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Robert Edward McTaggart

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Interview conducted by Chuck McManus

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Interviewee: Robert Edward McTaggart

Military Rank: Marine Torpedo-Bomber Squadron 131, Marine Aircraft Group 21

Interviewer: Chuck McManus

Hilton Hotel, Guam

Date: July 22nd, 1994

--00:00:03 AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Narrator: Robert McTaggart is a Caucasian-American man with glasses, wearing a maroon button-up shirt, with white printed patterns. He has a nametag on his left, and a US Marine Corps Badge on the right. Behind him, is a palm fronds and a floral patterned wall.

--00:00:27

Q: My name is Chuck McManus and I'm here at the Hilton Hotel on Guam on the 22nd of July at 2:30 in the afternoon, to record an oral history interview with Mr. Robert McTaggart, who served with VMTB, 131 during World War II.

This interview is being made by the National Park Service, War in the Pacific National Historical Park in conjunction with cable television. Mr. McTaggart, I understand that the National Park Service has your permission to make this recording, to retain all literary and property rights deriving from it, is that correct?

Robert McTaggart: That's correct.

[Brief Pause]

--00:01:11

Q: For the record-would you please tell us your full name.

Robert McTaggart: Robert Edward McTaggart.

Q: Will you please spell your last name?

Robert McTaggart: M-c-capital-T-a-g-g-a-r-t.

Q: And what unit were you with on Guam?

Robert McTaggart: VMTB 131, and that was Mag 21 at the time.

Q: Okay, MTB stands for?

Robert McTaggart: Marine Torpedo Bomber.

Q: And the V?

Robert McTaggart: V stands for heavier than air.

Q: What is your date and place of birth?

Robert McTaggart: April 7th 1925, Detroit, Michigan.

Q: Did you grow up there?

Robert McTaggart: Yes.

Q: Did you go to school there?

Robert McTaggart: Yes.

Q: When did you join the service?

--00:01:59

Robert McTaggart: February 13th 1943.

Q: That's your 17th birthday.

Robert McTaggart: February 7th. February 13th. My birthday is April 7th.

Q: Okay. Okay. So you were about, you were about, almost 18?

Robert McTaggart: Almost 18.

Q: Did you graduate from high school?

Robert McTaggart: At that time no, but I was able to get a, ah-a graduation certificate a couple of months later. My brother got it for me.

Q: Okay. How—did you go on for your education after you got out of service to get [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk]?

Robert McTaggart: Yeah. I went to a seminary for three years, studied to be a priest.

Q: Interesting. Interesting. Any particular reason why you opted out?

Robert McTaggart: Many are called, few are chosen.

--00:02:40

Q: [Laughter]. Well put. Well put. What motivated you to join the-the Marine Corps, or to enter the service and why the Marine Corps?

Robert McTaggart: Well, I think I was in love with the uniform.

Q: [Laughing]. You'd be surprised how many times we've heard that.

Robert McTaggart: And.. there was a war on and there was no keeping any kid out of service at that time. There was a national spirit that was driving, just about forcing every kid to go into service. I mean, the competition was there and if you didn't go-I had a brother

who was a year older than I and was a diabetic and he couldn't go and how he wanted to go. It was just-it was what you, it was what everybody wanted to do then when you were young.

--00:03:23

Q: Did you have some friends in the Corps?

Robert McTaggart: Oh, absolutely.

Q: You were following in their footsteps so to speak?

Robert McTaggart: No, I was falling in my own footsteps. [Laughter]

Q: Okay. Okay. Did you run into any of your friends while you were out in this area while you were in the Corps?

Robert McTaggart: Huh. Um-while I was here on Guam I had a cousin visited me. He was in the Army/Air Force, and he was stationed up on Saipan. And I have some pictures of him when he visited me here. Then, um-I had another cousin and he was in the Navy and he came through on a, resupply ship of some sort and he visited me here on Guam and I have pictures of the two. And the irony of that situation, or the out part of that situation is, these two cousins are the first two of all of my cousins who are now died-who are now dead.

Q: Hmmm.

Robert McTaggart: One, the older one deceased from diabetes and then the other one died from emphysema.

--00:04:22

Q: Hmmm. I don't think we could draw a line between their deaths and Guam at all.

Robert McTaggart: No, not at all. Not at all. It's just coincidental that—

Q: Just pure coincidence, huh? Where did you take your basic training?

Robert McTaggart: San Diego.

Q: How long did it take you to get from Detroit to San Diego? I assume you enlisted in San-Detroit.

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: Okay. And how long did it take you to get from Detroit to San Diego?

Robert McTaggart: I believe it was about three days and three nights, train.

Q: Uh-Hmm. Regular or troop train?

Robert McTaggart: Troop train.

Q: Hmm. How long were you in San Diego?

Robert McTaggart: Well I think boot camp back then was about 8 weeks. And then I was transferred to Naval Training Station next door where I went through a clerical school. And it was in conjunction with this clerical school and the work I did there, that I was able to get my diploma because I had been specializing in commercial subjects in high school, and my brother, in absentia, was able to get my diploma.

--00:05:21

Q: Okay. Excellent. Did you know how to type when you went to the clerical school?

Robert McTaggart: Yes.

Q: That probably was one of the things that got you there.

Robert McTaggart: Ah, I-no. We weren't tested for that.

Q: Oh?

Robert McTaggart: There were a lot of standard tests that you received when you went into boot camp. You know, your GCT's, but typing was definitely not one of them. They had a- a test for Morse Code, how, how could you dee-dah-dah-did. And, ah, apparently I didn't do very well on that. I didn't have any proclivity for that at all. No, no skill for that. And no, there was no typing course. They had a-a general idea of what you had in high school and they used that.

Q: At least you went farther than the rifleman.

Robert McTaggart: Right. Absolutely. I, well, I-I had a skill, they needed the skill.

--00:06:12

Q: Do you remember your DI?

Robert McTaggart: Well, it's funny. There was a-there was a-there was a comic-a comic strip in... those days and as I recall, the-no, I can't answer your question. I thought his name was Miller but. I had remembered it for years, but I can't. We had two. I know we had two.

Q: Do you remember him as a character as opposed to a name?

Robert McTaggart: Ummm... I think he was a good man. I think he was a fair man and a competent instructor. And-he didn't get involved personally with us. Uh-one of-his assistant DI, though, ah-he got a little more personally involved with us. You know, he was a friendlier kind of man.

Q: The assistant?

Robert McTaggart: Pardon me?

Q: The assistant was a friendlier man?

Robert McTaggart: Yeah. He was a friendlier kind of man. But you're still talking. He was a younger man. He was a Corporal and the other one was, I think, was a tech Sergeant. Competent instructor, absolutely. They didn't put incompetence in there.

Q: Do you remember anything unusual about your boot training, any unusual things happen? Punishments inflicted?

Robert McTaggart: Well, I slept with my rifle one night because I called it a gun. I think you've heard that probably before.

Q: [Hearty laughter]. I have....

Robert McTaggart: And, ah... well, I was an extremely competent swimmer and I did very well in the swimming course. I remember that. Ah, rifle range, I just barely qualified. In fact, I didn't even expect I was going to qualify and the-the nice part about it was it was very satisfying to me was 500 yards. I had to put-I had to put and I did put 13 out of 16 rounds dead center from 500 yards from the prone position. And-I qualified as marksman. And if I hadn't qualified I'd have to spend another 3 weeks there.

Q: Uh-hmm.

Robert McTaggart: And would have necessarily dropped back into another platoon. [Smacks lips] So I just barely qualified with a rifle.

-00:08:26

Q: Did any other people in your platoon go to the same school that you did?

Robert McTaggart: [Smacks lips] I believe there were some, yes. I think there were some. Ah, we had to go through a casualty company, what they called it I think at that time, up in... Miramar or Kerny Mesa which was a sort of, you know, like casualty or clearinghouse kind of thing. And from there then, we were dispersed out to different schools or different duty stations, whichever the case. And-I honestly can't remember, but I think there were a couple others that went down to the—we went down to Naval Training Center. Well, there was an interesting case, down there that I'll never forget. The food was horrible. I mean really horrible. And, we were, as usual, marched to the mess hall for the-for the noon meal, and to a man, when we were dismissed to go into line into the chow line, we all left the chow line and went over to the nearest PX and got stuff out of the, you know, got food from the PX. And that immediately got a reaction from the, ah-commanding officer of the station, and immediately resulted in better food. We didn't mutiny. Nobody said anything. We just went to the-we just went to the PX.

Q: A little protest.

Robert McTaggart: To a man. Could be construed as mutiny, I think.

Q: Ahh...Slight civil disobedience. [Laughter from both]

Robert McTaggart: Yes.

Q: Where to from there, Bob? Where did you go from the casualty [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk].

Robert McTaggart: Ah, from there back again to Miramar and again it was a clearinghouse and uh-went up to El Toro almost immediately, where I assumed duties in VMTB 131 as a squadron payroll clerk.

-00:10:11

Q: Then the unit was in being, there when you joined them?

Robert McTaggart: Right. And El Toro was being formed, at that time, and that was in 1943, September of '43. And-the squadron was not a new squadron, understand. It was being reformed. It had already returned from a long term in the Pacific which included the Guadalcanal campaign. So there were a lot of veterans, including the pilots and a lot of the non-coms. And we had a fantastic Chief Warrant Officer, was Adjutant, an old man by the name of Ralph Geary. What a-he was really a wonderful man. And, ah-he left us, I think he left us in the Espiritu Santos and then we got a new Adjutant in there. I don't even want to get into that oddball. But, I stayed at El Toro with the squadron and I had a couple interesting experiences. Um-the first one, I think, was I took—was one of the junior pilots took me up in an SNJ. and he didn't say doodle-y about fastening that seatbelt, but I had it fastened. And I don't think we were very long in the air when we were over upside down. And I'm hanging onto anything I could hang onto. And that man had not said a word to me, and I'll never forget that about that seatbelt.

-00:11:31

Q: Was he a nugget?

Robert McTaggart: Say again?

Q: Was he a second lieutenant?

Robert McTaggart: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. Had to have been. [Laughs.] And then there was another time there, that was a, I think it was the second time I went up, then I went up in a TBM in the tunnel and I got very sick. It was a sort of a cross country flight and I got very sick and I've always-I had always been prone to motion sickness and, ah-I lost everything in the tunnel of this TBM. And when I got back on the ground everybody really got on my case about it. Not so much that I got sick, but that I put it all over everything. And the answer was, I should've just taken my hat off and put it in that. Well, hat's good hindsight. [Laughs.]

Q: Did it ever happen again?

Robert McTaggart: Ah no. I-I didn't get sick again until the, ah, ship on the—I came home from Guam on an English carrier and we were just on the leading edge of a typhoon. We were just ahead of it, but we were getting some pretty bad weather. And-I was cleaning out the Chief's quarters or the Chief's head at the time I think, and I got sick and I lost it there, but it wasn't a case of that some people do, they have chronic motion sickness and chronic seasickness. It just happened once and that was it.

-00:12:54

I sailed around the world in 1979 for a whole year and, there was a friend of mine on that trip. He was sick for almost the whole trip. He-he lost over 50 pounds on that trip.

Q: Did he give up sailing?

Robert McTaggart: No. He didn't-in retrospect, he didn't go the whole trip. He had to back out. It was just too much he could handle. I think it was around Singapore he went home.

Q: Uh-hmm.

Robert McTaggart: Halfway.

Q: What kind of a boat?

Robert McTaggart: It was a 180-foot steel hulled bart-steel hulled, um-made-over oceanographic ship.

Q: With a crew of?

Robert McTaggart: It was owned by... Windjammer out of Miami, Florida.

Q: I know the outfit.

Robert McTaggart: And uh-that was the last trip ever made by any company-any around the world cruise by any company. And I'm glad I made it. Guam for almost a year.

-00:13:46

Q: [Light laughter] Did you have to work your way through?

Robert McTaggart: No, I was-that was one way to go through. You could go through as a work-away which meant that while the ship was at sea you were crew. When the ship was in port you were free to do what you wanted to do except go over land while the ship was leaving port, because that was always-always against port regulations, country's regulations. You were technically crew and when the ship left-you left.

-00:14:12

Q: Okay, get back to the Marine Corps now.

Robert McTaggart. Ok

Q: We are at El Toro.

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: And we are, ah-just forming up with your squadron. With your unit. How long would you stay at El Toro before you-the squadron was moved back out?

Robert McTaggart: About 6 months, but I have paperwork that I can give you exact dates.

Q: That's good enough. 6 months at El Toro, getting the-the organization once again combat ready?

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: Adding your people to it and getting going.

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: Okay, approximately when did you leave El Toro and for where?

Robert McTaggart: Oh, about March and, ah- we were reasonably close to San Diego and we went, we-we were bused down to San Diego and we boarded a carrier there. A Jeep carrier, uh- U.S.S. Petrof Bay, CVE80. And our-aircraft were loaded by derrick. There were trucks flown to Coronado Naval Air Station, then they were trucked over or hauled over somehow and were brought aboard the ship by derrick. They were not flown aboard. And uh-I believe-I believe we were the only squadron on the ship. I'm not sure about this, but I think we were the only squadron on the ship. And then, um-we sailed for Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides and I remember going by the Fiji Islands and they were just a- a shadow on the horizon, or profile on the horizon. And it was always-always a very mysterious thing to me. I mean, I'd never been in-aboard ship before and I'd never sailed before and, well, I mean, you're 17 years old, I mean, these are all wonderful, new experiences. Everything's full of mystery.

Q: Uh-hmm.

Robert McTaggart: Ah... we wound up in Espiritu Santo and then we went ashore in an LST and I'll never forget the smell of diesel fuel. That was the first time for that, too. Back up a little bit, we- we crossed the Equator and I became a Royal Shellback. And there are stories to be told about that experience, too. Shall I expand on it?

-00:16:34

Q: Please do. That's what we're looking for is these-interesting personal stories.

Robert McTaggart: Well, um-I think we pretty much were on the Equator for about three days. Now the Shellbacks had complete control of the ship because the Captain was undoubtedly a Shellback. And-no mercy was shown, regardless of whether you're an officer or enlisted. And every-every Pollywog was known as a Pollywog, visibly was known as a

Pollywog because he was not allowed to wear pants.

Q: [Laughter].

Robert McTaggart; They had to, they could only wear their shorts. But I tell you more than once I saw, especially officers, they were given very-very hard treatment.

Q: That's believable.

Robert McTaggart: Absolutely. They deserved it. [Laughter from both] Ah-they were literally put in stocks. Now I understand later on that a lot of this stuff had to be stopped because, ah, naturally there were, I mean there were, there were war ships in the area and submarines were attacking warships and you can't very well have people in these-this condition. Well anyway, we did go through it on that basis and then the day of initiation, oh-my-God. That was a horrible experience. I damn near drowned. They had built a pool on the fantail. It was a huge thing, and they set you on this... on this plate. I mean, besides beating on your backside as you were going through with God only knows what, and this plate was electrically charged that you sat on and you're wet anyway, and they hit that thing with a charge and it was pivoted, and you went back into the pool and you didn't-you didn't get out of the pool till you could say Shellback, but they wouldn't let you have—well, it was horrible. And then, of course, you had your head shaved. And then you were a Shellback. Ehhh-they stopped also that head shaving, too, because that was a very serious problem. In case, again, you know, the ship was attacked, and you were afloat, either in the water or in a life raft, they didn't want you out there with a bare head. So they stopped that too. So as I say, this was something that we had gone through in a very- it was relatively the early part of the war.

-00:18:45

Q: Were you in convoy or alone?

Robert McTaggart: ... It's funny you ask that. I don't think I could have ever considered that, but my first reflection is to say we were alone. I think that would be stupid for me to say that, but that's-that's as I recall it. We-I remember there were, ah, a lot of lighter than

air aircraft above us when we first left the United States and we probably had lighter than air aircraft over us for quite-for may two or three or four days, escorting us out. No, we were not alone. We did have other aircraft. We were in convoy, now that's-I remember that. It's funny that, you know, talk- talk about that to bring it back. We were in convoy. I don't remember how many ships but we were definitely in convoy.

Q: Any other escort carriers?

Robert McTaggart: I can't tell you the makeup of it. I really don't remember other than I know we were in convoy.

Q: Did you fly any of your airplanes off before you got to Espiritu Santo?

Robert McTaggart: No.

Q: Okay.

Robert McTaggart: In fact, I honestly don't remember how those airplane got off of that ship. Were they launched before we were put ashore? I don't recall that at all. Um, when we got ashore, Espirtu Santo, we were in an area that was sort of on a little island-island or we had a beautiful-beautiful fresh water river right in front of us. We all swam and had a good time in that. And, ah, the area was constantly being sprayed for mosquitoes because there was malaria in the area. And, um-I don't remember how long we were there. It wasn't an Exceptionally long period—September, we-we went to Guam, we landed in Guam in-about the 10th or 15th of August and ah-we were en route for about three months, stuck for at least two of those months in Eniwetok.

Uh-there..., I guess, we were-everything was in the planning stages when we left, ah... Espirtu Santos, and the planning stages and the reality of it is it didn't happen to come together, and like many-many troops—I mean, the lagoon in Eniwetok was just loaded, proliferated with ships of every description and we uh-did swim there. We got some recreation, and I really screwed up. I screwed up badly. I had no idea we were going to be gone for so long and I didn't, you know, I mean, I'm not an experienced traveler. And what

I'm getting at is, all of my clothes, I mean all of my clothes went in my sea bag and my sea bag is in a hold about yay-yay decks down below. and what did I have in my backpack? Just personal articles, shaving articles, pencils, whatever, but no clothes. No clothes. I was washing socks and underwear every day. And-the only way I got an extra set of un, ah-of underwear and, ah-fatigues was when we got ashore, one day I was able to get some blue Navy fatigues and underwear and socks and I bought them, from the-from the store supply there, and I was able to have that so actually I'm a Marine, but I'm wearing Navy blue uniform. No problem. You know, nobody thought anything about it. You know I just forgot to pack my clothes properly.

-00:22:28

Q: You went from Espiritu to Eniwetok?

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: Directly?

Robert McTaggart: Directly.

Q: How long?

Robert McTaggart: Were we en route?

Q: Yes.

Robert McTaggart: The figure 3 weeks comes to mind.

Q: Okay, that's all. And then you said Eniwetok until they declared Guam as secured?

Robert McTaggart: No. No. No, no. We were well en route, and... it was sometime when the invasion of Guam actually occurred that probably we were in the process of leaving. Ah, we couldn't have got there within a matter—see they, they can't—when did they, ah, actually

the invasion date was about the 20th of July?

Q: Twenty-first.

Robert McTaggart: Twenty-first of July and we got there about the 15th, which was 5 days after the official securing, so we had to have been en route there from Eniwetok. I mean, by that time they pretty well had their staging in or they had the reality of what was going to happen. And, our aircraft, oh-that's a big mystery because our aircraft had flown from Eniwetok...over the ocean, which was I believe about a 37-3800 mile trip and, ah-the whole time that we were en route from Eniwetok to Guam, which was say in an area of 90 days, our ships were flying. And I-suppose wherever they touched down and got gas they had parties, too.

-00:23:53

Q: Yeah. What kind of ship did you come from umm-Espiritu to Eniwetok? Was that on the same Jeep carrier?

Robert McTaggart: I'll never forget that. Not a Jeep carrier. United States Army Transport Cape Meares. There are-there are things you don't forget. [Laughter from both] That ship was one of them. Two meals a day, the first meal of the day: wormy oatmeal and an orange.

Q: Uh-hmm.

Robert McTaggart: And it was meeting about five or six decks below, and the temperature was unbelievable. And what I didn't, I felt sorry enough for myself in that environment, but I really felt sorry was the mess cooks and the cooks that had to prepare the food and clean up. It was horrible down there. It was horrible.

Q: Now your airplanes follow you up to Eniwetok or led the way?

Robert McTaggart: They, whether they followed or not they-they got there. They got there pretty much, I think about the time uh-the ground crew arrived.

Q: Okay.

Robert McTaggart: Now I can't, I have-maybe this journal that I provided you will clarify dates on that.

-00:25:00

Q: We're not—absolute accuracy is not necessary. We're more relying on your memory of what you think of things.

Robert McTaggart: I-I, since I was working in an office I can't-I can't really have any, I don't really have any recounting of when those aircraft arrived.

Q: Now you came to Guam, after they had declared Guam secured, uh-did you land down at Apra Harbor?

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: And then immediately up to the Naval Air Station?

Robert McTaggart: Ahhhhhhh... the record that I showed, and I had looked at it, said Agana airstrip.

Q: Okay, Agana airstrip then.

Robert McTaggart: What Agana airstrip relative to what-what is what today here I don't know where it is.

Q: It's the Naval Air Station, same thing. It just expanded.

Robert McTaggart: Then that's-that's what I thought.

Q: That's also the civilian field. It's a joint use field.

Robert McTaggart: Okay. And we had a Marine air group there, and their headquarters, I remember, were just sort of like down the street. We had tents at first, and then we had, um-Quonset huts. And my cousin, my first cousin visited me there when we had tents, and then my second cousin visited when we were built, when the Seabees were building the Quonset huts.

There was an interesting situation there. See... as I recall, we were being raided nightly by Japanese from Rota. They were coming over for food. They were raiding our galleys, our mess halls. And, in-in time sequence, I don't remember just exactly when this happened, but there were a lot of Japanese that were holed-holed up literally in holes, in caves. As I recall, we were down in Tumon Bay, now that I, you know, I mean I know, I'm getting a little idea of the-of the topography here, and this Japanese came out of the bush. I would say 16 or 17 years old, just wearing a loin cloth, you know, he had no weapons. And we were down there, we didn't have any weapons either. So nobody's going to be shooting anybody, and there was no reason to shoot anybody. But probably we would have if we'd had rifles. But in all honesty, sometime-an oriental and a Chamorro, you can't really, you know, you can't really distinguish. You know, I mean, after all we're not experts in, in features, at least not at that age. Well anyway, we took him back to our camp area, and that was when we were still in the tents. And he stayed with me in the office for a couple of days. We had called for military police to come and pick him up. There was no communication between us. I think we got him some clothes, I I'm sure we got him some clothes. And he ate within the mess hall. He-he was 16, 17 years old. He's just a kid, you know? He wants to go home to his mother and father, too. I always enjoyed that memory for the way he was treated.

-00:28:02

Q: Treat him like a brother?

Robert McTaggart: [Shakes his head yes and then shakes his head no.]

Q: And what happened to him?

Robert McTaggart: Nothing. But there are some terrible things our people did. [Becomes emotional and starts crying.] I don't like to talk about them. Not nice things at all... Let's move on.

-00:28:36

Q: How long did you stay on Guam? How long did the units stay on Guam?

Robert McTaggart: Well, I moved out of here on April 2nd 1945, which is about uh-8 months duty here and I had my time in and I rotated back to the States. And the squadron reformed and they went to Okinawa.

Q: What-what missions did they fly out of here in support of what mission?

Robert McTaggart: Submarine patrols for the most part.

Q: All submarine patrols?

Robert McTaggart: As far as I recall they were. I, there may have been some ground support involved there but I don't think so. They were doing bombing raids over on Rota, and there were occasional missions back and forth to Tinian and Saipan. I know I went up there once or twice. I really had no official reason for going up there I just went. And, um-I left on a British carrier, HMS Rajah about April 2nd 1945 and then, as we discussed earlier-well actually I crossed the International Dateline on my birthday, April 7th. I don't know whether I got an extra year older or a year cut off, quite frankly?

-00:29:44

Q: How do you feel?

Robert McTaggart: Say again?

Q: How do you feel?

Robert McTaggart: Now?

Q: Yes.

Robert McTaggart: Okay.

Q: You picked up a year. We solved that problem with no trouble at all.

Robert McTaggart: Well, it reminds me of the story of the HMS Pinafore. You know the story?

Q: Hmm. Hmm.

Robert McTaggart: Now I am 5 and a little bit more.

Q: Yeah-going back to Guam, while you were stationed here, did you have any—you mentioned this one, ah, Japanese...captive if you want to call him that, was that the only experience you had with the Japanese on the island?

Robert McTaggart: My personal contact?

Q: Yes.

Robert McTaggart: Um-we did draw sniper fire after we first got here.

Q: From?

Robert McTaggart: The Japanese.

Q: Okay, well, in what area?

Robert McTaggart: Well, where we were-where we were bivouacked which was the Agana

area, I mean the Agana airfield.

Q: At the base.

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q: Did you do any moving around on the island, see any of the beaches?

Robert McTaggart: No, I, you know, you were pretty much advised to, you know, to stay, stay where you belonged for a long time and other than getting down to the beach, and that in itself, as I recall, quite a trick. We, you know-it just wasn't going down there, walking down there. We-we weren't that close to it. Um-oh, I have a lot of memories of this place. I mean, I remember just total, almost-total destruction of Agana. I remember that very clearly. My impression was there wasn't a building left with a brick standing on a brick, but it quite-wasn't quite that bad, though. And I never thought about it until being here, but there must have been a very large loss of civilian life as a result of that bombing, shor-shore, ah-ships at sea were bombing, you know...

-00:31:34

Q: Fortunately at that time the-the Japanese had pretty much moved them out of the area of interest.

Robert McTaggart: Yeah. I understand they were put in concentration camps.

Q: Yes. But they were safe.

Robert McTaggart: Yeah.

Q: Relatively safe from our bombardments...

Robert McTaggart: Right.

Q:... not necessarily from the Japanese.

Robert McTaggart: Um-one of the big problems I recall after we arrived here, and I was talking to a former corpsman today about it, is that there was a lot of... well-uh-skin lesions. From mosquito bites mostly where the people were scratching mosquito bites, and causing festering conditions, especially the children. And just about any corpsman that we saw in the area, including we were doing it, too I mean, putting salves-salves on this and trying to clear up these lesions.

-00:32:23

Q: What did you do for recreation while you were here?

Robert McTaggart: Myself?

Q: You said you were a good swimmer. I wonder if you came down to [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk]—

Robert McTaggart: Well, we went swimming of course and um... baseball. One of my best friends was killed on-as an accident. He was hit in the head with a pitched ball and I don't think he got-got the more-any more into the infirmary than he died. I mean complications set in very rapidly. He was buried here and I understand how they moved all these bodies. I was hoping, you know, I was hoping to visit a cemetery here but of course there, they-they don't exist here anymore. I don't know why they moved them out. I think that was wrong. I think that wherever those men died-they should've stayed there.

Q: There's a difference of opinion on that.

Robert McTaggart: I mean, after all, when a man dies at sea he's buried at sea, you're not going to exhume him and send him someplace else.

Q: They say that's what, the move they opted to at the time and it's difficult to undo that. So you went back to the States in...?

Robert McTaggart: April 2nd, 1945. We were just ahead of a typhoon... I remember I got seasick just that once, cleaning up the Chief's quarters.

Q: Uh-hmm.

Robert McTaggart: And we arrived in Honolulu on April 12th 1945, and we off loaded some survivors, some sick wounded men that we had taken, I think, from the Franklin, and uh-we off loaded them, and I think that was the only reason for stopping in Honolulu. We off loaded them, and then we had liberty for the day, and we were proceeding to get pretty loaded in a bar, when the news came out that President Roosevelt had died and they shut down all the bars. So we found uh-we found other recreation.

-00:34:18

Q: If you will, for a minute, let's go back to Espiritu. You said that's where you picked up a new Adjutant. You didn't seem uh-very pleased with him. I'm, I'd like to hear some reasons.

Robert McTaggart: Ah, no-no-no-no-no. Um... I'm not quite sure when this—his name was Lieutenant Edward Wicke [Phonetic]. I'm not quite sure when he joined the squadron. I remember his presence only on Guam, not necessarily on Espiritu. And I ran afoul of him very early and the reason I ran afoul of him—oh, God. I don't even—that poor man is very sick and dying right now. But, ah—he had ordered me to clean his rifle. And I'm a lowly PFC or Corporal, whatever I was at the time, 18 years old, and I told Lt. Wicke that in this man's Marine Corps every Marine cleans his own rifle.

Q: Was that a wrong thing to say?

Robert McTaggart: Um-no, it wasn't a wrong thing to say it was the truth. But it was politically wrong. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs]. You were right even if it hurt.

Robert McTaggart: I was right even if it hurt and I stayed a Corporal.

Q: Did you clean his gun?

Robert McTaggart: Absolutely not.

Q: Okay.

Robert McTaggart: And no-I didn't clean his rifle.

Q: [Laughing] You caught that, didn't you?

Robert McTaggart: Oh, yes.

Q: I, too-have slept on the bolts of a rifle.

Robert McTaggart: Oh, well- I didn't sleep on it, I slept with it.

Q: Uh-huh, well, when you have six of them then you don't have much room. [Laughter from both.]

What did you do after you got back? What were you assigned when you got back to the mainland?

Robert McTaggart: To the States?

Q: Yes.

Robert McTaggart: Well, of course I had a 30 days, ah-liberty, I mean, ah-furlough and I went home. When I returned I was sent to Miramar for clerical duties there and that's pretty much where I, much I-I I think that's where I was discharged from.

-00:36:23

Q: What did you do after you were discharged?

Robert McTaggart: Well, I was sort of a square peg in a round hole. You'd been listening for three years, or four years the servicemen this, you know, our boys this and our boys that. They like, we're little gods. When you come home and you take that uniform, off it's a whole new ball game. And I had a job, I worked for Kaiser Frazer in the drafting room. I was just sort of a go-fer. And after three weeks I couldn't deal with that anymore and then my brother got me a job at Chrysler, and I wound up slugging the foreman. And, oh-I had a couple other jobs, I guess. And then I just said, well, there's something wrong here, you know? I'm not, I'm not fitting in anywhere and I figured I'd go to college and the college as it was, I happened to go to a seminary. And I went to talk-to the Rector of the seminary about applying to go into the Seminary and because I'd had commercial courses in high school, I'd had no Latin, it was incumbent upon me to get some Latin in quick-quick large doses, which I did. I started in June, July and August, and I had a tutor, and I absorbed enough formal Latin in those three months of tutoring to qualify me to when I went into the seminary to go into 11th year high school. Which meant I was then competing with students who had two years of formal Latin. And one week in there, and they put me into third year of high school, ah-12th grade. Now I'm competing with kids that have had three years of Latin. And I caught the priest in a clerical-in a grammatical error and they moved me into first year college.

Q: [Laughs.]

Robert McTaggart: So, in the course of about 3 months tutoring and a month or so in the seminary itself, I had moved up into first year college where I was now competing with students who had four years of formal Latin. And all my marks were-well, they weren't good for the first-first three or four markings. But I wound up in the last quarter with just about all A's and B's, and, just about all A's in the second year. Really, what was involved was nothing more than reestablishing study habits. Just that I- I hadn't, I hadn't-I didn't know how to learn. I had forgotten how to learn and that's what high school is all about. High school really doesn't care how much you learn, it's there to teach you study habits. That's always been my opinion. So... I spent, uh-oh-two years in the seminary and then I went into a monastery for a year. And then I spent the whole year there and then I left, and

then I went to college at Wayne State University, and I became a substitute teacher in a high school, teaching Latin and English and I decided after a year of that that...I didn't like, I liked teaching but the kids didn't want to learn, and I wasn't innovative enough to want to put up with that foolishness and uh-then I wound up going to, I got a job at Ford Motor Company and I wound up in an apprenticeship and spent uh-four years becoming a metal model maker. So I sort of moved around in vocations in life. And, ah-I spent 30 years as a metal model maker. That's the work I did until I retired.

-00:40:15

Q: With Ford?

Robert McTaggart: Uh-huh.

Q: Back to Guam for a second. Did—was any of your unit involved in any combat. You mentioned a lot of submarine patrol and bombing of the road and so forth.

Robert McTaggart: No-No-Not to my knowledge.

Q: Okay, you mentioned an event up here at the Naval Air Station dealing with a pilot who lost control of his airplane and effectively took your unit out of the field. Could you tell us some stories about that please, or embellish on that, sir.

Robert McTaggart: Um-I had consulted some records before I came over here so, on December 12th 1944, one of our pilots lost control of his airplane. I mean, we can talk about the technical aspects of this, and they were written up in technically in some information that I have. Quite frankly, I don't think the man that wrote that, well-if he was the historian he's not a pilot. I think that, I think this was a pilot that wrote this. But it comes down to a simple matter of, I think, pilot error. He lost his airplane on landing, and he had a bomb bay full of fused bombs and literally spun his airplane into the parking area, and ... he totally destroyed four airplanes. There was about 12 other airplanes that were partially destroyed, and they cannibalized parts off of one another until they put about four more back in commission. I think that's about all they were able to recon—get back operating

again. And the rest which was scrapped. So out of 16 airplanes, as I recall reading now, I thought that all 16 were lost, but I think there were about four that were re-you know, they had enough parts to put them back together again.

Q: Was the pilot hurt?

Robert McTaggart: Pardon me?

Q: Was the pilot hurt?

Robert McTaggart: I believe he was killed and I believe there were a couple other, 8 or 10 other people maybe had been killed in that. And out of that we had a Master Sergeant. His name was Swindel, got a commendation for heroism. Not a wartime experience, though. There's something like that, it's, it was a non combat—

-00:42:39

Q: Similar to a soldier's medal for doing something heroic but not in a combat.

Did your unit, you said your unit moved on to Okinawa and that's where you began to lose touch with him?

Robert McTaggart: Whoa, not begin to lose, I did lose.

Q: You did lose touch with him.

Robert McTaggart: Right. And I actually, that was the last I had heard of VMTB 131. It was about 10 years ago, in 1980—maybe about '86, eight years ago. I was coming out of church one morning and I saw this car, it had a Guadalcanal Campaign Veteran's Association de-ah, sticker on his bumper. And I talked to the man and he sent me an application and I joined and in their next publication, they have a bi... a semi-annual publication, and my name showed up in there with my home address and this VMTB 131 and it was several months later I received this letter with the VMTB 131 Association, a

return address, and that really flipped me. [Laughing] I mean, after 40 something years. So I, I wrote back and ever since then I've been attending annual conventions. The first one was in Nashville. Boy there were a lot of familiar faces. Lot of familiar faces, including Lieutenant Edward Wicke, my old Adjutant. And then I found out since he's not been able to attend meetings. He's been very sick.

Lot of old faces.

-00:44:17

Q: Did you get to know any people, Chamorro people, while you were living here on Guam, while you were stationed here in Guam? Did you get out into that-area at all?

Robert McTaggart: Not that I could give you names. And other than, ah-medical treatment to some of these people, yes our squadron got involved in that, our Corpsman did. I don't remember their names. And... they were doing, they were doing chores for us as, you know, as the men let them do them. I mean, laundry was the big one. Just about all of our laundry was being done by the Chamorro people. And that's about as far as I can remember that, you know, our contacts with them. But understand, see, I-I was really busy. I,-I had a squadron of over 300 people that I had to keep on top of payrolls. And it was a pretty, it was a pretty time consuming job. I didn't have time to get out in the field and uh-socialize a lot. And uh-my socializing was basically done with, between the people in the office and the people down at Marine Air Group 21, with the payroll department down there. I remember some of the times, though, running into Tyrone Power. He showed up a couple of times and I talked to him. He was in that Marine Air Group.

Q: Yeah. Marine Air Group—what would make up a group as opposed to your... torpedo bombs?

Robert McTaggart: Oh, boy. Honestly I can't say. I don't know.

Q: I wonder if they were corsairs or [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk].

Robert McTaggart: Probably. Probably.

Q: A variety of airplanes.

Robert McTaggart: I-I honestly don't know what was on that airfield.

Q: Okay. Do you ever recall seeing TBM's launched from carriers or recovered from carriers? Were you ever involved in that?

Robert McTaggart: No.

Q: You wouldn't be involved in the actual—

Robert McTaggart: No, in subsequent years-I spent 6 years in the Navy and three of those were a lot of sea duty on many different carriers on several different carriers, so I, I had been involved a lot in actual sea duty involving aircraft launch and recovery.

-00:46:25

Q: When did you go back in the Navy?

Robert McTaggart: Well, while I was in the seminary I was in the reserves, the organized reserves and then after I got out of the seminary, after I got out of college I, ah-during the Korean War I went regular Navy. And then I was sent to school for six months and I was a metal, I became a, ah-aviation structural mechanic. Worked on Panther jets. The F9F's. And then we had a lot of, we had quite a few times when we would go off for short periods of time on carriers—the Bennington, the Tarawa. Not the Tarawa, um-the Antietam, which was the first candidate carrier, and we went to England on that, and allowed the British to qualify as candidate pilots. You know what I mean by the candidate?

Q: Oh yes, very well-very well. I worked with a boxer on the Antietam on the Yellow Sea.

Robert McTaggart: Well, good. I don't know what-what the fate of the Antietam is today,

whether it's even around or whether it's in ah—

Q: I could find out.

Robert McTaggart: Whether it was remelted or, melted down.

Q: I have a book at home and it accounts for all the carriers.

Robert McTaggart: I know she, after I left the squadron, or after I left the-the carrier I was sent to Pensacola and I continued the same kind of duties I had. I was a metal—I was an aviation structural mechanic and I, I got-when I, when I went back in regular Navy I had a reduction in rank. I was an Aviation Storekeeper, and then I went down to, ah, an airman, which was, you know, you-you don't have the crow anymore. And, ah, almost immediately after school and I got out into the fleet I got Third Class. I know I had very-very high markings in my tests. And as soon as I was eligible I got Second Class, and I know as soon as I would have been eligible I'd have had First Class. But I wouldn't have gone any higher for a while. I enjoyed being an enlisted man.

Q: Uh-huh.

Robert McTaggart: I didn't want to be an officer. Uh-I had been approach, for that. In fact, I'd even passed NavCad. All the course-all the-all the requirements for NavCad and I decided not to go. So that's about the extent of my military career.

-00:48:40

Q: After you got out of the Navy, after the Korean War, after the regular Navy, then what did you do?

Robert McTaggart: Went back to work with Ford Motor Company and resumed my, ah-I was still on the apprenticeship. I hadn't completed my apprenticeship. I had probably another two-two and a half years to go in the apprenticeship. And uh-that's basically it. I spent the rest of my time at Ford Motor Company as a model maker and when I had my 30, actually before I had my 30, I went out for medical reasons. I had-a crippled right arm.

Q: You mentioned parachuting. What got you interested in parachute training?

Robert McTaggart: Well there's the irony of it. While I was in the Navy and right after I got on in and I went to school I had a chance to take a class A school, and I had any school of my choice and I could've taken parachute rigging in uh... New Jersey, Lakehurst. And I had considered it but what discouraged me was, and this was in 1952, graduation involved a parachute jump [Laughs.] And, ah-needless to say, I went to a structural mechanic school.

Q: [Laughs.]

Robert McTaggart: But in 1959, I had, I was home. I was discharged. I had-I was planning on making a, making the Navy a 30-year career. Ah, but I had a lot of sickness at home. My brother's a diabetic and had gone blind, and my mother was sick. So, I had to take a hardship discharge, and I don't know if you're aware of this, but once you've taken a hardship discharge, it's about as difficult to get back in as it was to get out. So that went the end of that career, but I still had, I still had Ford Motor Company apprenticeship to rely on and that's what I went back to. And as far as parachuting goes uh- in 1952 I wasn't ready for it. In 1959 I was ready for it. I saw an article in the paper. It was the 82nd Airborne Association in Detroit had a-started a skydiving team. I made a couple of phone calls the following week and I was out, took a first jump course and away I went. And I jumped for, pretty actively, for about 23 years. I formed up a parachuting school of my own after about two years, which was the second one in the country, and I had that for about 15 years. And during that time I-I got my private and my commercial li—pilot's license and my senior and my master parachute rigger's license. And I made 1100 jumps.

It seems like I've had more than my share of diversity of careers, doesn't it?

Q: [Laughs.] You've had a wide range of things, there's no question about that.

Robert McTaggart: Yes, well. And so much for my personality development.

-00:51:33

Q: [Laughs.] And now you've grounded yourself from your pilots flying and you don't do anymore jumping?

Robert McTaggart: I don't jump anymore. I haven't jumped for about six or seven years. My last jump, you know, I got to the point where I thought I knew everything about parachutes, and I got a hold of a parachute that surprised me. I had borrowed it. It wasn't mine. And it surprised me to the point that it put me in the ho-it put me in bed for about a month. Again, I had—it was the second time I'd injured my back. The first time, well, it was painful but uh—at least I was working for Ford's and when I was hurting I was getting paid for it. But the second time I hurt my back, you see, I wasn't working for Ford's and the pain was, the pain was my pain and there was no recompense for it. So I haven't jumped since then. And, would I jump again? I'd have to lose 50 pounds to do it and I'm—I'm heading in that direction. I will. I'll lose 50 pounds. I have to.

Q: Tell me how. Stop eating?

Robert McTaggart: Well, I've lost 15 pounds until this trip started. And, of course, this is, you know, I'm trying to taper off on eating on this trip. We'll see when I get back. Well, I have to do it. I have to get my cholesterol down and I have to get my blood pressure down.

Q: Uh-huh.

Robert McTaggart: And get my waistline down along with it. And I will. I'll lose 50 pounds. And then we'll see about skydiving again.

-00:52:57

Q: Okay. We've just about wrapped up our-our time allotment for this thing. On behalf of the National Park Service, I certainly do want to thank you very much for taking the time and the interest and a certain amount of interest involved in sitting down and telling of these experiences that you've had. Each one goes into a book of sorts and is used for research purposes and without sitting down with people like you that kind of history will be

gone.

Robert McTaggart: I don't know how I contributed any history here, quite frankly.

Q: You're a vanishing-a vanishing resource. And it's in a personal account and that's exactly what we're looking for. No great revelations of any kind. No-no-no terrible organizations as far as wartime. No preaching and nothing, just a simple sitting down and, and listening to what you have to say, and for that- we appreciate it.

Robert McTaggart: Well, I've never been one who hasn't been able to talk.

Q: [Laughs.] Okay. Thank you very much, Bob. I appreciate it.

Robert McTaggart: My pleasure.

[END OF SESSION]

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