. So that was the reason that I went from place to place and one of the places I found a solution [phonetic]. And a major said, "Do you want to get separated?" And I said, "No [02:00], I'll finish out the war." And he said, "Well, anytime you want to get out just call me, and I'll cut orders, and you'll be sent home." And -- so that was nice to know when you're -- that they don't want to kill you anymore and they're going to take care of you. What they did -- they took care of us. I did -- finally I got a job with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base [02:33] with the --

INT: Mr. Wylder, before we go to Wright-Patterson, can we go back a little bit? I think Brandon and others have questions.

JW: Sure. Yeah.

INT: First question is that it seems like we determined that you arrived in San Francisco [02:47] somewhere probably in January and that when you arrived at the Pentagon [02:53] you said your orders were in March -- what was it? March 18th?

JW: Nineteenth [03:00].

INT: March 19th.

JW: Yeah.

INT: So between January and March 19th do you recall at all what may have occurred during that time period? Because that's a month and a half at least in terms of time.

JW: Well, they sent me to -- after that they sent me to Fort Sheridan [03:22] and then I got about six weeks off of -- well, I got an extra couple of weeks before I had got to Fort Sheridan [03:36] because I had a delay en route. Of course, they were madder than hell at me when I got to Fort Sheridan and they said, "How come you didn't come here? You were in Washington [03:47] and then you left on Tuesday and you should have been here Wednesday." And I said, "Well, I got off at -- off the train in Chicago and I couldn't find Fort Sheridan [04:00]." And I just looked at them and laughed. Anyway, he wasn't happy but then I got about four weeks -- a month off as -- to go home. My mother lived in Chicago and so did my girlfriend, which later became my wife. And so that took care of that.

INT: So you took a little bit of leave before you went to 1142 [04:35]?

JW: No, no. I went there -- I was going to 1142 first. Yeah, right, then I came back to Washington [04:48] and went to 1142 [04:49]. You're right.

INT: So they allowed you to take leave before you went to 1142?

JW: Right.

INT: And question -- did at any point from the time that you were [05:00] in -- with your first initial meeting with MIS-X [05:06] -- were you ever fully debriefed?

JW: No, not any more -- not any more than -- until I got out to 1142 [05:21], Fort Hunt [05:22].

INT: So they allowed you to go on leave prior to being debriefed.

JW: Right.

INT: And you went to Chicago, spent some time with your family.

JW: Yes.

INT: You came back, went to the Pentagon [05:34], got your orders to go to 1142 [05:37].

JW: Right.

INT: I'm going to hand the phone to Brandon.

INT: Mr. Wylder, had they at any point prior to getting to P.O. Box 1142 [05:47] were you debriefed at all about the loss of your aircraft? I'm not talking about the actual -- your escape and evasion -- but the actual details surrounding the loss of your aircraft. Were you ever debriefed [06:00] about that?

JW: No.

INT: Were you debriefed about that at 1142 [06:08]?

JW: Not particularly, no. They -- the only thing they wanted 1142 is just to show up so that they could send us out if they needed to. That's the only thing you had to do there.

INT: So --

JW: And we didn't go any -- we got -- came at 1142 [06:32]. We actually did go to the post office and maybe put something in the mail or I don't know. Anyway, then they -- we didn't get out of the limo, we just stayed in there then the fellow drove us over to Fort Hunt [06:50]. Now, all you could see at Fort Hunt was the -- maybe an Army mule wandering around [07:00]. And there was an old post office -- I mean a mailbox, you know? A farm type mailbox and a little barbed wire but no gate. So you went in over a berm, then you went down, and then you didn't -- couldn't see anything. You couldn't see in the place and we couldn't see any farther. So there was other stuff going on in

there that we didn't know anything about. So, then the fellow got me in a room, and he said, "Sign this saying that you'll keep your mouth shut so long as you live." And I -- so I signed it and I said, "How do you know I'm not a plant? And I'm not a Nazi [07:53] and I've been sent here to you folks?" He said, "Well, we would have caught you [08:00] before you ever got here." So, because they never interviewed me. I had nothing -- all of my records were gone. The only thing I did have in my pocket that was in the water four times was my vaccination shots and that was the only thing because my Army pants disintegrated from falling in the water four times. So that was -- so he said, we would have caught you" and that was it. So, I -- because I knew the military, the Nazis [08:44] were quite smart in doing things.

INT: So, Mr. Wylder, what exactly did they question you about? What did they debrief you on [09:00] when you were at Fort Hunt [09:01]? What did it seem like they were getting at?

JW: Well, just knowing where we were and -- so they could use us to send out and help other fellows. Now, they would send us out with the intelligence officer and I only made two of these briefing deals. And I went once to Fort Wayne, Indiana [09:29] and another time in Salinas, California [09:32]. So we -- went with an intelligence officer. Now, they would have a meeting that would last about a day and a half, and the first day -- the only people that were in the meeting were people that were being shipped overseas. No base personnel were allowed. And anyway, they would talk for a day and then [10:00] about a half a day the next day they'd wind up and say, "Well, you've heard this part before. This is probably just another crock." Well, here's a fellow that's done it and he has been shot down in broad daylight, [unintelligible] Japanese air field, strafed in the water, lost in the most shark-infested waters in the western Pacific and he's here to tell you his story.

I stand up, they look at me, and their mouths fall to the floor. And they look, "Well, if this guy can survive I guess anybody else can." So that gave a lot of confidence that there was a chance for you to live. The only thing we were told when we were overseas that "if you get shot down in Borneo [10:55], you ought to farm. We're not going to come and pick you up [11:00]. You're going to be --"the statement in those days was Golden Eight in 48 but nobody knew about the atom bomb. And they said, "You're stuck there and so take care of yourself." So they have -- they asked questions and things. I could tell about each thing they wanted to know and it gave confidence that there was a chance you could survive.

INT: So again, getting back to P.O. Box 1142 [11:38] to just to rehash that -- you were-- you visited 1142 how many days in a row?

JW: Every day -- five days a week and I was for four weeks.

INT: Okay, so you were there for four weeks Monday through Friday [12:00]?

JW: Right.

INT: Okay. In your time at 1142 [12:05], did you only meet with one person or did you meet with -- these meetings you're describing right now, these were at Air Corps [12:14] bases across the country later on, correct?

JW: Right. Yes.

INT: Okay, but when you were at P.O. Box 1142 [12:22], how many people and who did you meet with on those five -- those four weeks that you were at 1142?

JW: Well, they were just the other fellows that are there with a -- maybe a head of the fellows that kept records. You know, they had on the big, black board with our names on there and they'd tell you where you were and we'd just go in there and see if they needed us.

And one interesting thing [13:00], marines were always screaming about Guadalcanal [13:03], Guadalcanal, Guadalcanal, Guadalcanal. Well, the first guy that was on Guadalcanal was not a Marine. It was an Army officer I met there. And -- at Fort Hunt [13:17] and he was put ashore by a life raft off of a submarine and he went in and found out what the depths were before we ever made it, before any Marine every got to Guadalcanal [13:33]. So, but you don't hear that in the history books because I met the fellow and they -- another interesting thing. When the war ended in Europe the general from the 9th, the 12th, and the 15th commanding generals all came out to Fort Hunt [13:56] and Jimmy Doolittle [14:00] of the 8th -- the mighty 8th, he didn't show up. Well, they lined us up in the room -- I think there was six of us -- and went around the room and they thought to us and the only war was in Europe, and us in the Pacific, we were just out there surfing and swimming and catching deep sea fish and having a ball because the war was all in Europe. So anyway, we had a critique and the fellow got up, and he was a little Chinamen. He was still a flying sergeant and he was an American born Chinese who could hardly speak English. But he pulled down the map and he says, "China one big country. So big that they don't understand each other because they've got so many different dialects." But, he said, anyway, he says, "I'm flying a piper cub with wounded [15:00] Chinese colonel in the back. And the engine conked out and I have no place to land, it's all the jungles. So, what do I do? I put the airplane in a hammerhead stall and flip down between the trees which were 150 feet tall." And the generals -- if you could have picked them off the floor laughing because number one, they may tell you in pilot training never put the plane in hammerhead stall because that's sure death. But it worked. It slid down between the trees. And he said, I got down and I'm about 30 feet

off the ground and I get the wounded Chinese colonel down and finally he says,”
Sergeant, what are we going to do?” And he says, “I don’t know. They make you a
colonel, you’re supposed to tell me what to do.” So anyway, that was another laugh and
the way he told it -- the little story [16:00]. Six weeks to go fourteen miles in the jungle
was so horrible. And I can understand having been in life -- the jungle.

INT: To get back to 1142 [16:20].

JW: Yes.

INT: Again, you described the one incident where a number of commanding generals showed
up. But you said Jimmy Doolittle [16:30] was supposed to but he did not?

JW: Yes, right.

INT: Okay. So, again, back to my earlier question of your time at P.O. Box 1142 [16:42],
were you -- you were primarily working with one individual or did you work with
different people each day?

JW: Well, yeah, we didn’t -- with different people, yeah. And we did -- when we did [17:00]
-- when we took off on a debriefing or a briefing of what they called, it was an
intelligence officer and he went with us wherever we had to go and did everything and
introduced you at the end of the meeting. So that was what we did. My only thing at
1142 [17:27] we didn’t know anything else that was going on in the place, but we came
up, going down one Sunday to go to Mount Vernon [17:38] and a tour bus and this lady
in the seat in front of me, she said, “Oh, that’s Fort Hunt [17:46] over there. That’s
where they have all the crazy people.” And -- so that’s what gives us Washington, D.C.
[17:55]. Now this is something interesting that George Marshall [18:00], the
commanding general wanted to come out to Fort Hunt [18:04] and they said, “I guess we

can't keep you off. You are the commanding general but you know the rules and the rules is need to know. You don't need to know, so don't come here." So he never got on the place.

INT: Okay, that's a good -- that's a good point to break for a minute. Wanted to go back to the Pentagon [18:26].

JW: Yes.

INT: When you reported to the Pentagon, did you go to the Pentagon more than one time?

JW: Well, every day but we never -- I just reported in the MIS-X [18:38] office once and got the pass to go with Erik [18:41] and then went -- we went in there every day to the 1142 [18:47] where I just went down in the basement and got in the limo for 1142.

INT: And so when you went to this office, was it a big office? Was it a small office? Were there lots [19:00] of people in the office? Was it a one-person office?

JW: Oh, it was a small office. Maybe half a dozen people.

INT: Were there files in the office?

JW: I don't remember.

INT: Okay. So, when did somebody tell you what you would be doing at 1142 [19:20]? Was it at the Pentagon [19:23] or at 1142?

JW: At 1142.

INT: So you were pretty much in the dark until you got to 1142?

JW: Right, right, yeah.

INT: Did you know anything else about 1142 [19:35]?

JW: No, no. They -- I only reported to the office of MIS-X [19:43] in the -- in the Pentagon [19:44] building just once and that's when they gave me the pass and then they said you

got to go out to 1142 [19:52] and to Fort Hunt [19:54] and they didn't mention the name Fort Hunt. They just said P.O. Box 1142 [20:00].

INT: So you went to 1142 [20:03] Monday through Friday, five days a week?

JW: Yeah, right. If I was in town, yes, right.

INT: And that was for 28 days?

JW: Yeah, yes, right. It varied maybe, but we were on a briefing field and we wouldn't be there that week, maybe gone several days.

INT: And you had told us in a previous discussion that there was a reason that they only wanted you to be at 1142 [20:31] for a month or less. Do you remember?

JW: No, you could only be in Washington, D.C. [20:38] for a month in a year because so many people in Washington.

INT: Can you elaborate on that any more? Because that's not -- we hadn't heard that before.

JW: No? Another and a very interesting thing I'll tell you, you're told that you're not to contact the families [21:00] of people that are missing or presumed dead until you find out what the Army has already told the family. So, I went to the place where they gave out all that information. I went in there and the fellow said, I said, "I'm going to look up records of my five servicemen that didn't -- that were missing in action or didn't show up." So he says, "I'll need their name, rank, and serial number." I said, "I don't know their serial number." He said, "Well, where were they born?" And I told him. And so he says -- when he got through, he wrote down who wants to know and, without me even opening my mouth, he just told a friend, and that was 15 minutes later I'm sitting there, and they come out with five clipboards [22:00] of people and my servicemen. And they take me, I guess, in the crying room and I look at the thing and he says -- "Oh," I said,

“that’s my mother.” He says, “What do you mean your mother?” I says, “I was off that crew with these fellows.” And he looked at me and he said, “You’re sitting here in Washington, D.C. [22:25]? You’re alive? I sent out thousands of these missing in action and nobody shows up from the Pacific and you are here in Washington, D.C. [22:38].” If he had the keys to the White House or the keys to the Capitol he would have given them to me. He couldn’t do enough for me and because he was shocked that I was even there. Anyway, because I looked at the telegram, the first telegram they sent to my mother was wrong [23:00]. And they sent all the others. They said, we were shot down over Las Negros. Well, that was an American base; it was Negros Island, Philippines [23:13]. Negros, PI. So they had to send another one out. Now, when they sent out these telegrams, they had the name of the person and then they had the stars, like blue stars in the telegram, the Western Union telegram. And that meant they had bad news. And so the fellow that is delivering the telegram is supposed to find out that somebody is with the person before you give them the telegram so that the people might get all upset and have a heart attack and die or commit suicide with the bad news [24:00]. So I have the telegram that my mother received.

INT: Do you still have a copy of that?

JW: Yeah, I still do, yes.

INT: I wonder if that’s something we could get a photocopy of?

JW: Yeah, I can -- yeah; I can send something, yeah.

INT: But just to keep it clear, these telegrams were being sent out someplace else other than 1142 [24:25], isn’t that correct?

JW: Right, yeah. To [unintelligible], to their families.

INT: Okay. So when you were -- let's go back to 1142 [24:33]. Your first day when you went to 1142, did they give you some sort of briefing, orientation, or what happened on your first day?

JW: Well, they took me in the room and I signed the till death do you part thing and that was where you signed that. It was more than what we signed originally with the MIS-X [24:56].

INT: Did they tell you anything else about what went on [25:00] at the camp?

JW: No.

INT: Were they secretive?

JW: Yes.

INT: Did they show you anything that they did regarding MIS-X [25:10]?

JW: No. I just -- I wasn't really interested in finding out because as I mentioned before, I might read an article years later and say, "This is what," -- in a Reader's Digest or some magazine and say, "This isn't the way they do it, this is the way they did it." So I didn't look into anything that was secret.

INT: Did they allow you to go into any of the buildings?

JW: No, they didn't say we couldn't or they didn't say we could. We weren't interested. I wasn't anyway.

INT: When they had classes, were there classrooms or were the classes outside?

JW: Oh, we didn't have any classes. It was just a room, a small house I guess it was [26:00], where we could sit down. About a half a dozen guys could sit down and then there was maybe one officer and he would talk to us. And you know, just ask -- he didn't say much, you know? He showed us the few things that they had. Like they had some little

thing about the size of the D-cell battery that -- a radio that you could listen to anywhere in the world. But he thing just hook it on to a window screen as an antenna. But that's about all that we saw.

INT: So they actually showed you some items that were part of the MIS program -- MIS-X program [26:52]?

JW: Yeah, just that -- that's only the one thing that I remember. I've heard other things [27:00] about the buttons, you know, that had compasses in them and so forth. I didn't see anything like that and I didn't have any maps. All the maps I got -- my maps where I was shot down in the Pentagon [27:12] building. I didn't have it when I was overseas and needed it so I didn't have them.

INT: So you were aware that they were doing something with these items?

JW: Yeah.

INT: And did you have any idea what they were doing with these items?

JW: No, probably smuggle them in with the [unintelligible] or something. The way we contacted the outside was a coast watcher in the Philippines [27:40] and he kept in contact with the military.

INT: Where were they smuggling these items to?

JW: Probably, I don't know -- maybe on submarines to somewhere -- the submarines would come into what they call Hallsey Harbor [28:00] and that's -- they'd come in periodically and pick up -- leave off ammunition and guns and medicine. Then they would take off. But they would pick up somebody and so forth. Now, I read a book that -- about another book about a submarine fellow and they told the people that they picked up some people and when they got them to Darwin [28:35] they said, "Get lost, don't talk to anybody but

don't tell where you were, you were in the Philippines [28:42] or anything that you've been -- survived. Just disappear.

INT: So presumably you weren't staying at Fort Hunt [28:52] overnight. Were you staying in a hotel?

JW: No, no. I was staying in a hotel, yeah.

INT: Okay, you were staying in a hotel. So you would come back and forth [29:00] for the five days a week for the 28 days but it still seems unclear as to what you specifically were doing all day.

JW: Well, we were just getting out there and if they didn't need us then we went to the beer chest and you grabbed a bottle of beer and waited to go back to the Pentagon [29:23] building. And then we would party until the next day.

INT: So for the most part then you drank a lot of beer?

JW: [laughs] We did drink a little.

INT: Was there a day where you didn't drink beer because they had you doing something?

JW: No, they -- we didn't do anything out at Fort Hunt [29:49] other than just check in. They did nothing there.

INT: And so nobody was talking to you or taking notes or you weren't talking to anybody [30:00]?

JW: No.

INT: Okay.

JW: It's an interesting thing that I have to have a breakfast, a meeting once a week some fellows there in this retirement area. One of the fellows had a thing -- it was his cousin was a colonel at MIS-X [30:31] at Fort Hunt [30:33] and he was the code colonel,

commanding officer of the codes there. And he didn't even know what MIS-X [30:41] was and they'd have to pass the thing around. And I said, "Holy mackerel, I've been there."

INT: So you know about some of the code users?

JW: No, well, I -- no, I just got the picture of this colonel that was there [31:00] and he was the commanding officer of the code deal. But I didn't know anything about it other than that.

INT: And so you were introduced to him or someone just told you about him?

JW: Well, yeah, I was just told about him. It was a cousin of his. So he was dead, I guess, already.

INT: Did you know anything about interrogation or prisoners?

JW: No.

INT: Okay. Any other questions from anybody? Go ahead.

JW: I will tell you, this might be of interest to you. There was a fellow that I used to sell insurance with, company in Englewood, California and there was a fellow that sat across the table from me, and his name was David Hackworth [32:00], and David Hackworth had -- in Korea and he was a -- quite a character. We knew that he was pretty sharp, not how sharp. Anyway, David [32:17], when he was in Korea, he had a group of fellows that worked for him, about 50 volunteers that would come and work for him. Their only job for the week was go out and grab two live Chinamen and bring them so he can talk to them. Well, they'd bring them in and -- blindfolded and kneel on the ground and he would ask the first Chinaman in Chinese something and the Chinaman probably said, "Drop dead," or something. So anyway, he would take a gun and he would fire it

between the two fellows [33:00] kneeling. And not shoot anyone, he'd fire between the two of them and then shove one of them next to the other one like he was shot. Well, he got all the information in the world.

[End of Tape 3B]

[Beginning of Tape 4A]

INT: --18th, 2010. This is part of the Fort Hunt Oral History Project [00:11]. We're interviewing Mr. John Wylder in Seal Beach, California [00:15]. This is the second part of the interview, but it actually is the fourth tape. And we're interviewing by telephone from Virginia from the George Washington Memorial Parkway. There are five people that are participating in the interview in Virginia. That includes Brandon Bies, the Cultural Resource Management Specialist for the Parkway; David Lassman, who is Park Ranger; Dan Gross, who is a researcher; George Coin, who is a researcher; and my name is Vincent Santucci, the Chief Ranger of the George Washington Parkway. Again, Mr. Wylder is participating by telephone from Seal Beach, California [00:55]. Mr. Wylder, I just wanted to let you know -- I guess we're getting close to wrapping up here [01:00]. The story that you just told us, does that have any relationship to what went on at 1142 [01:04]?

JW: No, no. It was just a novel thing of interrogation and David Hackworth [01:15] became the most decorated serviceman alive. He had 78 medals and everything but the Congressional medal. And he went back, he took it back in Vietnam, he had stories, and people loved him because he kept them alive.

INT: Very good. I appreciate you sharing that. So what we want to do is at this point sort of briefly then summarize after you left 1142 [01:49], where did you go from there?

JW: Well, I went to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base [02:00] with the public relations department. And I happened to get there and they had a tour of the base that took about 10 days and they had people from all the leading magazines, Popular Mechanics, Popular Science, and then air research and companies -- Boeing and Lockheed and North American and all these people. They took us all around there for about 10 days. And then they put us in the room and they told us what they were doing for the future and they said, "This is to show you that we're not asleep but you don't print any of this. This is just for your information to know that Wright Field [02:53] is doing something." And anyway, we got to see everything in the radar business [03:00]. And it was the -- but then they wanted to know and Wright Field [03:07] they were all looking for after the war so they knew I wasn't a newspaper reporter so they said to go work for special services. So I went to special services and they made me a decorations and awards officer at Wright Patterson Field [03:28]. And -- which was an easy job but I knew that I had to know all the battles in the war and where people were located, which side of the river and all different kinds of things that was --

INT: Very good. So just roughly, do you know how long you were at Wright-Patterson [03:50]?

JW: I was there till October of '45 when I got separated.

INT: So you were discharged in '45, October?

JW: October [04:00] of '45.

INT: Okay, and just one other question about Wright-Patterson [04:05]. Were you aware at all that there were German Scientists that may have come there?

JW: No. No.

INT: Okay, once you were discharged, just a couple of sentences, what did you do after the war?

JW: Well, I had a fellow -- interesting -- he had asked my mother, he said, "What is your son going to do when the war is over?" She says, "I don't know." Well, he said, "I'd love him to come to work for me." Well now this man, his father-in-law has the patent on the dial telephone -- the original patent on the dial telephone and he got 25 cents for every dial in the world. So he was quite wealthy and he said, "I'm in the advertising business and I want him [05:00] to go out to the streetcar and bus advertising and take over southern California." So I went out and I put an ad from Santa Barbara through San Diego and all the street car ads. Because he was going to underbid everybody and he was going to eventually take over the whole country because he didn't see the money and he said, "I'm going to take it over and leave it to nice people. And your father took care of me." And my father was a big corporate lawyer and he said that, "I know if I had first he would take care of my son, so, but anyway, I want to take care of you and give you a piece of the business." So -- unfortunately, he passed away about a year and a half after I went to work for him and that was [06:00] the end of that because his son that had the business, the mother was the stockholder and the General Telephone and eventually he became the president of General Telephone of Illinois. And anyway, he was -- that was the end of that deal. So I went back in market research and then other types of business.

INT: Very good. Well, I'm just going to check and make sure that nobody has any other questions and I have one last question myself. At -- in an earlier conversation, you talked about the name Erik Rhoades [06:47].

JW: Yes.

INT: And Erik Rhoades briefed you at one point before you actually flew into the Pacific.

JW: Right.

INT: You weren't aware of [07:00] what his role in MIS-X [07:04] was at that point?

JW: I don't even know if he was in MIS-X.

INT: Okay.

JW: I heard of it, but anyway, Erik Rhoades [07:12] was the movie star and he had made oh, maybe a dozen movies. He made a couple of them with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He was always the guy who never got the girl. And he was -- he was the one that briefed us when we went overseas. I recognized him immediately.

INT: You recognized him at the time because he already was famous?

JW: Yeah, right.

INT: And where did that occur?

JW: Hamilton Field [07:45] in -- outside of San Francisco [07:48]. That's where we took off to fly to Hawaii and on to Guadalcanal [07:53].

INT: And we talked about this a little bit before, but I just want you to restate. Can you recall what he shared with you or what he stated [08:00]?

JW: Well, he just stated the idea that we can have a chance of surviving if we just get shot down and ask somebody for help. That was what he said.

INT: Okay, I'm going to hand this over to Brandon.

INT: Mr. Wylder, just a real quick question jumping back to Fort Hunt [08:25]. You mentioned at one point that there was someone at Fort Hunt who was an Army officer who was the first person to land on Guadalcanal [08:35]?

JW: Yes.

INT: What more can you -- was that someone who was just visiting at Fort Hunt [08:42]? Or were they -- did they seem to be a regular staff member there at Fort Hunt?

JW: It sort of seemed like he was a regular staff member, yeah.

INT: And again, your recollection of him was that he was an American officer who was the -- you said the first person [09:00] to land on Guadalcanal [09:03]?

JW: Right. Yeah. He went there, dumped off by submarine before we ever invaded Guadalcanal. So he did intelligence work and then brought back the information before we invaded it.

INT: Do you recall -- I'm assuming you don't recall his name.

JW: No.

INT: But do you recall approximately what rank he was?

JW: He was a captain when I knew him.

INT: Okay, and again, that's a captain in the U.S. Army [09:36]?

JW: Yeah. Right.

INT: Okay, yeah, that's new information to us and it seems like possibly a rather significant person so we'd like to look into that a little bit more.

JW: Yeah. Well, he was a -- it was interesting to me because we were all told that the Marines, Marines on Guadalcanal [09:58]. And so [10:00] it was a big deal with them, but they weren't the first ones there. So I landed in Guadalcanal [10:10] and they made me the officer courier and taking the stuff over to the -- and the mail going on to MacArthur [10:24] and I took it too Hickam Field [10:31] and then they told me he would come out and meet me and take it off. And they put the airplane under guard and they said that I read the forms, the clipboard, but we were flying and should you go down

with the stuff and they did -- they said, "Don't worry about it. It's weighted, it'll sink to the bottom of the ocean, just take care of yourself."

INT: Mr. Wylder [11:00]? Was there one person at Fort Hunt [11:03] that you spent more time with than anybody else during your four weeks?

JW: No.

INT: This gentleman from Guadalcanal [11:12], did you see him more than once? How did you know the story about him?

JW: They mentioned it and he -- I think he even told the story.

INT: So you actually heard it from him directly?

JW: Yeah. Right.

INT: And so that was the only conversation you had with him or did you have more than one conversation?

JW: No, we were just waiting to go back to party. We didn't stay there for any instruction or anything. We just went out there, reported in, and then if we weren't needed took off to go party until the next day [12:00].

INT: So this is some sort of reward for getting Truman [12:08] to become President?

JW: No, it was -- no, that was just a -- my uncle was with him, that's all, in the First World War and the same outfit --

INT: Good. David had one final question and then I think we can wrap it up.

INT: Good day, Mr. Wylder.

JW: Yes.

INT: Just for future working on your interview and with your experiences, do you have any original papers, letters, pictures of yourself from the World War II time period that you

might be able to share with us so we can actually incorporate that into your record?

JW: Yeah, okay. Yeah, I can get something and fax it back to you or mail it to you.

INT: That'd be wonderful. We really appreciate it [13:00].

JW: Who would I send it to, you?

INT: Yeah, what you can do is if you send us anything original we'll make copies and send it back to you, but so that's wonderful.

JW: And what -- where would I -- have you got a fax number?

INT: I'll get in contact with you in a few days with all the information. And I'll also be sending you probably -- you'll hopefully get it by the end of next week -- copies of all the interviews we've been doing with you.

JW: Yeah.

INT: Okay?

JW: And -- okay, have you got a fax number?

INT: We'll get -- I'll get the information for you next week but I don't have the fax number on me right now.

JW: Okay, now I've got one number here. It's David Lasseter [phonetic]? Is that your name?

INT: David Lassman.

JW: Lass --

INT: L-A-S-S-M-A-N [14:00].

JW: Okay, now I got a phone number -- 703-289-2536.

INT: That is the phone number, but --

[end of transcript]

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