

This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, August 18, 2015 at the home of John V. Likosar. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Mr. Likosar who served in the United States Navy during World War II. Mr. Likosar learned of the Veterans' History Project through me, and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is his story:

When and where were you born?

Born in Chicago, May 7, 1924.

What were your parents' occupations?

My Dad was a meat cutter – butcher.

How about your Mom?

She was a seamstress; worked downtown.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

One sister.

What did you do before entering the service?

I worked for the Comptometer Company – remember hearing that name?

Yes, yes. I used to operate a comptometer – it had nine keys - nine keys across and nine keys up and down – I remember it well – my first real job.

I was a service man for them – downtown Chicago – various office buildings that we'd go to.

Did you have any other family members serving in the military?

No. My Dad enlisted in the Army – he got gassed –

In the First World War?

Yeah; he lived to be 58 – died rather young. That gas knocked the hell out of him – you know, your lungs go –

Mustard gas?

Yeah.

How did you enter the service? Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted.

How old were you when you enlisted?

I think I was 18.

And the Second World War was going on?

Yeah. And the first thing you do when you go down to enlist –they said the Navy is looking for me – and because, at that point they had these Landing Signal Officers – I don't know if you remember that – probably heard about it –

No, I was a little kid during WWII.

But anyway, the thing is, you have to have perfect vision because they use flags – and I said okay, I'll give it a try. They said okay, you got perfect eyesight.

20/20 huh?

So I could have gotten into anything I wanted at that point.

Is that why you chose that specific branch of service? Yes, he said. Okay.

And how about your departure for training camp and your early days of training. Where did you go and how did you get there?

First it was in Indiana – flight school training.

Did you have college or just high school education?

Just had high school when I entered and then ended up getting credit for two years of college – while you were in service.

So you had like college-type classes –

Yeah.

College equivalent education – while in service.

Right.

Do you remember where in Indiana?

Greencastle, Indiana.

And that was a –

I probably was just going on to 18.

How did you get to Greencastle – by train, by bus – from Chicago?

Pretty sure it was train.

How long did you spend there? How much time?

I would say it was probably six months.

What did you learn? What did you do?

You learned flying –

Flight school?

Yeah. They had – what the Navy called Aerology – meteorology – they had their own names for everything.

So that means you were in a classroom setting – studying –

Yeah.

And did you actually go in planes –

Yeah –

You learned about planes.

Right.

Engines, and about flying planes.

Actually did it – cubs – we called them “Yellow Peril” – you know, scary – when you’re in peril.

Yellow Peril – what does that mean – yellow peril?

Well, we called it that because of the chance of it flipping over –

Was that a plane painted yellow?

Yes.

Oh, it was -- were these small, one-person planes?

Two –

Two-person planes – and those were for training?

Yeah, you had to - you had your instructor and you sitting right there.

And you took off and made touch and go landings? Things like that?

Right.

Okay, so you did that for six months; that was considered specialized training.

Yeah, I would say – because of the fact that I was in the Navy it was only natural you would be going on a carrier.

Right. Aside from the training and classroom teaching, how did you adapt to military life – like the physical regimen, the barracks – did you have any kind of basic training?

Well, yeah, it was at Glenview Naval Air Station.

You went there first?

No, this was after. See, you're still a civilian – so I went to Glenview and it was there that you had to take swimming lessons, obviously, because you're –

So that was basic training.

Yeah.

What else did you do besides swimming – tying knots, seamanship?

No, not so much that, but again they had the Signal Flags, which was very important at that stage of the war. And then also they had a thing called “Dunking Dilbert” – and what it was, they would put you in the stubby part of a plane, half of it, and drop you in the water, and then you had to work your way out –

And you were clothed with your uniform?

Yeah, right.

And all your equipment?

Yeah.

Wow – and you passed – I take it.

Yeah. I guess so, 'cuz I'm still here.

So how did you adapt to military life – okay?

Yeah, I didn't have any problem.

So how long were you at Glenview?

Glenview – I was only there for probably 3 or 4 weeks – because that was mainly to get you accustomed to going up and flying – working with power and so on.

So you were flying on your own or with an instructor still?

With an instructor and then you had to solo.

So you soloed there at Glenview?

Yeah, correct. And then they had what you call a catapult –

Yes. – How you land and take off on a ship?

Well, no.

They catch you on the tail –

You're ahead of me now.

Okay.

You're on a steep angle, like this (indicating) and they fire off – almost like a fireworks thing –and they would shoot you up in the air, and you'd maybe go up about 150 feet, and then you would have to come down and land.

Oh, okay. You're talking about in an airplane?

Yeah.

No, I never heard of that.

In the Yellow Peril –

Oh, the yellow peril – okay. So that's how you learned landings, in other words –

That's how you started out, yeah.

So you did that at Glenview?

Yeah, and then, from there, you'd take off, from Glenview, fly out to the carrier, which was out on the lake –

Lake Michigan?

Um-hmm.

It was like a stationary barge or something that was there?

No, it wasn't stationary; no – because when you fly, you take off into the wind –

I knew that – my husband soloed; he took private lessons.

So you take off into the wind and you had to make 14 landings and takeoffs.

Okay.

And the way this would work, we'd come in very hot, as they'd say, in other words pretty good air speed, and you would land and then they had – they were like barriers, so in case you didn't make it – a good landing – and you had to take off again, you'd fly over those barriers, and come around and try it again. So I made 14 landings and takeoffs.

So what you were landing on was actually a moving field –

Like a small carrier.

And it was actually moving in Lake Michigan.

Oh, yeah.

I know that George Bush practiced there too.

Yes. In fact, eventually I went to Minneapolis and that's where he was.

Did you meet him in person while you were in the service?

I think I met him once – along with a group of other cadets. But they had – the main airfield was in Minneapolis and I went to St. Paul / Minneapolis – where they had – instead of having a runway they had a big round spot with blacktop. And that was so they could change – to show you which way the wind was blowing – they had a thing that would point it one way or the other – so you knew which way the wind was coming from – because you want to take off into the wind.

Right.

That gets you up faster.

They didn't have windsocks at that time?

No. This is what they had instead.

Before windsocks.

Yeah. Well, I won't say that; they probably had them at other larger airports.

So anyway you practiced all this stuff right here at Lake Michigan and at Glenview but only for 3 or 4 weeks?

Yeah, approximately.

And then you went to Minneapolis and did the same thing there – you practiced more landing?

Yeah, yeah, but there you were flying solo.

Oh, flying solo; okay.

You did get other air instructions with a pilot.

And how long were you in Minneapolis?

I would say probably about six months.

By the time you were done in Minneapolis, you were a flyer.

Yeah.

You were on your own – landings, takeoffs, everything?

Yeah.

So you're ready now for the service – where did they send you?

I went to – (Mr. Likosar is having trouble remembering dates and times)

I met my wife to be while I was in Minneapolis – and how that happened, I went into the USO after I got off the train, which took me up there, and I was sitting down and writing my Mom a letter, and a woman came up to me and said, “You look like you’re a newcomer here.” And I said Yeah, I guess you can call me that. And this woman said, “I work in a bank in Minneapolis, and there’s a lot of nice young ladies there and she says, would you mind if I called a couple of girls to come in and meet you.?” I said yeah, I suppose so. So sure enough, my future wife came down there – at the time she was engaged to another guy –

Really?

So that went over big – and he was also in the Navy – but he was aboard ship. But anyway, to make a long story short, that’s how we finally connected. Her folks invited me over to meet them and after we got there her Dad came out and said, “So, you’re a pilot, huh?” – Yeah. “Maybe you kids want to go out – to a show or something?” and I said Yeah, that would be nice. ‘Cuz she met me at the streetcar line – and he said “Here”, he throws me the keys to his car. I said, “Wait a minute; how do you know I can even drive?”

Well, if you can fly a plane –

He says, “I know you can.” And of course I already had my driver’s license.

Right, right – well, getting back to your service – you stayed in Minneapolis for six months. Where did you go afterwards?

Then I went on board a carrier.

Which one – do you remember?

That was –

Mr. Likosar says he has a log book which he will look for to get more information. If we miss anything in this interview, he will get back to me and we’ll fill in the blanks later on –

That sounds good.

So you did go on a carrier.

Yeah.

How did you get to the carrier – was it in New York or California – where was the carrier?

It probably was in – up in – New York –

So you actually went on a carrier and you served there. Do you know where the carrier went – did you go to Europe or – where did you sail with the carrier.

No, I didn't get overseas. I got out over the ocean, but what happened, the guy that I was flying with – I was flying wing on him, and all of a sudden he did what I call a "split S" – that's when you flip over and you pull it through like this (indicating), and he just kept on going, and kept on going, and I kept yelling over the intercom "Pull out! Pull out!" He hit the water and was just one big fireball.

Wow – he crashed.

He crashed – and I kept circling – I had called in on the radio saying that he'd gone in there, and they said you just keep circling around there so we got the general vicinity –

Right.

'cuz when it hit -- it just exploded into one big fireball.

Wow, and he didn't bail out or anything.

He didn't have a chance. No he didn't bail out. Like I said, if this was the plane flying and you flip over, he was at this attitude (indicating) –

He did it that way - Wow, he turned upside down.

No way he could have lived, but you always gotta figure maybe he could.

So what happened after that?

When I got back to the base, of course, they interviewed me –

But he was gone – he died.

Yeah, they wanted to know what happened.

Do you know who he was?

George Prokson (phonetic) P-r-o-s-k-s-a. The ironic thing was he had a brother that was a Navy pilot, got all through the war, shot down other planes and came back in perfect health.

That's too bad. How did that accident affect you?

It was traumatic.

Were you able to fly after that?

Yeah.

You still continued flying.

Yeah. In fact, I told you I met my wife and she was with me when I was stationed in Atlantic City, and after I went through that – the –

The briefing afterwards?

Yeah, the memorial – and he was asking me more about it and he said, “Do you want to stay in?” And I said, “Well, my wife is pregnant and we’re expecting”, and I talked to her and she said “Honey if you want to stay in, you do it.” And at that point I thought , no, I want to stick around, if I can. So we were married then – and we came back.

So how long did you spend in the service – you said you were there for 2 ½ years.

Yeah.

So that had to be 1946 that this accident happened?

Yeah.

That was after the war was over.

Right.

So where were you when the war ended?

In Atlantic City, yeah.

Atlantic City, New Jersey when the war ended.

Yeah, we were there with all of the excitement. If you ever saw pictures on the Boardwalk – it was just mobbed completely.

So you married your wife when you were still in Minneapolis – during the six months that you were there? She came with you to Atlantic City?

Yeah. She came up here and stayed in a hotel down in the Loop. Her parents came down and we were married when they got there.

But you were married in the Chicago area?

Yeah. Chicago, down in the Loop.

And then she went with you to Atlantic City.

Right.

So your baby was born after this accident?

Yeah.

Did you have a girl or a boy?

I had three boys in a row, actually.

When was he born – I'm trying to get a date – so we can tell when that accident happened –

He was just here – I'll get all that information.

Were your boys in the service?

Yeah, yeah. And my oldest one was a pilot, but he was in the Air Force. And he didn't get overseas; in fact he was in service and called me up one night and said, "Dad, I'm flying okay, but I just want to get out of it." He had some bad dreams about it. And boy, I said, you got everything going for you. I hate to see him get out –

Well, they can only do what they can do.

Right, and I said hey, if you go up there and you got any thoughts about not coming back, that's the best thing. Get the hell out of there.

So what about friendships formed while you were in the service?

Were you in contact with buddies that you met in the service?

Oh, yeah, yeah. In fact there was one guy I went to school with and he went in, same thing, in the Navy, two weeks before I did. And he went through the war, had no trouble. In fact, he flew into the airport here in Chicago –

Midway?

He called me up; I'm in here, I flew in with a Navy plane and he had a dog with.

I said they let you have the dog with – you're damn right; they better have. So I went down to meet him and he took me up for a flight.

Oh – what did you do when you got out of the service?

I went to work for a company called Chicago Aerial Industries and the reason I went there is – there again there were airplanes involved.

But you didn't fly as a pilot, did you?

Yeah, I did; I was flying there for awhile.

What kind of flying did you do – did you take people up or –

No.

Just deliveries – mail deliveries or whatever –

Yeah.

So you did work as a pilot.

Yeah.

Were you there a long time?

No – I worked there for a long time but –

Do you belong to any Veterans Organizations at the present time?

Yes – when I was at Carillon --

We have a VFW there –

Yeah, yeah, in fact –

Do you know Jim Singler – he’s the head guy.

No response

Do you know Charlie Mueller? He’s from Carillon and he moved in here –

Yeah, yeah, in fact he was down at the Veterans’ luncheon. Yeah, I know him very well. We talked over – he was at – well, we called him an aerologist – when he was in he was a meteorologist -- See, in the Navy you call them aerologist –

Aerologist – I never heard of that.

So do you belong to the VFW or American Legion.

American Legion.

But you never were overseas and they’re sort of fussy about that –

Yes.

Well, that’s about it. Other than flying in Minneapolis and Atlantic City, what was your purpose – what did you do? You didn’t bomb anywhere with your pilot’s knowledge – with your experience.

Well, yeah, I flew out of Bolingbrook. I usually went to the air shows wherever they may be –

You were like the Navy pilot at the air shows that went on –

Yeah.

Where were you flying when this accident happened? You were in Atlantic City at the time so you were over the ocean –

Yeah.

What were you doing – were you in an air slow?

This is training.

Oh, you were still training.

Yeah.

And that's where the guy crashed.

Yeah.

Wow –

That's why I said I had second thoughts about flying after that –

Yeah, the war was over already – you were in there for two years already.

As I said the ironic thing was his brother flew combat, the whole bit, he came back unscathed.

So you were in a total of about 2 and one-half years.

Yeah.

And the war was over so – how did your military experience affect your life?

Well, I guess you could say it affected my marriage – because of my marriage. I asked my wife about staying in. She said it's strictly up to you. And I said well, I want to be there, the fact that she was pregnant, I want to be there when my first one is born.

What about you – how did your military service affect your life?

Well, I guess I was shook up because of what happened to my buddy.

Well, yeah, that's a traumatic experience. But over all, I'm talking about your whole military career, the whole 2 ½ years that you were there – how did that affect your life – later on, after you got out?

Well, when I got out I worked for Chicago Aerial and I was still involved in aircraft and things to do with aircraft.

When you went into the Navy was that your intention – to fly?

Yeah.

Oh, it was – you went in with that intention to fly and you did.

Yeah, because, as I said, go through this eye test – 20/20 – have to read signal flags – and of course after I got in signal flags went out the window. Most people don't know about it.

I can remember seeing pictures of carriers where the guy was signaling the pilot for landing – up, down – I can remember that.

The ironic thing is when they want you to cut your air speed – they go (indicating) like that – (finger across throat) – you better make it or you're in trouble.

So when you landed on the carrier – the makeshift carrier in Lake Michigan, did they have the tailhook that grabs you?

Oh, yeah. And if you missed it you were in trouble.

Oh, yeah

Not only that, there were planes parked – you could run into them and kill guys who didn't even know you were coming.

They're finding – they just hoisted a plane from Lake Michigan –

Oh, yeah, I know it.

A lot of planes did go over.

In fact, I went to a – something to do with – one of the gals that works down at the desk, her husband is in the Navy and through him, he had me give a speech about carrier landings.

So did you do things like that afterwards –

Yeah.

Give little speeches here and there explaining what you did in the service?

Yeah.

This booklet is for you, to read about the Veterans History Project. I'm going to type a rough draft of this interview and will bring it over when I come back again, and give it to you --- maybe you'll find your book by then
Maybe I'll find my stuff by then –

And if you do we'll continue on and we'll add that on later.

My daughter's got a lot of my stuff at her place. She lives right in Bolingbrook.

Good, give her a call; ask her to read this and maybe we can continue this interview when you have all your material

That would be good –

Because there are a lot of blanks in this –

Yeah.

Okay, we'll plan on that; just let me know – you can call Kim Crist and she'll get hold of me.

Yeah, okay.

And I can come back and finish this interview. I'm going to turn this off.

Thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

Thank you – I'm sorry I can't find all the stuff I had; it would make it easier for you.

Well, we'll try it again.

John V. Likosar

605 S. Edward Drive #295

Romeoville, IL 60446

815-733-6660