Carleton Warner Davis Sr.
Veteran

No name given
Interviewer

Historical Society of Whitehall
Whitehall, NY
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HSWH: The date is October 3, 2012. We are in the Isaac C. Griswold Library in Whitehall, New York. We are interviewing Carleton [Warner] Davis [Sr.], a World War II Navy pilot in the Pacific Theater. In addition to Mr. Davis, also here, is his son-in-law Lee [Leland] Smith, and from the Whitehall Historical Society, Carol and Wayne Senecal, Ray Brown, and Gary Hart. I'd like to start before the war. Where did you go to school?
CD: I grew up in Braintree, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. I went through high school there. After high school, I went to night school. When I first got out of high school in 1940, I went to work in the shipyard [Fore River Shipyard] in January of 1941, and attended night school one year at Franklin Technical Institute and the next year at Lowell Institute, which is an evening school at MIT. I studied mechanical design. Then, of course, December 7th 1941, Pearl Harbor, and everything changed. In the spring of 1942, I applied for aviation cadets with the U.S. Army Air Corps. I went through all the tests, physical and otherwise. They sent me a paper that my mother had to sign. I was probably nineteen years old. But one of my buddies I was talking to in the neighborhood informed me that the Navy accepted aviation cadets without a minimum of two years college completed if you passed their examination. So I filed the Army Air Corps application instead of taking it back and started all over again with the Navy.

HSWH: How did you decide to go into aviation?
CD: Why did I decide? I always liked flying. When I was a kid, I had a little booklet that I read; it showed you how to fly. I used to tell the kids and they laughed at me. They said, Carleton knows how to fly, he read a book. [laughs] But I was always interested in it. So, I completed that and then was sworn in on the 3rd of July, 1942.

HSWH: Did you have any other brothers or sisters that were in the service during the war?
CD: No. My two older brothers and sister were much older than me. I was the youngest in the family. My next oldest brother worked in the shipyard, too, but he had an exemption during the war because when I left, he was the sole supporter of my mother. He went in after I came back home, but that was all that went in the service.

HSWH: Where did you go for training?
CD: When we first enlisted, there was a backup at the pre-flight school which was in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While we were waiting, they sent us to Rhode Island State College to go through a CPT program, which is a Civilian Pilot Training Program that all the colleges ran. I think they still do. We went down there and completed our work at the school, except for the flying. Usually it was study, fly, study, fly. But the college was too close. You couldn't fly within forty miles of the coast during the war unless you were a military or scheduled airliner. So we did all the groundwork first, the schoolwork, and then we went up to Concord, New Hampshire, and did the flying on skis. Skis are better than wheels because they are more forgiving when you land. We finished that and we got a private pilot's license. There still was a backup, so they sent us out to Pittsburgh State College and went into the intermediate program. We went through another program the same way of flying. We flew in the morning, studied in the afternoon, half of the group. The other half studied in the morning and flew in the afternoon. By the time we finished that, within a couple of weeks, we got the call and went down to Chapel Hill, North Carolina for pre-flight school. It was probably about sixty or seventy physical, and the other was military training, aviation-related training, engines, navigation, and so forth. We spent the spring down there. We went from there to Glenview Naval Air Station, just north of Chicago, for the actual Navy training. At the CPT, we had civilian instructors. But when we got out to Glendale, that was a Navy station and we had naval instructors. We flew the old N3N, a bi-plane, which we used to call the Yellow Peril. We spent the summer out there. From there, we went down to Texas, Corpus Christi. They had two main training facilities at that time, the Navy one at Pensacola and one at Corpus Christi. We went to Corpus Christi and took an intermediate course. We flew an SNV [Valiant], which they used to term the Vultee Vibrator for reasons you knew as soon as you got in it. We flew that for intermediate training and also for instrument training; we had an instrument course. We finished the instrument course and went on to advanced training and flew the SNJ [Texan]. Which was getting a little more powerful. It was a 600-horsepower engine, low-wing monoplane. We flew that for advanced training right up until the time we graduated. When we graduated from there, we got reassigned. Some of the trainees went to the Marine Corps. You could opt for the

Navy or Marine Corps, whichever you chose. I opted for the Navy because it seemed by that time it was getting along in the war, most of the action was at sea. Also, you were assigned to either a flying boat squadron, fighter squadron, dive bomber or torpedo bomber. They selected that. You had no choice. You went where they sent you. I went to the fighter squadron in Melbourne, Florida. That was where we first flew the actual combat-type aircraft. We had the F6F-3 [Hellcat] at that time.

HSWH: During training, how did they prepare you to fly off on and off the aircraft carriers?
CD: Well, after we finished down at Melbourne, Florida, flying the F-6, we went to Chicago again, back to Glenview. They had two ships that before the war had been passenger ships that toured the Great Lakes. The Navy took those over and converted them to carriers, if you will. They were paddle wheelers, actually. They put a flight deck on them and took the whole superstructure off. They used them not only to train pilots for landing and takeoff, but to train the deck crews in running the arresting gear and all the other things that go along with operating on a carrier. We went up to Glenview and had a few days of field carrier landings where they had a runway marked off like a deck with a landing signal officer. A couple of days of that and then you went out on the ship. You had a minimum, I think it was eight takeoffs and landings, and then they considered you qualified. Then we got thirty days leave, and from there we reported back to San Diego to the Pacific Fleet Headquarters, for assignment.

HSWH: We've interviewed a World War II service member. He serviced planes, and he's working down in Florida with trainees. He mentioned a lot of accidents, including some fatalities. Did you have any on your crew? Any accidents in training?
CD: Near misses don't count, huh? [laughs] No, I don't recall a serious accident. But like I said, a lot of near misses, but nothing during the training.

HSWH: By the time you went to San Diego, how many hours did you have training by then?
CD: I'd have to look at my logbook.

HSWH: Oh, okay. I didn't know if there was a minimum number of hours that you had to have to be qualified for carrier duty.
CD: It takes so many hours to go through the training syllabus and whatever that was. I don't remember. [laughs] A long time ago.

HSWH: So you got leave after your training. What about after that?

CD: Then we went back to the West Coast and joined the fleet. I was assigned to Air Group 1. That was reforming. They had come back from the Pacific. The guys had gone home for a month or so, and they were reforming Air Group 1 again. We had a little time, so we stopped off at Navy Auxiliary Field halfway between San Diego and Alameda, where the Air Group was forming. We spent a few days there. We got to try flying different planes other than what we were qualified in, trained in. But then we went to Alameda and they started coming back from leave. As soon as the whole group was back, we transferred to Fallon, Nevada. They flew us all up there to start training as an Air Group to fly together, get used to each other and the tactics and actual preparation for going aboard ship. But before we started flying up there, in the late fall, they were having a problem with icing on the wings. This was up at high altitude. While the powers that be were deciding how to attack the problem, we took different lectures and so forth, groundwork. The squadron duty officer came into the ready room one day and said, I need twenty six F-6 pilots, that's the F6F Hellcat, the fighter plane, to leave and go directly with the fleet. Boy, he got twenty six hands before he could finish talking. [laughs] Before that night was over, we were back in Alameda, twenty six of us. The next day, we took off and headed for Hawaii. We landed at Hickam Field, and they bussed us down to Pearl Harbor and out onto Ford Island. We spent the night at Ford Island.

HSWH: Was there still damage visible from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?
CD: Was there damage? Oh, yes. The one ship that's still underwater there. It didn't look bad by that time, but there was still plenty of evidence there. Once again, red tape takes time. While they were waiting for the fleet to come back to Ulithi Atoll, Ulithi Atoll is five hundred miles southwest of Guam. At that time, that was the fleet headquarters anchorage, where they came and went from. They were out in action at that time. We spent time at Barber's Point [Naval Air Station]. We flew whenever we got a chance. The only scheduled flights we had was more carrier practice. If they had carriers in the area that were available, we went out and did touch-and-goes. On the [USS] Saratoga, the CV-3, was going by. We used that for a couple of sessions. Then we landed on the CVL [independence-class light carriers], which was a cruiser hull converted to a carrier that they used a lot for Merchant Marine Fleet escorts and also for direct support for the landings. Also a converted tank, a CVE. We made touch-and-goes on those until we got the orders to head out to the other side of the Pacific. We were down at Johnston [Atoll] Island. Then we flew over to Kwajalein, stayed there a couple hours, and flew on to Guam. We were a couple days at Guam, including Christmas. Then they had a lot of new planes that came to Guam on shipboard. They trucked them to the airport, reassembled whatever they had un-assembled and made them combat ready. The group of us ferried twenty six of them from Guam down to Ulithi Atoll. That's how we got the last part of

the journey. From there, we went aboard the ship because the fleet was in. They had just returned from the Philippines. We went aboard and were assigned to different ships. It was, I think, about three or maybe four of us went aboard the [USS] Lexington, CV-16. Air Group 20 was aboard there then, so we were assigned to VF-20 [fighter squadron]. Within a few days, they left port and headed on out.

HSWH: What was life like on a carrier? How was your food and your quarters?
CD: Oh, that's one nice thing about the carrier. You had food, good food. [laughs] No C-rations and D-rations and all that stuff. Life on the carrier was really…of all the ships, that was the most comfortable. It was enjoyable as far as the ship was concerned. It was really good duty.

HSWH: What did you do for amusement there?
CD: Acey-Deucy, [laughs] that's the Navy Air Corps' unofficial official game, plus bridge games and stuff like that, and lectures. We found out then what a Navy pilot was worth. Because during landing operations, or takeoffs, the carrier had what they called a plane guard. The destroyer cruised along just a little bit behind the carrier and off to the port side. If anybody went in the drink, they picked them up. Then when the operation was done, they rigged a breeches buoy from the tail end of the carrier to the destroyer to bring the pilot back. But before he came back, they wouldn't put him in the seat until the carrier sent over twenty five gallons of ice cream. Because the carrier had ice cream freezers and the destroyer had nothing. So we found out what we were worth, twenty five gallons of ice cream. [laughs] They got that and then they [pilot] came back aboard ship.

HSWH: So you were on the [USS] Lexington? What was your first action?
CD: When we left Ulithi, the invasion of Luzon was underway. We went up and attacked and intercepted anything going from Formosa, Taiwan nowadays, down to Luzon. Bombers made that flight very easily. Our duty was trying to keep planes from heading down to attack the invasion forces there. That was the first action. Then we went from there and attacked the Naha Airfield, which is on the southwestern tip of Okinawa. From there we went over to Iwo Jima because the landings at Iwo Jima were taking place. We didn't have direct support, but once again, we were there to intercept any Japanese planes that came in. We were what they called a Fast Carrier Task Force. It was Task Force 53 or 58, depending upon who the admiral was, Halsey or McCain. We operated as a protection over there. The actual support for the Marines and the Army on the ground was done by planes flying off the small carriers. They didn't have to be as fast as the large carriers because the fleet didn't move that fast. So we flew over there and protected the island.

Then we went south, and for the first time in the war, the fleet went through the Straits [of Malacca] into the South China Sea. Up until that time, the only thing that operated in and out of there were submarines. We went through the straits in the middle of the night. The minesweepers went through first, and then the ships single file followed through. From there, we went to Hong Kong, a very busy port the Japanese were using at that time. We attacked the ships in Hong Kong Harbor, plus Kowloon, which is the long peninsula that heads down to Hong Kong Island. We attacked the airfield there to keep the planes down while we were attacking the fleet. After that, we went down along the coast of what was then French Indochina, which is now Vietnam, looking for anything that floated. From there we went back out and back to Ulithi and spent three or four days again resupplying, arming and preparing for the next operation. I don't remember exactly which one was next, but we went up along the southernmost Japanese island of Kyushu. There were a lot of airfields up there. We spent a lot of time dropping bombs, firing rockets. The actual air-to-air combat by that time was slacking off. Only sporadically we ran into an opportunity to engage in aerial combat. We were mostly trying to keep down the kamikazes. Easter Sunday morning, April 1st, 1945 was when they landed on Okinawa. Once again, our job was to cover the island, intercept the planes coming down. Because the kamikazes were becoming a problem. They were attacking, especially the ships in the invasion fleet. A lot of the smaller ships, destroyers, took a real beating. A big part of our job was to neutralize the airfields up along the Ryukyu chain into Kyushu and along the eastern coast of Kyushu and attack the planes on the ground and in general interrupt their air operations.

HSWH: Did you encounter a lot of flak over the airfields?
CD: Flak, oh, yeah. [laughs] They had all kinds, from 20mm up to 150mm. They threw everything they had in the air, I'll tell you. But one thing, you saw it, but you were intent on what you're doing so that you really ignored it. You couldn't be bothered by it. You had a target you were heading for. You went after it, and you were not too aware of what was going on around you. If they hit you, they hit you.

HSWH: Did your plane take any hits?
CD: Oh, yes. You often came back with extra ventilation holes. The most potentially dangerous one was a 20mm hit I took in the top of the engine column. It came through the column and hit the armor plate in front of the pilot. It didn't go through, because they fired a 20mm, [which was] an explosive shell. What we carried was. 50 calibers in the plane, which was non-explosive. But the shells on the 20mm, were either armor-piercing, which took them through thicker steel, or high explosive, which exploded. Well, the one

that hit me was a high explosive shell, but it didn't explode. It was a dud. The reason I knew what it was, was because when we got back to the ship afterwards, any ship with damage was taken right down to the hangar deck. So the mech [mechanic] came to me afterwards and said when they took the column off, they found the shell inside. It hadn't exploded, for which I was very glad. Individual small holes, we had all the time.

HSWH: I believe the Hellcat had a reputation for being very rugged. It could take a lot of abuse.
CD: Yes. That was one thing about it. It was rugged. You came back lots of times, half of the flap missing, a piece of the aileron [missing] and the thing still flew. The exact opposite, the Japanese Zero was a very famous plane. It was very maneuverable and very fast, but it had its problems. They had to learn what it did and then devise tactics to do what you do better, not what he does better. They had no self-sealing gas tanks. They carried no armor. Later in the war, they started making heavier planes. They developed one similar to the Hellcat that had armor plates and self-sealing tanks and so forth. But most of the war, all you had to give them was one good burst of.50 caliber and they blew up.

HSWH: Is it true they never had parachutes? They never carried them?
CD: The Japanese didn't carry parachutes, no. We had parachutes. [laughs] The funniest part was when the safety officer in our squadron had to bail out one time. So he put his training to good use. That was a big part of our work at that time, was trying to hold down the kamikazes. They came after the fleet. They attacked us a lot, but we didn't take the beating that the destroyers were taking. Whenever the fleet operated, we had a destroyer probably thirty to forty forty miles ahead either side and behind the fleet as radar pickets. Anything that was heading in, they picked it up. One time we were sitting on deck, because whenever you were in a danger area, you had planes on the deck ready to go and you took turns. Our division was up on the deck one day. The basic division that the Navy fought was a four-plane division. The squadron was made up of a group of four-plane divisions. Four guys flew together all the time. Our division was up there. The division leader was on the port catapult. I was on the right catapult. Then the second section behind us was right ready. So you went up there, took a book to read because you sat there for a couple hours. But the plane was armed, gassed, ready to go. All of a sudden, all sorts of activity around the deck. The air officers waved at you so you stowed everything away so it wouldn't move. Next thing you knew, you had the engine going. The division leader went off first, and as soon as he was airborne, the second section leader moved up. Then they shot me off and the other guy moved up. We got in the air with orders to go out over one of these radar pickets, because they picked up something

on his radar that wasn't responding. All our planes carried what they called an IFF, Identification Friend or Foe. It was a transponder mounted in the fuselage. The ship sent out a signal, the transponder received it and sent back a signal. Depending upon what came back, they would know it was a friendly plane. If they didn't get a signal back or the wrong one, then they investigated. This was one that didn't respond so they sent us up there, and we looked for it. We found a twin-engine bomber hidden from Okinawa back to the mainland of Japan. The division leader and I took it on. The other two guys just stayed up and watched. We made two runs at it and put it in the water. They had these ships out there all the time just for that thing. But sometimes they still got through. We were prepared for an early morning launch. Some launches were predawn, and that was pretty sticky. But we were on the deck, pilots were in the planes. We started the engines, waited to be launched, and all of a sudden everybody on the deck disappeared. We got the order over the bullhorn to cut our engines. Some Japanese planes had come in underneath the radar and they were attacking the ships. We sat there on the aft end of the ship, and one plane came directly over us, he wasn't thirty feet above the deck. He crashed over on the starboard side. He came in from the port and crashed on the starboard side. If he'd have been thirty feet lower…, the planes were all gassed and all armed, it would have caused mayhem. That was what happened to the [USS] Franklin. The planes were all armed on the deck. They were even carrying what they called Tiny Tim rockets, 21-inch rockets. Most aircraft rockets were 5-inch. The Japanese plane hit the back end and caused explosions and fire and put the Franklin right out of business. They lost hundreds on that. But the picket guys were the ones that took the beating, because when the Japanese kamikazes came in, that was the first ship they saw. They [Japanese] weren't the best-trained pilots. Most of them barely knew how to get it in the air. They weren't concerned about landing too much. The first ship they saw, they got a little excited and down they went. The poor destroyers, we lost a lot of them. We spent a lot of time trying to take care of them.

HSWH: So how long were you on the [USS] Lexington?
CD: I was on the Lexington in January with Air Group 20. Air Group 20 had completed their time, so they left and went home at the end of January. When we went back into port, Air Group 9 came aboard. We went through another month's operation, came back, then the ship went home. So the whole Air Group transferred from the Lexington, CV-16, to the Yorktown, CV-10. They started off the war with Lexington. The original Lexington carrier was CV-2. The second carrier that we had was converted. It started as a battle cruiser at the end of World War II. It was launched in 1922. The Naval Treaty limited the kind of ships you could have. That was over the U.S. allowance, so they converted it to a carrier. It was sunk in the Battle of the Coral Sea. That was the first real

aerial-naval engagement. The Japanese ships and the American ships never saw each other. As a result, the Lexington was lost, not due primarily to damage from torpedoes or bombs, but [because]they had learned how to control fires. They [used to have] gasoline still in the hoses where they gassed up the planes. They learned pretty soon that as soon as you gassed them, you drained the lines so you didn't have all these gas lines around. Because that was what happened. They were towing the Lexington out of the area to take it back for repairs. It was loaded with fumes down in the aft end compartments, they ignited and blew up. It was hopeless, so the destroyers moved in and torpedoed it. Then they renamed one of the carriers that was on the way to being built, the Lexington. The Lexington was renamed CV-16. They lost the Yorktown at the Battle of Midway, so they renamed another ship Yorktown. That was the Yorktown I was on, CV-10. That happened to a lot of the ships.

HSWH: So you went to Yorktown. When did you go onto that ship?
CD: Ulithi Atoll. See, that was the fleet anchorage. The fleet departed from there, a three to four week operation. They returned to Ulithi and did whatever had to be done, repairs, rearm, refuel. Though they refueled at sea, too. That was where I first went aboard the Lexington. That was when we went from the Lexington to the Yorktown was when the Lexington had to go back to the States with a cracked rudder that required drydock that wasn't available out there. It went back, we changed and went aboard the Yorktown. Then I finished out the tour on the tour Yorktown.

HSWH: What action did you see on the Yorktown?
CD: We started out on March 1st. We operated up against Okinawa, against Kyushu. In fact, when Air Group 9 came aboard, first they came aboard the Lexington. The first thing we did, 1st of February, the fleet went up and engaged in the first carrier attacks on Tokyo. Now, the [USS] Hornet had launched B-25s early in the war, but that was just a token. They took off from the carrier, but they went over to land in China, those that survived. This was the 1st of February, the first full carrier group attack. We hit Tokyo and its environs. In fact, that was the first operation with Air Group 9, and we lost the air group commander. He took off once and never came back. They never really knew what happened. Somehow he got shot down. Then on the Yorktown, we went up to the same area, but not to Tokyo. We attacked the fields mostly up and down there and industrial areas. Then with the Yorktown, we were involved in the invasion of Okinawa. Before the invasion of Okinawa, a lot of the personnel came up from the Philippines area. They traveled, not in ocean ships, but on the LSTs and that type of ship. There were a whole fleet of them. We had the task of accompanying them up. In the daytime, we picked them up and followed them along to protect them until they got up there, because they had no

protection against aircraft attack. We did that. We did a lot of attacks in Okinawa. I know one time we went to Okinawa, and four of us in our division had an area to watch over. The weather changed, and we were in the fog and rain. It was pouring rain. We couldn't see anything. We were flying along hoping we didn't meet up with a mountain. Along came four torpedo planes. Now the torpedo planes had radio altimeters. The ordinary plane had an aneroid altimeter that worked on air pressure, which changed with the type of weather, so you didn't know how accurate it was. But these TBMs, [Avenger] they had radio altimeters, so we snuggled up beside them and followed them until we broke out into the clear again. [laughs] There was one time we were glad to see them. We did a lot of work in Okinawa, interdicting planes that came down and so forth.

HSWH: How was it putting these planes on a carrier at night?
CD: They were operating occasionally at night. We had one division that flew night fighters. By that time, we had a few planes that had a radar dome on one wing. The Navy still weren't convinced that that was the thing to do. But this one division did all the night fighting. We had a fighter director who was the radar officer on the ship that directed them. He directed them onto the Japanese plane and then they picked it up on the little radar in the plane. But that was all it was for. The one they had in the plane wouldn't search the area. So they were quite successful, really. But that was all the night flying we did. Though I thought one time that I was going to have to do some night flying. We were over the south-central part of Okinawa watching out for Japanese planes trying to come in the area. They got a report of Japanese planes just north of us. The division leader waved, let's go. We turned around. Everybody flew full throttle and went bombing off, that is everybody but me. [laughs] All I got was a lot of pop, pop, bang, fizz. The engine just wouldn't take the full power. I cut it back to normal cruise and it was fine. So I limped along heading up to where they went and they came back about probably fifteen minutes later and picked me up. By then we were directly over the island. I just pointed down to the division leader, waved goodbye, blew him a kiss, and took off. I was going down. The number four man in the division came along with me. You tried, if at all possible, never to be alone. Always a minimum of two planes. If one guy went down, somebody else knew where he was. We landed and taxied up to the flight line. The mech came out, chalked it up, and we went into the tower. When the Japanese came ashore just west of Yontan airstrip, they didn't defend that area. They moved back into the mountains. So the airstrip was fine. The Marines moved in and set up shop and got tower personnel to run the tower. We went in there, and as soon as you stepped inside, they passed you a carbine, a small rifle. We told them why we were there. They passed us the best of their food, a bunch of K-rations and other stuff, and took us out behind the tower. There was a bivouac area; they had a tent. Assigned us to a cot. The officer took us out

there and said, tonight, when you sleep, keep that carbine on the cot. Not on the floor, on the cot beside you. He said, these guys sneak in here at night and try to shoot the place up. So be careful. But nothing happened, fortunately. Although, within a couple of weeks, half the time, the Japanese flew in at night, landed on the airfield and tried to shoot up the planes.

The trouble that I had was when the magneto was gone. The R-2800 was an 18-cylinder engine. It had two magnetos. One of them failed. That's why I had no power. I could run the plane on one, but if you wanted power, you needed them both. So I told the guy. We went in. It was late afternoon. We wandered around. As soon as it got dark, there's only one thing you could do. There were no lights there. You laid down and slept. We got up in the morning and I and the other guy went down to the flight line. All set, said the man. So I started the engine. The only thing you did to test it is run it up to full speed, turn off one magneto, and see how far the RPMs drop. Then you brought it up to speed again, shut off the other one and saw how far they dropped. They should drop down, you know, when you lose one. It checked out fine. We went in, gave them back the carbine. They gave us the location of the fleet, their course and speed, the wind and stuff we needed to navigate with. We got in line, took our turn and pulled out on the runway, got the green light from the tower, put the throttle to it and started down the runway. I said to myself, This is not right. This is not right. What am I going to do? I kept full throttle on and I got it in the air. I said, I have two options. I can try to get it back down or try to get around the field and land again. I said, I'll never make it around. I cut the throttle and wished it back down onto the runway. That's the only way I got it down. [laughs] As soon as the wheels touched, which is eighty percent a good landing, you hit the brakes. You couldn't hold them, you burned them right out. You just pressed them, pressed them, pressed them, and got down about fifty feet from the end of the runway and stood on one brake and hoped the thing would spin around, and it did. I made a one hundred eighty ground loop, which everybody tried to avoid, and taxied it back up to the line. The guy, the mech, jumped up on the wing. I said, I'm not going anywhere until you get another mag [magneto] in there. He said, we would have put a new one in, but we didn't have any. He didn't tell me that before. We got into the jeep with him, went across the field and down in the open areas to the revetment that they used to park the planes in for protection from the Japanese. It was full of all shot-up planes, Japanese and U.S., because planes that were damaged landed on the runway. You looked for one that had an engine that was still good. The rest of the plane might have been shot to pot. So he found one with the same engine. Pulled off the magneto, drove back and put it on.

We were going to try this all over again. [laughs] When the first try wasn't too good, you didn't feel too confident about the second one. [laughs] But it got in the air, the wingman followed me, and we headed back out for the fleet. We did our navigation in the air. There is a navigation board there [gestures to something in the room], Dead Reckoning was the navigation system that we used, which was an accurate navigation system if you kept within four degrees of latitude. If you extended beyond four degrees of latitude because of the curvature of the earth, things converged and it threw it off and the Dead Reckoning was not close enough. We did that and headed out. The fleet was probably two to three hundred miles off the shore. We left there and by that time, it was mid-afternoon. We were heading east and the sun was heading west. After a while, you began to get a little uneasy because it was not too light and we hadn't seen the fleet. We couldn't go back because we wouldn't get back over the island until after dark. If you were flying over that island in the dark, they shot at you from the ground. They were not trying to find out who you were. So we said we would go on. So we continued on and pretty soon we saw a little bump on the horizon, and then two little bumps and three little bumps. Then we relaxed a little bit again. You got up close and the carrier pulled out of formation and headed into the wind and we came aboard. But it was a little bit nail-biting and hair-raising trying to get the plane back on the ground. I've never seen that done before, and I wouldn't want to try it again, but it was the only choice we had.

HSWH: Did you ever encounter any typhoons at sea?
CD: Yes.Toward the end of the tour, we went through a typhoon. No particular damage to our ship, but I'll tell you, it was rocking and rolling. And that was a big ship to rock and roll. Some of the carriers suffered damage. They had the corners of the flight deck extended out. They didn't have closed bows in those days. The bow was open down to the forecastle deck. When the ship went down, the waves came up and broke the corners off of the flight deck and they were just hanging there. Other than that, we had no problem. The destroyers were the ones that had the problem. They rolled almost eighty degrees in some of those waves. I don't know how they did it. Some of those destroyers had a pet on board. You saw a dog running around the deck. I can't imagine.

They came alongside us to refuel. Refueling at sea was an interesting thing, actually. When the tanker pulled up next to you, they shot a line across and ran the hoses across. Of course, you were not floating on a pond. The ship was constantly either rolling, pitching, or yawing, and usually all three at once. They had to keep the hoses out of the water or it would tear them right off the mounts. We always watched when they refueled. The tanker came up and unloaded onto the carrier. There were guys on the hangar deck of the carrier. They had a line tied to the hose. When the ships got close together or rolled,

they ran down toward the stern and pulled the hose up. Then as the ships parted, they ran the other way to allow more hose out. These poor guys ran back and forth for the whole time the ship was refueling. [laughs] While we were in a combat area, the small ships, the destroyers, took fuel from us. That was one way they were able to refuel to enable the fleet to go where it wanted to. The tankers were right where we were going. They got there ahead of us because they knew where we were going and we came up to them. Then they took off and got out of there because that was not a safe place to be for a tanker. [laughs]

HSWH: Was the [USS] Yorktown ever attacked by the Japanese while you were there?
CD: Oh, yes. I told you that once, that it flew right over the top of it. We returned from an operation one time and the fleet was under attack, which was not unusual. But you had to stay out. They didn't allow you to get back in because early in the war they didn'... some of these things they had to learn the hard way. The fighters got on a Japanese plane and followed them right down into the fleet. Well, the fleet had to fire. When a plane was coming in, the fleet was firing. We shot down more than one of our own planes. They learned when the enemy planes got in close, back off. Let the ships do what they can. We came back and the fleet was under attack. We had to circle around outside. During that time, I think it was a two hundred fifty or five hundred pound bomb that came down and hit the Yorktown on the starboard side. It wiped out one Marine gun crew, traveled inside the ship. It wiped out the parachute riggers' shack, and we lost a couple of parachute riggers. Then it veered off again and came out through the hull again. The bombs had a delayed fuse, because they wanted them to get down into the ship as far as it would go, before it exploded. The thing didn't explode until it was leaving the ship, because it got deflected on the way out. They lost some more gunners, crew on the starboard side. That was the only time we were actually hit but I wasn't on it. I was flying around waiting to come in. [laughs] That produced another dramatic experience, if you will, which was a burial at sea. It was kind of an emotional time. You realized, as they tipped up the tip board and the bag slid off, you were probably over fifteen, ten, twelve thousand feet of water. It made you stop and think a little. That's the only time we had to do that. [looks down, appears saddened]

HSWH: Where were you when the war ended?
CD: When the war ended, I was home. [laughs] I was home on leave. We came back at the end of June. We went aboard another carrier. We lived on the flight deck on the way home. In fact, there were two Air Groups living on the flight deck in cots. We went back, the carrier plus a couple of destroyers accompanied us. We pulled into Pearl Harbor, and a day later we headed back to Alameda. The Air Group broke up. Everybody got their

new orders, whether they went back to the Air Group or went someplace else. Then we went home on leave. That was early August sometime. I was due back to Jacksonville, I think, the middle of August, but they dropped the bomb in the meantime. The war ended. When the time came, I went back down to Jacksonville. I walked in and the first thing they asked you, "Staying in or getting out?" I said, "Getting out." [laughs] So that was the end. But it took a month to set up the separation center. So we just lolled around for a month. If we could get a plane, we took it and flew it out to one of the runways on one of the islands, sat there and grabbed a while.Then flew back. [laughs]

HSWH: Did you join any veterans' groups or attend any reunions?
CD: No. I decided to join the Reserves because there was a Reserve base not far from my home. My wife wasn't too happy about me continuing flying. The best thing to do was to drop out, which I did. I never went into the Reserve and I never joined any veterans groups. Veterans groups were a big thing for World War I veterans. The American Legion and the VFW were big things. Because before World War II, life was different. You didn't have all the social diversions that you have nowadays, so that was what a lot of the guys did. I remember growing up as a kid, there were guys in the neighborhood that belonged to the American Legion or the VFW. But I never joined any group.

HSWH: You didn't attend any reunions either?
CD: Yes, they have a reunion every year on the Yorktown, which is now a museum in Charleston, South Carolina. They have a reunion there every year. A couple of years ago they had it on the West Coast as a convenience to the people out there. But I never attended, although I've been down to the Yorktown several times.

HSWH: You know the Lexington is a museum too, down in Corpus Christi.
CD: Oh, yes. The reason I know where the Lexington is, is because it was built in the shipyard about three quarters of a mile from where I grew up. When I was working in the shipyard for the Navy, I went aboard the Lexington while they were building it. I kept track of that a little bit. But it's a very expensive thing to maintain. In that same shipyard now, they have a cruiser that was built there right after the war, the [USS] Salem, and that's a museum. They have trouble keeping it in condition, even the Yorktown.When you go aboard it, it's not like it was when it was operating. When you had four or five thousand guys to take care of it, they kept it spick and span. It's still nice to visit. They have several planes on the hangar deck. They have an SNJ, F6F. They have a B-25 on the aft end of the hangar deck. It's worth a trip. I've been there with my wife. I've been there with my son.

HSWH: I'm going to ask my colleagues if they have any questions for you.
[Unidentified male speaker]: One question. You mentioned your wife. When did you get married? During the war or after?
CD: I was discharged the 13th of September, and I was married the 25th of December. [laughs] That's what my wife wanted. You can't fight that.

HSWH: Why don't we take a break for a minute?
CD: …Anything tried to come in on the fleet, and I heard the radio call come in that they spotted the [Japanese battleship] Yamato. The PBY flying boat [Navy Catalina] saw it coming down, making a suicide trip. It didn't have enough fuel to get back. That was one of their big troubles. They had no fuel, because the submarines were sinking all the tankers coming up from the East Indies. They went out to destroy as much of the fleet as they could. They had 18-inch guns. Our biggest battleships carried 16 [inch]. They could outrange them. They sighted it and down on the decks, everyone they could spare was in the air heading out for it. They had to keep some planes. We were flying CAP [Combat Air Patrol] and we had to land pretty soon and somebody took our place. But everything else went up after that. It was the Yamato and three destroyers, I think. They blew it sky high. The squadron skipper and the three guys with him in his division, had photo planes equipped with cameras. There's a fellow from just the North Shore of Boston, a buddy of mine. He was in that division. He took a photograph of the Yamato when it blew up. You see a picture of that big cloud of steam and smoke and everything else in it. Classic picture. That was the end of the large ships that the Japanese had. That was the last one.They went looking for it a few years ago and they found on it the ocean bottom.

HSWH: Mr. Davis, you brought some items with you today.
CD: Oh, yeah, I've got a lot of different things. A pad. This we used to wear on our leg to write on. This hooks on. [shows pad] We carried all sorts of gear. We always carried a .45 revolver. We carried a knife that we strapped on our leg here. I didn't bring my Mae West, that's the life preserver that we used. Then this thing, we never had to use fortunately, and it's worn out. [shows mirror] This is a signal mirror. It's a mirror on the front and a mirror on the back. There is a little cross in this mirror, and you hold it up and the sun comes through the cross and lands on your face. When you line the reflection of that in here with the cross on your face, you'll be pointing right at whatever you're looking at. So if you want to signal a plane in the air, it's about the only way you can ever aim it. This was very accurate. Fortunately, I never had to do that. [shows pistol] This is a Very Pistol, another thing we carried in our emergency pack that we sat on. Put a shell here like a shotgun shell and it fires a red flare. Another thing that you had but you hoped you never had to use. The most important thing we had was what we called a small area

plotting board. [shows navigation board] This is what we did our navigation on. It sat on a little tray that slid in underneath the instrument panel and you slid it out. I have it mounted on a piece of board to protect it because it's kind of fragile. You lined up the grid. You were always concerned about the wind. You put a wind vector facing into the middle. It depended on what you were looking for. If you were looking for a heading, you put in your course to scale. These lines are for scale. It's like a ruler. You put in the wind, the course, and it told you your heading, so you knew which way to head. Of course, you only knew the wind where you took off from. The problem was, when you got out there, what was the wind like if you were two hundred miles further out? You could tell by looking at the water. If it was dead calm, you said it was zero to maybe five knots. You could tell within five knots the wind speed. If you had swells, it was five to ten knots. If you got a little bit of whitecaps showing here and some there, you could get the wind speed accurate enough to navigate as we did. This was what we used. It's easy when you're sitting here, but when you had the stick between your knees and holding it while you were trying to make a straight line. [laughs] But it was a very handy little thing. It just solves triangles, that's all. This is what the boaters use when they go out. I had a boss once who was in the [unclear] 1.12.20 squadron, and used to tell me about his navigation. The other guy looked at me and said, what do you have to navigate for? If you're out off the coast, you just head west and you're going to hit [unclear] 1.12.33 pretty quick. [laughs] But, that's what we used.

I don't know, I was telling somebody about the logbook. I have two logbooks because the original one was down in the mechanics shop, because they kept track of all the engine hours,the aircraft hours, and the pilot hours. They had them stacked up on the shelf. When the ship came under attack and started firing their 5-inch guns, it sounded like somebody had a twenty pound hammer hitting on the bulkheads. Everything shook. Well, it shook these right off the shelf into a bucket of gunk that they used to clean the grease. The result is black insides. [shows the stained pages] So they had to make a new one. They copied it all over and continued with a new one that you could read. I've got all sorts of stuff there. [shows a map] That's a target map of Okinawa, and it's squared off. Inside, each square is shown larger. So you could locate any particular point very closely. This one is Okinawa, we had Iwo Jima, and the different places we attacked.

Oh, yeah. This is what they called a shackle code. [shows code book] When you needed a code to encode something for the moment, we used the shackle codes. To a cryptographer, he could break this code probably in about half an hour. But for information you wanted for just the moment, you used a shackle code. When you transmitted it on the radio, you could transmit regular information via text. But when you

wanted to give a position, a distance, you put it in the shackle code and it was good for a period of time. This particular one, effective from 2100, 9 o'clock at night, 12th of June to 2100, 13th of June. It was only good for a twenty four hour period. And of course, everyone in the fleet had these. I only had to use this once.

We raided an island, the name skips me right now, not Aishima, a small island just north of Japan. The number three guy in our division got shot down. The other three planes had a procedure depending upon which guy went down. The division leader went down one hundred feet to keep him in sight because it's next to impossible to see somebody in the water. On your life jacket you had a dye pack. You opened the dye pack and it stained the water with a twenty foot diameter circle with a yellowish-green, and they could see that. That was the only way. So the division leader went down close, the second section wingman flew a couple of thousand feet as protection, and I went as high as I could to give the report of a downed plane. I used the code to locate where we were. That report went back to the ship, and they picked it up. They immediately sent four planes that were on the deck to take our place because we were out of gas pretty near. And there were no gas stations on the way. Also, it was picked up by the Dumbo flying boat, the air-sea rescue ship. He picked up the signal and headed out there. We were gone. The other planes got there first and we took off, but he came right along afterwards. He landed on the water, picked up the guy that was in the water, and took him back to their base in Okinawa. They always flew out of the actual action area to where they were safe because they had no protection.

One time we attacked a place in the southern end of Kyushu and there's a big bay on the southern end. There was a plane down there. So he landed down, picked up the guy and said over the radio, I'll taxi you around down here on the water in case I have any more business. They were shooting at him from both shores and he was taxiing this big flying boat all over the bay. [laughs] He said, let me know when you're done. So when we took off, somebody gave him a holler and he took off and went home. Crazy. [laughs] But they were there. It was nice to know that.

Toward the end of the war, there was always a submarine in the area. They knew where we were going to go and they surfaced, sometimes fully, sometimes partway. That was the thing that rescued George Bush, Sr. He was flying a torpedo plane and went down and the submarine picked him up. They saw somebody went down and they headed toward them. Or if somebody went down, you reported it, they picked it up and they headed right over. The only problem with that was that if you got on a submarine that just got out on station, you were on the submarine for the next three months until he went

back home again. [laughs] Because they didn't go home just for you. They finished what they're doing.

These were all things that put you a little more at ease. You hope you didn't need them, but you knew it was a possibility at least. I thought of that when my engine quit one time over Kyushu. I was climbing back up to altitude and it just stopped. There was only one engine in that fighter.You don't think, you react from all the training you've had. You were doing three or four things at once. The first thing you did was turn toward the water to get as far out over the water as you can, hoping the submarine can find you. Then you went about whatever else you had to do, change the propeller pitch, switch the thing to a full tank of gas, which if I had done before that, I wouldn't have stopped. [laughs] But I didn't know that. But you switched and pretty soon the engine started coughing, coughing, and started running again. You said, what a klutz. [laughs]

So the dangers were not always from the enemy in these operations. There were three things that you had to worry about when you were in that area. One, of course, was enemy action. If you attacked a place, they didn't want you there and they fired everything they got. The second thing was mechanical failure. These engines had hundreds of parts and they had to keep running. The third thing, which was usually the biggest factor, was pilot error. You made mistakes. [laughs] Usually, you recovered.

HSWH: When you got up to altitude, what was the normal altitude that you would be at?
CD: Heading into a target, we usually hit maybe ten thousand feet. As we approached the target, maybe ten, twenty miles back, we started a gentle glide, went down to around seven thousand feet, and then attacked if we were bombing, rocketing or strafing, whatever we were doing.

HSWH: Was ten thousand feet the limit of the F6?
CD: No, no, no, no, no. But it was the limit of most things that we did later in the war. Early in the war, they took them up to twenty, thirty thousand. But there was no need. Everything took place below ten thousand. After that, you had to use oxygen. That was another pain in the neck. Everything that we did was down low.

HSWH: This is the plane, huh? [someone hands him a framed picture]
CD: [shows framed photo of an F6] That’s the F-6. The only trouble is it didn't have the belly tank on it. We always carried a belly tank with one hundred fifty gallons [of fuel]. That was why I got into trouble. Heading into the target, you ran off the belly tank, but

when you got close to the target, you switched on to a full tank. I didn't switch and the belly tank ran out. Your instinct was to change tanks immediately when you had trouble.

HSWH: Is that just a shot of a plane, or is that you in the plane?
CD: No, that is just a plane. The only one I have [of me] in a plane is sitting in the cockpit of an F-6. That's an actual Navy photo. [shows a photograph of himself in the cockpit] [directs question to someone off camera] Do I have a photo there on the wing of a Hellcat with the division. [shows photograph of four soldiers sitting on the wing of a Hellcat] These are the three guys and me, four guys. That was taken aboard the Yorktown. I took a camera with me. I don't know if it was legal or not, but I had a camera. I took the pictures, but I had no means to process them. When we were in Honolulu, I bought a developing tank and some solution, so I could develop the film. Then when I got home, I made the prints and sent them to the guys.

HSWH: Do you remember the names of the fellows in that photo?
CD: Oh, yes. [points to each person in the photograph] Division leader is Stuart Ball, myself, the second section leader is Ralph Warner. He came from Binghamton. The third guy is Matty Williams, and he's from Washington State. You can see the top of the tower in the background from the Yorktown.. This is the plane that we flew. Nice plane. It took a lot of damage. You want to see those? [someone hands him a frame] Well, this is a little bit of memory. [points to medals and items in a frame] This is the name tag we used to wear on the flight jacket. Distinguished Flying Cross, and that's the Air Medal. That's a World War II Victory Medal. Those are the dog tags. These are cadet insignias. These are for areas. This is a Southwest Pacific area. The gold star is for a second one, a Bronze Star. The Air Medal is two gold stars. That means you got two additional ones. The Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, which is a citation for the whole group, I have two, because I was in both of those actions with two different Air Groups. I guess that takes care of most of my couple of years.[laughs] [shows certificate] Oh, this is the certificate designating me as a naval navigator.

HSWH: That's the one that you traveled all over the country to get, from Concord to___
CD: That's the one that I spent two or three years sweating out, and they finally gave it to me. There were times when I wasn't sure. That's the helmet. [shows helmet with goggles] This is not like you see on the pilots nowadays. This is just a cotton helmet and the goggles. I was in primary flight training in Chicago. I got two downs. You were only allowed three and they kicked you out. I was on this third check flight. Who do I get but the guy with the biggest reputation for being a scrounge. I groaned and moaned. We went up, flying a yellow Peril biplane, open cockpit. You had a circle on the ground and you

came down and tipped the plane up and slid down to land right in the middle. Well, we went out and came down. I missed it. [He said] Oh, let me show you. He took over the controls, went up, swung around, came back in, tipped it up, and missed the circle. He went ballistic. He was swearing about all the things he told the plane riggers to do, that this plane wasn't rigged right. He flew it back to the base as quick as he could get there, steam coming out of his ears. [laughs] I figured, boy, I'm done. He walked over the truck, put a big up arrow on it , and walked off. I said thanks to the guy that rigged the plane wrong, I missed another one. [laughs] You know, these things are funny now, but you sweated them out during the time.

HSWH: Is there anything else over there that you'd like to___
CD: [looks over his momentos] That's a publication. [shows a bound book] One of the administrative officers in the Air Group was in the publishing business. He gathered all sorts of information for Air Group 9's trip. When we came home, he took all the information and we paid him. I think the officers gave him twenty dollars, the enlisted men gave him five dollars. He took all the names and addresses, went home, made a book, and sent them out to everybody. In fact, I probably have a picture here of the Yamato. [flips through book] Well, maybe not. These are pictures of the pilot's ready room, two rows of seats on either side of an aisle, and everybody was assigned a seat. You packed up your gear. These guys were all rigged up, ready to go. When we had a predawn launch…to see at night, the bright light killed your night vision. You see with two types of things in your eyes, rods and cones. And the daylight, regular vision is the cones. But the bright light blinds the others. So you have to be in the dark. It takes twenty minutes in full darkness to get your eyes acclimated. If we were going to launch at night, those cones would not be affected by the red light at all. Half an hour before the flight was due to launch, they shut off all the white lights in the ready room and it was just the red lights. Then when you walked out of the ready room, which was underneath the hangar deck, you went out the walkway and up onto the deck in the dark. You saw very well if you had been in that red light. We often had predawn launches.

HSWH: What was your rank assigned when you first joined?
CD: Aviation cadet.

HSWH: And [your rank] when you were discharged?
CD: Ensign. I graduated from flight school as an ensign.

HSWH: [your rank] When you finally discharged from the Navy?

CD: Still an ensign. I ran into a little trouble because I changed air groups. I was due to be a JG [lieutenant junior grade] when we were in the process of leaving the area and going home. A lot of red tape.

HSWH: All the pilots were officers, is that correct?
CD: Now, when the war started, there were enlisted pilots. It became a little awkward operating that way. The Lexington had enlisted pilots on it when it was sunk, as well as officers. But then they changed it. The enlisted pilots did a lot of the ferry work, service work, and a lot of non-combat operations. But now all pilots are enlisted. The Japanese had enlisted and officer pilots too. They were even stricter in their separation than we were. Most of our pilots were casual. They weren't big on ceremony and so forth. [laughs] Because most of our time was spent in war. A lot of this ceremony and so forth, was put aside. It got in the way.

HSWH: Well, thank you very much for coming in today. We appreciate it, and your offer of letting us make copies of that is great. We'll try to do that before we let you go home.

CD: You're welcome. I enjoyed it. [laughs] The only problem I have is my memory is not what it was.