

Interviews: descriptions

Gen. Colin Powell



On his section of the tour, Gen. Colin Powell describes for us, the visitor, about the desegregation of the Navy that started in WW11. He tells the story when, on Oct. 29th, 1944, the Intrepid was attacked by kamikazes. Many men were killed and wounded. African American and Mexican American sailors, assigned to the mess hall, volunteered to go up to the Flight Deck where officers gratefully assigned them to man a 20 mm gun to defend the ship.

Gen. Powell tells us: "The volunteers stuck to their post even as a kamikaze dove straight down at them. They managed to shoot off a wing, and the Japanese plane dropped its 500-pound bomb into the water, just off the ship. But then, the mangled remains of the plane crashed directly into (them) and exploded into flames. Ten of the men were killed. The others were burned severely." One burned survivor, Alonzo Swann, Jr, rushed back into the flames to try to save his friends. Gen. Powell quotes a young sailor, Don Bee, who learned that day that "all men bleed the same color."

Lt. Alex Vraciu



Later in the audio tour we hear from Crewmember, Navy Cross winner and Navy Ace, Lt. Alex Vraciu, who shot down six Japanese planes – two in one pass – in one incredible day. Lt. Vraciu tells us that as a "good fighter pilot... you learn fast, and if you don't, you may not make it." He also tells us how, after shooting down the six planes, "....I thumped my heart and I said, 'This is my payback for Pearl Harbor.' "

Sen. John McCain



Sen. McCain was a young Navy pilot aboard the Intrepid in the early 60's. Later, off another carrier, he flew A-4 Skyhawks, an example of which is on view in the Intrepid's Hangar Deck. In his interview, he tells us that when he was imprisoned in North Vietnam his father was Commander in Chief of all US forces in the Pacific during the Vietnam War. "....you can imagine the weight it was when he ordered the bombing of Hanoi and he knew that I was there."

Crewmember Winston Goodloe

On the tour, Crewmember Winston Goodloe tells us that one night in February 1944 he went to get some cigarettes before joining a friend for a cup of coffee. By the time he arrived for the coffee, his friend and many others had been killed by a torpedo. Goodloe tells us, "So the fact that I went for a package of Luckies, that saved my life."

Pres. George H. W. Bush



Museum President Bill White describes President Bush's experience in the Navy flying Avenger Torpedo Bombers, an example of which is in the Museum's collection. We learn that Pres. Bush enlisted on his 18th birthday, and when he earned his wings, a year later, he was, at the time, the youngest pilot in the US Navy.

Mr. White tells us about then Lt. Bush attacking a key military radio station on a heavily guarded Japanese island: "...as he began to dive towards the target, Japanese anti aircraft fire jolted the belly of his plane and smoke began to fill his cockpit. He pressed on, dropped his bombs, and scored a hit." He had to ditch his plane in enemy waters, but was saved by a US submarine and went on to fly over 50 combat missions in all.

Lt. Ray James

Lt. James describes how he got his first kill in a dogfight: "I engaged a plane at maybe 12 - 13,000 feet. He started every maneuver in the world to get rid of me. I mean, a lot of times, they would turn upside down, for example. Well, that doesn't matter when you are dogfighting – you don't know when you're upside down or right side up anyway. And you can shoot the airplane down upside down just as well. We were playing cat and mouse like that all the way down.

Probably the whole engagement from 13,000 feet down to a thousand feet seemed like an eternity and it yet it probably just took a minute or two, but when I finally got good position I virtually blew the plane to pieces. I was so excited about it that I really froze to my stick and flew right through the debris, which was the dumbest thing in the world you could do. When you're flying, your concentration is just so fine, and so developed, that you're almost a different person, to be honest with you."

Astronaut Scott Carpenter



In 1962 Carpenter was picked up by a helicopter from the Intrepid. After safely landing in the ocean and getting into his life raft, he remembers:

"I waited for quite a while to see some airplanes flying around me that would let me know my location was known, but that was a good quiet time. Most of the people on recovery are battered by debriefing teams immediately and I had that quiet time in the life raft where I could think about – without any interruption – the marvelous preceding five hours.

Scott Carpenter - continued

I was in the raft for maybe three hours all by myself. I was mighty glad to see that chopper there with the horse collar coming down, and I was happy to grab my camera, and take the ride up to the rescue helicopter — that was a beautiful sight too!"

Crewmember Coy Jarrett

"My name is Coy Jarrett and I was on the catapult crew. We got on the Flight Deck one night and we saw our Division Officer shaking his head and talking on his phones to the Bridge. We thought we'd really messed up and done something bad. And the Chief says, "I want to congratulate you all. You just broke the Navy launch record." Twice we broke it. First time we averaged one every 28 seconds. The second time, one every 26 seconds. Very proud moment. They did send word down one time to slow the catapult crew down because they were afraid someone would get hurt. I think our division officer sent word back: 'You slow them down, someone will get hurt!' It was like a well-oiled machine. Nothing spectacular, no heroes – we just did our job."

Lt. Robert 'Boom' Powell

I'm Boom Powell. I was on the Intrepid in the summer of 1967. When Operation Rolling Thunder began, they moved the aircraft carriers up north, to North Vietnam. We were flying into the suburbs of Hanoi and Hai Phong – that's as serious as you can get.

The only time I was hit was on a strike into Hanoi during a bomb run and I felt something bang the airplane a little bit so knew I'd been hit. But since I was already in the bomb run I continued with it and released my bombs and as I'm pulling off the target I called my flight leader (and said) "I think I've been hit."

He flew alongside and looked me over to see what damage there was and there were just two small holes up near the nose section of the airplane. And I said, 'Oh, OK.' And he said, 'Well, how are things inside? You know, what are you finding wrong?' And I said, 'Well not much. I can't breath. My oxygen's been cut off to my mask.'" So we flew back to the ship.

Lt. Charles Mallory



WWII kamikaze attack. "I got my gear and headed down to get the spare plane on the Hangar Deck. I signaled I wanted to go up. Finally a young sailor came over and pulled the chocks and put me on the elevator. I got to the top. There's firing going on from every ship in the whole group, and I know it's kamikazes 'cause I saw one of them hit the carrier running with us.

Our ship went into an emergency turn, so I decided that I had to get out of there – I wanted to get in with it – and I just put on full power and headed down the deck and I saw I wasn't going to be able to go off over the bow, so I went off over the side. The kamikaze hit as I was clearing the deck and it hit the elevator that I was on — the time spread there was probably not more than a couple of minutes. Everybody who was in that area was killed. I don't see how the people who were there, how they kept going, but they did.

It was fifty years before I went back aboard the ship."

Crewmember Don Bee

After the kamikaze attacks in November 1944: "Two days later, Admiral Halsey came aboard. The whole Hangar Deck was burned black and the paint would come off the walls and fly down, and so I got a broom and went up and I was sweeping away, and all of a sudden they called 'Attention on Deck!' And I looked and I'm standing right in the way of four officers. One of them was Admiral Halsey, and our Captain, who was Captain Bolger. I come to attention and pulled my broom up to my side and saluted and the Admiral looked right at me and he had a big smile on his face and he said, "Carry On, Son" and I felt like about 10 feet tall. I just thought here is the main warrior of our fleet and he recognized me and I was a plain ordinary sailor and I thought that's pretty neat.