

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

**#270**

**ALBERT J. HOBDAY**

**B-17E, HAMILTON-HICKAM**

**INTERVIEWED ON  
DECEMBER 7, 1998  
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

MARCH 19, 2001

**Daniel Martinez (DM):** ...and then I'm going to read this small introductory part, which is kind of the introduction to the oral history.

**Albert Hobday (AH):** Okay.

DM: You and I are going to have just like a conversation.

AH: Just a conversation.

DM: Just look at me like we're sitting in your front room.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. The taping was done at the Imperial Palace Hotel, in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 7, 1998, at approximately 2:30 p.m. The person being interviewed is Albert Hobday?

AH: Hobday.

DM: Hobday, excuse me. The person being interviewed is Albert J. Hobday...

AH: Yup.

DM: ...who was flying on a B-17 from Hamilton Field to Hawaii on December 7, 1941. Actually that flight took place on the sixth of December.

AH: Sixth, yeah.

DM: For the record, would you state your full name?

AH: Albert J. Hobday.

DM: And the "J" stands for?

AH: John.

DM: And your place of birth?

AH: Cincinnati, Ohio.

DM: And the date of birth?

AH: February the twelfth, 1917.

DM: And in 1941, what would you consider your hometown?

AH: I still consider Cincinnati, although I was working, I had a job and working in Dayton, Ohio.

DM: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your family. You grew up in a family of how many kids?

AH: Two. I had a brother, two boys.

DM: Okay.

AH: My mom and dad.

DM: And who was the oldest?

AH: My brother was the oldest. I was the baby.

DM: How many years separated?

AH: Three years difference, yeah.

DM: And were your mom and dad alive while you grew up?

AH: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DM: And what was your dad like?

AH: Well, he was a, he came from England. He was born in England and he came here as an immigrant and got work and met [*his*] wife, my mother and raised us two boys here. He worked on a railroad.

DM: Oh, he was a rail—was he an engineer or...?

AH: No, no, he was a car inspector.

DM: For what railroad?

AH: B & O Railroad.

DM: B & O Railroad.

AH: Yes.

DM: Out of Baltimore area or...?

AH: Well, that was the headquarters...

DM: Right.

AH: ...but he worked in Cincinnati.

DM: Okay. And what'd your mother do?

AH: She was just a housewife. I think before they were married, she was a wholesale grocery clerk. They had a wholesale grocery company and she was a clerk there.

DM: What was your mom like?

AH: Well, a lovely person, very German and German family. Small woman, but very German to us. She made up her mind once and didn't take any guff from the boys. We always had to obey.

DM: And how'd she deal with your dad, pretty good?

AH: Oh yeah. Very good. They were a very loving family.

DM: And if you don't mind, what was your faith at the time?

AH: Well, we were raised Catholic. My mother was born and raised Catholic. My dad converted to Catholicism.

DM: He was Anglican before?

AH: I suppose he was, yeah, Anglican. Yeah.

DM: You went to grammar school in Cincinnati?

AH: Holy [*Family*] Grammar School.

DM: So you went to Catholic school?

AH: Catholic school.

DM: How about high school?

AH: Saint Xavier High School.

DM: Boys or...?

AH: Boys. Yeah. Won a scholarship to go to that school.

DM: Scholastic or sports?

AH: No, scholastic. Yeah, I wasn't much of an athlete. (Chuckles)

DM: I bet you were pretty good at math then.

AH: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DM: Okay. So you go to the boys' school. Were they Jesuits?

AH: Jesuits, yes.

DM: Jesuits are pretty tough.

AH: Oh yeah, yeah. I loved them though. They were a good school. In fact, I still get together with some of my classmates...

DM: Do you go to your class reunion?

AH: That's where. I graduated in '35 and every month we get together, about twelve of us.

DM: Are you living in Cincinnati still?

AH: No, I live in Centerville, which is outside of Dayton.

DM: Okay.

AH: It's only a fifty-mile drive and we go down there and have lunch with the fellows.

DM: Where was this school at? Was it Cincinnati or Dayton?

AH: No, it's Cincinnati.

DM: Cincinnati, okay. [*You graduate from high school...*]

AH: Yup.

DM: ...and you have all of life ahead of you.

AH: Yup.

DM: And what did you want to do?

AH: I wanted to go to college.

DM: And did you fulfill that dream?

AH: I went one year and completed one year and then we just ran out of money. I couldn't afford so I went to work and went to night school then.

DM: Okay.

AH: Wanted to be an engineer.

DM: Wanted to be an engineer.

AH: An engineer, yeah. So I started...

DM: And how did the army come into play?

AH: Well, I got a job at Wright Field, civil service [*in Dayton, Ohio.*]

DM: Okay.

AH: And I was a engineering draftsman there.

DM: Now, we would know that as Wright Patterson Field today.

AH: That's Wright Patterson now, but it was Wright Field and then Patterson Air Depot at that time.

DM: Named after Wilbur and Orville Wright?

AH: Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: So I had a very interesting job. I was doing installation work on airplanes, electrical installations. And occasionally I'd go out to the flight line. They have to do a little measurement on an airplane, we're going to install something. And I got to know some of the air corps pilots out there. And they told me about this flying cadet program. If you had one year in college, and you had pretty good grades, there was a possibility you could be appointed a flying cadet. So I applied for that and I was accepted and went in on my birthday, February the twelfth, 1941, became a cadet, to be a pilot.

Well, I didn't make it as a pilot. I wasn't a very good pilot.

DM: What was the biggest drawback you had as trying to be a pilot?

AH: I think I was just scared of the airplane. They were good airplanes but I didn't have the knack to—I think I could've been a good pilot, but I wasn't learning fast enough.

DM: And they wanted you to learn fast at those...

AH: Well, yeah. Well, at that time, the war was coming on. Everybody knew we were going into war.

DM: Right.

AH: And they were really pushing, pushing you through.

DM: Right.

AH: And I finished forty-six hours of primary flight training, soloed and had, oh, about forty hours of solo time. And then they told me, well, we better drop you out. Maybe you better qualify for navigation school.

DM: Okay.

AH: So I took that up.

DM: Were you disappointed?

AH: I was. Yeah, I was a little disappointed. I think it was a little ashamed of myself, I think, or something like that.

DM: Right. Just to wash out...

AH: Yeah, to wash out with...

DM: Even the term "wash out" is not a great term, is it?

AH: That's right. Yeah, yeah. But that didn't take long. I got over that and went down to Maxwell Field for a while as just sort of a pre-navigation school.

DM: Right.

AH: And then from there I went on down to Coral Gables, Florida, where the Pan-American navigators taught us. And they were very good navigators and good teachers and just good people. They were great.

DM: How old were you then? When you were in training?

AH: I was twenty-four.

DM: So you were a little bit more mature than some of the guys?

AH: Oh yeah. A lot of them were just eighteen and nineteen-year olds.

DM: Okay. So you go down there and what kind of navigation are they teaching you?

AH: Oh, everything. Radio and dead reckoning and celestial. They specialized in celestial.

DM: Now, I'm unfamiliar with navigation, as many listeners of this tape would be. Are those the three primary navigational techniques?

AH: Back then it was, yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: Oh, there was a fourth one, pilotage, which means you got a map here and you're looking down and you recognize some landmark down there or you see that on the map and that's where you are.

DM: And that's called?

AH: Pilotage.

DM: Okay. And let's go to the next one.

AH: Dead reckoning.

DM: What is that?

AH: Oh, say you know your starting point, you're here. You know how fast you're going, you know how fast the wind is blowing and in which direction, which direction you're drifting, so after an hour, if you got an eight-knot wind pushing you left, you're going to be, let's say, 200 miles up this way and eight miles off this way. So that's...

DM: Okay.

AH: It's a pretty good way to do it.

DM: All right.

AH: As long as you know what the wind is and everything like that.

DM: Okay. And the next one, I guess celestial?

AH: Radio. Well, radio.

DM: Okay, radio.

AH: We had radio direction finders on the airplanes.

DM: And are those the little...

AH: Little loop antennas. Yeah.

DM: ...loops. Okay.

AH: And you tune in on a radio, a station somewhere and you tune that loop so you get the loudest in your headphones.

DM: Right.

AH: And then your needle would point the direction of that station.

DM: Okay.

AH: So you got a bearing off of that.

DM: Alrighty. And then...

AH: And now celestial navigation, which was the best of all, if you know what you're doing, particularly at night. If you got all the stars in the world and you know maybe fifty stars that you can take celestial observations on...

DM: Right.

AH: And the idea of that is you get a bearing from, say, three stars. And where those bearings cross, you got a three-star fix. And ideally that cross is in a dot.

DM: Okay.

AH: Normally they all cross in a triangle, where you're somewhere inside that triangle. But if you're very careful, you get some very good celestial fixes.

DM: As...

AH: It's very reliable.

DM: From a non-navigator's point of view, would that be like triangulation? Is that a term that would fly there or not?

AH: No, I don't think so.

DM: Okay.

AH: It would be actually getting bearings from three points off—say you usually want to get one dead ahead.

DM: Right.

AH: One off your right wingtip.

DM: Right.

AH: And one about forty-five degrees. Those three will intersect.

DM: And pull them back towards you.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Okay, I understand.

AH: And you try to cross 'em at a particular spot. Of course, remember in an airplane, B-17, now you're going maybe [180] miles an hour.

DM: Right.

AH: Or you're not—no, you're not going that fast.

DM: About 250 or...

AH: About 180.

DM: One hundred eighty miles an hour.

AH: Well, that's just three miles a minute. Well, it takes you maybe a minute or two minutes to get a—we would take ten sights on a star, get an altitude. So and maybe five seconds apart. So that's fifty seconds per star.

DM: Okay.

AH: So three of those, by the time you get your calculations done, you're maybe three minutes, another three minutes, so when you get your fix, you're already thirty miles away, you see.

DM: Okay. Now what kind of instruments would be on board a B-17 to assist you in this type of navigation?

AH: Well, celestial, we have an astrodome, which we called it, a little glass bubble.

DM: Right.

AH: And it was optically perfect. So you could shoot any direction out of that bubble and you wouldn't get any distortion looking at a star.

DM: So when it was manufactured, it was manufactured with very specific...

AH: Right.

DM: It wasn't just a plastic bubble.

AH: No, no. No, no. No. It was optically perfect.

DM: Okay.

AH: Then you'd have your octant, which is similar to a navy sextant.

DM: Right.

AH: Which measured the altitude of the stars that you're looking at.

DM: Okay.

AH: And then you'd—that's all you need for celestial navigation. Now you also got a drift meter in the airplane...

DM: Right.

AH: ...which tells you how far you're drifting one way or the other.

DM: Okay.

AH: And of course you've got your airspeed indicator and I guess that's about it. Altimeter, of course, which affects your speed. And so on.

DM: And all those instruments play into this navigational...

AH: Oh yeah, see the higher you go, the thinner your air is and it's colder up there.

DM: Right.

AH: And you're going faster and all that stuff and so you got to...

DM: And the navigator has to take all of that...

AH: Oh yeah, yeah. And we also had a computer. They called it an E6B computer, which was a little plastic thing. And you could plot your course on there and put your wind drift on there and put your airspeed on there and then you would get your actual ground speed and your actual course that you're flying.

DM: And that existed in 1941?

AH: Oh yeah. It wasn't an electronic computer though. It was just a mechanical computer, but we called it computer.

DM: But these were wondrous instruments in those days, right?

AH: Oh, it was. Yeah, yeah.

DM: Now, inside a B-17, where you were sitting, what was that space like? If you were to describe it to me, what was that compartment of that plane like? What would you have in there?

AH: We were in the very nose of the airplane.

DM: Okay.

AH: Right in front of me was the bombardier.

DM: Okay.

AH: He had this big, clear plastic [*nose section*] and with his bombsight there.

DM: Right.

AH: Right behind him was my table. I had a space, a table about that wide.

DM: Right.

AH: And I sat on a stool.

DM: Was it comfortable?

AH: Very comfortable, yeah, yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: And I had a window out the side, and out this side, and the astrodome was above.

DM: Right.

AH: And the hatch, to get to the pilot's compartment. Now, the pilot was above me and behind me.

DM: Right.

AH: There was a hatchway that...

DM: Right.

AH: ...was actually a floor hinged, double-hinged.

DM: Okay.

AH: To get up there, well, you just open that door and I climb up there and we'd talk to him and we had intercoms and he'd call us and I'd call him.

DM: Now those intercoms, you had headphones on?

AH: Headphone.

DM: Was that a throat intercom?

AH: We had...

DM: Or how did that work?

AH: Originally, we had handheld microphones.

DM: Okay. In '41 would you have had those?

AH: Oh yeah, yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: That was the original equipment. When we got into the combat zone, we were a little busy, so we started using throat mikes then. Which was...

DM: And that would pick up your voice vibrations.

AH: That's right.

DM: And sent it through.

AH: Yeah. And we wouldn't have to use a hand to hold it or anything like that. We just talked and I think that was the reason we put the throat mikes. 'Cause I manned the gun also when we were in combat.

DM: Okay.

AH: I had a machine gun.

DM: Now, the B-17 model that you flew over, was those B-17C's or D's that...

AH: No, we had E's.

DM: E's.

AH: The first E's. That was the airplane with the tail guns.

DM: Okay. So that's what you were in, a E model

AH: That's right.

DM: Okay. Inside this compartment where the navigator sat, where you sat.

AH: Yup.

DM: There were lights that you needed?

AH: Oh yeah.

DM: There was charts.

AH: Charts, yeah.

DM: And you had enough working space?

AH: Yup, yeah. We used parallel rules to [*plot our course lines*], we could move our course lines around with parallel rules and so on. It was a regular drafting table, really.

DM: And you would plot where you were?

AH: Plot, yeah, exactly, yeah.

DM: And so you knew about every, what, ten or fifteen minutes where you were?

AH: Well, yeah, we would try to get a fix, an accurate fix every hour.

DM: Uh-huh.

AH: And in the meantime, every fifteen minutes, I'd advance our position somewhere, you know. If we suspected wind shift, I put that in and guess we were over here, to the left a little bit. And at the end of the hour, where we get a fix, then we would get an exact position and then we would redraw the course line we were on. So we knew pretty well within, oh, ten, fifteen miles where we were most of the time.

DM: Okay. How long did this navigation school last that you went through, in total?

AH: Oh, I think it was about six months, I think.

DM: How did they test you, that you were an adequate navigator? Would you be put on a flight?

AH: Well, no, the test was actually what you call a [*theoretical*] crossing, which was a classroom exercise.

DM: Okay.

AH: And they would give us a whole bunch of data and we would start in some, oh, say, New York or La Guardia and we would see Montauk light out here and that was our starting point. And our wind, when we took off was at, oh, at certain degrees and certain speed. And then we'd take a star fix and they would give us the altitudes that were given.

DM: Okay.

AH: And we fix those points then.

DM: Yeah.

AH: And we would go right on over and correct for the windspeed and all that stuff. [A] theoretical crossing.

DM: Okay.

AH: (Coughs) But we [*did*] have over water training in the Clippers. We actually trained in Pan-American Clippers.

DM: I love the Pan-American Clippers, so this is a question that's more serving me maybe, but what was it—those Pan-American Clippers, what were those planes like, those Boeing planes?

AH: Well, if you're talking about the same ones I'm talking about, they're not so charming. They're just flying boats, flying tugs we'd call 'em.

DM: Right.

AH: They land on the water.

DM: Right.

AH: They weren't land planes at all.

DM: Right.

AH: And we had two-engine models. Of course, they did have some four-engine models...

DM: Right.

AH: ...but we would take off in these two-engine models.

DM: Oh, the smaller versions. Not the Clippers that would later fly the Pacific, which were Cadillacs, right?

AH: Oh, no, no. That's right, yeah. But these, we would start out taxiing out and I think, well, maybe we're going to taxi all the way over to where we're going. It'd take us, maybe, it seemed like about five minutes to get off the water. But then they fly maybe eighty-five miles an hour or ninety miles an hour, something like that. I don't know. Not very fast at all.

DM: Now after all this was over—do you like to be called Al or Albert?

AH: Jack.

DM: Jack?

AH: Jack, everybody calls me Jack.

DM: All right, Jack. After this training was all over, did you think that the army air corps had made the right decision for you then?

AH: Yeah, oh yeah.

DM: You loved being a navigator?

AH: I loved it. I loved it, yeah.

DM: It seems to me—and this is an assessment, listening to you talk—that this was really your niche. I mean you had, in school, you had done very well as a scholar.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: You were on scholarship.

AH: I was a good scholar, yeah.

DM: In mathematics...

AH: Yeah.

DM: ...and probably science.

AH: Yeah.

DM: And this was a full extension of maybe that gift?

AH: Right, mm-hm. Although I still think I would have made a good airplane commander. (Chuckles) And that hurt me a little bit when I couldn't make that.

DM: Well, here you are now a navigator and where did they assign you? Where do you go next?

AH: Salt Lake City.

DM: And what was there?

AH: At the seventh bombardment group.

DM: Seventh bombardment group?

AH: Yeah.

DM: And what kind of planes did they have?

AH: Well, they had B-18's, equipped with B-18's. Just getting furnished with new B-17's. And unbeknownst to us, this was—we arrived there sometime in around Thanksgiving time, 1941.

DM: Right.

AH: So we weren't there very long and I started hearing rumors, well, we're going to Plum, wherever Plum was.

DM: Yeah.

AH: And of course the grapevine said, well, we're going to Philippine Islands so...

DM: Okay.

AH: ...I was all set for three years foreign duty. And I thought I'd be over there for three years.

DM: Okay.

AH: And so finally I got assigned to a crew and we had a brand new [B-17E] airplane. I took my first flight, introduced to the crew and they said, "We're going to go south and then we're going to go east over Texas, turn around and go back."

And so we came down and that's when I first heard of Boulder Dam. And the pilot said, "If you look out down there, you'll see Boulder Dam. That's that new dam they just built."

I think it was about three or four years ago they built it, in 1937.

DM: Not a \_\_\_\_\_ from here, right?

AH: Yeah, '37.

DM: Yeah.

AH: (Coughs) And that was a long flight. That was a fourteen-hour flight just checking out the airplane.

DM: How'd you do?

AH: Good, wonderful.

DM: Is that a confidence builder? Was that the first flight you...

AH: That's my first flight in the B-17.

DM: And how many miles was all of that?

AH: Well, that must have been close to 2000 miles.

DM: You got 'em back safe.

AH: Oh yeah. Oh, we didn't go back to Salt Lake City. We ended up at Hamilton Field.

DM: Okay. And what kind of aircraft were you flying that day?

AH: That was a B-17.

DM: So it was a brand new B-17?

AH: Brand new B-17.

DM: "E" model.

AH: "E" model, yeah.

DM: What'd you think of those B-17's?

AH: Oh, I thought it was a wonderful airplane. And I was used to flying in, well, a PT-17, which...

DM: Right.

AH: ...when you take off, you know you \_\_\_\_\_ forever. And I thought, man oh man, when we took off in that B-17, when he put those four throttles up there, I could just feel myself going back in the seat.

DM: Makes you feel the power of that.

AH: Oh, the power. I said, "Oh man, what an airplane!"

DM: Was it noisy in that navigator's compartment...

AH: Oh yeah, very noisy. Yeah, yeah.

DM: Now, that, your flying all those years affect your hearing?

AH: No. But it used to. I couldn't hear very well after, say, a fourteen-hour flight. I had trouble hearing the next day.

DM: Did you ever use earplugs? Or you couldn't use earplugs, right.

AH: No.

DM: You had to have your ears...

AH: We had earphones on all the time.

DM: What kind of flight gear did you guys have at that time?

AH: Oh, we had the heavy sheep-lined leather suits, heavy leather boots.

DM: What was the cruising altitude for a B-17 on a normal flight?

AH: Well, a normal flight, it was 8 to 10,000 feet.

DM: So it could get cold up there right?

AH: Oh, yeah. But then when we're at the combat zone and started bombing and getting shot at, we went up pretty high. We could go up to 30, 31,000 feet. And it was very cold up there.

DM: And that gets really cold.

AH: Yeah. Very cold.

DM: All right, so you go to Ham—you're now at Hamilton Field. What year was that?

AH: That's 1941.

DM: And what, do you know what month?

AH: Oh yeah, that was, I'd say about December the fourth or the fifth.

DM: Now, did you do a lot of training up there?

AH: No, no. They had a few little, oh, alterations in the airplane where maybe the pilot thought he ought to have new plugs in one engine or something like that.

DM: Right.

AH: Little things that didn't amount to anything. But it was getting in tiptop shape. He even knew where we're going, I didn't.

DM: So how many navigation flights did you have before you flew to Hawaii?

AH: That was the first one. I only had one in a B-17.

DM: You're kidding me.

AH: That's right, yeah.

DM: So the next flight, when you fly to Hamilton Field, which is over water, is your second navigation?

AH: My second, in the B-17. Now, I flew a lot in the Clippers.

DM: Right.

AH: But that was my second flight over water.

DM: And now, I want to ask you this question about your plane. Did you guys have a name for the plane? I know later the guys would stencil things on the airplanes, but in the pre-war days?

AH: No, that didn't start until, I think, I think that became popular in Europe.

DM: Okay.

AH: We didn't have that. We had one had a name on, *Chief Seattle*, which was the one that was built by the pennies that the kids, the school kids from Seattle, I think...

DM: Okay.

AH: ...contributed this airplane and they got their name on it.

DM: Is that before the war they got it?

AH: No, that...

DM: It was later.

AH: That came over later. But we didn't have names on our airplanes.

DM: You're probably very familiar with the fanciful movie called *Air Force* that talks about your group flying over. There was a—do you know about this movie?

AH: No, no. I didn't see that.

DM: It was filmed during World War II. It was about your B-17's flying over to Hawaii.

AH: No. I'd like to see that.

DM: Well, I can get you a copy of that. And I'll ask you to comment on that after you see the movie. But it does talk about a plane called the *Maryanne*, and that was one of the planes that flew over with your group.

AH: No, that's wrong. That's wrong.

DM: Well, I won't ask you anymore about that, but I'll get you a copy of the film so you can see it.

AH: Okay, okay.

DM: You'll enjoy it.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Especially when you see how wrong it is. All right, so you get over there to Hamilton Field December 4, when do you get orders to go to Hawaii?

AH: Well, we, I think we found out on the morning of the sixth.

DM: Okay.

AH: Because they start issuing us charts. We didn't have any air maps.

DM: Uh-huh.

AH: We had to use navy charts. And I remember looking at some of those, South China Sea, I saw that. And Celebes Islands.

DM: Okay.

AH: And I had no idea where the Celebes Islands were.

DM: But you knew it was out there somewhere.

AH: It was out in the South Pacific somewhere.

DM: Okay.

AH: So I knew we were going somewhere beyond Hawaii.

DM: Now there must have been quite a few B-17's there at Hamilton Field then?

AH: Well, we had twelve of our group. Now I don't know if there were others there or not.

DM: So twelve were in your group.

AH: Yeah.

DM: And you were under the command of Lieutenant Carmichael, right?

AH: Well, he's a captain.

DM: Well, Captain Carmichael. Excuse me.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Captain Carmichael. There was another group by...

AH: Landon. I don't know what his rank was at that time, but I assume he was a major.

DM: Okay, was that—you were talking about Truman Landon?

AH: Yeah.

DM: Okay, Major Tru—he was, he was a major at the time, Major Truman Landon.

AH: Okay, yeah.

DM: Obviously you were called in for a briefing before you fly. Did the navigators go first to their own briefing, or how did it all work?

AH: No, I don't remember really. I remember being a little resentful because the officers, the pilots were having a meeting discussing this flight and the navigators weren't invited there.

DM: You weren't invited?

AH: We weren't invited. Now, I think—I don't—this is sort of hazy to me, but I must've found out we were going to Hawaii somehow.

DM: Uh-huh.

AH: And I think that's all I had because I had no idea where we were going after Hawaii.

DM: Okay.

AH: And I remember that day we were plotting our great circle course to go to Hawaii and that took us a little while.

DM: Why do you call it a great circle course?

AH: Well, if—when you fly, say, from San Francisco to Hawaii and you look at a map, an ordinary map, and you draw a straight line from there to Honolulu, you're going a long way. Whereas the actual route you should use is a globe, a big globe.

DM: Okay.

AH: And stretch a string from San Francisco to Honolulu on that globe.

DM: A curve.

AH: That's right. And then when you transfer that onto a Mercator chart, which we had, we used, that would come out as a circle, or not a circle but a curved...

DM: Right.

AH: ...routing. And that's the shortest way between two points on the ocean, across the ocean.

DM: Right. I'm starting to learn a lot about navigation.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Okay, so...

AH: So we were plotting our courses that day to go to Honolulu.

DM: Okay. What time was takeoff?

AH: About 9:30, 9:45 in the evening.

DM: Okay. In the group of planes that took off, describe to me how takeoff was for the twelve planes that were now headed to Hawaii.

AH: Well, I think we took off in about three or four-minute intervals.

DM: Okay.

AH: And I know that Carmichael, who was just one of the greatest leaders I'd ever served under. He was always the first guy. If there was any danger involved, "I'll go."

DM: Okay.

AH: And he was the first one to take off. Because we were overloaded, really. The B-17 was redlined at 60,000 pounds, I think, at that time, for takeoff. Well, we were going around 65, 66,000 pounds. And anyone...

DM: Why were you overloaded?

AH: Well, I don't, really don't know. We had luggage on board and we dropped our ammunition. We didn't want to take any ammunition on to lighten the airplane.

DM: Did you...

AH: I don't know why. Of course, extra gas. We had wing tanks, of course, which are ordinary.

DM: How much fuel did you need to get down?

AH: Well, we had, I think, 1600 gallons of gas too. We had a bomb bay tanks, each could hold 400 gallons, I think.

DM: Okay. Did you carry any extra cans of gas?

AH: Oh no.

DM: Okay.

AH: We had bomb bay tanks in the bomb bay.

DM: Gotcha.

AH: And I think they held 600 gallons each.

DM: All right, so the plane was overloaded.

AH: I think probably that was why we were overloaded. And then of course we had our luggage. We had our clothes and everything with us and stuff like that. No ammunition. We dropped the ammunition. I remember that because we could use...

DM: Did you have guns aboard?

AH: We had guns, yes.

DM: Okay.

AH: We had no ammunition.

DM: So when a plane that's overloaded takes off, they need a lot more runway.

AH: Well, yeah, that's right. A longer runway, but we were at sea level, so that makes a difference too. If you're taking off at sea level, you got better lift. The air is heavier, more dense there and so there was no problem getting off at all.

DM: What was that night like? Foggy or...

AH: Beautiful, beautiful night.

DM: Okay.

AH: Just as clear as a bell. We could see Golden Gate Bridge. We went over that, flew out of that.

DM: If you would, where were you in the line of planes? First, second? You obviously weren't first. Were you third, fourth?

AH: No. I don't remember. I think maybe we were three or four. I'm not sure.

DM: Okay.

AH: My pilot \_\_\_\_\_ was Bob Thacker, and he stayed, he became a regular officer later on.

DM: Describe your feelings as a navigator, taking off on this first over ocean water.

AH: I was very nervous.

DM: What were you nervous about?

AH: Oh, just wondering, I hope I don't screw up and get lost or something like that.

DM: Right.

AH: I had a little apprehension about the length of the flight. This was 2400 miles, statute miles. About 2000 miles nautical miles, which was a pretty good...

DM: And how many hours did you estimate it take to get there?

AH: About fourteen hours it was, yeah.

DM: So it was a long flight.

AH: Long flight, yeah. Long, tiring flight.

DM: Would you be awake during the entire flight?

AH: Oh yeah. Well, I probably had catnaps along the way, I think. Because I'd been up all day long before.

DM: Okay.

AH: But I was excited and I had a pilot flying as a [*bombardier*]. We didn't have any bombardier. We didn't have any bombardier assigned to the crew. So we had a young pilot, a second lieutenant pilot who essentially was going to help me with navigation, but he, I could tell him, you know, dead reckoning or something. We could be up here in fifty minutes or something like that. But he wasn't a navigator. So once in a while, I'd nod off and have another nap. But outside of that it was, no, no help.

DM: We're going to stop the tape right now and switch tapes and then I'm going to...

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

DM: ...too?

AH: Well, yeah, I just got so choked up because it just brought so many memories back that it just upset me, so I don't want to go back.

DM: Well...

AH: But maybe this time I'll go.

DM: Maybe we'll get you to come back. Okay, we're going to start it up right here. I'd like you to describe for me that moment you took off and the route you flew and what you saw as you went out of Hamilton Field into the Pacific. Can you describe that for me?

AH: Okay, yeah. We took off Hamilton Field out over, I think it was Oakland Bay, which is a body of water there. I made a big sweeping turn and back, down over the Golden Gate Bridge.

DM: Could you see that?

AH: Beautiful, it was beautiful, yeah.

DM: It was all lit up?

AH: All lit up. Yeah.

DM: See the cars going across?

AH: Oh yeah.

DM: And it was San Francisco.

AH: San Francisco, yeah. Yeah.

DM: What did you think when you saw that?

AH: Well, I was a little upset because I thought I'm not going to see that for three years. I'm not going to see that for three years again. And then, from then on, we cruised at 8000 feet, as I remember. It was just a gorgeous night. Starry, bright stars and a little undercast under us. Couldn't see the water. But as smooth as velvet, flying was. And occasionally we see another airplane.

DM: We're going to stop right here.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

DM: So you're flying out over San Francisco and Golden Gate Bridge and you thought to yourself, "Well, heck, I'm not going to see this in about three years."

AH: That's right, yeah.

DM: You were heading out for a whole different adventure.

AH: Oh yeah.

DM: How was the navigation going as you get out of the Pacific?

AH: Wonderful. The farther we went, the more confident I got. I was getting good three-star fixes all the way over and our ground speed was good. I had to check that too because about midway, you come to a point of no return.

DM: Right.

AH: Which is you figure out that when you get this point, you don't have enough, beyond that, you don't have enough gasoline to get back to where you started from.

DM: Right.

AH: So you better be sure that you got enough gas to get to where you're going.

DM: Now that's an anxious moment.

AH: That's a very anxious moment. So we had that all figured out and we had gas to waste if we wanted to. We were going real good.

DM: When you reach the point of no return, was it still darkness?

AH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: Our whole flight was in darkness. Yeah.

DM: Now, could you see any of the planes ahead of you?

AH: Occasionally we would see one off to the right, or off to the left. Just the running lights.

DM: Right.

AH: You couldn't see the plane.

DM: Okay.

AH: But you couldn't see anything, any surface craft down there at all.

DM: Was there any communication between the planes?

AH: No, no, we were told not to communicate.

DM: Oh, you were told.

AH: No, we were going to have radio silence all the way over.

DM: All the way over, so...

AH: Not to call anybody.

DM: And no one was flying in formation?

AH: No, no. No. See, we used more gas flying in formation.

DM: All right.

AH: So we could just cruise as we liked.

DM: And the navigators would pick the route?

AH: That's right. Yeah.

DM: Now, did all the planes get away and make the flight? All twelve of the planes.

AH: As far as I know, all twelve got off.

DM: Okay.

AH: In intervals.

DM: Now, I'm going to take you up to Sunday, December 7.

AH: All right.

DM: And as you're approaching Hawaii...

AH: Okay.

DM: ...what was the daybreak like out there?

AH: Well, it was beautiful. Shortly before daybreak, we tuned into the radio station, Honolulu—I forget the...

DM: KGMB?

AH: I think so, yeah. And we could hear the music.

DM: So now the directional finder?

AH: Directional finder was straight ahead so we knew we were right on course and everything.

DM: Now you checked that finder...

AH: We checked that.

DM: ...with your course and what did you find out?

AH: We were right on course coming in.

DM: Okay. I bet a smile got on your face.

AH: Oh, yeah. I was real happy then. And then we could see, in the distance, probably Diamond Head, one of the peaks of Hawaii. We could see that. And as we—it was just beginning to get light then, and I saw, we'd see this black smoke up in the air. And our radio operator on board, his name was LaLancet. And he's the only that ever been to Hawaii before.

DM: Right.

AH: So we call him and say, “What’s that? All that? Is that anti-aircraft fire?”

He says, “Oh, that’s the navy. They always have exercises on Sunday mornings. They shoot off their stuff. Don’t worry about it.”

DM: Now what—this is just shortly, about eight o’clock?

AH: About eight o’clock, yeah.

DM: Now where were you supposed to land?

AH: At Hickam Field.

DM: Okay.

AH: Which is right next to Pearl Harbor.

DM: Alrighty. And so as you approach the Hawaiian, the island of Oahu, it’s getting closer...

AH: That’s right. It’s getting light.

DM: Now, which way are you approaching from?

AH: We’re coming from the, a little bit northeast.

DM: Okay.

AH: And we come around Diamond Head and we flew parallel to the coast...

DM: Dropping altitude all the way.

AH: Oh yeah, we were dropping altitude.

DM: And...

AH: And this tremendous smoke and everything coming up over Pearl Harbor. So then we start calling in the...

DM: Did you guys talk to yourselves, saying "What the heck is this?"

AH: Yeah. Oh, I was up in the pilot compartment. He was calling the tower, Hickam tower. Couldn't raise 'em. "Hickam tower, this is army 1243, 12432," I think it was.

DM: Uh-huh. Is that the tail number of the plane?

AH: That's our number of the airplane.

DM: Uh-huh.

AH: Ask them for landing instructions. No answer, no answer. Kept calling, calling, calling and we flew right over Pearl Harbor, made a big right turn. And navy start shooting at us. And there was anti-aircraft person around us, and they were shooting at us.

DM: Now, let me ask you a question here, because it's very important. As you were flying over Pearl Harbor, you said you flew over, you made a big right turn.

AH: Right.

DM: Okay. Now that, you turned towards the mountains or you kind of swept...

AH: Towards the mountains, towards the mountains, yeah.

DM: Okay.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Are you aware that there's a picture of a B-17 flying over Pearl Harbor?

AH: No, I wasn't aware of. That could be ours. 'Cause we did, we flew right over Pearl Harbor.

DM: Okay. This B-17 is flying against the mountains and it looks like it's starting to make a turn.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: And I will make sure you see that picture because it's the only picture of a B-17 in the air during the raid.

AH: One-two-four-three-two, is that, can you make the...

DM: Well, it's a small little...

AH: Oh, I see.

DM: It's in the distance.

AH: Okay.

DM: But you can't miss the profile.

AH: Okay.

DM: And I'll share that with you.

AH: It could possibly very possibly be ours...

DM: Okay.

AH: ...because I don't know of anyone else that flew over the harbor.

DM: Now why did you guys make that turn? To line up on the runway, or to...

AH: No, we—originally we were supposed to land on the north-south runway, the main runway of Hickam. Well, there was a burning air—a B-17 down there, burning on the runway.

DM: And that was one of yours?

AH: I think it was, yeah. And of course, we couldn't land there. So we were going around, and I guess we were going to come in on a long diagonal runway, going to the northwest.

DM: Were you getting fired at?

AH: Yes, we were getting fired at, yeah.

DM: And could you see the fleet down below?

AH: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DM: You knew what was going on?

AH: Well, at that time, then the tower finally came in and says, "Army 12432, we're [*under*] enemy attack. Land at your convenience."

Well, and one thing in our briefing, they never told us about an alternate Airport. I knew about Hilo, which was 300 miles away or something like that and real quick, I said, "We don't have enough gas to get to Hilo."

So we said, "Well, we're going to land at Hickam."

So we went around, around up towards the mountain then landed on a short diagonal runway towards the entrance to Pearl Harbor.

DM: At Hickam?

AH: Very short runway and we ground looped and hit the runway about halfway down. We were light then. And he just floated, floated and well we finally hit the runway about halfway down the runway and he had the ground loop to stop the airplane or else we would've landed in the water there.

DM: That was probably an anxious moment.

AH: That's right. It was.

DM: Now, you land at Hickam.

AH: At Hickam.

DM: Did you know that the Japanese had done this?

AH: No. Well, we didn't know who it was, but it didn't take us long because we got out of the airplane and here comes this Japanese airplane strafing us.

DM: You're kidding me.

AH: Oh yeah. And we all scattered. Luckily we all scattered.

DM: Did anybody get hit?

AH: Nobody got hit. Nope.

DM: Did the airplane get hit?

AH: The airplane got hit. Yeah.

DM: Was it damaged badly?

AH: No, no. It wasn't damaged badly. It had bullet holes in, that's all.

DM: Okay.

AH: Luckily they didn't hit any empty gas tanks, or that might've blown up the airplane.

DM: Now there was a photographer with you, with that group. His name was Lee Embry. Did you know Lee Embry at all? Have you seen these pictures he took of...

AH: No.

DM: Okay.

AH: I never heard that name before.

DM: I have—Lee Embry donated some pictures to us and he was in one of the B-17's and he snapped pictures of all of this stuff.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: Now, your B-17, did they shut the engines off and everybody get out?

AH: That's right. Engine was shut off. We blew out a tire as we spun around.

DM: Okay.

AH: Blew out a tire.

DM: Okay.

AH: To stop.

DM: Now you saw the movie *Tora, Tora, Tora*.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Was that a fairly accurate depiction?

AH: Oh, I think it was. Yeah. I thought that was pretty good.

DM: And they show a plane blowing out a tire, well, coming down with no landing gear.

AH: No, no, no.

DM: That never, we know that never happened but your plane grounded. Where did you go after that? Did you guys go hide in the shrubs?

AH: Yeah. I was out in—we all scattered somewhere and I got, my face was bleeding because I got in some thorn bush or something out there and got scraped.

DM: Okay.

AH: And later on, about an hour later, we came in somewhere at the flight line and I thought it was a hospital, but I don't think there was a hospital there. But a nurse saw me and she said, "Are you wounded?"

And I said, "No."

She says, "Well, you're bleeding."

I said, "Well, I got thorns or something. I got into a thorn bush or something."

DM: Now was the raid over by the time you guys got back to the hangar?

AH: Oh no. No. Well, I guess to the hangar, yeah. We were still out on the field the second wave came over and I saw 'em hit the barracks there and the mess hall.

DM: Could you believe what was happening?

AH: I couldn't believe it, no. And I was very angry. I just thought that was terrible. Yeah. Here was unarmed—we were unarmed, actually.

DM: Right.

AH: And to do something like that I thought was terrible.

DM: So you could also see the destructive force of air power?

AH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And I guess that our navy was pretty well incapacitated, which was right.

DM: Right.

AH: Everything was in Pearl Harbor.

DM: And so you're watching Hickam getting blown apart. You guys are out on the outer part of the airfield.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: And staring in disbelief. Were you scared at any time?

AH: I was scared, yeah. I was scared, yeah.

DM: Did you think, well this might be my last day of life?

AH: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah.

DM: And I mean, I guess, I'm sensing that you guys flew in unarmed, low on gas, in a moment of peace. You suspected...

AH: That's right, yeah.

DM: ...no Japanese airplanes came up and chased you around as they did...

AH: Oh yeah, they were shooting at us as we were coming in. There was a couple of them following us in as we tried to, as we were landing there. And they were shooting at us.

DM: So there's a scene in *Tora, Tora, Tora* where a plane is trying to land and they're shooting at it.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: And that's...

AH: That's true, yeah. That was true.

DM: That was a bit unnerving, wasn't it? Did they hit you at all?

AH: Oh yeah. There were some bullet holes. Nobody got wounded, though.

DM: So...

AH: And then after that, I saw several Japanese airplanes get shot down.

DM: Oh you did?

AH: After I was on the ground. Yeah.

DM: But your plane got attacked from the air and then it got attacked again when it was on the ground.

AH: When it was landing, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DM: So it was just a miracle you guys didn't get...

AH: Well, it was, yeah. It was. I can't explain that. And then flying right over the navy and...

DM: And they're blasting away.

AH: And they're blasting away at us. And I couldn't see, I can't recognize these little things busting out there, shaking the airplanes [*as*] we were going over.

DM: Were they pretty close?

AH: Yeah. They were fairly close. Yeah.

DM: It'd be something if you had been shot down by your own forces, huh?

AH: Oh yeah. Well, I think that did happen later on in the afternoon when the navy fliers were coming in.

DM: Right. Right, the *Enterprise* planes.

AH: Yeah. Yeah.

DM: I just want to go to back just to one moment, did you—there's a lot happening up there when you're in the air and you're making this turn over Pearl Harbor, were you able to look down and see the ships?

AH: Yeah, oh yeah. I couldn't make out any ships but all I could see was just clouds of black smoke coming up.

DM: And that indicated only one thing.

AH: Oh, that was just terrible, yeah. It was terrible.

DM: So you make that landing, you ground loop it to avoid going off the end of the runway and crashing.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: You make your way back to the hangars and what do you see there?

AH: Well, I don't remember really. After that I was just so scared I think and we went back out to the airplane I know and we dropped—there was a ground crew went out and helped us. They dropped the tanks and loaded up with bombs and then later on that afternoon, we went out on a search mission to look for the Japanese fleet.

DM: Japanese? And how far did you fly out, in what direction?

AH: We went out northeast, I know. I don't think we went too far because I think we probably got off around four. I know we were coming in around eleven o'clock. And that was another scary thing because we were coming in and it was total blackout at that time.

DM: Right.

AH: I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was and they would put the runway lights on for maybe ten seconds for the pilot to line up and then everything was dark again. So we land, landing with our own, just our landing lights. No runway lights at all.

DM: You didn't get fired at though?

AH: And then we got fired on, yeah, as we were coming in.

DM: That's not popularly known. So you guys went out looking for the Japanese.

AH: Yes, yeah.

DM: And you went out northeast.

AH: I think we went northeast.

DM: How many miles did you go out?

AH: Well, I would say maybe 4 or 500 miles, at the most.

DM: Okay. And we now know that the Japanese had closed to almost 200 miles...

AH: Yeah.

DM: ...from the north.

AH: Yeah.

DM: But you were prepared to tack 'em. Did any other planes go with you?

AH: Oh yeah. Yeah. We went out in sort of pie-shaped segments and search pattern. You know, how many planes went, I don't know. But...

DM: So when you came in, had planes landed before you or were you the first in?

AH: No, I think other planes were there first.

DM: Okay. And so you had...

AH: One of our guys landed on the golf course and Carmichael, I think, landed at Bellows Field, because he had been over there before.

DM: Yeah, let's talk about—I'll go to this night. So when you landed that night, you guys had gone out on a mission trying to find the Japanese. Didn't, so you had to land with a full bomb load.

AH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: In limited sight.

AH: Yeah.

DM: And how was the navigation getting it back?

AH: Well, no problem. No. I was perfectly confident by that time. I was an expert. I had 2000 miles under my belt.

DM: So it must have been apprehensive landing with a full bomb load in darkness.

AH: It was, it was, yeah. Yeah.

DM: But you got down okay.

AH: Oh yeah, yeah.

DM: And where did you put the airplane?

AH: Well, we left it right on the runway, as far as I know.

DM: Still loaded up?

AH: Still loaded up, yeah, as far as I know.

DM: And...

AH: I don't remember dropping any bombs or anything like that.

DM: Did you anticipate what the next day might bring?

AH: Well, no, not really. I was just so stunned with everything and no, I wasn't worried too much about invasion or anything like that.

DM: Well, I know that from this point on you went on to fly in the war.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Did you spend the entire time in the Pacific?

AH: South Pacific, yeah. Yeah, we stayed in Hawaii until around the first part of February and then we went on down and ended up in Australia and New Guinea, flew out of New Guinea then.

DM: Well I know that there's more, a lot more, to talk to you about, but this interesting segment of that flight down to Hawaii is certainly one of those. And as you know, the radar guys had interpreted the Japanese planes coming in...

AH: Yeah.

DM: ...as your planes.

AH: Yeah, we heard that. Yeah.

DM: And the story of the B-17's is one of those interesting footnotes to history.

AH: Yeah, it's a footnote. Yeah, really.

DM: Yeah. But yet in large part, it was very interesting. Because you were going out, your mission was to go out and increase the offensive power in the Philippines.

AH: That's right, yeah.

DM: But you never got there.

AH: That's right, yeah. And evidently, probably were pretty lucky I didn't never get there because I never would've gotten out, I don't think.

DM: That's right. You might have not lived through that experience or been a prisoner of war for some time.

AH: Prisoner of war, yeah.

DM: And that was tough.

AH: And being a cadet, I was the low man on the totem pole getting out.

DM: Yeah.

AH: And you know how that is, rank.

DM: Has its privileges?

AH: They pull rank, yeah.

DM: Did you ever have a close call or a crash in your entire career?

AH: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. There's a famous one. I think probably this is the only time it ever happened. We were at Port Moresby, going on a bombing mission, and one engine started acting up and then the second engine started acting up, so we came back and returned and landed all right. And it turned out that one engine, I think it was number three engine, inboard engine, had to be replaced. And they didn't have the facility to do it in Port Moresby. So the pilot decided, well, we could fly back to mainland Australia, on three engines. Well, that entailed taking off on three engines on a short runway out of Port Moresby.

So we of course dropped all ammunition, put a light fuel load in and I think just four of us were on the airplane—a navigator, pilot, co-pilot, and the in-flight engineer. And we were taking off on three engines. Well, there was an army truck, some guy was driving an army truck and alongside the runway and I could see him over there, and we were starting down the runway, going pretty good. And the road turned and went right across the end of the runway. Well, this guy came across there and stopped, watched us taking off. Well, we didn't have enough altitude, we hit him. (Chuckles)

DM: Oh my god.

AH: And we crashed right into, right off the end of the runway there.

DM: And he didn't make it, did he?

AH: Oh yeah, he jumped.

DM: Oh he jumped?

AH: (Laughs) I think he was still running because we were after him and we'd have got that guy.

DM: What's an air crash like into the water?

AH: Wasn't in the water. Hit the ground.

DM: Oh my gosh.

AH: Yeah.

DM: Did you catch fire?

AH: No, no. We had, no, we were lucky. I got my hand caught in between, oh, I don't know, something. I was trying to hold on. I got a gash on my hand there. And a bump in my back of my head. But outside that, we were all right. And it was a total loss, the airplane was a total loss. I got a picture of that if you'd like to see that sometime. (Laughs)

DM: Yes, I'd love to see that. Well, our time has come to an end. I want to thank you so much for this interview.

AH: All right.

DM: And we'll be sending a copy of this to you in about five weeks.

AH: Good. It was a pleasure doing it.

DM: Thank you. We'll get your...

END OF INTERVIEW