



Emmett S. Davis

United States Army Air Corps

Colonel

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:

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Geoff: What is your full name?

Emmett: My full name is Emmett Smith Davis.

Geoff: And where were you born?

Emmett: I was born in Roosevelt, Utah.

Geoff: What year?

Emmett: In 1918, December 10th, 1918.

Geoff: And I thought this was interesting, you had an interesting person in your background. Was it you father or your grandfather who was in the Spanish-American War?

Emmett: My father was in the Spanish-American War and he was one of Tory's Rough Riders, he was in an infantry from Wyoming, he was a cowboy in Wyoming when the Spanish-American War broke out. So he participated in that capacity as Theodore Roosevelt's rough rider.

Geoff: And you grew up in Vernal?

Emmett: No I lived in Roosevelt until the 3rd grade and then I moved to Duchesne and lived there through the 7th grade and then I moved to Salt Lake City and went to Roosevelt Jr. High School, East High School, and the University of Utah. Then I went to California.

Geoff: What did you do down in California?

Emmett: Well I was first down there, I went to work for Purex Corporation and then I went into the Cadet Program of the US Army Air Corps, and that was in April of 1940.

Geoff: What made you want to fly?

Emmett: Well when I lived in Duchesne, the guy that brought the mail from Salt Lake City, his wife was my 4th grade teacher and he bought an old jetty and he used to fly it off the west bench and I used to go up and watch him fly that old airplane and I guess that was really when I got struck with being an aviator.

Geoff: You had some other friends you joined with and they didn't get picked up, is that the story I remember? You had a natural affinity for math, I think that's what you told me and it gave you an advantage.

Emmett: Well I don't know, I was always pretty good with figures and I was mechanically minded and, I don't know, that's - but I really think what gave me an advantage was that I was a boy scout and I lived the boy scout code.

Geoff: So, and you chose fighters, why did you choose fighters?

Emmett: Well I really wanted to go into B-17's and my instructor in my advanced flying school in Kelly Field, Texas, he says, "No Davis you're a fighter pilot and that's where you want to be." So that's what put me in fighters.

Geoff: Why did he say that?

Emmett: Well I just, I think that fighter pilots are unique in the fact that, you know, they're in command of the entire spectrum. They're the pilot, the navigator, the bombadeer, the gunner, and the radio operator, and anything else that goes with running an airplane – he does it all, and so we always kind of thought that fighter pilots were a little unique.

Geoff: Alright, tell us how you got to Hawaii.

Emmett: Well I when I graduated from flying school which was in San Antonio, Texas in November of 1940 I was assigned out in the field, the 20th pursuit group commanded by Ira C. Ager who later became a 4-Star General. And I went into the 77th Squadron which was commanded by Captain McCauley and then come February of 1941 they asked for volunteers to take a bunch of P-36's, that's a Curtis War hawk, to Hawaii on an aircraft carrier and a bunch of us volunteered and I was one of them. And we took 36 P-38's from Hamilton down to March Field and then to San Diego and loaded them on the USS Enterprise and then we set sail for Hawaii and when we were about 100 miles out from Hawaii we took off on the deck of the carrier and landed in Hawaii.

Geoff: So you were Army Pilots taking off of a Navy carrier?

Emmett: Yes, we were Army Air Corps and that happens to be one of the scariest things I'd ever done in my life. If you can imagine sitting on that carrier and the flag men hold up these flag hands and he gets you to rev up your engine and then as the bow goes down, he waves to you and says, "Go!" And you go full throttle and it looks like you're diving into the ocean, but of course by the time you get to the end of the ship the bow would back up and you're launched, but that first two or three seconds was pretty scary.

Geoff: So you landed in Hawaii?

Emmett: We landed in Hawaii, a place called Wheeler Field, which is about 12 miles north of Pearl Harbor.

Geoff: And that's where you settled in?

Emmett: And that's where I was stationed until the war started.

Geoff: A very interesting story you had to tell us about, December 7th.

Emmett: Well it so happens that I was living on the north shore of Pearl Harbor in a place called Pearl City and a week before the war, why they put us on alert and they moved me back to the base and I lived in the Officer's Club and we went on alert at daylight in the morning and stayed on alert until night all during that week. And then Saturday came along and we, they stood us down and we had an inspection Saturday morning and we had a dance in the Officer's Club Saturday night and about 8 o'clock the next morning or just before 8, why the Japanese hit us on Sunday morning.

Geoff: Tell us what you were doing, how you woke up that day.

Emmett: Well I was, it just so happened that a bunch of us were having a few card games after the dance and we stayed up a little late. So I was sleeping in another fellow's living room on a couch next to a window and his name was Thorenson, and he came in and he shook me and says, "Japanese are here!" And I looked out the window and I saw a Japanese dive bomber diving down on the flight line and so I jumped out and put my flight suit on and went outside and I run into an officer by the name of Collier, Lieutenant Collier and he and I jumped to his convertible and we drove to the flight line and while we were driving to the flight line a Japanese aero strafed us but he was too close to us and couldn't get his guns to bare on us, but he did shoot up the road right in front of us. And we got down in back of the hangars and parked our car and raced to the flight line and our airplanes were all on fire and there, at Wheeler Field, the wind is generally from the east to the west. And they started the airplanes from the east on fire, so when I got back to where my squadron was in the middle of the ramp, the smoke had kind of protected our airplanes and I pulled 4 airplanes out of the fire, or the closest to the fire. And the 4th one I got into was a P-40 and it looked like the attack was about over, so I taxied it out to a bunker on the parameter of the field, a bunker, and parked it in there to protect it a little bit and got in my car and drove back to the flight line and picked up 6 machine guns and a Sergeant and he and I went back to that bunker and put the guns in the airplane and loaded it with ammunition, and while we were doing that a Japanese dive bomber came over and strafed us again but the bunker protected us. And he was so low that we could see the rear gunner sitting in backwards in the back of this dive-bomber and he was grinning at us as he flew over and he couldn't have been more than 50 feet above us. And we got the airplane loaded and I took off and one of the

miracles of the war, I fired all 6 machine guns and they fired and I called fighter control down at Fort Shafter on Honolulu and told him I was airborne with a P-40 and they sent me to Barber's Point to investigate a landing that had been reported there. And we had an Army Artillery Unit there at Barber's Point, but there was no landing there. Then I came back and I intercepted three other P-40's that had just taken off, one of which happened to be Lieutenant Gabreski, who I might add Lieutenant Gabreski wound up being the leading American Ace in the European Theater with 32 victories.

Geoff: He writes about you in his biography?

Emmett: Yes.

Geoff: What does he say about you in his biography?

Emmett: Well in the book called Gabby, why he tells about running the dogfight and he and I used to dogfight each other a lot. And the way you do these dogfights, you fly along parallel and then each would go 180 degrees out, turn and come back and when you got adjacent to each other the fight would start, and you would try to get on the other guys tail. And Gabreski told in his book about how good he got at dog fighting where he could handle almost everybody else except for one pilot by the name of Cyclone Davis who he wasn't ever able to compete with.

Geoff: Alright, so you're heading form Barber's Point, you catch up with these other P-40's, what happens then?

Emmett: Well then they called me and told me to escort some B-18's from Hicken Field, which lies just south of Pearl Harbor. And as I circled Pearl Harbor, by that time every Navy guns could see me started shooting at me so I pulled away and there was no way I could get to Hicken Field and so I went back to Wheeler Field and told control to get the Navy under control if they wanted an escort out of Hicken Field. So that was the anti-aircraft fire I happened to see during the war was the US Navy shooting at me.

Geoff: Alright, so what happened then?

Emmett: Well then we, of course, I guess the second attack had already occurred and the Japanese withdrew and we didn't know what was going to happen, but I flew three more missions that day and I never really ever contacted any enemy. And then of course from then on out we just flew patrol missions and we didn't what the Japanese were going to do but they never came back to the island, they'd achieved their objectives by knocking out our battleships. And their aim, it appears now, was to go ahead and invade all the islands in the South Pacific they could capture, and they felt that the only deterrent to them being able to accomplish that mission, which included the Philippine Islands, would be the US Navy. And so that was the purpose of sacking Pearl Harbor was to disable the US Navy so they couldn't interfere with their objectives of invading all of the islands of the South Pacific, down through New Guinea and maybe into Australia.

Geoff: What did you see in the airway? You saw Pearl Harbor from the air; you must have gotten a real good view.

Emmett: Oh yeah, it was...

Geoff: Can you describe it for us?

Emmett: You know, there was several battleships burning and, you know, just big clouds of smoke and it kind of looked like just kind of like in the movie Pearl Harbor.

Geoff: How did you feel?

Emmett: Well it was, we were astonished and surprised and as a matter of fact they made a movie called 'Tora! Tora! Tora!' and that was the code word the Japanese had to let them know if they had achieved the surprise, which is a real element of their success. And when they did their attack on Pearl Harbor and Wheeler Field and the Marine Base, why they sent the

word to the control ship, “Tora! Tora! Tora!” That they had achieved, “Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!”

Geoff: And how did you feel about the Japanese at that point?

Emmett: Of course we were trained to be soldiers and to be fighters and of course they had assumed the position of the enemy and it was our job to attempt to destroy their will to fight. That’s the purpose of the war is for the military to destroy the enemies will to fight and once you’ve achieved that, why you’ve gained victory.

Geoff: Did you have any personal feelings about the Japanese?

Emmett: Oh, just outside them being the enemies, why no, no personal feelings per say except that it was, you know, they didn’t deserve a lot of mercy according to our viewpoint.

Geoff: So tell us about how you got to, what happened then?

Emmett: Well of course nothing really happened in Hawaii and then the Navy got engaged in the Battle of Midway in early 1942 and after the Battle of Midway they had lost quite a few experienced fighter pilots. So Commander Thatch, who later became Admiral Thatch, he and a Navy Lieutenant by the name Butchell Hare came to shore on Oahu to recruit a few Army Air Corp Pilots and 8 of us volunteered to go with Butchell Hare to Maui Island in Hawaii and learn how to fly Gruman F-4 F-Wildcat Airplane, which we did. And we went over and went through an intensive gunnery training and field carrier landing training so we could aboard ship with the airplanes and some of the Navy tactics. And just as we were about ready to be taken aboard the carrier, why the Army changed their mind and decided they wouldn’t release us. So then after that I had an opportunity to volunteer with a bunch of pilots to go to New Guinea and the 5th Air Force established itself in Australia and advanced headquarters up in New Guinea. And I flew with 14 other pilots in back of an old DC-3; we flew from Hawaii to Christmas Island, to the Fiji Islands, to New Caledonia, and then to Australia, Charter’s tires. And then went to Brisbane and I was assigned to the 8th fighter group, which was located in Townson, Australia and I was put in

the 35th fighter squadron of the 8th fighter group, and part of the other kids that were with me went to the other two squadrons which was the 36th fighter squadron and the 80th fighter squadron. And then the 35th and the 36th squadron, after a short orientation period, we went to Milne Bay, which is the southern tip of New Guinea and the Japanese had invaded there and then the Army had gone in and dislocated them and we were able to build an airfield in the middle of a coconut grove, so that's where I started operating in P-39's from Milne Bay. And I was there for almost 6 months in the 35th squadron, but that airplane had such short range that we really didn't have enough range to make contact with the Japanese which were operating way to the north of us.'

Geoff: People don't understand how big New Guinea is.

Emmett: New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. From tip to tip its about close to 1,800 miles, its almost 300 miles wider. The only island larger than New Guinea is Greenland.

Geoff: And how high are the mountains there?

Emmett: Well there was one mountain on the western, midwestern part of the island which goes as high as 16-18,000 feet, Mt. Hogan is about 14,000 feet which is about a third of the way up the island in the center of the island.

Geoff: Is there snow up there?

Emmett: Oh yeah, they I guess sometimes, their wintertime of course is our summertime in the United States because they're below the equator. But generally it's a very tropical island, you're only – the northern part of New Guinea is just a couple of degrees off of the equator.

Geoff: And so, the way you were fighting, explain to people the distances involved in trying to fight the Japanese.

Emmett: Well the Japanese, there big strongholds were in the north in Hollandia, Wewak and an Island just to the east of New Guinea called New Britain, and on the eastern end of New Britain was Rabaul and that big harbor the Japanese Navy had taken and built several airfields there. And the people that attacked Rabaul were the kids in the P-38's, they were the only ones that had enough range to reach Rabaul and a lot of the P-38 pilots, that's where they engaged most of the enemies, was over Rabaul.

Geoff: How far was Rabaul?

Emmett: Rabaul from, the major port in New Guinea was Port Moresby, which was over on the Coral Sea or the western part of the southern third of New Guinea, the southwestern part. Port Moresby to Rabaul must be about 500 miles I guess.

Geoff: So, you get to the 8th fighter group and you start flying combat missions, what happens?

Emmett: Well we flew combat missions, we'd go out on patrol up over a place called Buna which the northeastern side of the island opposite from where Port Moresby was. And then we, of course we flew patrol missions over New Guinea, but we never engaged the enemy except one time when we first got P-38's over there, the 39th squadron of the 35th group was operating out of 12 Mile which was 12 miles from Port Moresby and we named the airfields according to how far they were from Port Moresby. And they were operating out of 12 Mile and they had to stand the airplanes for some kind of maintenance and so I took 16 P-39's up there and we flew their patrol missions. And we did we get in one fight up there but I didn't happen to be airborne that day, one of my kids shot down 7 airplanes and that was the first and only Japanese airplanes we ever shot down in a P-39 in the first 6 months I was over there.

Geoff: So you say your kids, were you in a position of command at that time?

Emmett: Well I was acting Commander, that Commander was a Captain by the name of Ben Green but I was the Senior Operations Officer and I was also Captain and I was kind of put in charge.

Geoff: How old were you?

Emmett: I was, at that time I was 24, just turned 23 years old I guess. And shortly after that we moved out of New Guinea back to Australia because about 60 percent of us had malaria of which I was one of them and when I got back to New Guinea, why then they made me the squadron Commander of the 35th squadron with P-30's still and they re-equipped us with some new pilots and gave us some new airplanes. And we went back to New Guinea and I went to a place called 17 Mile, which was right on the Waigani Swamp just the southern part, there's a big swamp on about a third of the way just about Port Moresby and it runs, its about as big as Utah County and Salt Lake County put together and if you can imagine a tropical swamp like that, well that was Waigani Swamp and we were on the southern shores of that and we flew across and up to a place called, the midsection of New Guinea –Lae, New Guinea. As a matter of fact the name Lae, New Guinea is where Amelia Earhart took off on her last flight was from Lae, and she was flying towards Truck and we never heard from her again.

Geoff: When was your first real combat yourself?

Emmett: Well after I went back to New Guinea and went to the 17 Mile on the Waigani Swamp then they brought P-47's over there, the Thunderbolts, and they couldn't operate off of some of the runways but my runway was adequate for them so they moved me to a runway called 3 Mile and they took over 17 Mile. And when I got to 3 Mile, why then I heard that they brought over 90 new P-39's and 90 new P-40N's which was a stripped down P-40, and I, we only had two squadrons of P-40's equipped at that time and four squadrons of P-39's and I called General Wordsmith, a Commander of the 5th Fighter Command, and told him that I would like to change my squadron to P-40's and he thought it was a good idea and so he let me do it. And we re-equipped ourselves with the P-40N's and in September I took a flight of them to a little island, a little runway in the middle of New Guinea called Selesele. And from there we had enough range to reach Wewak, New Guinea, which was a big strong hold of the Japanese. And I took, on September 23rd, 1943 I took 16 P-40's into a little mountain strip with engineers and made force called Bina Bina and there we refueled them out of 55 gallon barrels and we sat in the cockpit

and waited for the B-24's and when they flew over we took off and joined them and flew protection for them while they attacked Wewak, New Guinea. And then as we withdrew from Wewak that day, why a couple of Japanese fighters, one of which was a Tony attacked my blue flight, which was the flight flying on my left and one of my kids called in and told blue flight that they had two enemy bogies at 6 o'clock and the kid that was number four in that fight, he rolled over and dove for the jungle and I rolled over and started after the Tony. And I could see the P-40 pulling away from the Tony, you know the Tony broke and started climbing back up and of course I was above him and that was to my advantage and I dropped in on his tail and shot him down, that way my first airplane I shot down was a Japanese Tony which is an inline engine kind of like the P-40.

Geoff: So that's your first plane you shot down. How did you feel?

Emmett: It was, you know, the other airplane, one of my flight leaders was a Lieutenant Captain Thomas and he shot down the other one. And of course when we got back to our base at Selesele, why as soon as the airman could see that the guns had been fired they wanted to know the story you know, and of course they were as much a part of the combat group as the pilots were and so we of course filled them in with all of it and it was, you know, just part of a day's work.

Geoff: So, you were flying a lot of missions.

Emmett: Yeah, all total I guess I flew 267 combat missions of which I led 264 of them. And I never lost a pilot on a mission that I was leading but I did lose some pilots but they didn't happen to be out of the flights that I was leading.

Geoff: So can we jump ahead to that day where you really mixed it up?

Emmett: So anyway, we were stationed just below Selesele, in New Guinea there's a big central valley called Markham Valley and the Markham River runs down from the northwest of New Guinea down into Lae and that's where it goes into the gulf down there into the ocean. And that's called Markham Valley and there were several airdromes built there at Nadzab in

Markham Valley and that's where 5th Air Force Fighter Command and the 5th Air Force Headquarters advanced headquarters had moved to. And so I took my squadron of P-40's to Nadzab and then we'd taken a point, there's a cape that goes up the northeast side of New Guinea and in-between that island of New Britain that I mentioned and the island of New Guinea and where the two islands are closest together, Finschhafen was on the left and Cape Gloucester was on the right. And that channel we'd captured Finschhafen from the Japanese and then they built a pairs plank runway over there and I moved my P-40's over to Finschhafen in the late part of 1943. And then the plan was to land the 1st Marine Division on Cape Gloucester which was a big island, the western end of a big island just to the east of us. Cape Gloucester, the 1st Marine Division was in a big float tail of it, came out of Buna which was about a couple of hundred miles south of Finschhafen on New Guinea. And the day before which would happen to be the 24th of December 1943 came out and was on its way to Cape Gloucester where the landing was going to take place on daylight the next morning. And one of my squadron pilots a flight leader by the name of Harold McClellan was leading a flight of P-40's and he run across a Japanese nail bomber which was tracking this fleet and reporting it back to the Japanese. And he decided to make an attack on this nail bomber which was a twin engine reconnaissance bomber and he remember reading the statistics that the bomber had a tail gunner, so he decided to do a side approach to attack it and his wingman was a kid that we couldn't hardly get him to tell his name and we called him Gabby, Gabby Holder, but he wouldn't say very much and he was flying McClellan's wing. So McClellan pulled out to do this side attack and of course Gabby had seen the nail bomber and he thought the Captain Mack hadn't seen it and so he drove up the tail and as Mack got himself in position Gabby Holder shot it down. And of course that disturbed his Captain a little bit and he spoke to him kind of roughly when they got back and he said, "Well I didn't think you saw him Captain Mack."

Geoff: Tell us about the day that you shot down all those planes.

Emmett: Well anyway, the next morning was the landing at Cape Gloucester. When we landed the 1st Marine Division and I was put on patrol over the landing area with my P-40's early in the morning we thought the Japanese would be there, you know, because we had shot down that reconnaissance plane the day before by 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning at least. And so I was on

patrol for 4 hours and no Japanese showed up and we planted the whole Marine Division ashore and I had the second mission setup to go back to New Guinea and refuel and it was just 35 minutes and we'd be back over the freight again. And I told them if we didn't get in a fight in the morning then I would lead the second mission, and so we didn't get in a fight in the morning and we went back and refueled but I had fired my guns a few times just to see if they were working and apparently when they saw the guns were fired they pulled the gun camera film out of my airplane. And before they put it back in, why we refueled them and took off. So I led the second mission and we had my whole group, the 8th Fighter Group, which I was just a Squadron Commander in, met the enemy that day. The P-38's met them half way to Rabaul and they broke up their formation and got them a little disoriented and that was one thing about the Japanese, if they were so regimented, if they could stay on their plan they were pretty good fighters but once you got them disoriented they didn't have the ingenuity that the old American boy had because they hadn't learned the things we learned on baseball diamonds and football fields and a lot of other things, you know, that we do. And so when things started going wrong the American boy he can come up and stay forward and adjust to it and the Japanese didn't that quite so well. Anyway, the P-38's shot down 14 of them and we hit them and my 16 P-48's we got credit for 18, but what happened to me was I shot down one of the first two that I saw were up above me and I flew up to them and I shot down the leader and then the wingman and my wingman said, "Nice shooting Colonel." Or Captain I guess, no I was a Colonel then, a Major I guess I was. And anyway, then we got into the middle of this big dogfight and my wingman couldn't stay with me and so when I shot another one down head-on and I shot another one off a tail of P-40 and I did couple other shots, I made about 14 passes at them. I finally ran out of ammunition and I calculated I shot down 6 and probably 7 airplanes, but I had no film and so there was really not a record of it. But I got credit for the first two because I had a witness for that, and all totaled my squadron shot down 18 that day and the P-47's which is another squadron in the 8th group shot down 6, so in all total we got credit for 38 plus the 3 or 4 that I didn't get credit for. And then the following day...

Geoff: How many pilots did you lose? How many pilots did your group lose?

Emmett: Well we, on that particular fight we lost two P-38 pilots, one we never got back, the Captain of the Squadron Commander, Major Craig, we never got back, but his Operations Officer, Captain Taylor, we did get back he parachuted into the ocean and we reclaimed him. We only lost two people in that fight.

Geoff: So you felt pretty good at the end of that.

Emmett: Well it was a very victorious day for us, we had, all total the group had 38 confirmed victories and I never pursued ever trying to get credit for the other airplanes because of what happened the next day. And this is an interesting story, its not a very good one and not very flattering for me, but it just so happens that the next day we, the P-38 pilots that we lost were on the south side of New Britain which sent out a flying an Army Air Corps flying boat, which was an amphibious flying boat that had landing gear, one that they could operate off of land or off of sea. And we were escorting it, it was codename Mocho, and my squadron and I were leading it and we took Mocho out to look for these down pilots. And we stayed between Rabaul and the flying boat because that's where the Japanese would come from and in one of my swings up north towards Rabaul, I run across a flying boat which was down below me, a completely black no markings on it whatsoever in defiance of all the rules of engagement you had to mark your airplanes according to who you were, and this was absolutely no markings on it. And the Japanese had a flying boat we nicknamed the Cherry and it just looked just like our flying boat, just like a PBY. So anyway, I called this here flying boat on every channel we had available to us and on the emergency channel and I could get no response out of them. And my kids, they wanted to shoot it down, they knew it was a Japanese. And I said, "No, I'm going to fly underneath him and see if he's got any markings underneath his wing." So I flew underneath the flying boat to look for markings underneath his wings and as I flew under it he had no markings underneath his wing, but his tail gunner opened up at me and he fired right across the top of me and I could see his gun shooting across him, so I pulled up and did a sharp shown down in front of him and shot his left engine out and he landed in the water and called me on the radio just as clear as anything and said, my code name was Brandy, and he says, "Brandy leader I'm Gardenia One," which was a codename for the Navy, "and you just shot me down." So I called Mocho and I said, "I just shot down a flying boat up here, he says he's Gardenia," and I says, "you come

up and take a look at him and keep your finger on the mic and if he's hostile, why we'll sink him." And Mocho came up and landed and decided it was the US Navy and they picked up crew and they carried, you know, a crew of about 7 or 8 people on it and put it on Mocho and Mocho was able to – two of them were injured right in the nose. One kid had a 50 caliber, just cut the skin on his hands he must have had his hands close together, and the other one got hit with a 50 caliber across his thighs but just a flesh wound. So they told me they had these two wounded and then I flew back to Finschhafen and got the ambulances all ready to receive them and take care of them, which they did. And then my commanding General he wanted me to come over and report to him exactly what happened and I went over and told him exactly what happened and he says, "Now was it Army or Navy?" And I says, "It was Navy." And he says, "Well that serves them right for not marking their airplanes." And the next day, why that Navy squadron had a whole squad of airplanes that were not marked, and the next day they complied with the Geneva Convention and they had all their airplanes marked so you could identify them. But anyway, because of that I never pursued ever trying to receive credit for the other airplanes I'd shot down.

Geoff: So you get further into the war here, anything while we're in the New Guinea area...

Emmett: Well right at that time it so happened that the Commander of the 8th fighter group was given another assignment to go with the Navy up to invade a place called Saidor. And so they sent me to Sydney, Australia after I'd had that mishap for a little rest and recreation we called R and R, and I went down to Sydney for a week and came back and joined my unit and when I joined it I found out I was no longer the Squadron Commander but I was now the Group Commander, and I assumed, at that time, Commander of the 8th Fighter Group. And we had one P-38 squadron and one P-47 squadron and the P-40 squadron that I'd had, and then they moved the group to Cape Gloucester where we'd landed that Marine Division, we only stayed there about three weeks and then they wanted me to move my whole group back to Nadzab where we changed the group to P-38's. So in early 1944 they promoted me from a Lieutenant Colonel, I was Group Commander of the 8th Fighter Group and I changed all three squadrons to P-38 Locket Lightening's.

Geoff: So what was your next?

Emmett: Well we really became dive-bombers there and I, the big hotspot for the Japanese besides Wewak was Hollandia. And we decided, the Military decided to bypass Wewak and invade Hollandia and take away the northern most base of the Japanese on the island of New Guinea. They did have some other islands just north of New Guinea that they operated from, but we so we attacked Wewak and Rabaul very hard everyday to make the Japanese think that's where our next landing was going to be. And then we bypassed them and landed at Halai and did a dual landing on a little place called Wakde and Hollandia. And after two days of fighting we'd only lost 16 men, if you can imagine the number of men we lost on a lot of the other islands we took, but in Hollandia, the Battle of Hollandia and Wakde together, jointly we only lost 16 men.

Geoff: On the ground?

Emmett: On the ground. And of course, I led the first combat mission I even flew in the P-38 was over Hollandia and the only time I ever saw the Japanese in that thing was in my rearview mirror, I never got any of them in front of me so of course I didn't shoot any of them down, but luckily I didn't get shot down either.

Geoff: So how many men were under your command?

Emmett: Well let's see, we kept about, we had about 35 pilots and a few other Officers and then you had about 1,200 men in a squadron, so you really was about 4,000 men in a group.

Geoff: And so you're the Commander at the age of what?

Emmett: And I was 25 years old.

Geoff: So...

Emmett: So anyway, I was going to tell you an interesting story here. After we took Hollandia we were still based at Nadzab and there were three Japanese bases on that little island called Biak, which is just north and off the coast of New Guinea and the Army went in and landed and captured the airbases but they failed to secure the area behind them and Japanese Imperial Marines moved in behind them and cut them off from their beach and their supply and they had to fight their way back. And so we lost those airdromes again to where we couldn't operate from them and so the Corps of Engineers went into a little island, a little tropical island called Owi, and no inhabitants on this island, but they cut out a runway out of the coral and the jungle. And after they had been there six days I'd sent in a team of men to setup a camp and they'd gone in and setup a camp for me and I took a flight of P-38's up the Jeffman Islands which is north of New Guinea on patrol and we came back and recovered it on the island of Owi and so I landed a squadron of 16 P-38's there six days after the engineers had started building that runway. And after we landed I'd been up for about 8 or 10 hours and I told the Sergeant after we inspected the camp, I says, "Sergeant you got a place where I could lay down and take a little nap?" I says, "I've been up since a long time today." And he says, "We just put up a new tent Colonel, right next to the jungle there and they've got a couple canvas cots in it." And so I went in and there was canvas cot on each side of the tent and I laid down on this canvas cot and as I went to sleep and as I awoken, sitting on the other canvas cot with a 45 pistol pointed right at me was my Captain Peters who had setup this camp and he said, "Don't move Colonel!" and I thought the kid had been up there and slipped something and was going to shoot me. And, "BOOM!" he shot that gun and I jumped two feet in the air from a prone position and he shot the head of a two step viper that had crawled out of the jungle and curled up underneath my canvas cot. Boy you talk about being scared, that was pretty scary.

Geoff: Great. So did you have any more mix-ups with Japanese when you got the P-38's?

Emmett: Well as far as, at that time I came home. They sent me home because I'd been over a long time and they rotated me home, I had secret orders that told the Army and the United States that I was to come home for 60 to 90 days and be returned to that theater. But of course the people back here had different ideas about it and they had a rule that they wouldn't return us over there for 6 months. And so 6 months to the day after I came back I was returned over there, but I

did, they did give me a fighter group to straighten out down in Drator, Louisiana which was a P-40 group and I went down there as a Commander. I went first to a group in Thomasville, Georgia and then over to Drator, Louisiana and then I went back to New Guinea, and by that time the 8th Fighter Group had moved into the Philippine Islands and they sent me over there and reassigned me to kind of an administrative kind of a combat headquarters called the 85th Wing. And I went in there as a Deputy Commander and of course the Commander was an old friend of mine and he had asked for me and I had told him, you know, I said, "I was supposed to come back over and get my old group back." And he said, "I know that," he says, "If you really want it we'll go up and see General Smith." Who was in Commander of the 8th Fighter Group. So we flew up to, we was on the island of Leyte and we flew up to the Island of Luzon where Clark Field was and I went in to see General Smith to tell him that he had a Group Commander in waiting for a fighter group and he said, "Cyclone you're just they guy I wanted to see!" And he assigned me out to be the Liaison Air Force Liaison Officer with the 7th Amphibious Force, which is located in Subic Bay right off from the Manila Bay. And so I went aboard there and there was an Amphibious Force commanded by an Admiral and at that time it was just time to invade Borneo and so Admiral Royal was going to take the 5th Amphibious Force into an invasion of the island of Borneo way to the south of the Philippines. And they ordered me to go down to observe this invasion so I flew down to a little island south of the Philippines and caught a flying boat to take me out to the Admiral Royal flagship. And I stayed on this flagship and watched the invasion of a little island called Taracón right off from Borneo.

Geoff: Tell us what an amphibious invasion looks like.

Emmett: You know, you have a bunch of landing ships they can drive right into the beach and let the front end of the ship down and the troops and the vehicles and everything come off from them and they're called Amphibious landing vehicles. And you know, you go in and according to how big the invasion is and how big of force you're going to put forth, why you might be 20 vehicles or 120 vehicles and in addition for support you have cruisers and battleships that sail the shore and in addition to coordinate air packs that come in we used air tacks out of the southern part of the Philippines flying B-25s to support that landing. So its big big joint Army Marine

Navy adventure to do an invasion. As a matter of fact when we invaded Okinawa we had 50,000 in Okinawa.

Geoff: Were you involved with Okinawa at all?

Emmett: Well I was involved, after I went back, oh after the invasion into Borneo then I went back and General Smith called me and gave me the 8th Fighter Group back which was flying P38s out of a little Philippine Island called Mindoro which is just south and west of Luzon. And out of there I was strictly a bombing outfit, we were close air support for the Army for all the troops north of Manila as we chased the Japanese out of the Cagayan Valley and I'd take my P38s up there, 48-50 of us each a couple of times a day and bomb the Japanese in front of our Army guys. And a matter of fact, a lot of my experience in close air support was gained right there and later after the war I went to Fort Bragg and helped right the doctrine for close air support. Then later went to NATO when it was in Paris with General Norstadt and rewrote the NATO doctrine for close air support.

Geoff: So were you involved with Okinawa? Were you involved with Okinawa at all? The invasion of Okinawa?

Emmett: Well the invasion of Okinawa occurred about the same time that D-Day did over in Europe in early 1945 and so when I was at Mindoro and then they decided to move me to a little island right off of Okinawa, just south of it called Iyashima and I sent troops up there and they setup a camp at Iyashima and I moved my P38s up to Clark Field on the island of Luzon and was setting there daily waiting for orders to go to Okinawa. And this was in early August 1945 and on August the 6th we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and on August the 9th we dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. On August the 9th I got orders to move my 75 P38s to Iyashima, which we took off and landed at Iyashima about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. And my Deputy Commander was there and he met me and he said, "Cyclone," he says, "General Smith wants to meet with you right away over on the island of Okinawa." Which was just four or five miles to the north, so I got in a light airplane and flew over to General Smith's headquarters and went into see the General and he says, "Cyclone I want you to load every airplane you have in commission in the

morning up with napalm,” which is a fire bomb, “and go in and do a low level high speed bombing attack on a town called Kumomuta.” Kumomuta is a town on the island of Kyushu about I’d estimate about 100 miles southeast of Nagasaki. So anyway, I went back and put out the order and we loaded the airplanes up with this fire bomb, napalm, and the next morning I took off at daybreak and I had 62 P38s and we flew up to the island of Kyushu and I flew off over the water away from the shore for protection until I got to where I was going to make the turn in. And what I decided to do, my plan was and what I’d briefed was we’d fly north of Kumomuta and turn in and go down through a mountain pass and bomb Kumomuta from the north going south. And for some reason or another I got the strangest feeling that that was the improper attack that I really should turn early and go in and attack from the south going north. And so, because everybody followed me, why I didn’t really need to re-brief anyone, but as I approached the coast of Kyushu, I turned that whole flight of 62 P38s in a new direction and went with a new plan in mind and just as I did, where I would’ve been if I hadn’t have turned, right at my altitude where I would’ve crossed the beach the sky went black with inner aircraft fire, and I suspected that the artillery might have decimated me. But as it was I didn’t lose a P38, we dove down, I turned the flight, we went in and did a low level attack and you can imagine this fire bomb is much more effective if you can deliver at a low level and at high speeds. Because it sets on fire everything it touches, and when you drop them, why they have no forward velocity hardly and so they just burn what they hit, but when you drop them out of a fighter like that you really destroy a lot of. And when we did that to Kumomuta and the Japanese surrendered four days later, so you know, I kind of smile when I tell my story that the two big bombs got their attention and my 62 P38s brought them to the surrender table.

Geoff: Now were you involved with the mission flying over the Missouri or bringing in the Japanese?

Emmett: Well a little bit I guess I was. After the Japanese surrendered, really was on August 14th, 1945. And General McArthur’s headquarter was in Manila at that time and he told the Japanese to send an envoy to Manila to arrange the protocol for the signing of the surrender terms aboard the USS Missouri which would occur September the 2nd, 1945 in Tokyo Bay. So the Japanese sent an envoy to Manila and they put them on Betty Bombers and flew them out of

Japan to land at Iyashima, my island, and then we'd put them on an Army C54 a Douglas C54 and fly them to Manila. And so I took off with my three P38 squadrons and two B25 reconnaissance squadron airplanes and we intercepted the Japanese and protected them and brought them into the landing area in Iyashima and from there they all fled the Japanese envoy off of their two Betty Bombers which were painted white with green crosses on them, according to the instructions that we'd given them. And we put them on the C54 and then one of my squadrons escorted that C54 to Manila, so from that aspect I participated a little in the surrender terms, but I had nothing to do with the signing of the documents aboard the Missouri on September the 2nd. However, we were a designated invasion force into Japan and in later in 1945 I took the 8th Fighter Group into Fukiyoka, Japan, which is on the northwestern part of the island of Kyushu, Fukiyoka. As a matter of fact the Mormons have built a temple there. And we took over an old factory and their offices and their cooking places and setup my headquarters there, and I stayed there until December of 1945 and then I was rotated back to the States and I came back to the States on an old Liberty ship out of Tokyo Bay and up through the Aleutian Islands and down into San Diego and it so happened that I was the Senior Officer so I was the Troop Commander too and I had 35 troops and I just decided a good way to come on that slow boat and it took us about three weeks. And we landed in San Diego and then I went through a processing station in Santa Ana and they reassigned me to an Air Force Board in Orlando, Florida and I stopped by Salt Lake and married my pretty wife, Margery who was a Salt Lake girl that I'd known before I'd left to go overseas. And as a matter of fact I've always said that she's my inspiration invasion, my aviator of dreams, and all that exists in love, tender thought, stirring sweetness, is uttered by her presence. So anyway, that beautiful little blonde, brown-eyed girl went to Orlando with me and of course being a little Salt Lake girl she didn't know what she had gotten into with an old fighter pilot. And from there I went back to Edging Field, Florida which was an air proving ground command and I became a test pilot and stayed in the testing business for five years and my first two children were born at Edging Field.

Geoff: I have a question for you; you talked about something a little earlier. The American character, the American boy, you have a really nice thing you say about that. What makes, and why we're so, our ingenuity, our patriotism, really expand on that.

Emmett: Well, you know, Military guys become very regimented and that's what we found with the Japanese. With the American boy, he can become regimented but when that discipline breaks down, because of the way he's raised, I think, and the way we do things on the school grounds and the way we compete with each other. It just seems to give that American boy the edge and I really think that's why we fighter pilots had a 10:1 victory edge over the Japanese rather than them having it over us, because when we got into a fight we could adapt to a changing situation right on the spot because of learning how to do that playing marbles or whatever we did, you know, football, baseball, and I just think the American boy is our way of life it lends itself to that.

Geoff: What about their patriotism?

Emmett: Well, you know, they were patriot to the Japanese to deaths end; I think we were a little smarter than that. Our patriotism was just as strong and just as valiant but we didn't, we weren't suicidal in the way we fought a war.

Geoff: And how did you feel about your men?

Emmett: My own men were really very special, you know, they were so tremendous and they never gave you any argument, they'd say, "Yes sir, no sir, why don't you do it this way sir." You know, it was just, they knew how to do it too, you don't think that little old Captain and Major like I was at age 24 that the real Master Sergeants didn't teach me how to run an outfit, because they did and they did it so coolly that you didn't know that they were leading you with a hand but they did.

Geoff: Well your men cared about you a great deal and why was that? Why did they care so much about you?

Emmett: Well I think because I paid attention to what they did too, you know, you put a man working and you then you don't go around and see what he does pretty soon he's not going to do his work very well. And I made it a principle to go around and watch them work and encourage

them and see that they were taken care of and see that the bosses looked after the troops under them and so we became a community and we cared for each other and we looked after each other and we respected each other. And we lived according to a code, you did what you were supposed to do, you didn't lie, you didn't cheat, you didn't steal, and it was just a good code, you learned it as a boy scout. As a matter of fact when I had the 48th wing in the early 60's over in England, my Commanding General flew in one day and we visited together and he said, "I just the won the highest award that had ever been given in Europe for a fighter group readiness." And he says, "Cyclone, you run this group like a bunch of boy scouts." And I says, "Is that a reprimand General?" And he said, "No, that's the highest compliment I can pay."

Geoff: Okay, tell us how you felt about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was it a good thing and why, or what's your feelings on that? Because you were facing the invasion of Japan, your unit would've been one of the front units.

Emmett: You mean as far as the atomic bombs were concerned? Well we didn't know much about it at that time because we weren't involved in that end, the planning of it. But as I look back now in retrospect, if we would've had to invade Japan we would have probably wound up with over a million casualties and I just say that those two big bombs really accelerated the end of the war and really minimized the amount of casualties that we would have had. If we would have had to invade Japan, because knowing what happened at Okinawa, I just can't imagine what we would have had to go through in order to conquer Japan without those two big bombs.

Geoff: And you took three weeks to come home, you were a Commanding Officer and you come home on a Liberty ship, that's unusual to me. Why was that?

Emmett: Well, just kind of had an opportunity, I knew enough about life aboard ship but it gave me a chance to unwind, you know, because you know, fighting a war is – my wife tells the story now. When I came home I'd lay down on the couch and she didn't come over to touch me to wake me up because I'd come up fighting. She'd take a broom and touch me to wake me up for protection you know, because you know, fighting wars you get pretty much on edge, if you want to live through it you better be alert.

Geoff: What do you think made you, we talked about how why your men respected you, but what do you think made you a good Commander, I think an exceptional Commander?

Emmett: Well I don't know, I suspected, you know, all the things when you're growing up it always seemed like it when we operated, you know, a neighborhood group of boys. I was always kind of the leader, as a matter of fact I grew up, I was in the LDS Church and I grew up in the Liberty First Ward which was the same ward that President Hinckley belonged to. And we had this group of boys that we were all deacons together and teachers and priests and we played basketball and baseball together and when I got too old to be one of them, why they made me the coach of our volleyball team, the First Ward volleyball team in the winter of 1938 and early 1939 we won the church championship in the desert end, we beat the two wards I had to beat last was Logan Ninth and Logan Third. And my ward won the church championship in volleyball and I was the coach and my star player was a kid by the name of John Duncan who was the son of the bishop who happens to be the same bishop that sent President Hinckley on his mission to England.

Geoff: So you were a natural born leader do you think?

Emmett: Well, I don't know if I was natural born, but I always assumed that was my job.

Geoff: One last question, when you heard the war was over where were you that moment it was finally over, where were you, what were doing and what was your reaction?

Emmett: Well actually, I had a brother, an older brother who was a Lieutenant on an Infantry Landing Ship which was stationed right off of Iyashima which is out in – and he had had an emergency appendectomy in our station hospital in Iyashima. And when I was of course connected right at the end of the war I was paying attention to that brother down in our hospital down in Iyashima when the Japanese surrendered. And as a matter of fact the day before they surrendered I had a flight of my P38s up covering a PBV over the sea on the west side of Kyushu and they got jumped by a Japanese Jacks and Franks and I had one kid by the name of Captain

Myers that I'd been trying to talk into going home for several months and he said, "I don't want to go home, my dad thinks I'm winning the war and I've never even seen the Japanese." And he shot down two Japanese on the 13th day of August and the Japanese surrendered the next day.

Geoff: So where were you standing?

Emmett: I was on Iyashima at that time where my camp was.

Geoff: Did everybody cheer?

Emmett: Well, you know, it wasn't a big get together; it was, you know, work went on as usual.

Elizabeth: I'm wondering if you would like to speak to the whole allied accomplishments of WWII and the importance.

Emmett: Well, you know, its – you had to have a centralized command and when you get right back to our Admirals and our Generals and we had in the Air Force of course and our Army Air Corps at that time we had a General by the name of Hap Arnold and of course in the Army, why we had General Mercer and then of course out in the field was General McArthur and General Eisenhower. And with those kind of guys in the leadership position and their ability to plan and draw on their experiences and one thing or another that they were able to collectively. But really the driving force of winning at war was the civilians here in the United States, when they all reacted to what they had to do and they changed their jobs to build airplanes and to build ships and to build tanks. And you know, in 1942 we couldn't build automobiles, we started building tanks and to give those American boys something to fight with. And so when you get a whole nation all pointed in the proper direction, you know, they couldn't do anything except achieve victory and it was just outstanding.

Geoff: Did you have any, were there any doubts that we'd win the war? You were there at Pearl Harbor.

Emmett: Never any doubt in my mind.

Geoff: Why is that?

Emmett: Well because defeat never entered our minds.

Geoff: And why is that?

Emmett: Well I don't know, we just, that was what we were trained to do. Destroy the enemies will to fight, that's really what you're objective is. You see, a fighter pilot, he doesn't win the war, what he does is he provides the freedom of movement to the guys on the ground or on the surface like the ships and the Marines and the Army guys, have the freedom of movement so they can achieve their objectives, that's what the air guy does. The Army, Navy, or Air Force and he allows them to have freedom of movement and the first way you do that is achieve air superiority, so that gets your air victory so you kind of have the other guy attacked at your ground forces. So you have to clear the skies so he has freedom of movement to do what he does, and then of course the enemy ground forces impede his movements and so that's where the close air support comes in and you start doing the bombing in support of the Army to give them the freedom of movement so they can win the war. And it's just the way we're organized and it works and it worked in Europe and it worked in the South Pacific and we were victorious.

Geoff: Philosophical question. What was WWII all about, what was at stake? Because honestly, there are so many kids today that don't understand the magnitude of what was at stake.

Emmett: Well of course its control, power and control. That's what Hitler was after, he wanted to be in control, he wanted to have the power, he wanted to (??) – and then the communists, you know, they were going along the same lines except their idea was to have the individual subservient to the government instead of the government subservient to the individual. And of course that's what imperialism is, and the Japanese, they were an imperialistic nation. They were led by one guy and do what he says, and of course his crew below him, why they told you what he says and that's how they were organized. So it really was freedom and, I was listening

to the President's speech last night when he said that WWII we had just a handful of nations operating on democratic principles and now we got 122 nations operating on a democratic principle. So it's really a matter of freedom, individual freedom.

Elizabeth: That's what I was going to ask, the importance of that success and how WWII places in history, did it change the world?

Emmett: Yes, it did change the world. It changed the world and I think that it gave people an opportunity to realize that you can have freedom. And you don't necessarily have to achieve it through Military mind, that you can do it through a lot of other means, economic and diplomatic and there's a lot of factors enter into it, a lot of different principles had to come involve that you have to exercise and in the right term to where you take the diplomacy and try to make that work. But sometimes when you do imperialistic nations, diplomacy doesn't necessarily work.

Geoff: One last question. How did you get the name Cyclone?

Emmett: Well going back to Gabreski when we used to do our dogfights, you know, and we'd come together and start the fight. I had a, I used to pull up into what I'd call almost a hammerhead stall to come around on the other guys and the kind of left to right cyclonic movement, you know. And when we'd come back at night and we'd stand around the club, you know talking, why we'd get talking about these dog fights we'd had and one thing or another and someone would say, "Who's going to fight the Cyclone tomorrow?" And so anyway, I just kind of picked up the name Cyclone and so I went ahead and used it.

Geoff: What was the nickname of your fighter group?

Emmett: My men, they named it Cyclone's Flying Circus. They painted a big sign and it said 'Cyclone's Flying Circus' and named the three squadrons and it said, 'Always moving. On the ground, on the water, and in the air.' And we did many many moves during the war and so it was kind of a tribute to me to be called Cyclone's Flying Circus.

