

CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WNHC 22.83-10

MR. ADDIS H. MC DONALD



**NATIONAL HISTORICAL COMMITTEE
Headquarters Civil Air Patrol
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama**

CIVIL AIR PATROL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview
of
Mr. Addis H. McDonald
by
Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP

Date: 17 September 1983
Location: Little Rock, Arkansas

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I, Addis H. McDonald, have this day participated in an oral-magnetic-taped interview with COL L. E. HOPPER, CAP, covering my best recollections of events and experiences which may be of historical significance to the Civil Air Patrol.

I understand that the tape(s) and the transcribed manuscript resulting therefrom will be accessioned into the Civil Air Patrol's Historial Holdings. In the best interest of the Civil Air Patrol, I do hereby voluntarily give, transfer, convey, and assign all right, title, and interest in the memoirs and remembrances contained in the aforementioned magnetic tapes and manuscript to the Civil Air Patrol, to have and to hold the same forever, hereby relinquishing for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, and assigns all ownership, right, title, and interest therein to the donee expressly on the condition of strict observance of the following restrictions:

NONE

Addis H. McDonald DONOR

Dated 9-17-83

Accepted on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol by

L. E. Hopper
L. E. HOPPER
COL CAP
Dated 9/17/83

CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Civil Air Patrol Oral History interviews were initiated in early 1982 by Lt. Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP, of the Civil Air Patrol's National Historical Committee. The overall purpose of these interviews is to record for posterity the activities of selected members of the Civil Air Patrol.

The principle goal of these histories is to increase the base of knowledge relating to the early accomplishments of Civil Air Patrol members who in their own unique way contributed to the defense of our great country. Certainly not of a secondary nature is the preservation of the contributions of individuals as Civil Air Patrol continues its growth.

FOREWORD

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In this oral history interview Mr. Addis H. McDonald covers his experiences as they primarily relate to his service at Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 on Grand Isle, Louisiana.

Starting with his background and training as a radio technician, he recounts many of the trials and tribulations involved in his patriotic volunteer service. He humbly records the numerous hardships encountered by both him and his family, which were involved in quitting a relatively well paid job and moving to one where, in the beginning, there was no steady pay.

He continues with an unusual insight into the closing of the base and subsequent property disposal.

Special note should be taken of his admiration for those with whom he served.

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CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number: WNHC 22.83-10
Taped Interview With: Mr. Addis H. McDonald
Date of Interview: September 17, 1983
Location: Little Rock, Arkansas
Conducted by: Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP

H: September 17, 1983 Little Rock, Arkansas, with Mr. Addis H. McDonald as relates to his experiences while serving at Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 in Grand Isle, Louisiana. Mac, how about getting started with a little bit of background on your family, and your education, and when you first got interested in aviation, you know, CAP, and so forth. Just a little bit about Mac-----

MD: Well, Les, I was born September 4, 1906 right here in Bancroft, which is a section of North Little Rock. I'm still living in the same block after all these years. I went to Bancroft School there, and I got through the ninth grade. They was having school difficulties there, a lot of trouble in the schools, and they got where the parents had to pay tuition to keep a child in school. My father died when I was seven years old. I had two

older brothers and a sister. The time was kind of hard trying for my mother, trying to take care of this house full of kids, you know. So, I talked her into letting me quit school before I finished high school. I went to work then to help get what I could toward the family. I went to work for a grocery store. I worked in the grocery business for quite a few years. When I was twelve years, well it was eleven years old, World War I came about. My older brother had to go into the Navy and my next older brother went to work. He was a machinist and he went to work in the Mirror Island shipyards. The USS Ward was built there in the Mirror Island Shipyard and my older brother was attached to the Ward. At the time that it was lost, it was the flag ship of the fleet. It was one of the fastest destroyers they had. They've brought the old Ward out of moth balls during World War II and it was the first ship sunk in the battle of Leyte. After I had went to work, I started saving a little money and I started taking correspondence courses. I'd taken a correspondence course with a radio school in Washington D. C. I went to the local school, to East Side High of Little Rock two years, two terms, winter terms of it was Smith Hughes vocational courses in radio and I also was taking a course with Philco, in radio.

H: And that was when Mac in the 30's?

MD: That was about 1928, I guess 1927, because I got married in 1927, and I know I was taking some of those courses...after I was married. I ended up with a fair knowledge in radio. I got

interested in aviation in a small way. I really couldn't get into it, but I was interested in it. During World War I they had the Army Air Base just three blocks from where I lived. It was an open section of town and we called it the brick yard. In the past it had been a brick yard, because it was just red clay soil. It was operated by convict labor. Through the years this open space out there, which was probably, oh I'd say, a half mile square, was a brick yard. They used to land those old World War I planes there, Jenny planes. They had an awful big tent, it seemed like this big, and that was their hangar. We used to hang around out there to watch them airplanes take off and come in here. Once there was a plane flown by, he was a lieutenant at the time, Lieutenant Frank Vermillia, and made a forced landing in a field close to where I lived. We ran down there to this plane and the Lieutenant asked us if our folks would object to us staying down there to guard that plane that night. He had to leave and he didn't want to leave that plane with no protection. I was the biggest one there, I think. There was three of us boys, I was the oldest one. At that time I think I was eleven years old. We stayed down there all night watching that plane and I mean we guarded it (ha ha ha ha) I kept one of them walking around in one direction and one walking around in the other direction. I remember whenever an airplane would go over the first kid to see it would go around and around the block holler- ing "airplane" at the top of his voice. I never did actually get into aviation, only was really interested in it. I saved up my money and I'd taken a couple of rides. I think this Lieutenant Vermillia gave me a ride in the plane after whatever the trouble

was got fixed. They used to land on a sand bar right close to, not far from where the field was. Lieutenant Vermillia gave me a ride in the airplane for guarding the airplane that night.

H: How about CAP when did you first belong to CAP?

MD: Well, I joined Group Squadron 1 of Arkansas Wing August 4th, 1942. Before then I had had some friends that was in the CAP, Ray Beam and some of the fellows. They talked me into coming over there just to drill with them and to teach a code class. I believe it was one night a week that we met over there at the Click Apple building. We had a room in there and I conducted this code class. Then we would get out there and drill for thirty minutes or so ...afterwards. I stayed active in the wing until October 1942. At that time the submarine activity had picked up quite a bit down around the mouth of the Mississippi River. Raymond Beam and Colonel Hays came over to my house one night and told me what was going on down there. You didn't read too much about it in the newspaper or radio and it was more of a surprise when people learned what was actually going on in the Gulf. When they described just what was going on and how I could be of real service to the country by going down there as a radio man, I signed up to go. To active duty until I guess, January 1st.

H: Yeah. they usually took you three months, six months, a year, or the duration.

MD: Yeah, I went on active duty on October 30, 1942.

H: You were working with radios in your business at the time weren't you?

MD: Oh, yeah, at the time I was working for the Crosley Distributor in Little Rock. The Borne Bicycle Company was the distributor for Crosley Radio and I was working full time. I was a radio man and making service calls or they called it shooting trouble at night.

H: That's how they found you?

MD: Well, I had known Raymond in the same activity. Raymond Beam and myself, joined, I mean we were accepted as members of the radio, electronics, what did they call it, NRI.

H: There's NRI and ARRL and ---

MD: I wasn't in ARRL, but I was an associated engineer in the National Radio Institute.

H: There was National Electrical Engineers for a while and well---

MD: Yeah well, anyway I got this job with Crosley Distributor and I was working for them full time when I went off to active duty. No, let me take again, I had changed from Crosley and went

with Westinghouse just before I went on active duty. I was working for Fuller Brothers and they gave me leave to take this active duty assignment. I explained everything to them and they gave me this leave. Colonel Hays, Rex Hays had a man working in his department in the Alcoa Factory that he was connected with. The two of them drove myself and Pat Middleton, who also worked for Fuller Brothers. Pat was a mechanic, he was aircraft mechanic and he had worked here at the airport as an aircraft mechanic and he was a good mechanic. Pat joined and we went down together.

H: That was in October '42.

MD: That was in October '42. We went on active duty on October 30th 1942. In fact, they drove us all the way to the island. We spent the night in New Orleans I remember, then we drove on down to the island the next day.

H: Tell me about your first impression of the island, when you first got there.

MD: My first impression of the island was that I was really depressed (ha ha ha ha) but you see, I was a landlubber, I had never seen a body of water bigger than the Mississippi River. I used to think New Orleans was right on the Gulf of Mexico, but gee, by road its about 120 miles or something like that. Then the farther we went, the more forlorn the country side got. We

got down there where it was nothing but grass and water, salt grass and water. I thought, Lord, that's the longest street I was ever on. The road went right down by the first bayou and the bayou was on one side; ship traffic, boat traffic, up and down. On the other side was a row of houses that kept on going and going and going like---

H: Known as the longest main street in the world. It goes from the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico.

MD: They tell a story about when World War I ended. One of the neighbors way up the bayou there, shouted to her neighbor in the next yard over that the war was over, and she shouted to her next neighbor. The postman that had told them the war was over in the first place, that started this message going, that message beat him to the island just going from backyard to backyard.

H: Probably did. Okay, now it was kind of a desolate place to be going into---

MD: Oh, it was, it was. It was weird to somebody like me. That was the first time I'd ever been, you know, away from the family. We'd been married for a long time and our oldest son was nearly fifteen years old and our youngest was five.

H: Now didn't you move into a nice plush military establishment?

MD: No, No. We got this room at the Oleander Hotel. That Oleander Hotel was just a clap board building built in the shape of a L kind of. Had a porch cross the top; two porches, one at the lower level and one at the second floor level. The rooms was just little cubicles with a lavatory and a bed, it was a three quarters size bed. My only furnishing in there was an orange crate to keep my books or whatever I wanted to set on there. And those that raced might be able to pick up another one.

H: You were a big time operator with two orange crates.

MD: And we had our meals there too. Opey Lud in the hotel there, nobody like him, Opey and his wife Renae tried to, you know, make a home for us. They had a native colored boy, that was the cook, and after you got used to their cooking, why it was bearable. I had a little trouble getting used to black strap molasses. But, all in all, it wasn't too bad. The trees looked like everything was trying to get away from the Gulf. The trees looked like an umbrella turned inside out and were straining to get away from the Gulf like they was afraid of it. And the island itself, there was no high place on the island. Along the ditch banks, where they had plowed up a little along the edge when they cleared out the ditches, that was the highest place on the island. I didn't understand what made those waves stop. Why didn't they keep on rolling and go all the way across the island. It didn't seem like there was anything to stop them. I was there about a day a day or so before I was actually assigned to work at

the base. Halloween night is when they had just finished the new hangars. I left the hotel, I left from Hamilton Landry's house, he lived a couple of landings over from the hotel. But coming from his house, on the way down to the hangar, I had to pass the graveyard and in the cemetery they was candles sitting on every tomb out there, hundreds of them. I thought, Lord, what kind of a place am I in where they'd light up the cemetery at night with candles?

H: All Hallow's Eve huh...

MD: Yeah, it was Halloween and that was just for that night. When I got down to the hangar the bunch was there, and they were dancing. They had music and sandwiches, they had cold drinks. That was just a big happy bunch and of course, it was all right, the depression passed, everybody was having such a happy time. The next morning I went down to be signed in formally and take an active duty assignment. I knew a bunch of boys all ready, because they was quite a few Arkansas boys there then.

H: Now, what was the department that you went to work in Mac?

MD: Radio, and also in the radio room. And also the area of repairing radios and transmitters. The ships, the airborne stuff, see...

H: They took advantage of the fact that you knew a lot about how equipment works.

MD: The other radio man that was working with me was a close friend of mine. He lived in Hot Springs.

H: And who was he?

MD: That was Virgil Bruin.

H: Okay

MD: And we was close, close friends. He was a fine fellow.

H: He was down there before you got there?

MD: Well, yeah, was just a day or so before I got there. They was another radio man, Pop Brown, he had left, he wasn't on the base when I got there. He was just on leave and I think when he left, the reason they needed someone to take his place and they got me down there as fast as they did. But after I was there a while I got used to my surroundings and got a little bit accustomed to the solitude of the place. When you're off duty you go walk on the beach or something. You'd wonder what the kids at home were doing and you'd look at your watch, you know. What in the world am I doing down here?

H: Better known as homesick...

MD: Yeah, that's true, (ha ha ha) just plain old garden variety of homesickness, that's what it was. But afterwards you got into the swing of things down there, new friends and new things to do, it wasn't bad at all. Then after I found a place to bring my family down there....

H: Before we get into that phase, what were you doing, repairing radios and operating poles...

MD: Operating and repairing radios, keeping the sets working.

H: In the airplanes and the base station?

MD: In the base station I'd be sitting up there, you know, just monitoring, just handling calls from ships we had out, and keeping a log, and making out reports. But the main thing was repairing the sets and all the radio equipment on the ships themselves. Now, we had lots of radio trouble down there. We had furnished our own equipment. I brought tube testers and volt meters, I brought what test equipment that I had with me, also my tools. We had built us a cabinet in there and tried to make the door to the cabinet weather proofed to protect our equipment from salt air. Salt atmosphere was deadly to equipment. But if we could keep one ship going with the radio gear operating correctly we'd let two ships go out together on fly, if one of them had contact with the base. Lots of times, both planes had contact with the base and with each other, but we wouldn't break a flight up on account of radio failure, if one of them was still operat-

ing.

H: But I interrupted you when you fixing to say you decided you'd found a place and...brought your family down.

MD: Yeah, well, before I brought them down though I didn't get any money after I got to the base. My wife, she was a seamstress. She sewed at home, she'd sit there at that sewing machine day and night too. She sent me money to pay me keep, I know that Lud would let us have the room and fed us, I think eighty-five dollars a month. My wife, she sewed, she made enough to keep groceries on the table and also to pay my board bill on the island. It cost me about a dollar a week or something like that for laundry on my uniforms. But in hot weather we just wore our shorts and undershirt. The weather was so blamed hot anyway, and they wasn't strict about what we wore when we was on duty in the hangar. So the uniform business wasn't too bad. But, it all amounted to something, money wasn't coming through and I didn't understand the reason why. I was told they didn't know who was going to finance the thing, whether it was going to be the Office of Civilian Defense or if it was going to be...

H: The Army

MD: Yeah, the Army. You know, the oil companies came to our rescue, I had put in for my Christmas furlough, 'cause my time was going to be up the first of the year anyway. My furlough

came through and I could leave on December 15 if I wanted to come home for furlough. But I didn't have a dime to make the trip home. That was going to be the first Christmas that I ever spent away from the kids. Virgil Bruin, this other radio man there, offered to lend me the money to buy my ticket home, but I wouldn't do it. I said, "No Virgil, if I can't pay my own way, well I just won't take furlough." I was going to enlist for the duration anyway, I told them I'd be right back. Just a couple of days before my time to leave came up, out of a blue sky, I got a letter from Fuller Brothers Hardware where I'd worked. It said; "there was check for forty eight dollars." And it said that the company was paying a bonus, (ha ha ha) and part of the bonus for that year...amounted to that amount. They wished me a Merry Christmas and all that and a hurry back to them. That bought me my ticket home and it just so happened that while I was home, Pop Brown got back to the base again and filled the spot where I was. Actually I wasn't needed. That caused me some concern because I was all tooled up and sacked up for working at the base. Now I was perfectly satisfied there, especially since I was having the opportunity to get this house. Hector Landry found this house for me, belonged to his brother, Hamilton. Then Major Hays called me and said, "Mac would you like to go to Beaumont?" He said, "Same kind of work you're doing, you'd be a radio man at the Beaumont Base." I told him, "Sure, I'd a whole lot rather go back to Grand Isle because I already knew the fellows there and I fit in pretty well there. I'd rather go to Grand Isle but now if I can't go to Grand Isle I'll be glad to go down to Beaumont." I was already set up to go to Beaumont. I

hadn't bought my ticket yet, but I had already found out what the transportation was and I was already tooled up to get on the train for Beaumont when the phone rang. It was the base calling and said, "Would you like to come back to Grand Isle?" I told him sure I would. He said, "How quick can you get here?" I said, "How quick does the next train run, I'll take a late one this afternoon." He said, "Well come on back, Pop Brown had taken another job on the West Coast." I went back down there. I got there, oh, I got the days wrong it seemed to me like it was might have been the first of February, something like that.

H: So you were home for a couple of months?

MD: Yeah, I went back and I signed up for the duration, then. Then I made arrangements to bring the family down and we moved into this little camp of Hamilton Landry's. We made it quite well then. The time that I spent on the island I wouldn't take anything for it. The experiences and the friends we made...

H: Did you get to do any flying while you were down there?

MD: Oh yes, oh yes. Luke Barber wouldn't check a radio in a plane if the motor was running. It had to be sitting on the ground. He said he'd do all the testing you wanted on it here but not if the plane was in the air. He wouldn't even trust the pilot enough to get in there with him when the motor was running. So all the test hopping fell to my lot. But I didn't mind it at

all, because I enjoyed it. Especially when the guys let me take over the controls and fly it awhile. Rippberger, every time I'd test that little Stinson of his, we'd usually go down to Timbalier Island which is around forty miles, something like that. I'd go down there and if I could contact the base all right from down there, then it was okay. Sometimes we'd go toward the mouth of the River. We'd go down the Timbalier with the antenna rolled clear in, clear up to the tail fin back there, I'd contact the base, why, that equipment was in good order. On the way back sometimes I'd get to fly awhile, you know, getting points, telling me what to do and everything. I enjoyed my work.

H: Did you ever have any close calls while you were flying?

MD: Well, yes. The time we rented a Waco, and old Bi-Wing Waco. We'd been down toward Timbalier...One way when you have to make your approach from off the Gulf, you flew right straight in, not along side of the administration building. You had to make a ninety degree to the left 'cause the runway went lengthwise of the island and right in front of the administration building. There was a parking area between where you make your approach from off the Gulf, the parking area was possibly three hundred feet long. Cars parked on both sides if they could, there was never enough cars to fill that whole space up, cars spotted in there all the time. When we came in and made our ninety degree, we were flying this old number 12, this Waco that had had so many accidents. That plane had a characteristic, if you mad a ninety degree to the left, that motor is going to stop about nine times

our of ten, it would. So it stopped all right, that prop stopped still. (ha ha ha ha). Man, that's a funny feeling cause we'd had no altitude and we had to stretch our flight across that parking area...

H: You fly it in a hurry.

MD: You're darn right we did. We had to stretch for we'll say three hundred feet, and those old Wacos they don;t have too good a gliding angle on those things. But we made it; it seemed like the wheels ran just about across the tops of them cars at the end. But it cleared right in front of the administration building. They weren't made for sleep. We went on down and stopped it, but that was the only one.

H: What did you do after you got out and kissed the ground?

MD: (Ha ha ha ha) I said, "No more, no more, not in that one." They called it the clunker.

H: The clunker, huh.

MD: I had received several maydays from that ship that I was flying. They'd be out over the Gulf and make a ninety degree turn and the thing would stop. But, well, if you had enough altitude you could make another ninety degree back to the right, you could correct the problem.

H: Put some gas back into the carburetor.

MD: You could correct it. Bill said a while ago that they'd found a ball of sod in one the fuel lines. Also they's found a bad battery terminal on that thing. You know the battery let down, you take two wing nuts off of it right underneath the breast of the plane and there's a board come down with the battery on it. The terminals on that battery were bullet shaped, large, about like a fifty caliber bullet and it fit up into tight fitting contact, at the top. All you had to do to take the battery out was let it down, there's no cables on it and to put it back up shove up there and tighten the wing nuts. Well one of them battery terminals was bad, between it and that other problem --it was tough.

H: Made it hazardous flying...

MD: When they took the fence down, I told you about this, they made us take the fence down. We put a fence down to keep the cattle off of or runway, but there was considerable grass along our runways and all around our buildings, they'd been on the walks, they kept things messed up around the place. They were always on that runway, and then when a flight would be coming in or taking off, why whoever was on duty would have to get on the speaker and tell the guard to get the cattle off the runway, there's a flight coming in and they'd get out there with their bull whips, run them cows off the runway. The same way when

there'd be a flight going out, they'd get out there and run the cows off.

H: Put a fence up? Somebody made you take it down?

MD: So we put a fence across there, see, set all them across there and put that fence to keep off our runway. But, the natives on the island, the ones who owned this stock...well, a lot of that stock wasn't owned by the natives we found out, belonged to people who lived inland, you know. They'd buy up a bunch of cattle and come and turn them loose on the island, didn't have to feed them see. There was all these little fresh water pools on the island, the cattle get plenty of water to drink and they had plenty of grass 'cause the grass was everywhere. But, when we put that fence up they didn't like it much at all. Anyway they used enough pressure that they forced the Base to take that fence down. They left one fence post up and it was up to old number twelve, the clunker, to remove that particular fence post (ha ha ha ha).

H: So then, maybe it bumped the post?

MD: It was a problem, but that plane lasted to the end and was sold to somebody in Mississippi. It had been tied down on the parking area out there for a long time, for I guess, ninety days at least, without it being flown. You know how I told you, how it had this air starter in there which was a complicated device.

This fellow came down from Mississippi, and he was a Waco man, I mean. He got in there and he fiddled with with those controls awhile, and the guys in the hangar tried to get somebody to bet. They knew it wouldn't start cause they had a time starting it even when it was flown often. So this guy got in there, and he pulled out that air starter, when that tank is always up you get about two chances. It'll wheel over about four times and then pull it out again and it'd wheel over about that far and that's it. If it don't start, you got to pump that tank back up again. You know, we didn't have enough pressure in our air compressor tank there in the hangar...I think we could get something like three hundred pounds out of that, but it took more than that to start that old starter. They had that big, old, long narrow bodied pump with a long handle; two men get on that thing and they'd pump that pressure on up till it would get it up to operate that charger, that starter, I mean. It had the copper tubes that went around each cylinder and this air would force them pistons down and start it that way. But that guy got in there and the second time that thing started, and all the guys in the hangar, well you could've knocked them over with a feather cause that old thing sat out there all of three months of mostly wet weather. But the last we seen of it, it was flying off into the sunset. We learned later that he had had to make a forced landing before he got back to his home base, but he got it back all right.

H: Okay now, what did you do in your spare time after you got your family down there. Did you spend it with them and do some

fishing and stuff like that?

MD: Yes, Mr. Landry, he had oyster beds over there, and I enjoyed getting out on the water. He had this boat, the Dew Drop, it was an old converted lugger, a shrimp boat. He worked his oysters with that boat. I drove over to the oyster bed with him and helped him work the oysters, I enjoyed being out on the water. Sometimes he'd have the boat chartered for a fishing trip out in the Gulf, he had plans for his boat. And I had plans to go out too, I would go out as a deck hand with fishing parties, I enjoyed it tremendously then. Sometimes when I couldn't go, this oldest boy of mine would go with Mr. Landry as a deck hand. We had all the fish we wanted to eat and oysters and shrimp and crabs.

H: Now I understand that one of the unusual things that occurred down there, is that when you have a ripped up airplane, you got Edna to do the sewing for you.

MD: (laughs) No, one time those fellows were using a hooked needle and sewing them things by hand and it takes you the longest time, and that was usually just on the rudder or on the elevators back there. I think that part of the tail fin, that's all she ever covered. But I told , I think that was Willie one time, that was working on it trying to see it on the rudder on that plane. And I told him, "Willie, if you take that rudder off, and let me take that bolt and see to the house." While I go

to lunch. Edna could make a cover for that thing and I'll bring it back to you when I come back from lunch. (laughs) She'd agree to do it? I said sure, let me have the same kind of thread, they use flax or something that they used to sew with. So I took it home and Edna just (laughs) marked it down. She was a seamstress, she knew what she was doing, and I'd bring it back covered. (laughs) They was all smiles. Then she covered when they had bad elevators or whatever any of the control surfaces that had to covered, they'd remove it off of there and I'd take it to the house. I'd go home and eat lunch and usually it'd be ready a'fore I'm ready to bring it back. Sometimes it wasn't, and I'd have to bring it back the next morning. She did, I guess, a half dozen of 'em, maybe more than that.

H: What was your schedule? When you say you went home for lunch, how'd you all work?

MD: We worked, well, at first all the time, we really did. If there's something to do, we did it and it would be dark when we got home so be it. But after we got the full crew down there and got some semblance of order, then we would work three mornings. Now the ones that must work mornings had to come early enough to send that report into New Orleans. We'd get down there I tell you six o'clock. We'd work three mornings and three afternoons. The one in the afternoon you didn't need to get there early. I'd get there right at twelve-twelve thirty, something like that, and you'd stay there until the dusk patrol came back. Everything on the ground, everything battened down in order then you're through

to go home. Then you was off three days. We had it worked though, after we was off three days, we'd come back to work afternoons. Then that would make it, you know, if you wanted to take a trip to New Orleans, if you had gasoline to do it, you could do it, or whatever you wanted to do. You had three and a half days of liberty. I loved explore on the island and take pictures. After I got the family down there and got them accustomed to rough living, like we had to do; there was no electricity except Delco on the island, with the exception of some of these six volt systems that I told you about. They're with wind chargers you know, but with using Delco...Now, we had butane gas to cook with. I made my own little septic tank and disposal system from our sink. There was an outdoor toilet, chick sale toilet, you know. But the water from the sink...I put a fifty gallon drum down in...it's hard to dig a hole on that island 'cause it starts filling up with water after you get about a foot deep, but anyway, I got that drum down in there. It had holes around in the bottom and I put the same stuff that you put in septic tanks, some chemical and I fed my pipe from the sink, greasy water and stuff like that. It worked just fine, worked like it used to run outside the house there. But, she had to get used to ironing with... I bought from Sears and Roebuck some of these irons that had the snap on handle. You know, you heat them on the gas stove, snap the handle on. She took it in her prime, 'cause she was a country girl. She was used to ironing, it wasn't new to her, she did it when she was a girl, with the irons that you'd have to heat on the stove. I had made a little deal

with the boss at the store let me take enough parts out of stock to make a little four tube receiver, using volt and a half tubes, and it come with a big old battery pack, nine volt, volt and a half, in the same battery, you know. One of those batteries would last you a year and that was our one contact with the outside world. (coughs) I still got that old receiver, its a four tube set using volt and a half tubes. I just sit by the side of the bed there, and I would get that news and weather and everything. We didn't get no newspaper, all the news I got, came on that little radio.

H: From an overall evaluation, how well was the base equipped? Pretty good after you all got it going?

MD: Yeah, not too bad now, because fellows brought down equipment.

H: It wasn't stuff provided by the government. It was stuff provided by you.

MD: No, no, now the government did supply the receivers that we used up in the control room. We monitored frequencies for the Air Corps, too. They had a bombing range down there in the gulf, you know. They gave us a receiver on that frequency so we could monitor their planes. We was closest to that base and we just rode herd on them too, as well as our own planes.

H: Just a receiver, no transmitter?

MD: That's right. If we got anything from them, we'd contact their base at Lake Charles by teletype.

H: Tell them that they had an airplane report?

MD: Yeah, yeah if they had anything that needed reporting.

H: How well do you consider the base managed and commanded? Pretty good, after they got over all the turmoil? Was it run pretty good or what...?

MD: I had no trouble at all with management. I was called up on the carpet one time, that was after Smith got down there. They said through the speaker, because MacDonald talks off speed. I went up there, I wondered (laughs) what in the world I had done. But this Smith said, "McDonald, they tell me you got some lumber stashed out." I told him, "Yeah, I got a pile and there that I picked up off the beach." He said, "Well, you know, how about...what we want to do, we want to make an outline of a submarine down here on the end of the island. We want to just outline it just by laying boards on the end of the island there to use for bombing practice. Could you rake up that much." I told him, "If I ain't got enough, it won't take me but a few days." They got their truck and I took them around and showed them where I had the lumber stashed out that I'd got off the beach. We did, we made the outline of a submarine and the guys

used to go up there and drop sacks of flour on it.

H: Do a little practice bombing?

MD: Yeah.

H: So in your overall evaluation you all ran a pretty good base down there.

MD: I think we did. I think we ran a pretty tight ship.

H: Well you got the job done. Okay, now you had a very unusual role in that the normal base personnel all started leaving there August 31 of '43. But you stayed on to close the base down. How about...What did you do then?

MD: During this process?

H: And who stayed with you, Bob West?

MD: Yeah, well now...we kept our guards there...of course the Army boys got their equipment off the base. They moved the ammunition dumps and they got all their equipment off the base. They guessed that the notice of termination was our flight commander. I had the responsibility of trying to dispose of all the radio gear, all the radio equipment on the base... I had made a list of everything we had, every tube, everything.

H: Okay, now that radio equipment belonged to who, CAP or...?

MD: It belonged to CAP, it belonged to the government.

H: In other words when people brought stuff down there, they more or less donated it.

MD: No, we didn't sell none of our own personal equipment. Test equipment, that's all we brought. We didn't bring no parts, tubes, anything like that.

H: So the radio set that Pem built and brought down there, what did you all do with that?

MD: Now that one belonged to the base.

H: Then he donated it to the base.

MD: I think so, I think so. Now Raymond Beam intended,...they was a couple of more more radio men instrumental in building that thing, built it in the back. Raymond Beam ran the Beam Radio Company there in Little Rock. It was one of the biggest suppliers, radio suppliers in Little Rock. They built it in the back of his place there. Pem took it to the island, he told you about it in his interview, I guess. But that belonged to the base, and it was disposed of with the rest of the stuff.

H: With the bids and that thing.

MD: Yeah.

H: You got a bunch of bids and sold it?

MD: Yeah I had all this stuff, I made a list of every item we had including the receivers. Except the one, that belonged to the Army, they got that back, I mean the Air Corps. I had this all typed up and then had copies made in New Orleans and I delivered a copy. I had it set in different categories, all the tubes that was together and all the resistors and condensers that was together and kept it kind of in categories so a person could bid on one section of it or bid on the whole thing. So I took these things and I delivered them to every shop in New Orleans that I thought was big enough they could use anything like that. Now what come...I never seen any...Nothing came to my attention. No answers to any of that ever came to my attention, all that went right straight to the office there on the island. I didn't know what was sold or what wasn't sold unless it would be gone from the shelf. But word came, that you know, that Blocker had bought out...but you know the base. The bids, I learned, was so slow in coming in...I called Raymond Beam on the phone and told him, "Raymond, we're not getting bids on this stuff like we should. Why don't you turn in a bid of some kind? There's all this stuff down here and I know you can use it." He said, "Mac, I'd rather not be involved because I was instrumental in setting it up. I just wouldn't want to be involved because some might think that there might be something wrong."

H: Collusion or something.

MD: Yeah, yeah, now that's the same feeling I had. One of those receivers, I'd give my eye teeth almost to own that thing, but I wouldn't think of turning in a bid. I didn't want nothing there, because I didn't want any shadows of anything crooked.

H: Now who stayed there, the people in the office, who stayed, who was that...

MD: Well now, one of them was this J. Lanthrip, James Lanthrip and McCarty. Now all I know about it, those girls that was in the office, I don't remember now. I know Smith's wife was still there, and I don't think Jimmy Lanthrip's wife...I don't think she came down. But he was part of the office personnel and if you could get a hold of Lanthrip, he could tell you more about the business end of winding that thing, I imagine than anyone...

H: Okay but your major job was getting rid of the radio...and that kind of stuff right?

MD: Right. I had to get those aircraft off the island that wouldn't fly. They was about half a dozen, at least, aircraft that weren't air worthy. So they were sold. I didn't have the responsibility of selling them, I don't know who sold them, but I know several of them were sold to individuals there in New Or-

leans. I had to deliver them...

H: The aircraft that was down there I thought belonged to other individuals?

MD: They did.

H: But they just abandoned them?

MD: I don't know whether that was it or whether they were sold for the individual, I just don't know...

H: Just was your lot, to get rid of them...

MD: Yeah, I had the responsibility of getting them off the island, getting them away from there. The carpenters built a little rig right on the back end of that old stake truck. They'd set the tail wheel up in that, they'd take the wings off, and slide them up in the side of the truck, and set that tail...I don't remember, it seemed to me like they taken elevator and the side assembly off that tail...They'd taken that off too, cause that thing had to fit pretty well. All that was put in the truck and the tail wheel was anchored secure in that thing, of course it would swivel on that tail wheel. I pulled them things to New Orleans backwards like that. One of those planes, it seemed to me like a Cessna, that the wheel stuck up two feet wider than the truck was. It was raining that morning. Traffic meeting me it'd see this old truck coming but out there two feet was all this water flying up off the highway it's wonder...

H: Wonder they didn't run off the highway, huh...

MD: Yeah, but, I got all those planes down there. I had to deliver one of them down town at a shop. I delivered one, Bill Fandison can tell you about one, cause we delivered it and put it in an old garage there in the industrial section down in New Orleans. It was close to where his folks broom works was. I don't know whether Bill bought that thing or one of his friends had bought it. I delivered the rest of them to the airport. There was a big, old, long building that we put them aircraft in there. I think they were sold for the individuals. When Luke Barber came down there, Luke had the idea of simplifying repairs on the airborne stuff, on the antenna and receiver. He has us get a board, a twelve inch plank about 20 inches, 24 inches maybe. He had the mechanics take tubing and make a square frame with legs on it. That was mounted right behind the seat with two wing nuts, bolts. You could let loose, disconnect the aerial and ground, I tell you it was grounded through the wing bolts. But anyway lift that board off and you got all the radio gear. Take it off of another plane and set it on there and you can change all the equipment in about five minutes...

H: Yeah they did that over in Pascagoula too.

MD: They did. Well, now while they taking that stuff off of there, converting it over, when they was snatching that stuff off

of the planes and mounting it on this board. lots of them little brackets and little parts of stuff they's pitch to one side. Now I got these little brass...I figured, what if I would be left down there to put that stuff back like it was original and have parts that'd be gone. I got these little old brass bands, like they put around a chicken's leg to market, you know, that you could scratch on it. I put the ship number on every little part that had one of those brass bands around it. And I put them in a bin and sure enough when it come time to get all those planes off the island...

H: You put them in the right planes.

MD: I put this back and fixed it just like it was when you found it. (laughs) And so, if I hadn't had those parts marked, goodness gracious above, that would have been just about an impossible task.

H: That's when it helps to be a frugal Scotchman.

MD: (Laughs) That's the truth. We got all the planes off of there. I told you that Hector Landry went over there with me one time, but Hamilton went with me, because he was a big help in getting those...sometime let that thing down off of that tailgate when you had to push it around to get it where you wanted to deliver it to. Hamilton was a big help to me and he liked to make those trips to New Orleans with me. Hector wanted to go one time, Hector was a guard there at the base, you know. So when we

got ready to leave, he wanted to ride in the airplane. I told him, "You'd be a lot more comfortable if you'd ride up here in the cab." He said, "No, I'd rather ride back there." So he rode all the way to New Orleans back there in the Fairchild. I believe... in the cabin of that plane. When we got over he said, "Mac, I want you to know I'm the only man in the world that ever came across the Huey Long Bridge in a airplane backing up."

H: Okay, tell me kind of in summary, Mac, have you got anything that we've failed to cover this fall about what you did down there. Your impressions or...

MD: Well, I was impressed, Les, by the cooperative attitude of the people on the island, after they understood what you was doing. They quit the job...the shrimp boats and everything, put their shrimp boats...tied them up and went to work for the CAP for five dollars a day. Sometimes when the shrimp was running they could make twenty times that much a day. But to put that uniform on, it felt like they were doing something for their country. I admired them for it. They'd stand at attention. This Mister Minic, he was an elderly man. He walked just as stiff and erect like he was, you know, like he was a general. He'd take his job seriously and he worked at it diligently and the other fellows on the base, too. They didn't any of them come along for the ride, they all recognized it. You know, they had seen ships sunk right out there off the... they knew they was adding a little bit of their weight to stop all that had been

going on our there.

H: So it was deep down, real, sincere patriotism.

MD: That's true,

H: Not only them Mac, don't underrate, you know, what it took of yourself to quit a good paying job and then go down there and you know, move your family and everything else...

MD: Well, it was the experiences that we had there...then on the island. All these little friends...He brought one of his little friends home, a little dark thing, and he introduced him to us. He said, "This is Chicazolas. He was one the little grandkids, you know, of the nut pickers over there. Then Caribbean, had a granddaughter in this same first grade class. He'd bring his little friends home with him. My wife, she loved to make cookies and stuff like that, and our front yard got to be kind of a playground. But...we enjoyed having them around. You know, time after time, we'd come out the front door, they'd be a water bucket full of shrimp or mullet on the steps. Sometimes it might be string beans, a water bucket full. Just like that, them people when they liked you, they'd do things.

H: Kind of in summary, Mac, what's your impression of the overall worth of the whole program of running the CAP?

MD: Well, Les, I think it was one of the finest things that could have happened, because the sinkings down there came to a

skidding halt after they got in operations down there. When we first got on the island down there, you couldn't walk on the beach for the oil, for the froth that had just beat up on it. We'd find life jackets all covered...that had been burnt all and covered with tar and oil and stuff. The beach was just covered with oil, there had been so many sinkings, I think. The people tell about that. After I got there, I didn't see any sinkings off the coast there, but they's tell me some had just happened. They'd tell about one of Standard Oil's biggest tankers. It came out of the South, past the river there, and all day long it was just slowly, it was as close in as it could get to the island, because the Gulf is fairly shallow for a long way out from the island, there. There'd be some of them oil rigs out there eight miles out, and they were only in fifty feet of water. But this boat was just slowly drifting our. It was waiting till night fall then it was going to make a run for it, I think to get outside. Just about the time it got dark, the sky lit up, you could stand on the beach and read a newspaper, because it had been hit by a torpedo and went up. This same fellow I was telling you about that had the speed boat, he went our there and brought in as many survivors as he could. That was before, I guess, that the Coast Guard had their regular...

H: Observance going...Well I think in summary you got it. You flavor it just about right, Mac. It was a very important period of our history, as I said, numerous times, all of you had the utmost admiration from me as an individual and from a lot of

people.

MD: The only hardship that we had was that period where we weren't getting any money. But after our checks started coming through signed by the War Department, everything was rosy then 'cause they was right on the dot every month then.

H: Part of the growing pains of the whole season. Okay, do you have anything else before we go off tape?

MD: No, no, not that I know of Les.