

Basic Detail Report



David M. MacMillan Oral History

Date

November 4, 2021

Primary Maker

David M. MacMillan

Medium

WAV, PDF

Description

David M. MacMillan served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid (CVS-11) as a flight surgeon in Attack Squadron

15 (VA-15) during Intrepid's first and second Vietnam deployments in 1966 and 1967. The Museum recorded his oral history interview on November 4, 2021. See transcript for complete interview. Below is a summary: MacMillan began his interview by stating where he was born and raised and recalling his education from high school through medical school. He then explained why he joined the Navy and recounted a humorous April Fool's Day story regarding how he learned he was accepted into the Navy's flight surgeon program. As the interview continued, MacMillan discussed aviation medical school in Pensacola. He stated what they were taught, noted that they learned to fly, and explained how he was assigned to VA-15, before describing the role of a flight surgeon. MacMillan also recalled the role he played in the Navy changing their regulations and allowing pilots to wear glasses. He discussed flight surgeon training, recounting a simulated ejection and an escape from a submerged simulated cockpit. MacMillan stated that the Navy had an excellent program and "we came out of that with a very good understating of what pilots go through." He also noted that flight surgeons handled the pilots' and crew's psychological or mental health issues and stresses, and he recalled an officer who died by suicide when they returned home. MacMillan next recounted a sandstorm while transiting the Suez Canal. He also discussed the differences between WESTPAC sailors and East Coast sailors. The interview then shifted back to the topic of medicine, and MacMillan recalled the day-to-day activity in sick bay, noting the personnel who worked in sick bay, sick call, and procedures they performed. He also discussed forms of entertainment that were available to sick bay personnel, notably board games, chess and poker. MacMillan also explained that one of the flight surgeon's duties was giving healthcare lectures to the ship's company before the ship visited a port. This topic then led to stories regarding USO shows that occurred on board the ship. The interview next shifted to the topic of surgeries. MacMillan recalled preparing for surgeries outside the operating room. He also described the personnel who were present in the operating room and the equipment in the operating room, stating that some items were anchored to the floor so they could not move. MacMillan then provided additional information regarding sick call and some of the common ailments they treated, before he discussed specific incidents, such as: treating crew members who were overcome by hydrogen sulfide gas while inspecting a void space, being sent to a destroyer to treat a sailor, a crew member who

died of a brain hemorrhage, treating Hmong fighters after their mission into North Vietnam, and treating casualties from the Forrestal fire. MacMillan also noted that, although he came aboard with the squadron, he treated both ship's company and squadron members. He then briefly recalled giving eye tests. MacMillan stated that he did not experience any psychosomatic issues among the crew. Given the ship's challenging living conditions, he was impressed with the fact that he did not experience any psychosomatic cases. He noted that the ship had a good esprit de corps, and there were few personnel issues. As the interview continued, MacMillan recalled additional memories from his time aboard Intrepid. He explained how his job brought him to various locations throughout the ship, which provided him with opportunities to have different experiences, such as manning the helm and spending time on the LSO platform. He also recounted the time he was hit in the face with a jet blast while on the flight deck. MacMillan then discussed his relationship with the aviators and recounted two events relating to the crew's camaraderie: Intrepid's A-1 Skyraider pilots shooting down Soviet MiGs, and Intrepid's crew decorating the F-4 Phantom that landed on their ship. He also recalled his experience at the Navy's Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape School in Maine. MacMillan was sent to be the school's doctor and that he was there in case anyone was hurt. However, he explained that he was also able to walk around and see everything, which led to some memorable stories. MacMillan then discussed life after the Navy. Although he considered staying in the Navy, he decided to leave, complete his neurosurgery training, and start his own practice. He then reflected on these decisions and noted his love for the Navy, stating that his son went to Annapolis and became a naval aviator. As the interview came to an end, MacMillan recalled visiting Intrepid as a museum and stated what he hopes visitors will learn when they see sick bay. He also discussed a few final topics, including: Navy showers, other compartments he was able to visit, the pilots' mentality, and some additional memories from his time in sick bay. MacMillan then noted that he did not spend most of his time in sick bay, as more of his time was spent in the squadrons' ready rooms and various other compartments throughout the ship. Extent: 1 audio file, 44 page transcript

Dimensions

175 minutes