Todd Dabney oral history interview

Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army Air Force
World War II – Pacific Theater

Interviewed: October 3, 2001
Identifier: VWM 230

Keywords:

World War II (1939-1945)

Bell P-39 Airacobra

New Guinea--Port Moresby

New Guinea—Milne Bay

Australia

Repository: Virginia War Memorial Archives

Title: Todd Dabney oral history interview, 3 October 2001

Collection (host): Virginia War Memorial Oral History Project

Interviewee (creator): Dabney, Todd

Interviewer: Kennedy, Tom

Date of interview: 2001-10-03

Decades: 1940-1950

Region of Virginia: Central

Branch of Service: United States Air Force

Conflicts/Era of Service: World War II

Military Service History
Service Dates: 1940-1945
Highest Rank: Lieutenant Colonel
Locations of Service: Long Island, New York; Brisbane, Australia; Townsville, Australia; Port Moresby, New Guinea; Tampa, Florida
Medals or Service Awards: Air Medal; Distinguished Flying Cross; Silver Star (SSM)

Extent: 55:52; transcript (19 pages)

Abstract: Todd Dabney served from 1940-1945 in the U.S. Air Force. Dabney reflects his childhood and college career, finding a sense of purpose in joining the Air Force and attending flight school. He talks about his service in New Guinea including his isolation and the dangers of Japanese bombing. He expresses his satisfaction mastering the P-39 and P-40 planes and recalls his success in downing at least one enemy bomber. Dabney also talks about losing several comrades to Japanese attacks and an off-duty motorcycle accident. He discusses life after coming home and his work coordinating domestic operations from the Third Air Force Headquarters in Tampa, Florida prior to his discharge with honors in 1945.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	Cinebar Productions
Abstract by:	Aaron Rodriguez, VWM Volunteer

Interview Transcript:

Interviewer: First thing we have to do is spell your name, last name first.

Dabney: Dabney, D-A-B-N-E-Y.

Interviewer: And first name.

Dabney: Todd, T-O-D-D.

Interviewer: Next thing we'll do is, branch of service, rank, serial number.

Dabney: Branch of service was, Army Air Force. That's what it was when I got in. And branch of service.

Interviewer: Rank.

Dabney: Lieutenant Colonel

Interviewer: Serial number

Dabney: 0420579. I can remember that. That's the one thing I remember.

Interviewer: Let's start right at the beginning. Tell me why you joined up, why you went in the Air Corps, what your parents said and sort of what was going on in general.

Dabney: Well, I was in college, and I was not a student, and I always wanted to fly. I had been to, down to, what the hell is the name of the field, field down here, the Army field where it still is... Langley Field. My uncle took me down there to see a friend of his and. And a friend was in and flew a P-36. And they showed me a P-36. And I just wanted to fly one ever since, I must have been, probably, 15 then, or something like that. And so, I left college in my junior year and joined the Air Force. And that was in 1940.

Interviewer: Where did they send you when you joined up?

Dabney: I went to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to primary flying school, and then Montgomery, Alabama, for Advanced and all the rest of the training. And when I graduated from Montgomery, from flying school, they sent me to Mitchell Field in Long Island, New York, which was the epitome of the, of the fighter stations they could have sent me to. I wanted to fly fighters. I just got my complete wishes, and I stayed there for, well, I was there for about eight months, I guess. But was on maneuvers most of the time in the southern United States flying P-40s, P-40. P-39, P-40s on maneuvers. And came back and was all set for a glorious life at Mitchel Field with a beautiful bar, and right about, you get to New York and a half an hour on the train and, and everything was just glorious. And then, Pearl Harbor came, and they sent us right away to. Providence, Rhode Island, our squadron. And we were up there, supposed to be training and looking for submarines. This was after Pearl Harbor, right after Pearl Harbor. And we stayed there. I don't think we stayed very long, maybe a couple of months. And I ferried a couple of airplanes out to the West Coast, new airplanes, just so they could ship them overseas. So, I wasn't even in, in New England very long. And they sent me back to Mitchel Field for a week or two, and then put me on a train for the West Coast.

Interviewer: How was traveling across.

Dabney: I don't remember much about it.

Interviewer: I know not as much fun as flying…

Dabney: Oh, no, no, it, I remember… no, I don't really hardly remember anything about it. I remember a couple of trips across the country after ferrying new planes out to California and then coming back on. Sometimes I'd have to come back on the train. I remember one trip I took back on the train was December, sometime early in December, when everybody was getting out of school and going, going home to the east from And I was on the train with a whole bunch of students, and I was in clover. I was a lieutenant. All the girls were great. And I had a grand trip home. Yeah. And that's, that's all I remember about. I don't remember going out on the train.

Interviewer: Where did you end up in California?

Dabney: In San Francisco. And we got on the boat in San Francisco and. I have to stay in there for a few days. The boat broke down when it was leaving the harbor, and they put us out on some island down near Ellis Island, right near Ellis Island for two weeks. And we were stuck while they fixed the boat and. But we finally got going.

Interviewer: And where did they take you?

Dabney: To Brisbane, Australia. We didn't know where we were going until we got there. We didn't know anything about it. And went across the Pacific took us 23 days. This was an inter-island steamer that we were packed on. And we were the first Americans to arrive in Brisbane. And I thought, boy, when we get to Brisbane, they're going to welcome us with open arms. Well, we drove up to the dock and docked in Brisbane and there wasn't anybody there, nobody. And but they put us in a camp, camped us in a racetrack in tents. And eventually got us shipped out to different places.

Interviewer: Now, where did they ship you?

Dabney: New Guinea… by, by several steps. We, we stopped and trained for a while in Brisbane. Then we jumped a little further and trained a little further at Townsville. And, and I don’t remember where... a couple of little bases They had, they had bases there. One that we stayed at called Petrie was, they reverted a road that was down, it was, they were all on the coast of Australia. They weren't, we didn't have any good maps over there when we got there, but they diverted a road out in the country and around this place and made a strip out of the road. And that's where we landed. And I didn't stay there for about a month waiting to go to New Guinea.

Interviewer: Now, what was New Guinea like?

Dabney: I called it the asshole of the universe. It was nothing. When we got there, we went to Port Moresby, which is the biggest town in New Guinea, and it was

nothing. It was bombed out and it was just a mess in there, and burned up half the buildings and paper and everything all over the streets and. That's, that's the way it was. And we went about ten miles up in the, in the jungle where they'd cut out strips. There were three airstrips up there: Seven Mile, Four Mile, and, and Five Mile, I think it was. It was just strips and that's where we flew to.

Interviewer: Now, what planes are you flying out of there.

Dabney: In that area? P-39s. We flew them up from where we were fooling with them in Australia and keeping in shape till we went up there. We were not the first squadron to get there. We were the first group, but my squadron was not… there were two of them that got there first before me, and I was a little late getting there. But by the time we got there, they had the Japs had found we were there and they were bombing us pretty regularly. And all we did was fly, every day, patrols. That's where most of my flying time was, flying patrols over Port Moresby, protecting them from the bomber, from the bombers. And I own the bombers didn't come in the daytime very much and we didn't fly at night, so we just stayed in our, in our tents during the night. And when, when the raids came, we'd get in a slit trench and wait till they were gone.

Interviewer: Now, how long did you do that?

Dabney: Six months. And then, we went to, our squadron was sent to Milne Bay, which you don't know where it is, but that's, that's the farthest west point in New Guinea where... just a just a point down there that sticks down into the tropics. And they had a, it was a big bay there. And just before or some, I think a month or so before, they were building our airstrip down there. And when they built it, we went down and took it over. But while they were building it, they had some supply ships in Milne Bay, which was not very big, maybe a mile across, and... maybe not that much. I don't know. I just flew over it all the time. But the ships could go right up to the shore. The mountains came right down, and the water was here and the mountains kept on going down. Ships just come back, came up to the shore and unloaded. And, and about a month before we got there, a Jap cruiser came in one night... and we had no airplanes, were there, no protection. And they came into the harbor and, and shined a light on two of the, two of the cargo ships

were there and sunk them right there at the bank. And a little later, they sent a troop of Japs in. By that time, we were ready for them. And this was before the Air Force ever got there. But this whole bunch of Japs came in and were not, they got to land all right, but they were waiting for them on land. And when they got there and I think they killed them all. I don't know how many it was, but we, we often, if we went walking out in the, in the woods, we sometimes ran into dead Japs that were around.

Interviewer: Now, as they, as they pushed up that island chain, **y**ou would go from the West Coast and, and fly patrols out to the west and then back.

Dabney: Yeah, I think I think it was west. I, I think it was more north and west. It was the north side of New Guinea where Lae and Salamaua and Buna. Buna was right across from Port Moresby. Port Moresby was on the south and Buna was on the north coast. I got a map, I think, and that's where we, I spent most of my time in Port Moresby. But we were, I think, seven miles out of Port Moresby.

Interviewer: Now, how long were you all together on New Guinea before you moved to the next island?

Dabney: Well, I didn't ever move. Stayed there the whole time. As soon as I moved, we, we got P-38s, and I never got to fly one. I mean, I left just before they came. I never even saw them. And I always wanted to fly a P-38, but I was damn glad to get home.

Interviewer: Yeah, I could, I could imagine. When you were in training, what was it like eventually to get into a P-39? Because that at that point was....

Dabney: Well, first, the first airplane we got into was a P-40, which, you know what they are, and that's what they had at Mitchel Field when I was sent up. We had several days of ground training before we got into them, and then they put us in the cockpit and gave us a, said, “This is this is for this and this is this. And okay, go on, get in and fly.” We'd already learned how to fly in flying school, but it was, and we had a good time flying around New York.

Interviewer: Oh, I bet.

Dabney: I flew under the under the… I started to say the Brooklyn Bridge... the George Washington Bridge one time. Not many people have done that. And I was a damn fool to do it, but I didn't make any noise about it. But I had some friends in the Navy who were in a training thing right at the bridge. And I saw them in town one night and said, "Okay, tomorrow I'm coming in and flying to the bridge." And so, they all saw me there, flying. I don't think many people did that, but it was nothing to it. That bridge, I mean, you could fly an airline underneath, underneath George Washington Bridge.

Interviewer: But still not many people know...

Dabney: No. Now, I'm sure they've got ropes hanging down there to keep you from doing it.

Interviewer: When you were over in in New Guinea and fighting there, did you ever run across the Japanese in the air? I mean, did you ever.

Dabney: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of that.

Dabney: Well, our first... when I told you there were two squadrons. There were three squadrons in our group, and two of them went up first, and I was in the third. They just didn't send us all at once. But those guys got up to New Guinea and fought Zeros at 20,000ft. And, and they killed a whole bunch of my friends. And, and by the time I got there, they said, they said, "You go for the bombers. And if, if the Zeros get on you, don't fight them. Go straight down and they wouldn't follow you." And that's what I did and that's why I'm alive. But that's what P-39s did. But as soon as they got to P-38s and the P-51s up there, boy, they went up and smashed the hell out of the Japs.

Interviewer: Now, I understand that, I mean, initially, the Zeros were more maneuverable.

Dabney: Oh, yeah. They knocked the P-39s down, easily. Of course, we couldn't... when we got to 20,000ft where they were, we were hanging on the prop, I mean, just wide open and going, couldn't hardly go. And they were flying, buzzing around like bees. So, it wasn't much sense in fighting them. But the first guys had got there didn't know that. And they, they started fighting them and they killed a whole lot of, of the other two squadrons. Most of my best friends got killed. I think back on them and consider the ones that got, that I can think of that got killed, all of them were good friends of mine. And not any manner of how many they were.

Interviewer: How did you live day to day with that going on?

Dabney: Well, we used to sit by thatched hut on the strip and wait for the wait for them to call on the phone that the Jap bombers were coming, and we'd take off and go after them, if we could, if we could get to them. And that's, that's about it. It was, wasn't anything good about it. One thing had happened. I had, my family who live in Maine, knew some people that came from Australia. They were in the newspaper business, and my family in Maine was in the newspaper business, and they visited. And they knew me, and they went home and told their son, who was a pilot for the Aussies to, said, “We understand that a guy named Todd Dabney over here, you're supposed to look him up.” And I was supposed to look him up. Kim up. And he was up in. Indonesia. Are the Japs had, he was in Australian bombers, he was a bomber pilot. And they ran him out of Indonesia, and he was on his way back to Australia and landed at seven mile strip where I was. And it really, it was some coincidence he got out of his airplane... I mean, this bomber came in and it was a strange looking English bomber, an Australian bomber. It was comical looking, and he got out and walked over to the alert hut, to the alert section where I was, and asked somebody and said, “Any of you guys know Todd Dabney? Ever seen him?” “Yeah, there he is, right over there on the left, sitting on the ground.” And he is I saw a whole lot of him after that. We, we, we've become he's come over and visited me here a couple of times. But wasn't that something. He was just getting run out of Indonesia. Happened to land at the airstrip where I was and asked for me.

Interviewer: In, in the, the time that you were there, the losses in, n your group were high. How did you keep going on?

Dabney: Well, they, I don't know where we got the airplane. We used to get airplanes, but the airplanes they sent us were the ones we had been flying on maneuvers down here in Louisiana. And, and, and we go down there hoping to find new airplanes and we come in the same ones we've been flying in, in Louisiana before the war. And it was disappointing. And that's what we flew. But they were, they were good airplanes. They just weren't meant to fly up at 20,000ft. The P-39 had a 37-millimeter cannon in it. That's a big gun in an airplane that's bigger than any of them carrying now. And I hit a bomber with, with a 37-millimeter on time, blew right up, right in front of me, whole big ball of flame, killed everybody on it. And I think it knocked down another airplane in the, in the formation. I told him it did, but I never got credit for the other airplane.

One shot. I mean, you never expected to... I guess. the cannon on the airplane, on the airplane never did fire too well. Most of them didn't go off, and they were supposed to shoot about six times. I don't think anybody ever got one to shoot more than one, just the shell that was in the chamber. And I happened to hit that bomber, and it was beautiful. Couldn't believe it. It looked so easy.

Interviewer: What were some of the close calls you had?

Dabney: I never had many close calls, not really. Close calls... whenever the bombers came over, you, you go and shoot at them. And, and I can't think of any, but I had a lot of nice experiences that I'd like to talk about.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about it.

Dabney: One time I went to, to pick up some airplanes in Brisbane. I was sent from New Guinea to get some airplanes that were shipped over here. And there were four of us, and we went down there and got four P-39s and were flying back from Brisbane. You have to stop three or four times before you get out of Australia to New Guinea. And at, at one stop, we have... I think it was Townsville, I was up getting the clearance for the four of us and there was a, another GI pilot up there

and, and after he heard me saying I was going to Port Moresby, he said, he said, "I'm going to Port Moresby, I've got a B-25 out here. Why don't you hook on to us? We'll navigate for you." Well, that was just great. We were happy to do that. So, we all took off together. And four of us following this B-25 and that guy got lost. And we, and we were four airplanes flying on him and we were running low, low out of gas. We were, we were running out of gas, and we were over the desert of northern Australia. You're supposed to follow the coast. But we thought he knew what he was doing, and we didn't play with it. But finally, we said, we saw over here some water over here, which was a Gulf of Carpentaria.

Well, we knew that that was a long way from where we were supposed to go and we said, "Hey look, here." Well, anyway we were, at that time everybody was running low on gas and we were hollering to the bomber and say, "We got to get down." And in the northern Australia, there's nothing, not anything. Like that, I mean, they have have sheep farms that, a sheep farm would be 40 square miles, not acres, 40 square miles. That's… and there'd be one house on it. Well, we were looking for a place to land and there was a little house with an airstrip by it. The owner of the sheep farm that we just happened to fly over. And so, we went… we were nearly empty. We, of course, went right down and landed on the little strip. And one guy ran off the end of it, but it didn't hurt anything. And when we got there, it was just one house and two, we said, old ladies over there. They were probably 40 years old or something. They were old ladies, 50. And we went in and they were, you know, they'd never seen a warplane before. They, they get their mail by Cubs or something like that every, every two weeks. And the airplane would come up and bring them the mail and the news.

And here's four fighters lit in their yard. Well, they were kind of astounded and they were very nice to us. And we slept on the floor. And the ladies, the way they communicated, one of them would, they had a bicycle generator and one of them would ride the bicycle and the other one would dit-dot the messages to whoever. That's their communication. They didn't have any phone or anything like that and that. They were from nowhere, and they had Aborigines were, worked for them during the... they killed a goat, and we had goat for dinner. And while, while we were there, I was looking up on the shelf and saw a National Geographic, several, they had ten of them up there. And I saw one of them said on the cover, on the

back edge, Virginia, had written in here. So, I pulled the thing down and, and opened it up. And there was Virginia, and I was thumbing through it. And I came to a section that was showing May Day at Sweetbriar. And I said, “Look it, here's May Day. There's, there's my wife,” who was my girl, and I could name all the girls in the in the picture.” And old ladies, I thought it was so, so admire. I was just that was just a real good story, isn't it? In no where.

Interviewer: And who did they contact?

Dabney: The bomber went and got and flew somewhere and got and told where we were. And they sent us gas in a C-47, next day or couple of days.

Interviewer: Now, they got a C-47 sitting out there.

Dabney: Yeah, that's right. Well, it was a nice... it was a good place to land. Only place... we could have let we could have landed most anywhere. There wasn't anything but scrub but wouldn't have been good to land for P-39. But we were just lucky as hell to find the strip.

Interviewer: That's a great story.

Dabney: The other three pilots are, “God damn, Dabney knows all those girls in the magazine.” And went back and told them. I was a big shot for a while.

Interviewer: Tell me another story. That was wonderful.

Dabney: About Kim, you heard, the Australian, my friend flew down there and was told to look me up. I just told you that.

Interviewer: When you went back to Australia. Oh, what was Australia like? I mean, was the were the people really nice?

Dabney: They were all nice people.

Interviewer: They loved having you all there.

Dabney: But most of Australia was like a West movies, I mean, boardwalks and no no paved streets or anything, but very nice houses. And Townsville was the biggest town up north there and they had paved streets, not paved, but they weren't rough, but all the roads were just hardly any good. And the, it was right on the ocean and right out there was the coral reef, what do they call it? The Great Barrier Reef. And I'm an ardent fisherman and I never got to go out on the Great Barrier Reef. We used to fly over it all the time.

Interviewer: Look down and see the sharks.

Dabney: Oh, well, no, we never messed around with looking. We would take off and go and do what we had to do. This was training when we were at rest, on rest camp. They'd send us down there every, every six months, I think, to go to Townsville and some other places down there in northern Australia.

Interviewer: Now, how long were you there all together?

Dabney: Almost two years.

Interviewer: Finally got enough points to come home.

Dabney: We didn't know what points were. When I got, when I got home, I found I had plenty of points.

Interviewer: When did you get notice that you were coming home?

Dabney: Well, I got home in 1943, May. I think, ‘43. And I didn't get any notice. They just came and said, one day, “Dabney, you’re going home tomorrow.” And, well, I got drunk that night, of course, and had the hiccups, and I had the hiccups for four days on the way. Oh, another good story. We flew home in a, in a B-20... great big four engine bomber. What is it? B-24, yeah. And there were several people on it. And there was one young Navy guy who. we sort of got friendly. And we drank beer together when we landed. I think we had to land three times to get home. And when we got to Hawaii, we only had one day. I think, maybe, we

spent one night. But I had a guy in my squadron whose wife was there, and this guy was a submariner, this friend of mine who, who... he was going on his way home, and he was just being sent home. And so, we drank a lot of beer on the way home when we could get a hold of it. And when we got to Hawaii, Honolulu, I looked up this guy's wife, my squadron mate's wife. And we went by to see her and we were sitting in one morning, and we were sitting there drinking coffee with her and a friend of hers came in. And she had just gotten word that her husband was missing, in our Navy, she was, she was a Navy. And this this guy said, "Well, where was it? Where was he stationed?" And he told him. And this guy was in the China Sea in his submarine. And he said, "What was his name?" It's really unbelievable. She told him and he said, "We picked him up last week." Isn't that something?

Interviewer: That is absolutely amazing.

Dabney: That's another good story.

Interviewer: She was a happy lady.

Dabney: And then, when we got to San Francisco, we said goodbye, shook hands and left at the airport. And we both went into San Francisco and we both called up the same girl. I'm getting tears thinking about it. Both got, man she's, she's just in town this week.

Interviewer: That's funny. What was it like coming all the way home?

Dabney: Well, it wasn't anything much to it. We just sat on this airplane all day long, every day. Oh, you mean getting home to, to Richmond? Oh, that. Well, that was right. Troublesome. I flew part of the way, but I couldn't get passage all the way. And I think I got as far as Washington, somehow or another, maybe, Chicago and got, no, got to Washington and couldn't get home. It was big, a lot of… but I got on the train finally with a special, somebody helped me get on the train. The train was packed with people and couldn't sit down on the train, drove all the way to Richmond on the train, slow. They were slow all day. Well, I finally got in. And

my **t**o be wife, my fiancé met me at the airport. I talked to her from New York, from Washington.

Interviewer: That must have been good.

Dabney: Was.

Interviewer: I heard that you flew jets.

Dabney: Well, no, not really. I flew one. This was an experimental jet. There were only eight of them made. Called a P-59, and they weren't, they were underpowered, and they were, they were more or less experimental. But it was the first time that they had put jet engines in an airplane. And, and when they had them on the field, they put big old wooden propellers on the front, just hooked, stuck them on the front, so nobody would know they were jets. And I had a friend, I was in Training Command and he had a friend who knew. who was out there at the field, San Luis Obispo, California. And he said, "Let's. let's get an airplane and go out there and fly one of those things." And we did. We got a B-25 and flew it out to San Luis Obispo and got checked out in... the both of us, took turns flying it and flew it around. I only flew it about an hour.

Interviewer: And what was the date?

Dabney: Well, this was, was probably '45, '46.

Interviewer: So, you had come home and then gone back out to California.

Dabney: No. I'd come home and gone to Florida. I was in the Training Command. As soon as I got home, I was sent to Tampa, Florida, where I was in Headquarters, Third Air Force. And I stayed there for two years, two and a half years, maybe more. I don't know how long. And I was a captain when I got home. And I had a good, I got a good job in the training. I was in charge of fighter training, but I was, I was a headquarters man and I was contact between the 12 training bases we had in Florida and Washington. And I had to fly to Washington every now and then to talk to the generals and things up there. That's what I did when I got home. And,

man, I got promoted to lieutenant colonel. My God, I never thought I'd be anything like that.

Interviewer: And so, so, you were in Florida, and you flew out to California?

Dabney: Yeah, we had, we had in our headquarters a B-25. We had bomber pilots and, and fighter pilots in the headquarters. And there was a B-25 there that the bomber pilots used to... I don't know what they use it for, but we got it. This friend of mine got a hold of it and we flew, two of us flew it out to California. And we didn't… I don't even remember spending the night out there, but maybe we did. We must have. We, it takes a, quite a, quite a while to fly from Florida to California. I don't remember much of the flight except flying the P- 59, getting home. Boy, I'd flown a jet and nobody else had ever done it in the whole headquarters and the whole Air Force. Yeah. This was before they had the F-, the, the ones that everybody flew. It was an experimental jet.

Interviewer: That's amazing. How did that, what was it like? How did it. How did they check you out, first? I mean, what did you have to...

Dabney: Check in the fighter pilot out, if you're a fighter pilot, it ain't much to it. They just tell you how to fly it and what the instruments are for, what airspeed to take off and land at and what mixture control to use. And you look at the instruments. That’s all it is, just one person in there.

Interviewer: Was it, was it fairly fast or was it...

Dabney: This thing? No, it wasn't very fast. It had, they were underpowered. I may... I'd slow rolled it and it, it was so different from a, from a fighter. When you, when you, when you roll a fighter, you have to step down on it one side. When it goes up here, you got to step over here and it got to work the cord. This thing, you just put the stick over and it just went right on around like that. But I only, only rolled it once.

Interviewer: That's amazing. It's really one of the first jets. So, how long were you in altogether? When did you finally get out?

Dabney: When did... I don't know exactly when, when the war ended. But I was one of the first that got out. Of course, I had plenty of points and I wanted to get I didn't want to stay in.

Interviewer: Went back to school.

Dabney: No, I didn't. No, got married. Oh, no, I got married before. Right after I got home. As soon as I got one, two weeks after I got home and got married. Well, I, I had been thinking about it for a while.

Interviewer: I understand. When you were over in New Guinea, what did you miss most?

Dabney: Oh, well, I'm an only child and my mother died when I was a child, and my father had married again. And so, I really didn't have any big loving family to think about. And I wrote most of my letters to my present wife and my father. Who was, he was in the Navy after, after I went out. He, he had been in World War Two and he went back in. And so, he was in the Navy the whole time I was in the Army. And we, we were, he, he and I were the same rank

Interviewer: Sort of amazing. Let me ask you this. When, when the war started and everybody in your generation just went to war. They either went in the war, or they went to the factories or, you know, everybody did their part. Why do you think that is?

Dabney: Well, I think it was just, the war hadn't even started when I went in. I went in before the war. But as soon as the draft came, I mean, nobody gave it a thought, I don't think. They just, they were drafted. They went in and it was a question of what you wanted to do and whether you could get to do what you wanted to do. When I went in, I went in, I hoped, saying I was going in so I could go to the learn to fly, and they let me do it and I did it. And I went in with three or four guys from Richmond. Two of them were killed. And my best friend was killed, from Richmond. And **s**o, there were a lot of good friends who get lost. Funny how I get so teary when I start talking about the good things that happened, isn’t it.

Interviewer: Losing friends during the war like that, especially in what you were in, because, I mean, you were in in one of the most dangerous things.

Dabney: You get sort of used to it. I mean, you don't, it isn't much fun. I remember the last one of my friends, I didn't see him spinning, but I went right to where he'd spun in and saw the mess that was there. And I guess I soon forgot about it. I mean, he was, he was a guy who'd been on leave with it. And, you know, and another friend was he and I had bought a motorcycle together in Australia and one of our leaves and we, we were, we had that and damn if he didn't get killed, too. And. so a lost a lot of good friends in the Army. But they were Army people, Army friends, not, not friends like I've got in Richmond now, really, long time school friends and everything else.

Interviewer: Now when the war was over. You got married? Uh huh. Most people came back. A lot of them got married. Got. Went back to school, went to work, whatever. Didn't really talk about the war very much. Just sort of went on with your life. Why don't you think you talked about it very much?

Dabney: Nobody asked you about it. If anybody asks me, they liable to have to listen to me for a long time. But you don't, you don't want to talk about it. I don't, don't want to make it, because you bore people that that they don't know what you're talking about. I don't want to do that.

Interviewer: When all these tapes are put together, are they going to be put in the schools of Virginia. So, students, if they're in a history class and they get to World War Two, instead of just pages in a book, you know, they get to see real people talking about the war. If you could talk to them about why the war was fought or what it meant. What would you tell them?

Dabney: Well, when. When we went to war, the Japs had raided Pearl Harbor. And, no, no, they hadn't. I was, I was in the Army when Pearl Harbor came, but we knew war was coming. And it was a most people just waited to get drafted. I mean, almost all my friends did. I... but very few people went in ahead of time like I did. And but we, we thought the wall was coming and we were going. We knew we were

going to have to get in. I did. I thought we were going to get in a war. But mainly I didn't give it much thought. I wanted to learn how to fly, and that's what I did. The main reason I want him to learn how to fly and to get in one of those P-36s that I'd seen out at Langley Field ten years before.

Interviewer: And you got to do that? How many planes were you credited with shooting down?

Dabney: I was credited with three.

Interviewer: Okay. We heard about the one with the one shot where you actually got to. You got credited one. What about the other two times?

Dabney: Well, the other times there was there was another flight of bombers. And I found them when they were, I think they must have been... I don't know what they were doing, but they weren't as high as usual. And I just made one pass at them, and they had about 20 Zeroes flying over the top of them. And, and I shot one of the… it was a, it was a fighter. He was not a, he wasn't a Zero, but it was a... they must have been a flight of something that was sending over to shoot up something. And I got one of them. And another one that I got credit for was a Zero that I shot down just before the, all the Zeros got after us, when we were up there patrolling for the bombers over Port Moresby. And as soon as, soon as the… well, you'd go and try to get a Zero if you could, but if you saw the tracers going by, we were told, just go straight down, because you can't have... if he's on your tail, he's going to get you. And that's what they did.

Interviewer: Well, I'll tell you, I thank you for your time today. You got some great stories.

Dabney: What was the other one I was going to tell you? I guess that's enough. That's enough.

Interviewer: If you think of it, you tell me.

Dabney: I can't, I can't remember. I've got such a poor memory.

Interviewer: You'll remember it when...

Dabney: Oh, I was on leave in, in, in Sydney. And we'd get, I got two leaves in Sydney while I was there, one every six months we'd get a leave down there, maybe, every eight months, I don't know. And we, when I got there we, I was one of the first guys that they saw getting leave from New, from New Guinea and coming to Sydney. And when I got there, they, they, I had to report to whoever it was. And they, the guys in the office, one of the guys in the office says, "Well, I got a nice apartment. Why don't you take my apartment?" Well, hell, I was, I was, wasn't he nice? He was a fine gentleman, and his name was Art Vandenberg and he was from, he was from Denver, Colorado. And his father was Senator Vandenberg. You remember him? He, he was before you, in World War II. Yeah, he was, he was a biggest senator in the in the Senate during World War Two, Arthur Vandenberg. And this was his son. And he, he lent me his apartment. And, well, that's not the story. When I was there, I guess this was the second leave I was there and I, I got a date. He got out, Art Vandenberg got me a date with a real nice girl. And I took her out the whole time I was there. And the next time when I went back, I took her out again and I took her to dinner on my second leave. And there was a, the best restaurant in Sydney was called… hell, I forget the name of it. Anyway, where everybody went that was on leave. And we were having dinner and in walked Mosby Cardoza, who is a Richmond boy, and he was in Guadalcanal flying C-47s. He was transporting stuff around over there and his headquarters in Guadalcanal. And that was before Guadalcanal got started. I mean, they were just building it up. And before the fighters got in there and they really had the war. And anyway, we were eating dinner, and this Mosby came in with his crew chief into the restaurant and saw us at the table, of course, came and sat down with us and, and talked and we had dinner and we had dinner. And the next day, I had to go back to New Guinea. And I was, I went up to, we went to the airport. I went into the airport to get checked out. I was going to get a ride back in a, in a bomber. And I was up waiting while the bomber pilot checked out. And while I was there, an MP walked in and I was just sitting on a chair somewhere and he looked at me and said, "Captain, I think you'd better come along with me. There's somebody out here in the draining gasoline out of an airplane." And I went out there and walked out there and there was Moseley draining gas out of his airplane and putting them in his car that he'd rented. And he had a picnic basket

and my date, and they were gone, my girl from the night before. And that's a good story. And he picked her right up. Her name was Phyllis Tooth.

Interviewer: That is a good story. That is a great story. Well, I appreciate this great story. That's exactly what we were looking for, was good stories. And I appreciate...

Dabney: Sorry. Sorry. I got teary.

Interviewer: Oh, that's okay. That's I mean, that's. I think you deserve that.

Dabney: It's just fun thinking about it. And you don't. I don't get to talk about it very often.

Interviewer: We should talk about it more.

Dabney: Well, nobody's interested. Nobody asks you about it. I can't just blurt it out.

Interviewer: Well, I'm interested in it.