

**The National Museum of the Pacific War  
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with Francis R. Ferry**

**U.S. Navy VB-82 – USS Bennington**

**Sinking of the Battleship Yamato**

**1941-1945**

**Mr. Cox:** Today is September 30, 2000. My name is Floyd Cox. I am a volunteer with the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. We are members of the Oral History Program and today we are here in Fredericksburg talking with Mr. Francis Ferry of his experiences during the war in the Pacific. Mr. Ferry is accompanied by his wife of fifty-nine years, Genevieve Ferry.

Thank you Mr. Ferry for allowing us this time to interview you. I would like to start out by asking you a few basic questions such as, when you were born and where you were born.

**Mr. Ferry:** I was born in the state of Nebraska in 1920. January 30, 1920.

**Mr. Cox:** What city were you born in?

**Mr. Ferry:** I was born in Oxford, Nebraska. On a farm north of Oxford Nebraska.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you go to school there?

**Mr. Ferry:** I started to school there and then I graduated from a school in a little town that no longer exists called Mascot, Nebraska.

**Mr. Cox:** Mascot? How many were in your graduating class if I might ask?

**Mr. Ferry:** There were seventeen. Five of us were boys so we made the basketball team.

**Mr. Cox:** After you graduated from High School, did you go on to college or did you go to work?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, I went on to college. I attended Kearney State Teacher's College as it was called at that time. It is now called The University of Nebraska at Kearney.

**Mr. Cox:** What was your major at that time?

**Mr. Ferry:** My major was education. I had three teaching majors. Industrial Arts, Mathematics and Science.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you teach any, or did the war start about then?

**Mr. Ferry:** I taught one year prior to enlisting in the Navy. I taught at Fullerton, Nebraska starting in the Fall of 1941. Just before Pearl Harbor. Right after Pearl Harbor, on February 2, I volunteered into the Navy. However; I was able to complete the teaching year.

**Mr. Cox:** When you went in the Navy...well first let me ask you this. What was your reaction December 7, 1941? Can you remember exactly?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, I can. It was quite a shock. I don't think I expected it; however prior to that time you know the government was talking about drafting people. I had some feelings about that. In fact when I was at Kearney, during the fall of 1940, we did demonstrate a little bit against the draft at that time.

**Mr. Cox:** Is that right? I wasn't aware of there being college demonstrations at that time.

**Mr. Ferry:** It was one of those things that just sort of was the spirit of the moment. I don't think we thought negatively about joining the Army or anything like that. It was the idea that we would be drafted into it rather than being able to volunteer.

An interesting note; when my number did come up which was in December 1941, right after Pearl Harbor. My mother called and said that I had a letter from the Draft Board which she knew about. I told her to write "He doesn't live here anymore" on the letter and send it back. Then I went on down and volunteered into the Navy. (laughter)

**Mr. Cox:** Well, once you got into the Navy, did you go into the Officers Corp. or exactly how did it come about?

**Mr. Ferry:** At that time, I knew I was going to be a flyer. I was a flyer prior to enlisting. We called in as Seaman Second. After a month or two, by act of Congress they switched us to cadets and raised our pay a little

bit.

**Mr. Cox:** Well, you said you flew before you went into the service. Could you tell us a little bit about that? What did you fly?

**Mr. Ferry:** I flew a Cub. During that time the Government encouraged people to learn to fly. So I got into that program. It is sort of interesting in that I worked for the President of the College at the time. One day he asked me to be ready and drive over to Hastings, Nebraska. I thought I was going to chauffeur him over, which I had done many times. When he picked me up, he continued to drive and when we got over to Hastings he stopped at the hospital and said “ Fran, I’m going to ask you to take the physical exam, I want you to learn to fly.” And so he paid for my flying lessons.

**Mr. Cox:** That’s wonderful. Well, after you went into the Navy and you went into Cadet Training. Is that what you call it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, it was pre-flight training. I was assigned to go to St Mary’s College in California. Basically it was physical training and some ground school in Navy regulations and things of that nature. But basically it was physical training before going into flight training.

**Mr. Cox:** Once you completed that, did you go home on leave before you went into flight training?

**Mr. Ferry:** Let's see, did I go home on leave?

**Mrs. Ferry:** About three months later you were home a few days.

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, I was assigned to the Olathe, Kansas Naval Air Station for flight training and I think I had to complete that before I had a little bit of leave. Then from Olathe I was transferred to Corpus Christi and that is where I completed my flight training and received my wings.

**Mr. Cox:** Well let me ask you. At Olathe, what type of aircraft did you fly?

**Mr. Ferry:** I flew the "yellow peril" which was the N-3N.

**Mr. Cox:** Was that a two wing bi-plane?

**Mr. Ferry:** It was a two wing, open cockpit.

**Mr. Cox:** I remember seeing those as a kid. At Hutchinson, Kansas we had a Naval Air Station and I remember seeing you young guys up there. It was fascinating.

**Mr. Ferry:** It was a fun plane to fly. You could do almost anything in it, a lot of acrobatics and that type of thing. So it was a fun plane to fly.

**Mr. Cox:** Now exactly how old were you when you joined the Navy?

**Mr. Ferry:** I was twenty two when I joined the Navy and I was twenty three when

I received my wings.

**Mr. Cox:** So you went to Corpus Christi where you took more advanced training. What did fly at Corpus Christi?

**Mr. Ferry:** I flew the SN-Js. I flew several different planes. I flew the OS-2U a little bit. But primarily the SN-J.

**Mr. Cox:** Once you got your wings did you get a choice of what you went into, Fighters, bombers or did they assign you?

**Mr. Ferry:** They asked us to make our choice but I didn't get my choice. I asked For fighters and they gave me dive bombers. (laughter) Actually that was my second choice. They asked us to list fighter planes, dive bombers, torpedo bombers or float planes. At that time they did have a few people who flew off of battleships and cruisers.

**Mr. Cox:** Like observation type planes. Once you made your selection did you go into more advanced training?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, my advanced training was at Opa-locka, Florida down by Miami. That was called pre combat assignment. We flew all sorts of planes there also. I flew AD's PT's and SNJ's. A variety of planes.

**Mr. Cox:** Can you tell me a little bit about how they trained you to drop bombs from a dive- bomber?

**Mr. Ferry:** That started after I was assigned to a squadron. I was assigned to VB-14 which was operating out of Wildwood New Jersey and that was the first time I started to do dive bombing. That was in SBD's.

**Mr. Cox:** I guess Pearl was where you learned your carrier landing is that correct?

**Mr. Ferry:** No, it was in the squadron where we learned to do the carrier landings. In fact I was assigned to SB2C's before making a carrier landing.

**Mr. Cox:** Can you describe your feeling when you did your first carrier landing by yourself?

**Mr. Ferry:** Well it was a real thrill I can tell you. (laughter) Since I came from Nebraska and on dry land farm, we didn't know what a lake or an ocean looked like or anything like that so the first time I was on a boat or a ship of any kind was when I landed an airplane on an aircraft carrier. I can tell you when I landed you have a strange feeling. You feel like you are moving backwards because the water is moving backwards according to the ship, which is moving forward. I kept my brakes on and the Landing Officer kept giving me the signal to release my brakes and I couldn't do it. He finally came up on the wing of the airplane, patted me on the back and said "you did a good job, now you can release your brakes." (laughter) So I released my brakes but when I did my legs were just shaking like you wouldn't believe.

**Mr. Cox:** That ship looked pretty small down there when you are up there doesn't it?

**Mr. Ferry:** It did, and we knew it could be done because other people had landed on it but it was the first time for me, and the first time on water. It was very strange feeling for me.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you start your combat practice at that same time when you are learning your carrier landings?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, we were doing dive- bombing practice and all kinds of maneuvers, just going through the squadron syllabus of training. That came toward the end of the training. To qualify for aircraft carrier landings you had to make three successful landings. That was it and if you did it you were qualified to land on an aircraft carrier. Night carrier landings were the same way. You had to make three landings to qualify.

**Mr. Cox:** I imagine that is quite an experience the first time in the dark isn't it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes. Of course the ship is blacked out at the time and you had to be in the grove really to see the carrier. You just go through the motions, get your cut and you land.

**Mr. Cox:** When you are learning to land on a carrier do you have a crew with you?



**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, we carried a crew of one.

**Mr. Cox:** So what was that, your rear gunner?

**Mr. Ferry:** They were called a rear gunner but generally they were called crew members. They were qualified to do radio work, radar work and of course some gunnery.

**Mr. Cox:** So you have a brand new crewman learning to fly with a brand new pilot. That would probably be a little hairy wouldn't it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Well I never asked the crewman how he felt. I know they get concerned from time to time.

**Mr. Cox:** Then you started your dive- bombing practice. That has always fascinated me. Can you tell me how they start teaching you to be a dive-bomber pilot?

**Mr. Ferry:** You do acrobatics before you learn to fly. Actually it is a very simple procedure. Normally we would start with left wing down and then you just roll over into the dive. You just sort of make a half turn and then go down. The dives are generally somewhere between seventy and ninety degrees. If you get over ninety degrees you could become upside down and you would have a little harder time making your dive.

**Mr. Cox:** I've always heard and read about diving brakes you fellows used on the dive- bomber. Exactly what did the diving brakes do?

**Mr. Ferry:** It slowed you down. It's like landing brakes on a regular plane only you have the brakes going both down and up so it slows you down. However, depending on your height, you do get into a terminal high velocity dive whether you have brakes on or not. Foreign bodies will accelerate to a terminal velocity and in our case it was about five hundred or a little over five hundred miles per hour you would be coming down.

**Mr. Cox:** When you were going through this training did you know or did it happen in your squadron that any of the fellows learning to dive bomb never pulled out?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, that happened several times. In our squadron between training and combat casualties we lost about thirty five percent of our squadron. Of course part of the reason was the plane we were flying. We were flying early SB2C's, which if you read the history of them you will find that there were a lot of early accidents. It was called the Beast and rightfully so because it could get you into trouble if you weren't careful and if you didn't know what to do when you got into trouble.

**Mr. Cox:** Once you finished this training did they assign you a ship?

**Mr. Ferry:** I was assigned to VB-14, which was assigned to the Wasp, a new Aircraft Carrier. We were plank owners (first crew members) of the USS Wasp. We took the Wasp on shakedown, down by Venezuela and that area. Continued training, dive- bombing, gunnery practice and all sorts of things.

**Mr. Cox:** Once you completed your shakedown did you proceed to the Pacific?

**Mr. Ferry:** Normally the squadrons, start out with about thirty- five pilots and then they are weeded down to about fifteen pilots. I happened to be one that got cut so I was reassigned to VB-82's. So I went through the training twice before going to combat.

**Mr. Cox:** That might be one of the reasons you are sitting here today.

**Mr. Ferry:** It sure is and I'll tell you I think it did me a lot of good. I know in our squadron it was generally the new pilots that had accidents. In combat it was generally the replacement pilots that we lost. In fact there has been a thesis done on that, what the effect of being a replacement pilot compared to a pilot that went through the training. There is no question about it they didn't receive as good training as they did in the squadron.

**Mr. Cox:** After you went through VB-82 did they assign you to a ship?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, and that ship was the USS Bennington. Became plank owner on

the Bennington and took it on shakedown. After the shakedown we transferred to the Pacific going through the Panama Canal up to San Diego. From San Diego we went to Pearl Harbor for about three weeks of training and then out to combat area.

**Mr. Cox:** What year was this?

**Mr. Ferry:** This was the end of 1944. We got out to the Ulithi Islands where the Task Groups were formed. We arrived there around the 4<sup>th</sup> of February I think. We joined Task Force 58.1, which was Admiral Mitchner's group. On the 11<sup>th</sup> February we started toward Japan.

**Mr. Cox:** You were still on the Bennington?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes. The Task Force had three groups. We were in Task Force Group 58.1. There was 58.2 and 58.3. Each of the groups had three Essex type carriers and one light carrier. In our Group it was the Bennington and the Hornet that were the Flagship. The Wasp and Bellawood was the light carrier. We had two battleships, a couple of cruisers, and about sixteen or seventeen destroyers in a Task Group.

**Mr. Cox:** You headed toward Japan at that time?

**Mr. Ferry:** Toward Japan. Our first combat mission was over Tokyo. I was one of the twelve hundred pilots that went in to Tokyo on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February. These were the first times over Tokyo after Doolittle.

**Mr. Cox:** First time after Doolittle and his was April 18, 1942 if I'm not mistaken. You bombed Tokyo and that is the home of the Imperial Palace. Were you given any instructions to stay away from that area?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, we were told to stay away from the Imperial Palace. Of course we were given specific assignments that we were to bomb. I don't recall what I did on the 16<sup>th</sup>. I do recall what I did on the 17<sup>th</sup>. We were supposed to go into Tokyo a second time. Tokyo was weathered in so we were redirected to Ha Chichio which is an island out from Tokyo. It was weathered there too. We didn't do dive bombing on Ha Chichio but we had to do low altitude attack and I was hit on the 17<sup>th</sup>. I came back with about eighty-six holes in my plane.

**Mr. Cox:** Oh my goodness, were you wounded at that time?

**Mr. Ferry:** No, I wasn't wounded but my crewman was. He took two or three fifty caliber probably. Not too serious.

**Mr. Cox:** Well you got him alive anyway.

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes. Several cables on my plane were severed including the landing hook cable so we had to figure out how to solve that problem. There was also fire on the plane and my radioman was able to put out the fire. When we got back to the ship we were directed to make a water landing, however, I thought maybe since I was engineering officer of the squadron I knew the plane pretty well so I had my crewman throw

over his guns, ammunition and everything he get hold of. There was a back entry to the plane and I thought he was small enough to crawl through that hole and release the landing hook by hand, which he did. One of the things I failed to think about at the time was when someone crawls back into the tail of the plane it disrupts the plane a little bit. I had that stick all the way forward to keep from stalling out. Finally he came forward and said he had released it and we made a safe landing.

**Mr. Cox:** Let me back up a little bit. You were flying into antiaircraft fire as well as machine gun fire?

**Mr. Ferry:** There was always anti-aircraft fire. When we got into Iwo Jima and Okinawa where we did close support there wasn't so much there but when we flew over targets like an airfield, ammunition plant, manufacturing plant or a railroad terminal and things like that there was always anti-aircraft fire.

**Mr. Cox:** I imagine it is hard to explain your feeling when you are flying in and you know these people are trying to kill you. Are you just thinking about the job you have to do?

**Mr. Ferry:** I think the way to explain it is you have a job to do. My oldest son asked me that question too. I asked him if he had ever been in a fight? Of course I hoped he would say no, (laughter) but he didn't say no. You have similar feelings. You are going in after them but I know

there is fear and you feel that fear.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you have any other major combat experiences? Tell me about some of the various ones you had.

**Mr. Ferry:** The interesting thing, if there are interesting things, about war, was the invasion fleets. I was involved with the burning of the beaches on Iwo Jima, as an example in preparation for the landings. To see all of those hundreds of ships out there and watching them come in to the landing was really a sight to remember. You really feel for those people too because you wonder how are they going to get through the night and things of that nature. I was involved with burning of the beaches on Iwo Jima and later Okinawa.

**Mr. Cox:** You said burning is that napalm burning?

**Mr. Ferry:** Napalm burning. The way we dropped the napalm was at low altitude. We had to be at tree top level or as low as we could get because we dropped napalm in gas tanks. The army had bombs that were fused that they could drop at high altitudes but ours were like wing tanks.

**Mr. Cox:** How did you like bombing versus dive- bombing?

**Mr. Ferry:** Well we did probably more of the dive-bombing than the close support work. On Iwo Jima and Okinawa it was dive- bombing. We were given a spot to hit and we would dive at a lower altitude also. The

dives there would start at maybe four or five thousand feet and then you would go down to several hundred feet and drop your bomb. Every fourth round of our twenty- millimeter ammunition was a tracer. If the tracers were going straight you knew you were flying straight. If the tracers were curving you knew you weren't flying straight so you would correct your flying pattern. If they go into the target then you know your bomb is going to go into the target. We also carried eight and five inch rockets. I would always start with the twenty-millimeter and then shoot the rockets and then the bomb.

**Mr. Cox:** When you are coming down in a dive like this can you get pilots fixation? Where you would forget you have to pull out.

**Mr. Ferry:** Some people you would have to holler at them. In fact our skipper was that type of person. Eventually, after the war he was killed in a glide bomb maneuver when he failed to pull out. I flew section on the skipper all the time.

**Mr. Cox:** Let me interrupt you. For the benefit for the people who will be reading this and listening to it, you said section, does section mean a type of wingman position?

**Mr. Ferry:** We flew in sections of four planes. The leader would have a wingman and the section leader would have a wingman so I had a wingman. I flew a section on the skipper. Of course I think he was the bravest



man I ever knew in my life. He would concentrate on the target and I would have to holler at him two or three times to pull out.

**Mr. Cox:** What was his name?

**Mr. Ferry:** His name was Hugh Wood. He was an academy graduate USM. He was about twenty-eight years old when we were in combat. A good leader, good leader.

**Mr. Cox:** He was kind of like the old man at twenty-eight wasn't he?

**Mr. Ferry:** I think we had about three pilots that were about his age. I think our executive officer was around twenty-eight. When our squadron was cut down to fifteen there were two or three other people who had been instructors and so on who were transferred out to other squadrons. I was about twenty-five, I was about midway. I think we had two or three pilots who were twenty-one.

**Mr. Cox:** As they always say war is a young man's game. Did you have any combat experience against the Japanese fleet?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes I did. Actually only two times and both of them against the battleship Yamato.

**Mr. Cox:** The Yamato was the largest battleship ever built, is that correct?

**Mr. Ferry:** It was the largest, most potent, fastest, had the biggest guns, the most

guns, it was a beautiful ship, it really was. It was the pride of course of the Japanese. It had a sister ship also the Musashi. They were building a third one but it was converted into a carrier and it was sunk on its trial run. It was sunk by a submarine so only the two were able to get out into the combat area. The Yamato was the pride of the Japanese Navy.

**Mr. Cox:** Tell me how this all came about when you went after the Yamato.

**Mr. Ferry:** The Yamato was sort of a mystery ship because most of the world did not know about her until she had been seen by a submarine. She was finally photographed at Truk so they knew about the ship and tried to keep track of her. She was involved in the Battle of the Philippines and the sister ship was sunk there. The Yamato was hit at the Battle of the Philippines but was not damaged that much. We knew that the Yamato was up in Curry Harbor. I'm talking about actions that occurred on March 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> in 1945. The Japanese did a lot of Kamikaze attacks during that time. In fact on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March about three hundred Kamikaze came down attacking the area of Okinawa and also the fast carrier fleets. There was a lot action. Five of our Essex type carriers were hit on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. On March 19<sup>th</sup> we were assigned to bomb Kuri Harbor. We flew to Kuri and were in a holding pattern waiting for our assignment to attack when we noticed that some ships were out in the bay west of Kuri. Our

skipper asked for permission to go over and investigate. We were flying about twenty thousand feet and going over toward the ships and we went on up to twenty one thousand feet, which was about our maximum altitude. We noticed it was a pretty big ship. We asked permission to go in and attack her and we did. There were eight of us. We all dropped on her and we all missed her. Came close, but we missed her. There was a lot of anti-aircraft fire. In fact they claim that it was about as heavy as any time during the war by Japanese. An observer said there was so much anti-aircraft fire that he couldn't even see us, it just blocked us out. I was hit on that hop. There was an explosion and I thought and it probably was one of the eighteen inch shells that came up from the Yamato, about one hundred feet below my wing. It spun my plane clear around and I recovered and took shrapnel in my left wing. I was losing oil from the concussion of it. I did go ahead and go down and dropped my bombs but I'm sure I missed. I was the third one in on the dive and the plane following me flew through the burst area and he was shot down. He went down. He was able to land and he landed in the bay. He was taken prisoner of war.

He was returned but in very, very bad shape. He did survive but I don't think he is alive now. We've tried to keep in touch with but he was just in bad shape. His name was Don Worden and he was from Missouri. We tried to contact him there but were not able to see him.

People that did see him after he came back and was in the hospital in San Francisco, said he was in very bad shape. I don't know if it was from the hit or from being prisoner of war.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you just lose one plane out of your group?

**Mr. Ferry:** We just lost that one plane. We lost a plane on the 18<sup>th</sup> the day before. We were attacking Kongono East and I was on that hop. That was an airfield and we lost a pilot there. To continue on what happened on the 19<sup>th</sup>, I pulled at about five thousand feet and played around with the engine settings trying to get power back. I was able to get flying power. Since I was in trouble I asked for directions as to what I should do. They told me to fly down the Inland Sea to a submarine in the straights down there and they would pick me up. When I got to the submarine I noticed the USS Franklin was burning. The Wasp, by the way, was hit that day as well. I asked permission to come over and land by the destroyer and they gave me permission to do it but when I got over there they had already cleared the deck from the Bennington so I asked permission to try landing there. I was surprised they gave me permission to do that, but they did. When I landed, I know I didn't have full power for there was sort of a backfire by the engine. The of the plane started on fire, the oil and that sort of stuff. So I experienced getting my cockpit full of foam. It was an interesting hop.

**Mr. Cox:** One thing I've often wondered. I know that enlisted men and officers don't socialize a lot together but did you get to know and did you have the same crewmen all the time?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, the same crewman. His name was Fred Warner and I'll have a good story to tell about him the next time we get going on Yamato. Fred Warner was a nineteen year old young man and very loyal. At one time he was bumped so an administrative officer could fly with me over on Iwo Jima. When I got back from that flight, Fred came over to me and said "don't you ever take anybody again, I'm your crewman and if you don't want me tell me". He was a great young man and a very dear friend of ours until he passed away. The second time was when the group was able to sink the Yamato Battleship.

**Mr. Cox:** Was this within the next few days?

**Mr. Ferry:** This was three weeks later. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, the B-29's noticed there was a fleet coming out of Kuri harbor down through the Inland Sea. It was possible that it was the Yamato. Or at least we thought it was the Yamato. It was the Yamato accompanied by a cruiser and eight destroyers. They alerted us and we were able to track her by submarines and fighter aircraft kept watch over her. I guess some PBY's were also involved in tracking her. Our Task Force was being refueled at the time when we got word. So we broke off the refueling

and started making a fast run toward where we thought the interception would be. I understand that there was some concern of Admiral Nimitz as to how to do it and he formed a plan in which a bunch of battleships would intercept her. Then as a second thought decided maybe they would send air people out to intercept her. 58.1 was assigned to be the lead group in. The Bennington was the lead group of 58.1. We knew that the weather was bad. Cloud cover was considered eighty percent depending on where you were. We kind of figured the Yamato would be under a rain cloud if possible, which she was. We got out to where the Japanese Task Group was to be intercepted and the ocean was empty. My radioman told me he had a target on his radar. We had a little six inch ash radar. Do you remember those? They were the beginning of aircraft radar. He said he had a target fifteen miles away and he gave me the direction and I transferred this over to the skipper. He said we would go over and find out. We were flying somewhere between twenty- eight hundred and three thousand feet. When we got over there visibility was about four or five miles. We flew right over the Japanese Group. As soon as he realized we were flying over the Group, we pulled up into the clouds and went on instruments. He made a very hard left turn to come back into the ship. His wingman was not able to stay with him because his turn was pretty hard. I was flying on the left side so I was able to cross underneath him and follow him in. My wingman was

able to come underneath me and follow me on in. We had eleven bombers but only three of us were able to make a run on the Yamato. Others got pulled away and made attacks on other units of the Japanese Group.

**Mr. Cox:** Was there Japanese aircraft in the area?

**Mr. Ferry:** There was no Japanese aircraft in the area, which was kind of strange. There was no Japanese air cover for the Japanese fleet. Our attack came out of the clouds at about three thousand feet and came right on down. I first started shooting my twenty millimeters at it to make sure that it was going in and then I released all of my rockets and bombs at one salvo. I didn't have time to do one at a time. I imagine I was somewhere between three and five hundred feet when I released them. Then I went right on down to the water and made a left hand turn in front of her and I circled her one time. I had a movie camera with me and I took shots of her.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you see where your bomb went in?

**Mr. Ferry:** I couldn't see where mine went in. According to observers, they claimed that all three of us got hits. The torpedo people were the best observers because they were coming in with their torpedoes. The Japanese scenarios obtained after the war only give us credit for two so we're not sure who missed or if we all three got hits. I kind of suspect

that two of us got hits.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you lose any of your planes during that time?

**Mr. Ferry:** We lost one plane but not on the Yamato. However, his citation reads that he was shot down by the Yamato. He was lost in action. No one seems to know what happened to him, he just disappeared. The weather was so bad and it was his first combat mission. When the weather is bad like that the ocean looks just like the sky. After the war his nephew contacted me and asked me to respond to questions as to what happened to him. He could have flown into the sea, he could have been shot down by gunnery, it is just hard to tell what happened to him.

**Mr. Cox:** It is very hard to look around when you are concentrating on what you are doing isn't it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, and no one was able to say that they saw what happened to him.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you get any flak damage to your plane at that time?

**Mr. Ferry:** No I did not, I came out clean. The skipper came out with a hit. Not all that serious, he lost some oil. My wingman came out fine.

**Mr. Cox:** None of you got wounded?

**Mr. Ferry:** No. It was amazing too because they were shooting everything they



had at us. They weren't able to get off their eighteen inch guns in that situation because we came in so low. The number of barrels on the Yamato was amazing and they were pretty much all shooting at us.

**Mr. Cox:** The ship was sunk?

**Mr. Ferry:** There is a lot of question as to why it was sunk. There are all kinds of stories about it. You'll read different stories. Some are different from others. It is like the person said at the symposium today "if there is a car accident, there will be at least two different versions as to what happened." There were two or three versions of what happened. According to the Japanese report the first two bombs hit, we dropped two each, did a lot of damage. They hit sort of forward of center of the battleship. The second two bombs hit and penetrated into the magazine areas where the big shells were kept and started a fire. It was a fire that they weren't able to control at all. Then the torpedoes started coming in. In fact during the two and a half hours of this battle she took about eleven torpedo hits and basically only those two bomb hits. There were other bomb hits but did little damage according to Japanese report by their strike groups. Even then, each strike group probably sunk the Yamato, you see. There are two versions that caused the sinking. One is that the fire that was started in the magazine area was the cause because the ammunition was stacked vertically and broke loose from their moors and into the fire and blew

the side out of the ship. That is one version. The other version, which I believe more than the other caused the sinking was all but one of the torpedoes entered on the port side which caused severe list and lots of flooding problems which they just couldn't control. Even if I thought it was my two bombs that caused the fire, I think they probably could have controlled it if the torpedoes hadn't caused the heavy list.

**Mr. Cox:** Maybe a combination of both.

**Mr. Ferry:** Could be a combination of both or it could have been the torpedoes. I think you have to give credit to the torpedoes, I really do.

**Mr. Cox:** You spoke of the bombs, were they five hundred pound bombs?

**Mr. Ferry:** They were one thousand pound semi-armor piercing.

**Mr. Ferry:** Did you see the Yamato go down?

**Mr. Ferry:** No, we had to leave the area. There were three groups. Ours was the first group in. Then the second group came in from another Task Group and then another from the third Task Group. Actually there were four Task Groups assigned to it but one of the Task Groups got lost and never could find her. A lot of the scenarios that you will read about the sinking of the Yamato will credit the USS Intrepid and their Group. I'm not sure but I think it might have been 58.3. I'm not sure where the Intrepid came from. I think they had just had a better

Public Relations person. (laughter)

The Hornet followed us in and the Wasp wasn't there because she got hit in March and had to go in for repairs. The USS Belleau Wood had a few planes that were with us also. One of the things that we read was Commander Heath was supposed to be our coordinator. He flew a F6F Wildcat. Generally he would take either an F6F or a Marine pilot with a F4U as his wingman. He wasn't able to get off so we had a F4U Marine pilot flying by himself. When he died it came out in the Santa Cruz paper that he sank the Yamato. (Laughter) There were two hundred and eighty pilots involved in the sinking of the Yamato so it depends on who you talk to who sank it.

**Mr. Cox:** You would like to think you did it.

**Mr. Ferry:** No, I don't want to take credit for it. I feel badly about it in lots of ways. I know the sailors on the Yamato were young kids. There were over fourteen hundred went down with the ship and only two hundred and eighty survivors of which only twenty three were officers. I thought most of them would be officers but I guess it was the people who were topside that were able to be salvaged. That is a sad moment and I think it is a worse moment than doing close support work. You don't see what happens when you do close support work. You can see what happens here so it leaves more of a sad impression.

**Mr. Cox:** At the time it happened you must have had quite an elation knowing

that you . . . . .

**Mr. Ferry:** Basically I think I was just exhausted. I don't think I felt elation, I just felt exhausted.

**Mr. Cox:** Glad it was over with.

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes. Of course we lost a pilot and all of those things that makes it real.

**Mr. Cox:** When you returned to the carrier and probably even before, did you guys have radio conversations.

**Mr. Ferry:** No, it was pretty quiet. We were all debriefed so you take your turn and tell your story. I think it was probably, the most difficult flight that I ever had. Even during my second combat mission when I was hit, I was still flying, I had full power and I knew I didn't have some cables I needed to have but I felt still in control. Being a guy from Nebraska, didn't know anything about water until he got into the Navy, and was not a good swimmer (laughter) I wanted to make sure I got back to that ship.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you have any other combat missions after that one?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes. Basically the missions we flew were close support on Okinawa. Then in the first part of June we went through the typhoon and our

aircraft carrier was pretty well damaged and so was the Hornet. We just couldn't launch planes. So we retired and they relieved our squadron.

**Mr. Cox:** Where did you go from there?

**Mr. Ferry:** Went down to Mindanao and Philippines and that is where we were off loaded.

**Mr. Cox:** Was that the end of your flying off ships?

**Mr. Ferry:** I came back to the states and was granted leave. It was our second wedding anniversary when I got back. Then we were assigned to Jacksonville, Florida to be reassigned. I was supposed to be reassigned to do experimental flying somewhere. When I was on my way to Jacksonville the war ended. We were in Hopkinsville, Kentucky on our way to Jacksonville when someone passed us and said the " war is over, the war is over. We stopped in Hopkinsville and tried to get a room. I guess we were successful, but boy, that town was wild.

**Mr. Cox:** I would like to ask Mrs. Ferry, how did it feel to be a young bride and knowing your husband was in a combat situation?

**Mrs. Ferry:** Well we had an interesting situation. Before he left he told me to subscribe to the Chicago Daily News, which I did. There was a

reporter from the Chicago Daily News who was aboard ship. I took that paper and every day I looked for his column and he never did mention Fran because we weren't Chicago people but he did mention a couple of our friends in the squadron who were from that area. In that way I could always keep track of what was happening. He wrote to me nearly every day and I still have all of his letters. By the time I got them of course the situation had passed. On the day that the Yamato was sunk it was a very short note to the effect that "this has been a very long day and I am very tired. I'll write more later". That was about the extent of that. From the first when we were married and he was flying in Miami, we decided that there was no need for either one of us to worry all day long about whether he was coming back that night or not. Some of the young brides really worried about it every day. We decided it wouldn't do him any good and it wouldn't do me any good to worry about it. Whatever happens, happens, it is out of our hands. So I think he was well taken care of out in combat. We were thankful to have him back.

**Mr. Cox:** I bet it was a joyous day for you when he got back.

**Mrs. Ferry:** Well it was kind of exciting. I met him in North Platt, Nebraska.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you get married in North Platt?

**Mrs. Ferry:** No we got married in Miami. It was an interesting time. He stayed in the reserve after that and ended up with thirty two years in the Navy

reserve.

**Mr. Cox:** Once the war was over what did you do?

**Mr. Ferry:** When the war was over they gave me several choices, but I finally asked to be separated. One of the choices was to stay in and go back and relieve people that were out in the war zone. I decided that I had been there and so I didn't think that was a good option. Another one which I seriously considered, took me about three days to make up my mind, was to stay in the Navy and go regular. They offered me college if I would go regular. I thought that would be a good thing but I chose to get out. I stayed in the reserve program. I think probably the reason I was able to stay in so long was I completed my twenty years, which normally you get a letter saying thanks for your service. They did send me that letter and I think I responded I would just get out. I wouldn't resign but I would be separated from the reserve. They came back with a letter asking me to stay in one more year. At the end of that year they asked me to stay indefinitely. When I became sixty years old, they said you are old enough to get out. (laughter)

**Mr. Cox:** One thing I failed to ask you, what rank were you when you took on the Yamato?

**Mr. Ferry:** I was a Lieutenant JG. I was up for Lieutenant in a couple of months.

**Mr. Cox:** If you stayed in over 20 years you were still in when the Korean War was going on. What was your job then?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, I was in school then. I was working on a Master's degree. I thought sure that I would get a letter. Especially when Ted Williams got a letter to go back in. I thought if they were going to take a famous baseball player, surely they would call me. Dive- bombers were kind of obsolete by then.

**Mr. Cox:** Is there anything else that you would like to add that you can think of? You mentioned that you were going to tell a little story about your crewman.

**Mr. Ferry:** He was very knowledgeable about what was going on. He anticipated things. He was a bright young man. Especially when we were going up to make the attack on the Yamato. He could have looked at that thing and said nothing but he wasn't that type of person. If he thought he had something to contribute he would. He was not bashful and he was a brave kid. He would do anything for me and for the Navy.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you ever go on shore leave together?

**Mr. Ferry:** No, in those days we were supposed to be separate. I don't know how it is now but in those days they didn't want you to fraternize with the enlisted men. We did. I'll have to tell you a story. My executive officer remembered it and reminded me of it before he died. You have



certain things on an aircraft carrier that you can take with you. One of the guys bought a record of Jo Stafford. I brought aboard a record of Jo Jo the Monjo. It wasn't a gold record or anything like that. After a while you get tired of hearing the records. I was tired of hearing Jo Stafford every day and this other guy was tired of hearing Jo Jo the Monjo every day. We had a little thing going against each other. One day I put his record in his seat in the ready room and the guy came in and sat down on it and broke it. Well the executive officer didn't think that was so funny. He said, "Ferry clean the ready room.", so I got a bucket and washed down the floor. I thought the ready room looked clean to me. He came back in and said "not good enough Ferry, you better do it again". My crewman, Fred was in there and he didn't say anything. He went down to the crewman's ready room and all the crewmen came up with a bucket. We washed the ceiling, walls, floor, the seats everything in there. He would do things like that.

**Mr. Cox:** Shows you what he thought of you didn't it?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yeah. When the executive officer came in again he said "o.k. it looks alright to me this time." I didn't realize it until just a few years ago at a ships reunion that he knew that the kids had come in there and helped clean it. It was at that time he acknowledged knowing about it.

**Mrs. Ferry:** When we have these reunions we are just as close to the crewmen and gunners as we are to the pilots.

**Mr. Cox:** Did he break your record or did you bring it home?

**Mr. Ferry:** My record got broken somehow, I'm not sure how. (laughter) It is terrible to have a record player and no records to play.

**Mr. Cox:** They say that boredom is one of the things that get you when you are at sea so long.

**Mr. Ferry:** Well you are always anxious to get off the ship. Our recreation area was in the Ulithi Islands. A little island called Mog Mog. We would go down there and fight the battle of Mog Mog. They had a baseball diamond and volleyball, things like that. Of course they had a bar and crap tables, things that maybe people liked. (laughter) One time I was down there and I was on the baseball team from the ship. I got to the crap table and I had about three dollars. I sent most of my regular pay home. They kept calling "Ferry get over here we need to start the game." The Chaplain's room was right across from mine on the ship so we had real close communication sometimes. He came up and said "let me play your three dollars." So I went out and played baseball and when I came back he had won three hundred dollars. (laughter) He wanted to give me the three hundred dollars. I said no, no, can't do that, but we have to figure out what to do with it then. They had taken the natives off of Mog Mog and put them on another island over there, especially the women. The Chaplain had

connections to get magazines and other things and so he purchased them and then took them to the natives that had been moved to the other island.

**Mr. Cox:** So your three dollars grew into three hundred.

**Mr. Ferry:** I certainly couldn't have done that well.

**Mr. Cox:** Before we close this interview, Francis, I would like for you to expand on the story you were telling me, during a break, concerning the design of the spinner on the P-38's your squadron were flying.

**Mr. Ferry:** On our way from San Deigo to Pearl Harbor on our way to WestPac for combat, we put a few planes in the ocean on take off. We tried to figure out what was happening with the planes because they were losing power on take-off. The engineer from Curtis Aircraft Company and I stood on the bow of the aircraft carrier and watched the take-offs. We noticed that the spinner was blocking the air-intake which is located the top of the cowling of the front of the SB-2 C and was cutting off the air in-flow causing an over rich mixture and therefore less power. consequently planes were going in (crashing). When we got to Pearl Harbor we experimented by taking the spinner off of my plane and my wingman and I then went through a series of test to determine what effect it had on the power. We discovered that it took less power for take-off because we usually took off in a three point

attitude and with the spinner off it cut less air off of the air-intake.

**Mr. Cox:** You said, a three point attitude. Exactly what is a three point attitude?

**Mr. Ferry:** It means tail low. Tail low. Normally that was the take-off procedure on an aircraft carrier. You would take off tail low. So we went over to Pearl Harbor and redesigned the spinner reducing it from an 18” spinner cover to a 9” spinner. That’s what we took into combat. We were one of the first planes with the smaller spinner and you will find them on the SB2-C’s and on later models of the SB3’s, SB4’s and SB5’s dive-bombers.

**Mr. Cox:** Correct me if I am wrong, but didn’t you get an accommodation from the Navy for that?

**Mr. Ferry:** Yes, I got an accommodation for that.

**Mr. Cox:** Your improvement probably saved a few lives.

**Mr. Ferry:** Well, at least it saved a few planes. There are plenty of planes on the ocean bottom that we left so maybe we did save a few planes.

**Mr Cox:** Well it has been a pleasure talking to you Francis. As I told you previously, I’ve been looking forward to doing this interview with you since we met several months ago when you were visiting the Admiral Nimitz Museum. I want to tell you again thank you for what you did

for your country so many years ago.

**Mr. Ferry:** I want to thank you and also the museum for all the things that you do for this nation. I think it is great what you are doing here at the museum. We have been here several times and we will always come back. It is one of the things we just take great pride in coming to visit. I did donate a print of the picture “The Sinking of the Battleship Yamato” by John White to the museum. I have at home a series of magazines that are called Navy News. I had never seen the magazine before. A friend of ours gave it to us the other day. It is a volume of magazines from January 1941 to January 1944. I have to find a place for them if people like those kinds of things.

**Mr. Cox:** I’m sure that the museum curator would be happy to accept them. Genevieve, I also want to thank you very much for your comments during this interview as it is interesting to get a young brides thoughts concerning her husband when he was in harms way. Thank you again we certainly appreciate it.

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