

May 19, 1942

INTERVIEW WITH LIEUTENANT GEORGE S. WELCH

Serial Number 398557

46th PURSUIT GROUP - WHEELER FIELD

has been

I was stationed at Wheeler Field since February 29, 1940,

leaving there May 14, 1942, reporting to Washington, War Department, A-2.

On December 8th, 1941, I was awakened by the sound of dive bombers peeling off about eight o'clock in the morning. I thought they were Navy dive bombers ... so I stayed in bed until I heard bombs exploding and machine gun fire. With about three or four other officers from the Club, where I stayed, I ran out -- saw red circles on the airplanes and realized what was going on and that they were Jap planes.

Lieutenant Taylor and I remembered that we had airplanes at Haleiwa, so we jumped into Lieutenant Taylor's car and drove out there. We got out there and the Fighter Command called us and requested us to take any pursuit we had and take off and proceed to Barber's Point at 8,000 feet. There were two of us there then -- we took off and didn't see anything except a fire at Pearl Harbor.

Later we noticed twenty or thirty airplanes in a traffic pattern at Ewa, the Marine Landing field. We found they were Japanese dive bombers strafing the field. Lieutenant Taylor and I each shot two of those down. I was leading and peeled off first. Lieutenant Taylor was about 200 yards to the rear and side, following me. Their rear gunner was apparently shooting at the ground -- because they didn't see us coming. The first one I shot down, the rear gunner didn't even turn around to face me. I got up close enough to see what he was doing. I got him in a five second burst -- he burned up right away. W#1

20 or 30!
VS 12 VMS
DSC

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By Authority of
The Commanding General
Army Air Forces

Date _____ Initials _____

142.052
WELCH, G.S.C.
19 MAY 1942

RETURNS TO
Aircraft Section
Army Air Forces
Maxwell Field, Alabama

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INFO HQS. ARMY
"BUCKY" DAWSON
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P.O. BOX 6955
KETCHIKAN, ALASKA 99901

Atch

AT THIS POINT, DSC STATES WELCH PULLED UP ABOVE CLOUDS TO CHECKOUT HIS A/C + THEN RETURNED TO THE ATTACK AT BARBER'S PT.

I left him and got the next plane in a circle which was about one

hundred yards ahead of him. His rear gunner was shooting at me. One bullet put a hole through my cooling radiator, and I got one in my prop and one in the nose. It took about three bursts of five seconds each

to get him. He crashed on the beach. W#2 DSC SAYS A/C DOWNED IN THE OCEAN HEADING OUT TO SEA OFF BARBER'S PT. ATTACKED: 2 A/C

In the meantime the rest of the dive bombers had disappeared.

We didn't know where -- so Lieutenant Taylor and I went back to Wheeler Field and landed. We refueled and reloaded right away. The enlisted men screamed, "The Japs are coming back again!" We just got our motors started when the Japs started strafing the field. They were coming from Pearl Harbor towards Wheeler Field and Schofield Barracks.

Lieutenant Taylor took-off down the field and I took off in the opposite direction, flying into the Japs. I made a full throttle climb for about three minutes in a low turn to the left. I climbed 3,000 feet a minute at 105 or 110 miles an hour. A Jap was on my tail shooting at me. I could see his tracers going by -- but he was either too far back or his gun wasn't working right. I shook him off -- outclimbing him. DIR. TAYLOR INTERVIEW SAYS HE TOOK OFF INTO APPROACHING A/C

I saw Lieutenant Taylor on one Jap's tail over Wahiawa and another Jap on Lieutenant Taylor's tail. I dove on this one while I was about 1,000 feet above him and a mile behind. I had to put down my flaps to slow down to keep behind the Jap. He burst into flame. Apparently I hit the big gas tank between the pilot and the gunner. He had a terrific explosion right there and crashed. W#3

I flew back over Ewa and saw one Jap plane flying around all by himself. His rear gunner was either dead or asleep for I didn't get fired at. I shot the plane down right on the beach off Barber's Point. W#4

I then flew around for fifteen or twenty minutes and then went back to 5 MI. OFFSHORE (EWA BEACH?) AFTER PURSUIT OUT FROM EWA VICINITY

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(PRODY CAMP #4)

Haleiwa.

When I looked down the hangar line at Wheeler Field, there were obviously very few, if any, airplanes left. They were all burning or scattered bombs had hit them and scattered them all over the place. The Japs came down parallel to the hangar line in a string. They dive bombed within twenty feet of the ground very slowly -- at very slow speed. The pilot would shoot at everything he saw and the rear gunner would spray everything as they went by. About half of them had fixed landing gear. They were all in open positions. They flew a regular traffic pattern around the field. They never got more than 100 or 200 feet ^{high} I imagine that there were thirty planes in this pattern strafing Wheeler Field. They flew around with their pattern to the right. When they returned, they used the same formation and signals that we do -- shallow left turn, wiggling the wings. They would come back into formation, peel off and come down again. There was no resistance from Wheeler Field at all, so that they had a perfect pattern, and could pick out individual ships that they could see weren't on fire and shoot at them with both their 7.7's and 20 mm. cannon.

- 1/2 WERE
VALS
"OPEN"
POSITIONS

I thought that about 50% of the dive bombing was very accurate. One or two pilots made large misses -- 100 yard misses from very low altitude. The air discipline was excellent. Their formation work was much better than anything the Army Air Corps does. Apparently the pilots had been flying in Manchuria, for in the planes that were shot down, the pilots had Manchurian newspapers and magazines. The Japs had well trained units.



OLD CCC CAMP -
TRAVENS SAYS NEAR 711 NEAL ST

One Japanese pilot committed suicide. He flew down very low the whole length of the field. His rear gunner was obviously taking movies. Three or four hundred men were shooting at him and apparently hit the pilot or a vital part of the airplane. He made a quick turn and dove toward the power transformer station. He fell short and missed it by 100 feet. I think the pilot was wounded.

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In combat the Japanese pilot, in dive bombing, tried to get away always by making a sharp right turn. They all made right turns. They apparently tried to get you to turn with them so another Jap could fire across the circle and get you. They didn't attempt any suicide tactics such as ramming, etc. and they were obviously in a big hurry to get out of there when they saw that there were P-40's anywhere near.

The Japanese planes I saw were Navy dive bombers, Type 97, with retractable wheels. And then another type with non-retractable wheels -- I am not sure about the model. I didn't see any two engine jobs at all, no bombers -- and no pursuits. —KATES, VAL

The attack started approximately 8:00. I got into action at approximately 8:30. The attack ceased about 9:30 or quarter of ten. We were still flying around looking for more Japs. That was the last we saw.

T/O
about
8:30 H.

About the training of the new pilots -- we get pilots fresh from flying school. The Air Corps says that they are pursuit pilots and they send them to us. One bunch we got had one hour in a North American P-66. No acrobatics of any kind. At the present time we don't have enough airplanes with enough engine time left on them to give these boys sufficient experience. I was sent on a mission with another Lieutenant -- we each took two new pilots to have a little simulated combat. Lieutenant Thacker

had three P-39's -- I had three P-40's. I dove on Lieutenant Thacker with my P-40's in a string. We had a general dog fight. One of these new pilots pulled up to try and get his sights on a P-40. He had so little experience with airplanes on usual positions that when the airplane stalled and dropped over he immediately bailed out. We have had several cases of pilots doing that at lower altitudes and not having time to bail out. Just spin in.

On the P-39 the gas tanks are seal-sealing and have compartments in them. These sections collapse. Your gas guage may read 30 or 40 fallons, but actually you run dry. We noticed that trouble about a month ago. We had our airplanes then about four months. It was still occurring when I left the Hawaiian Islands. They hadn't found any way to correct it. The electrical system on the P-39 is very faulty. When the electrical system is out, your prop feathers and drops to about 500 r.p.m. You can't keep it in the air unless you happen to be lucky to catch it and turn it to manual. I think this is being corrected.

I have never seen the 37 mm. on the P-39 fire correctly. I have seen them fired, but I have never seen them fire more than four rounds without jamming. Ordnance is working on that.

Approximately 75% of the 46th Squadron would rather have the P-39 than the P-40. I believe they like it because its a newer airplane. It's easier to handle and does have cannon. I like the P-40 much better than the P-39 because of its higher rate of climb and because it is more manoeuverable, more dependable, carries more gasoline and I am a little more familiar with it. However, if I were to run into large Japanese patrol bombers, I would prefer to have the P-39 because I would like to stay

off at long range and shoot at them with the cannon before I closed in.

We didn't have enough ammunition to practice with. Each pilot was allowed 200 rounds a month for gunnery practice, which is worse than no practice at all. If we could have enough ammunition to run one mission a week, firing all six guns, and in the case of the P-39, the cannon, making ten passes at a target, ground or low, preferably tow target, I think we would get sufficient practice. That would take about ten passes with six guns, firing in about five second bursts each pass. You would get used to where the bullets were going and what it was going to feel like.