

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
THOMAS J. CULLEN
B-24 Gunner, Air Force, World War II.

1994

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Cullen, Thomas J., (1925-). Oral History Interview, 1994.

User Copy: 3 sound cassette (ca. 170 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 170 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Cullen, a Madison (Wisconsin) native, discusses his service with the 494th Bomb Group, 7th Air Force in the Pacific theater during World War II. He mentions being drafted after high school graduation at Madison Central in 1942 and subsequent basic Air Corps training at Keesler Field (Mississippi). Cullen recalls training for officer corps, boxing, and seeing “colored troops” in segregated training. He relates public segregation in Biloxi (Mississippi), his CTD training at Austin College, flight training in Sherman (Texas), and playing pool with a “local girl”. Describing gunnery school and training at the skeet range, Cullen recalls a story of his chronograph watch. Cullen discusses his B-24 crew training at Muroc Army Air Base (California), Los Angeles night life, his experiences meeting movie actors Gabby Hayes and Eric von Stroheim, and his boxing matches with soldiers. He mentions his flight crew member profiles and details adventures while on liberty in San Francisco. After arriving in Barking Sands (Hawaii), Cullen notes Kauai’s climate, terrain and food and details searching for General Harmon (commanding general of Pacific Army Air Forces). Cullen discusses being sent to Palau (Caroline Islands) in March 1945, leisure time, and native reactions to western culture. He cites his distaste of the Schaefer beer provided by the Army and how he nursed a bottle of “Three Feather’s” whiskey. Cullen discusses arriving in Okinawa, the “primitive natives”, red soil, and the danger of Japanese burial crypts. He details Washing Machine Charlie, Tokyo Rose’s ploys, bombing military targets in Japan, B-29’s over Okinawa and losing crew members in the Hiroshima A-bomb drop. Cullen discusses a mission to Kure Naval Base that was cancelled and recalls some discussions and reactions to the use of atomic bombs. Cullen talks about some crew members witnessing the Nagasaki mushroom cloud and his recollection of a “red dust” floating in the sky on August 9, 1945. He talks about traveling to Guam, Hawaii, San Francisco, and Camp McCoy (Wisconsin) before shuttling between Madison and San Antonio (Texas) until final discharge on November 9, 1945. He talks about joining the veteran’s group, Wisconsin Veterans of World War II, and going to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 1946 (graduating in 1948). He discusses the quonset huts, veterans clubs, and friction on campus between veteran and civilian students. He reflects on a boxing incident and concludes by talking about adjustments to civilian life, his first crew reunion, and other veteran attitudes.

Biographical Sketch

Cullen (1925-) born in Madison (Wisconsin), was drafted into the Army Air Force in 1942 and served with the 7th Air Force in the Pacific theater. Cullen completed his bachelor’s degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1994.

Transcribed by WDVA Staff, 1997.

Transcription edited by John McNally, 2006.

Mark: The date is, what is the date today? The date is August the 18th, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, I'm the archivist of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and I am doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Thomas J. Cullen, a World War II veteran on the Pacific theater, US Air Force in World War II. Good morning Mr. Cullen.

Cullen: Good morning Mark. Do I talk toward the ...

Mark: It's helpful, yeah. On the data sheet that I had you fill out, it says you were born 1925.

Cullen: That's correct.

Mark: Your home town is Madison?

Cullen: That's right.

Mark: Did you grow up here all of your life?

Cullen: No. I lived around the country. I was born in Wisconsin and we lived here most of my life. However, we lived on the West Coast when I was in grade school and for a year or two and also in high school for three years. So, I spent some of my growing up mainly in southern California.

Mark: When did you come back to Madison?

Cullen: In 1941.

Mark: And what brought you back?

Cullen: My dad just wanted to come back to the home area. It was in the spring of 1941. He thought that we just assume come back to this part of the country.

Mark: Now the Depression going on at the time of course.

Cullen: Well, yes and no. I mean it was certainly when I was growing up but, I mean when I was younger, but by the time we had come back, why I think we were starting to come out of the Depression and so it wasn't quite, there wasn't quite the experience in seeing people around in poverty situation than in say the mid '30's.

Mark: What did your father do that brought him to California and then back?

Cullen: He was a clothing salesman. The phenomena of the Depression era was the credit clothing store. Headquarters in New York as one would imagine, in the garment center. And, they would open these, they were chain stores, and my dad took the training starting back in the early 1920's, in Rockford. Then as openings would come, after a person was trained in the retail selling, he would be assigned a store and he had the duties of not only merchandising and so forth but also the very crucial one of collecting as it was a credit

store. They had the unofficial motto of a dollar down a dollar when you catch them. So, it was something that anyway, we had a fairly decent income during that period but he got tired of credit selling so then he went to, we moved out to Seattle and went into a store where he was one of the of a group of clerks and because of his experience they put him on the floor to see how well he did and after he sold to the first 3 fellas that came in he sold complete wardrobes and they said that I think we won't have any problem adding you to our staff.

Mark: So, you came back to Madison in '41.

Cullen: We came back in '41 and I started at the University, I graduated from Central High here in Madison in 1942 and then I was still 17, let me see, I guess I was actually 16, 16 or 17. I guess I graduated when I was 17 and so I wouldn't be 18 until the next following March so I started the University and turned 18 during my freshman year. So, then I would have gone in earlier and I did I went in in the fall of 19-I guess October.

Mark: In the military.

Cullen: In the military. And, I would have gone in earlier than that but I was taking ROTC, I was up in the old armory down on the lower campus and I had an appendicitis attack and so I was rushed out to the hospital. Anyway, I had an appendectomy and that ran my delay of going into service about 3 additional months as I recovered from that surgery.

Mark: It says here that you were conscripted, you were drafted.

Cullen: That's correct.

Mark: While you were in ROTC?

Cullen: No. When I completed the ROTC and that was as a student, I suppose had I wanted to make a, oh I don't know about this, I wanted to make a commitment to stay in the program. I could have stayed in school. However, I don't think so. I think that, I don't think that was a luxury that one had so anyway, I thought I would just take my chances and, because I wasn't certain at that point of what branch I wanted to go into. So, I thought I would just wait and be drafted.

Mark: Maybe you could describe the induction process. I suppose you're sitting at home one day and the mail comes and greetings from selective services.

Cullen: Yeah, as a matter of fact yes, that's the way it went. In fact, I happen to have that along a message to you. I received a card and it said, Selective Service Official Business. If not delivered in 5 days, return, Local Board #1 and so forth. And, my address was at that time on West Mifflin Street and it advised me to report to the induction center in Milwaukee, and so I, it said report for induction and then, I went from Madison to Milwaukee. Took a physical in Milwaukee. And, at that point, after I had passed the physical, I was then sent a further order to report to Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois and

so, then I was given, sent along with my destination and so forth, and the time was sent a list of the other draftees who were from Madison. I was appointed the group leader. Here I was a barely 18 year old kid, I probably, if not the youngest, very close to being the youngest fella of the group, out of a group of maybe 50 or 60. And so, here I was their leader. It was kind of ironic, kind of humorous, but the older fellas treated me with uncommon respect I thought, in fact one of them, he went out and, I mean he got his notices and then who the group leader was going to be and I had known him somewhat socially. We used to work up at the Y and he was about 10 years older than myself. So anyway, he went out and bought a diary and when we got down to Camp Grant or at the train station, whichever it was, I can't remember now, he had all of the fellas autograph it. So anyway, I went down to Camp Grant and from there, if you want me to proceed from that point.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Cullen: Took the qualification exam.

Mark: That was a written test?

Cullen: A written test. And entrance exam or whatever they called it at the time. And so, my score on it was such high enough at least that taken into consideration along with the fact that I had a year of ROTC I guess, they said you are qualified for Army or corps cadets if you want to go into that. I said well, I thought about it first. They said let us know tomorrow. It was a fella that I had met in Milwaukee and, when I was down in Milwaukee, and so we were talking about it and he also had that option and so his argument which was winning over for me, I was thinking about some of the other problems with maybe being up there with a crew and being shot at in an aircraft and so forth and he said yeah but, he said, "at least you wouldn't have to laying around in the mud if you are in the infantry and all that cold weather." And then he said, "you know you're frozen and everything in that mud." I said, "Man, you've got a point there Schroeder." So, anyway, we decided to go into the Air Corps and then I was assigned to Keesler Field, Mississippi for Basic training.

Mark: I want you to describe Basic training a little bit. What was Basic training like for an enlisted man going into the air corps?

Cullen: Well, it was, see at that point the-I was an enlisted man but I was also going to be a, I was training for the officer corps. So, it could be that the basic which I had was a little different. I don't know for fact that it was but, it probably pretty general. We had naturally been taught the drilling, how to march, how to attack obstacle courses and crawl under barbed wire and do all that. A lot of the training I'm sure was fairly general for all Army trainees at the time and served, did our fair amount of KP, which nobody could escape from and some had a better job at doing it than others. Some were apparently professional KP alludes, they knew where to get a sick call, where to not answer a roll call, or something like that, but most of the fellas had to put in their standard for KP. Then one of the highlights of training was, I can't remember the number of miles, but I

think it was something like a 14 mile hike that we took a shelter half and went out on a overnight hike and then another fellow, we would put out shelter halves together and then they would form a tent and then we would, we slept inside of the tent. I don't believe that we had, I think we had sleeping bags, I'm not 100% sure of that at this point, but I think we may have had sleeping bags. And so, as I recall, this was in the very wet gulf coast area around the first of the year and we had a lot of rains and also, well that was earlier, we had more rains. Then, some of the coldest I had ever been in my life was at Keesler Field. We had the area where we had instead of living in barracks, we lived in squad tents which would hold 6 men. And, so, we, during the cold weather and it had got, it went down to, I think we went down to some ridiculous temperature like 21 or something like that. So, we were out there with no heat in the tents so we put on everything we had. We had the GI wool cap, I think they called it helmet liners at the time and we put those on over our ears. I can remember putting on all the blankets, I put on all my issued clothes, my two blankets over my cot as well as my overcoat and wrapped a wool scarf, GI scarf around my neck, up around and over my face and somehow we suffered through it, but that was quite an experience.

Mark: It's pretty cold, in Mississippi especially.

Cullen: Especially Mississippi. The Napa's was very penetrating.

Mark: Now, in basic training I'm sure you came across a wide range of people from all different parts of the country. Could you perhaps describe some of the people you were training with?

Cullen: Yes, that was quite interesting because at the, we would have, well we would see, it was still the era of the segregated troops, so we would see what we described as the colored troops at that time would be out drilling and so forth off in their areas and they had their own rhythmic cadences and it was very colorful to watch and we would pick up some of their shouts and so forth as they would march. Some of that type of thing, I enjoyed watching them from a distance.

Mark: Were they Air Force too, or just regular troops?

Cullen: Some were. I think some of them were and I don't know exactly if they were, if the fellas that we saw, although that was an Air Force base so I suppose they were probably, now whether they were Air Force cadets, although there were some, there were colored, Negro, black cadets, but I don't know to what extent and whether or not the ones we saw were those, if they were Air Force enlisted men training. I tend to think more the latter, I think they were more the enlisted men because I don't think there were many black cadets at that time. But, then there were areas of, the troops of course were still segregated, there were areas of the illiterates and they were near us. So, these were fellas that you could never guess that they were illiterate by their conversations and so forth, but they were. And so, they were actually kept in a separate area and we would go over occasionally and some of them would ask us, sometimes they were a little bit older than ourselves and sometimes about the same age and ask us to write letters for them. So, they

would dictate letters and we would write letters for them. But, then too, of course meeting the fellas from the different walks of life, the different parts of the country, I had traveled a little bit as a youngster so I was more prepared for, going through the southwest and so forth, for the accents and the speech and the expressions that were very typical of the people, we were still referring to each other as rebels and yanks. Whether they still do that, for example when you were in did they still use those?

Mark: No, not when I was in.

Cullen: No. I suppose those sanctions have broken down by now, but in those days it was so and so, yeah, he's a rebel and that type of thing. We had also the distinctions, not so much at that point, but a little bit later on in the air corps of referring to somebody that was not on a flight crew as being a ground-pounder. And so, there were lots of ground pounders as well as the flight crews. There were Keesler in addition to being a cadet training center, a basic training center, also was an AM School.

Mark: AM School?

Cullen: AM School. Translated Aircraft Mechanic School. And, that was about a 19 week course that the fellas that were going to be our engineers in the flight crews were taking their training at. So, our engineer, for example, took his AM School, as we called it, at Keesler. There were also fellas who were permanent party people and some of them were actually pretty good athletes. I had done some boxing in college and so I watched a fella who was watching in a couple of matches who was a permanent party, who was a religious trainer. He used to go and I used to see him running and training and I watched him box. But, there were post boxing matches of which occasionally the cadets could enter. Well, I had had some training and I had boxed at the University, in fact I had won a contender's trophy in 1942, which was the University's trophy awarded to non-varsity boxers. And so anyway, I thought I would take a chance on it and so I entered the match at Keesler and my opponent, even though this was a segregated Army, my opponent was a very heavy set colored fella who looked very much like Mike Tyson. I said, "Boy, this is going to be like a one round around knock out." This guy is, I mean, he was very powerful and I think the weight divisions were a little bit elastic and I think this fella was maybe, looked like he was 10 to 15 pounds heavier than myself. Maybe not. He was shorter. So, there was this other black second who was an older man he said, "No. I can see that you think he is going to be pretty tough. Don't worry about him." He said, "He don't know nothing about boxing." It turned out that that was the case. I came out and this fella would make, he would almost literally shut his eyes and swing and of course if he would have hit me he would have hurt me. But, he missed wildly and so I would come in with very quick jabs and then, you know, sort of a text book boxer and give nice straight right hands and so forth and dodge back and jump back and miss punches and so forth. So, he was totally bewildered and intimidated by the fact that I had boxing skills. So, in the second round I was awarded a TKO because this fella was not putting up that much of a contest. So, this was one of those little ironic touches of basic training, but those were some of my highlights in basic. Then the war shock process was taking place even at that time. Fellas were showing psychological or physiological deficiencies.

Mark: Like what?

Cullen: Well, if some fella was not reacting well under different kinds of pressure, or if he seemed to be showing quarks in behavior that he would see the psychologist or some of them were, maybe had some physical shortcoming. Fellas were showing up with maybe high blood pressure or sometimes they had, I think also we took as we were going along in basic, I think we took psycho motor tests. Did they still have that when you were in? Maybe not.

Mark: Not that I recall. I wasn't in flight training.

Cullen: Psychomotor tests was your coordination and things like that and simulated they still had a lot of electrical flight simulators and things like that. So, they would test us to see how we would react to balance and deficiencies movement and things like that. So, I think those were a lot of the reasons for. So, there was a certain amount of washing out as they described it and they probably still refer to it as that. And, so I can remember those that were intending to, who had enlisted from the civilian life, I was what they called a VFT, a Volunteer Flight Trainee, those were people who had been inducted first and then volunteered after they were in and had taken the tests and so forth at the other point, after they had been in the induction center to go into flight training. So, some of the fellas who were the enlistees, who were being washed out for various reasons and they were especially upset. I can remember some of them getting very inebriated and crying and so forth, because they had pointed for that for months, or maybe even years, as being a hot pilot as they used to say. And, they weren't going to be a hot pilot, they may have ended up by being a ground pounder of some sort, and this was a very crushing experience. So, you had, observing that along with the other phenomenon. The other thing that was of interest was the fact that my next step in training was going to be at what we call a college training detachment, CTD. It was kind of a form of the same type of training that Officer candidate would go through. And, so there had to be openings in these various colleges. They were scattered all around and they even had these programs, they were called V12 for example, they were the same type of thing over at colleges, well actually the ASTP was a counterpart in the Army specialized training program, was a counter part of the V12 and the Navy. They were studying meteorology and things like that. So, what I was in, what I was going toward, was not quite the same kind of training, but very similar. But, anyway, there had to be room in these colleges. So, there wasn't room for the next step, so I went through and most of my, our crew, our class rather, went through two phases, went through a repeat of our basic training. We went through, I think it was something like maybe ten or twelve weeks of basic, I can't recall at this point, we went through it twice. So, we...

Mark: That's no fun.

Cullen: Yeah. And, by that time of course we had leaned some of the shortcuts and we didn't get quite as much KP and so forth and so on, and I don't believe that we went through the 17

mile hike or 15 mile, whatever it was. I think it was a 17 mile hike now that I think about it. We didn't have to go through that one again. But anyway, I went through basic twice.

Mark: When you were in basic training did you get off the base much? Did you get into the community?

Cullen: Yes. The big excitement, the town we were near Keesler field was Biloxi, which is, in peace time, was a tourist Mecca, as was Gulfport down the line. And, the nearest little community was a place called D'Iberville, a French name, but of course that was a French area along there and initially being close to New Orleans and so forth. And then, the big excitement would be, and we were not able to do it, except some of the fellas that were older in our basic training and were cleverer, managed to get passes off long enough, I mean they were old enough so that they could be more sociable with the permanent party, fellas in the orderly room, same age and so forth. And, they got passes to New Orleans, but those of us who were 18 year old raw recruits, we didn't have that kind of, we didn't have politicking down well enough, or good enough to be able to get passed it. But anyway, I can remember going into Biloxi and Gulfport. Gulfport was probably a little more of a Mecca since it was further away from Keesler, and we figured that in Biloxi there would be fewer servicemen perhaps, this was our thinking of course, they were all the same, they were only about half a dozen miles apart. But anyway, the big excitement of course would be some of the meals that you would have along the Golf Coast, so there would be getting those big huge shrimp and so forth. And, then meeting some of the young ladies at the, what am I trying to call them, the letters have escaped me.

Mark: USO.

Cullen USO. Thank you for supplying my rapidly fading memory. Yes, I was thinking of some other letters and they were coming in my mind. Yes, at the USO's we would meet the local girls, southern girls of course, very nice. And, we were charmed by their accents and that sort of thing, and many of them were very good looking. So anyway, we had actually basic was a fairly comfortable time, especially when you're 18 years old. It was a lot of fun for me.

Mark: Now, of course, down south there was still segregation at the time.

Cullen: Oh yes.

Mark: Did you pick up on that, because you traveled a little bit, perhaps more than others?

Cullen: Yes. It was something that was not, there was no militancy involved because that's the way it was and so you would go into a bus station, a train station, a restaurant, whatever, not so much restaurants because I think there was pretty much the segregation of restaurants, but public accommodations and things, I mean there was a sign that said 'Colored Only' and 'White Only', and rest rooms especially, and drinking fountains. There was no, you would see black folk and there was no animosity or anything of sort. I mean the established order was so entrenched and so accepted that it was not

uncomfortable at all. I mean, you lived with it, you expected it, they expected it, so it was not a problem.

Mark: Okay. So, after Keesler, you went to a college somewhere.

Cullen: Yes. Austin College in Sherman, Texas. Sherman, Texas was about 60 miles from Dallas. It was kind of easy to confuse them because there was an Austin, Texas, but this was Austin College. And, it was a small liberal arts college and I think we were there approximately, thinking of the time, maybe 12 weeks, maybe longer than that. We covered what would be equivalent of about, maybe we were there 4 months, about the equivalent of a semester of schooling. And, we took things like aircrew and Navigator, with things like physics, chemistry, the mathematics, figuring out navigation, trigonometry, the great circle distances on the globe, and things like that. We met with formations early in the morning. We also took our first flight training, which were on small one-engine light aircraft, so we took I think the equivalent of about 12 hours of flight training. Some soloed, I did not solo. I think that was largely because by the time we were finishing up, in fact our training was terminated a little bit for the convenience of the government, and many of our class were VFT's. All the VFT's were taken from flight training. They had too many bombardiers, pilots, and navigators, and copilots, I almost forgot our copilots, and so they said you can stay in because you were in cadet training you can stay in flight training, but you are no longer in the cadet training, no longer officer air crew training. And, so from there we moved down to gunnery school. Sherman was a very nice little town, a little less service infested, so to speak, than the gulf coast was, nearly because there weren't the numbers. And, the closest was Parent Field, which was, I believe, a dozen miles from Austin, and that's where the pilots would take, I think it was, there was primary, basic, and advanced, and I believe that they were taking either primary or basic training there so there was, some of the pilot training was at Parent Field, which was very close to Sherman. But, we were treated very nicely. The USO's there were, I'm not forgetting it this time, the USO's were very nice. In fact, I can remember playing pool one time and there was a very attractive little blonde girl who was also playing there, we would play with some of the local girls there and play pool and of course the dances and things. And, she was with a fella that I considered not quite her speed. I thought that perhaps she could do better if she were to get to know me, so I scrawled a note and I put down my name and I said, I will give you this note, "perhaps if you could give me your name on a note and your phone and I would be happy to call you and perhaps we can go to a movie, or talk, or dance, or something like that." So, she was standing next to the table and I came up next to her and slid this under her hand and she saw it and put her hand around it and she went to the phone, or the ladies room, or whatever and came back. So, I was sitting around playing pool and her erstwhile partner was doing the same, so I came up and sort of glanced in her direction and I walked up near her and when this fella wasn't looking she moved over and handed me the note, and that had her name and address and we had a very pleasant 2 or 3 month association and so, the moral of the story is, if you are aggressive in a nice way, sometimes it pays off. (Laughs)

Mark: So, where was your gunnery school at?

Cullen: Gunnery school was in Harleton, Texas.

Mark: This was after Sherman?

Cullen: This was after Sherman. I was still deep in the, the song at the time was "Deep In the Heart of Texas". I don't know if you ever recall hearing that.

Mark: Yeah, I've heard of the song before.

Cullen: It was one of those songs that lasted for a number of years, but the stars at night are big and bright deep in the heart of Texas and there would be clapping and so forth before he says deep in the heart of Texas. But in any event, for those of us who were around in Texas, some of the fellas even took their basic training in Texas, took their college training detachments, CTD's in Texas, then took their gunnery in Texas. Some even took their, if they stayed in cadets, took their basic and primary in Texas. So, the idea of, you ain't gonna get out of Texas no matter what you do. But anyway, Harleton was in the Rio Grande valley, all the way to the furthest tip. And that was the large gunnery school. So, we went down there and we had, I believe, 12 weeks of gunnery, and we started out using shotgun, doing skeet shooting. The principle of that was to lay off deflection as they called it. They would shoot out these plastic birds from a launcher and then you would lead it and then pick it off, and this would teach you that if you were in air crew training that you would be giving the plane, especially if you were coming off of the side, by the time that you were, your bullets were to get to the plane you would allow for the speed of the plane and so forth, so that was... Well anyway, we took live ammunition training as well, with towed targets, so that was a very interesting time as well. We also got to know people, we went over to New Mexico, first encounter with Monterey beer. It was a, of course they were very geared toward the Yankee dollar and the GI's coming over, so it was a, people who wanted to find a little wilder entertainment could find it in, Matamoros was the town just over from Harleton, and if one wanted to one could. There were, most of us probably weren't quite that wild at that time of our lives and so we weren't looking for too much wild entertainment. But, the town again was fairly nice, perhaps not as pleasant as where we had recently come from, those of us who had been former CTD members, but we got to know people that I had kept up until very recent years. Many of these same contacts were people I had met in those service years. One thing that stuck out in my mind, well two, we were trained for different turrets. I was trained for Martin turret, probably because I was taller and that was the turret up above the pilot. I was B-24s later. There was a training for the nose gunners that was called the, I believe, the Emerson Turret, different factories. I was a Martin Turret. The consolidated turret, I believe, was the tail gunner. And, then there was the Sperry people, the Sperry ball turret, so there were 4 different turrets that you took training for and of course people like the engineers that had been trained down in Keesler for engineering school, they took gunnery training, I believe maybe there for a short time. I'm not sure, but they learned the principles of it, but they would be manning waist guns so they were not training for a particular turret. One of the instances I was going to mention though, am I talking too long on these things?

Mark: No, you're just fine.

Cullen: Sure. Was a very ironic incident, and I found these things happened later on, but not to the same extent. Someone was on the lookout for them. A fella in my barracks, by that time we had graduated into barracks, in basic training we were living mainly in squad tents, there were some, I think we lived in the barracks for a short time, but not that much. And the CTD, College Training Detachment, we were living in dormitories that the students had lived in at Austin College, but then when we got down to gunnery school we finally were living in full fledge barracks. Anyway, one of my barracks mates there was a fellow who had a big chronograph watch, a watch with all kinds of the time of day, the month, and all of the other things, stop watch and that sort of thing, which he had gotten a better one, either as a gift or something, so he wanted to sell it. Well, as I recall I didn't have a watch at that point and I said, "well I'll buy it from you, how much do you want?" And I think he sold it to me for something like 20 or 25 dollars, which was pretty expensive for a watch in those days, but this was a more special watch. Well anyway, he got his orders to go to, he was, I think, going into an advanced class, I can't remember exactly what it was, whether he was taking some additional training as an engineer, or what it was, but anyway, he left and where he was going to be on a flight line, so he left gunnery school a bit early for whatever reason, whether he was in an earlier class or just the reason I'm not quite sure, but in any event he left, and there were several fellas that knew him, and he was kind of a popular guy, and I remember his name and everything, but I wasn't that close to him, I didn't write to him. Anyway, I was out, when we worked on the skeet ranges as they called them, we sometimes had the duties of loading the skeets as well as firing the shot guns so we were back in some, so, I was back loading skeets, putting these light, I guess they were probably were, I'd say plastic, but that's not correct, they were something that shattered on impact, whatever they were some kind of graphite or material that came apart on impact because of the shells from the shotgun hit it. But anyway, I was stacking these up on the loader and the loader would come around and then it would just take these up. Well, not having done that too much, I had this watch on that had a GI clock, a GI colored band, olive drab, kind of loose, hanging there, slugged off to one side. Well, fortunately, I suppose there was a way to avoid an injury, but I had set these birds as we called them, that were the targets, up on a little stand and the arm of this thing, which actuated and threw these birds out onto the flight came around and caught my watch on the side and tore it right off my hand. I mean it just hit it with a tremendous impact and tore the band and took it right off and banged it onto the barricade immediately right in front of us. Well, of course, I found the watch and it was ruined, it had this big indentation from the thing which fired the birds out and so I took it back and was showing it, "look what happened to me out on the range out there today, so there went my watch." Well about a day or so after that, I was talking to one of the fellows in the barracks. He said, "Do you remember," and he mentioned the guys name which I have long forgotten at this point. I said, "Yeah I remember him because he sold me this watch. I said that was something." He said, "Well you know, I have bad news for you, he was killed. He said he walked into a prop on the flight line and was actually beheaded." Well, that was a terrible shock to me, and of course a lot of the accidents that we hear about, training school accidents you didn't hear about that much, I think the

civilians did in so much, but we used to hear about them more in training. So, I did a little, I said well when did he die? Well anyway, the guy said, well I just got a letter from a fella that went up there with him. Well anyway, it turned out that he walked into this prop the same day that that watch was knocked off my wrist. So, one can draw their own conclusions about coincidences and so forth. It was a little food for thought. But anyway, then from gunnery we went back. We had a furlough after gunnery. My first big furlough.

Mark: You went back to Madison.

Cullen: Went back to Madison and I think it was a good two weeks. And, I may have had a furlough after my basic, I can't recall at this point, I'd have to look through my papers on that. But, I do remember that I came back in, at that point I was a PFC, and I was parading my stripe around, my one whole stripe and I had my gunners wings, which I had attached on my blouse so, on my khaki shirt in the summer time, of course I wasn't wearing a blouse, it was called the outer coat. So anyway, I had certain prestige of walking around Madison with my wings on and my stripe and lording it over those lonely four F's and those lonely buck privates with nothing else to show and saying, "Yes I'm going out to be assigned to a crew." So, wow this guy is going to be a flight crew man. So anyway, there was a little prestige which a 19-year old can strut around with. At that point I had turned 19. So anyway, then I went out to Lamore Field near Fresno and was assigned, there we were assigned our crews and my assignment was to Muroc Army Air Force Base, which is at Muroc, California, which is now Edwards. That now is Edward's Air Base, at that time it was MAAF, Muroc Army Air Force Base and, I think it was MAAFB, I think they even put a B on the end of it. So, there we met our crew members for the first time, so there ten of us and we met and became acquainted, and the enlisted men were assigned their little squad hut at that point, 6 enlisted men, 4 officers, and it was right out on the Mojave Desert, nice low humidity, 10, 15 percent, very seldom rain, it got cold in the winter time, we had little stoves in our little squad huts, but they were wood as opposed to a tent and so forth, and we began our flight training. We were there for almost six months.

Mark: And what sort of flight training do you do?

Cullen: We would get on our B24s, we would fly, and we would do some simulated gunnery attacks and things like that. We would have towed targets, so then, more than that usually were just the drills going up in the turrets with the gunners. The bombardiers would have, I think later on in the training they were dropping dud bombs over targets, navigators were getting their flight training, bombardiers and navigators worked fairly closely together in picking out the targets, and of course the pilots and copilots worked with them as far as they would take the communications from the navigator as to when they were nearing the targets, but it was simulating combat missions. We did night missions and that was quite fascinating. We would pick out, we would fly over Los Angeles, see we were 125 miles northeast of Los Angeles I neglected to mention. Muroc was out in the Mojave Desert, but that's not too far from Los Angeles. So both the pilot, who was from Los Angeles

[End of Side A, Tape 1]

and the copilot were from Los Angeles as civilians, had taken training, well the copilot had taken training for his copilot missions someplace near Mojave and the pilot had gotten a private pilots license in civilian life, he was 3 or 4 years older than the rest of us, in fact I guess 3 years older. He and the copilot were about the same age, he was a little bit older. But, he had gone through a training program in a junior college had a flight program and had a civilians' pilots license for a single engine plane. So anyway, we took those missions, we would see the lights of Los Angeles and try to recognize landmarks, and we would go to other communities and we would figure out what community that was from the lights, we tried to figure the land forms and where all the lights formed. If we were to take a flight over Los Angeles now, it would be just so completely different, we could get out to the country fairly easily at that time. But, even then, of course, it was a large city. But, one of our more exciting moments at that point was having one of our engines catch fire. So, we were doing some fast radioing into Muroc and to the, in fact, sometimes at night we would do formation flying, not only would we fly individually, but we would do formation flying, so anyway, we would feather the prop, stopping all the four propeller driven engines, and the flames and smoke were streaming out of this and we could see the flames coming out at night, so we had a few anxious moments until we got back and got landed safely, but nothing blew up and so, but that was one of our more exciting missions.

Mark: I would think so. So flight training lasted about six months you said?

Cullen: Yes. The pilots thought about five months. Let's see. We started in July, so if you count July, August, September, October, November, December, I would say it was about a good full six months. Well, actually no, we started toward the end of July and we left, so I would say about five and a half months, but I would like to round it off to the next highest number because I enjoyed my stay there.

Mark: And those people that you trained with are the same people you went over seas with?

Cullen: Yes. Oh yes. We went over seas as a crew.

Mark: Perhaps you could discuss some of the personalities in your crew and how everybody got along.

Cullen: Yes. Before I forget too, I might just mention, and if I wouldn't take too much time on it, the leisure time duty in Los Angeles was exceptional.

Mark: I'm interested in that.

Cullen: That was A #1. You couldn't ask for a better duty. Maybe people who lived in, who had duty near New York City might argue that they had more fun in New York, I doubt it. I really don't think they could have had more fun than we had. We would hitch hike into

Los Angeles to leave the base. Hitch hike into Los Angeles, we would always get rides. There were USO's that wouldn't stop. There was a Hollywood canteen, there was a Hollywood Guild canteen where you could stay overnight. There were tours of the movie studios, there was a Hollywood palladium, which was a big dance emporium where a number of people met their future wives, in fact my navigator, who was from Detroit, met his bride, who was from Minneapolis, who just happened to be visiting the Hollywood canteen. All the name bands were playing there. You get in and there would be a sea of humanity, most of it service people, and then, of course, the kids who danced in the movies used to work on some of their jitterbug routines and things there, so it was a big exciting time. When you left the palladium, the palladium would close about 1 o'clock, you could go up on Hollywood Boulevard, that would close down a little bit later, however the places out on the beaches would stay open and there was the mission beach, it was Casino Gardens, which was at Ocean Park, and that was a dance emporium owned jointly by, and you have probably heard these names, Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, and Harry James. They were some of the big orchestras at the time, and they jointly owned the Casino Gardens, the two brothers, the Dorsey brothers and Harry James, who was a huge big name, a trumpet player at the time. And so, one of those bands would always be playing at Ocean Park. Well, I was going with a girl from Cincinnati I had met at the Hollywood Palladium, and so after the Hollywood Palladium would close down, we would alternate these different times, we would catch an inner urban car. The inner urban was a big electrical street car that had a wider track than your usual street car. It had a wider gauged track, almost as wide as a train, where as the street cars were quite a bit narrower, and these were big cars, and they called them inner urban because they went between the cities and they went out of style and came back of course. Where they are using those big tracks I don't know, but it had the overhead piece that would latch onto the electrical source, and they would have two of them, one on either end of the car and then for the trip back they would take the one on the other end of the car and put it up and then it would go back this other way and then the one going out, so you had the one that was tied down and wasn't in use. But anyway, these inner urbans were fast. I mean they could probably go 50 to 60 miles per hour on an electrical track. Anyway, you could get out to Ocean Park in a fairly, may 35 to 40 minute trip from downtown Los Angeles and then dance till 3 in the morning, catch an inner urban back, I would drop this gal off and then I would hitch hike back to the Hollywood Guild canteen, which was in west Los Angeles, UCLA, getting there maybe about 5 o'clock, I would hit the 'sack' as they used to say, I suppose now they say 'crash' or something, the terminology changes sadly over the years. Did they ever use 'hit the sack' when you were in?

Mark: No, I don't think so.

Cullen: No, that would date me saying 'hit the sack.' So, anyway, I would get up maybe at noon or thereabouts, 11 o'clock or noon, have a big breakfast which they furnished, then I could either go to a free movie, go to a tour of the studios, or various other things and site see around the area. If you opted for a 2-day pass, on the weekends we could often get 2-day passes, and so stay overnight and have two days of dancing and so forth. I remember especially following that - one time I had a boxing match scheduled, I had stayed up and

had about a total of about three hours sleep, I hitch hiked back to Muroc, I remember this particular trip very well because two exciting things happened, one that I had this match, which I'll tell you about later, but first was that I was hitch hiking. A fella picked me up, a civilian, in a Lincoln Continental convertible. Now a Lincoln Continental convertible in those days was a super beautiful car. It had teardrop type fenders, it had the metal case for the spare tire in the back, you know with the lock to the trunk separate. This was powder blue, it was, I don't know what the price would have been, anyway, I suppose it would have been, it was obviously a custom made Lincoln Continental convertible. I had never seen a more beautiful car in my life, I don't think. Who was driving it but a bewhiskered character actor from westerns, with a modified cowboy hat on, none the less than Gabby Hayes, if you remember that name?

Mark: No I don't.

Cullen: Okay. Gabby Hayes was a character from, he played in many of the B movies and so forth, who was a sidekick as they called them in western movies. He always had a beard with stained through tobacco juice running down the side, talking like he didn't have his teeth in. Saying, "By crackie," and so forth. He was a sidekick to Roy Rogers and many people like that and later became more definitely associated with Roy Rogers. But, Gabby Hayes, who picked me up, was dressed in a brushed cashmere, I'll never forget his outfit, a brushed cashmere sport coat, I had never seen a more sumptuous coat in my life, had a silk shirt with a string tie, silk gabardine trousers, two old modified, expensive, shorter cowboy boots, the extremely expensive cowboy boots, and this modified, but obviously very expensive cowboy hat on, and I said gee, "Gabby Hayes," and he said, "that's right." I said boy this is a..., he said how far are you away, I said I'm down on (ten second silence) Gabby, I was going into extremes about his dress. I could see that he was a fella who was a sidekick, tobacco stained beard, character actor, who was living very high with probably the most beautiful car that I was ever in, and dressed in probably would have been a many hundred dollar wardrobe. In any event, the nice thing about it was the fact that he was accommodating to pick up a young service man. I said, "I certainly appreciate this, would you mind doing some of your dialect for me?" He said, "oh no, I don't do that, he said I don't do that except on the screen." He actually apparently had been a Shakespearean actor who had come out to Hollywood back in the early 30's and had stumbled into some of the, well there were openings in the westerns, and he at first was playing heavies, playing the villains, and gradually worked into this change into playing this good guy, old timer character part, and made a fortune. His speech was a very cultured, very cultivated speech, you know cultured speech, and totally different, that's the thing I noticed too. Many times when I was hitch hiking, I was picked up by many people who were older and who were in the movies in various capacities, they were actors, some producers, I can remember one time a fella that looked very much like, if you remember Erich von Stroheim in the "Sunset Boulevard" remember with the shaved...

Mark: I don't remember.

Cullen: Yeah. But anyway, he was a monocled guy, he played a part of a Prussian officer, a fella in a Rolls Royce drove by when I was hitch hiking one time and drove down Hollywood Boulevard and said I like to help young service men. I guess I must have looked innocent and harmless enough so that they didn't mind picking me up.

Mark: I was wondering, now were you in uniform at the time?

Cullen: Yeah. Oh sure. No in fact, as I recall, I maybe wrong about this, but it was either official or unofficial that you just didn't get out of your uniform. In fact, at the time, it was really, I suppose you could, but at the time it was much more of a badge of attainment to have your uniform on. In other words, if you didn't, they said oh that guy must obviously be a 4F or something's wrong with him, or a draft dodger of some sort. I mean, it was certain onus of a young healthy looking guy not being in uniform. I suppose again that had changed by the time you were in.

Mark: Well, there wasn't a war going on.

Cullen: I was wondering, for example, if the Vietnam experience and so forth, and that type of thing, if the reverse would be sort of the situation. That's why it was very difficult for some of us who had been in the service at a different time to accept this opprobrium that was heaped on the young service men during the Vietnam. I didn't then and I still cannot fully comprehend that, you know, it's just one of those things. Anyway, I was going to say about meeting these people from Hollywood connected with the movies was that they were more serious than I would expect, because many times on the screen you expect this sparkling personality, this witticisms and so forth and the kind of light touch to things, and sometimes I would run across people who I would see in comedy roles and so forth who were, and everybody seems so serious, and they would often ask me where I was from and that type of thing. But anyway, it was a very interesting time. So anyway, when Gabby Hayes finally dropped me off and I got back to the base, and I was scheduled for a bout that evening, I had had about three hours of sleep, I was scheduled for a bout, I hadn't eaten all day, so I figured well, I have to get something to eat. I got back and I had about a half hour to play with, so I figured well, what do I do? Do I take a chance on overeating, or do I grab something just so I don't pass out from weakness in the ring. I figured well, I went to the mess hall and I remember getting a sandwich of some sort and some milk, and I figured well, that will at least...I will have some strength in the ring. So, I got into the ring and I was taking on a fellow that I had seen working out, who had absolutely no punch, fortunately for me, who was a condition boy. I can remember getting up early some mornings, earlier than usual, and I would see him out running around the dry lake doing roadwork. So, I imagine he would be a guy who probably could go 15, 20 rounds with no trouble. Anyway, we boxed, in the first round I came out and I was doing very well, I was very proud of myself. I said, "gee I guess this lack of sleep and this lack of meal and so forth didn't effect me too much," and by the end of the first round I was getting quite fatigued and so I had again, it was a black second, and he said, "Boy, you aren't in very good shape." I said, "Well, I didn't get as much sleep last night." He said, "Boy, I can tell that." And, anyway, I got through the second round and I would occasionally have bursts of energy, and I remember hitting this guy and actually I

set him down, and so the partisans said, “Boy, that’s the way.” Since I had blonde hair, my ancestry is Irish, I had blonde hair and came from Wisconsin, many people said obviously this guy is Scandinavian from the mid west, from the north. They said, “Come on Swede. Come on Norski. Go get em.” So, I was getting these encouragements for my imagined self and finally anyway, I managed to make it through the bout. The permanent party man who could go 15 rounds won the decision quite easily because I was mainly able to hang on through the three rounds, so that was a long way of telling you about my leisure time. But, you were asking more particularly about some of the crew members.

Mark: About the crew members, right.

Cullen: The pilot was from Los Angeles, he was a bit older. Well, he was three years older than myself. The copilot was the same age, he was also from Los Angeles. They did not know each other in civilian life. The pilot was a son of a doctor. He was married, he had married just shortly before he had joined the crew. The copilot was married, he had married just prior to him going into the service. He married his high school sweetheart. The bombardier was from Rockford, Illinois. He was a young guy, the same age I was, actually he was a bit older, not quite a year older, I think he was eight or nine months older than myself. The navigator was the old man of the crew. And by elderly, I mean he was really elderly, he was 24 years old.

Mark: Yikes.

Cullen: Yeah. That was something. When you are nineteen and a some guy is 24, you figure I wonder if I’m going to look as good as he does five years from now. Anyway, he was from Detroit, and as I say, he met his wife at the Hollywood Palladium, who was from Minneapolis. They were and are very nice people, the officers, well everybody in the crew was. I’ll go through the rest of them. The engineer was from Montana, from a small town in the mountain part of Montana. He had been a miner and we used to kid him because Montana was a sheep country and so forth, being from Mon-taaaa-na (taaaa sounding like baaa from a sheep), and he was also a young guy, he was only about 3 month older than myself. The tail gunner, no then the radio operator, let’s get them in descending order of importance, the radio operator was from Racine, Wisconsin. He was engaged to a gal, he was a bit older, he was the, let’s see, he was the third oldest man, he would have been I think, he was 23. The different stages of being 23. Then the next oldest man was the tail gunner. He was from Baltimore, Maryland. He was 23. The ball turret gunner was, let’s see, he was from Arkansas, and he had gone a year and a half at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. The tail gunner was from, he was from the tobacco country of, no not the tobacco country, he was from Virginia, but not the tobacco country, he lived back more in the mountainous areas of Virginia. He had a year of college in. He was the youngest man in the crew. He was three months younger than myself. The final member was the nose gunner. He was one of the older people, he came from Baltimore, Maryland. I think that’s everybody in the crew. Now, I told you what they were and where they were from, what else would you like to know about them?

Mark: That's okay. As we go on maybe I'll have more questions. So when did you guys all get orders to go overseas?

Cullen: When we finished our training at Muroc, which was shortly after Christmas of 1944, we received a, we were going to go to Hamilton Field, outside of San Francisco, and stay there for a short time, and then our orders were cut to go to Fort Lawton, which is in Seattle, and then take a troop transport from Fort Lawton overseas to go to Hawaii. It was a big excitement because when we were at Muroc, we were going to, the pilot was a member of the Elks, he had gotten a start early in life of being a lodge member and so forth, and his lodge brothers had taken up a collection, it was a fairly large lodge there apparently in Los Angeles, to buy a bomber. So apparently by the, not only from the lodge members, but also from going out in the community at large, the lodge had gotten enough collections to buy a bomber. So, we had our picture taken in front of a plane; it was just any plane, but it was described as that plane which Tom DeVaughn his name was and his crew are going to fly overseas and take into combat. We thought well gee, we got our own B24 to take in to combat, wow isn't that great? Well, it didn't work out that way. We ended up by taking a troop transport. But in any event, it was in January of 1945 that we got our orders to leave Muroc, and so we went up there into the Hamilton Field. That was a fantastic duty. That was a place where all you had to do was meet the formation once a day and the rest of the time you were on your own. We were just outside of San Francisco. San Francisco was another great liberty town as was Los Angeles. It was more of a, it was a little tougher town in those days because it had always been a seaport much more than Los Angeles was, and it didn't have quite, I mean everybody was very nice and everything, but it was a little rougher, tougher town, and it did not have some of the social aspects which is now reputed for, it didn't at that time, it was a much straighter town, say if you will. Anyway, it was a great service town. There were marvelous USO's and dances and clubs and things to go to. I'll never forget two things. One of the things which the officers wanted to do, they were always given just a little bit better facilities, and Tom DeVaughn, who was our pilot, was more of a gentlemen and traveled in little more rarefied social circles than some of the rest of us would have because he was older and a lodge member and things like that. They had a very marvelous officer's club mess. It was exceptional, I'm told. In fact when we had our reunion just recently, which I had mentioned to you talking previously at Colorado Springs, we went to the Broadmoor, which is the class of the mountain's area and they were remarking that we didn't stay there because it was quite expensive, but it was a place where a lot of the dignitaries, politicians and people of heads of state, when they go out in the mountain west, they stay at the Broadmoor. In any event, they were saying, golly, we had a very fancy expensive brunch. This reminds us of the officers club at Hamilton Field. So, that should give you some idea. Anyway, the other thing that they wanted to do was to go to the top of the mark. So, Bob Gustafson, who was our bombardier, the young bomber, the youngest of the officers, was a youthful looking guy. They took the elevator up to the Top of the Mark, which is the big Mecca for touring people, and they wanted to be served at the bar, the bar at the Top of the Mark. Well, they got up and everybody was going to be served except the exception of Gustafson who said, "Sir, can you show us some identification showing your age." He was actually under age. He hadn't turned 21 yet, in fact was still 20. So, in fact, I think if you were to

be accurate I believe, no, that's right he would have been, he was 20. So, anyway, he couldn't and didn't furnish identification. They said sorry, we can serve the others but we can't serve you, so our pilot sort of made a speech. He said, "It is very strange that we come into a place like this, we are men going out to fight for our country, we are going to be in combat in a few short weeks, we are very well behaved people, we are used to traveling in circles where our behavior is a matter of our pride and we were very disappointed that you could not see free, see clear to treat people who are going out to serve their country," anyway, he made this indignant speech and he said, "I'm sorry sir, but if he isn't twenty-one we can't serve him." They said, "Well, in that case we are going to leave." They left their drinks untouched and left in high dudgeon. That same day I was, in a little less rarefied circle I heard that there was a great tough colorful bar. It was downstairs and along the San Francisco waterfront. So, I wanted to see this so that I could say, boy I've been in this dive, supposedly the toughest dive and there was all kinds of fights and colorful characters from all over the world were there and so forth, sea farers, you know, the long shore men and the Merchant Marine and everybody, and the Marines had big fights, and I wanted to see what this real waterfront dive was like. So, I can remember going downstairs and there was, again they were checking ages, so I came up trying to look, putting my overseas cap down over my eye and so forth, trying to look very mature, or as I would consider a very 'tough guy' sort of thing. So, there was a middle aged peroxide blonde gal there, probably fifty who had a flashlight, she shown it up in my face and said, "Let's see your ID card sonny." So, I was crushed, I said, "My ID. I don't have, all I have is my passes." She said, "Sonny, unless you have your ID card, you ain't coming in here. Bye, bye, sonny." So, I turned around on my heel and stormed out of this dive which I thought looked pretty interesting because it was very smoky, and probably somewhat over rated, and I went upstairs and I went to the first bar on the corner that I spotted, went in, ordered a mixed drink, served with no arguments, so I had redeemed my manhood and my seniority by going to this less than tough dive and proving that I looked old enough to be served. Some of the little things that you encounter, especially in the bigger cities.

(Something comes over the speaker.)

Mark: I'm sorry, go ahead.

Cullen: We were talking about some of the...

Mark: You were in San Francisco.

Cullen: Yes, and we were... Some of the adventures that you would have on liberty and so the main challenge at Hamilton Field was meeting the formation at seven o'clock in the morning and from then on you were on your own. That lasted about two weeks and that was probably about as much as we could stand anyway.

Mark: Needed some more structure in your life.

Cullen: Yes. So, and had to recover because every place you went many times they were giving free drinks and things like that, and then there was lack of sleep and that sort of thing, and you were constantly on the go. Of course, I was still nineteen at that time, and at that age you could get by with that a little bit better. I think doing those things now, I think I would probably be in traction, or be in an auction tent.

Mark: Me too. So you went to Seattle for a little while?

Cullen: We went to Seattle. That was our POE, Point of Embarkation, and that was at Fort Lawton, which was primarily, I think, a POE or more so for Air Force, for ground Air Force, and of course as it turned out in our case, flight crews. And so, we were there for a comparatively short time. Our orders were cut and we had, Seattle was a fairly nice liberty town too. We had a nice time in Seattle. Anyway, we took this transport which I recall as a ship called the "USS Herald of the Morning", but I believe our pilot had a different recollection of it and he may be right, but someplace along the line I saw a ship called "USS Herald of the Morning", whether it was one that I took back from Hawaii from the states on the way back, or whether it was that one, I'm not sure. In any event, what I do recall is that we went down on the coast and as we got opposite San Francisco, opposite San Francisco Bay, we then veered left. Why they sent us all the way up to Seattle, I suppose that maybe the processing center was there, and it was a less attractive place because Seattle was on hills and this was the raining season, it was in January and so in those days the weather pattern was somewhat different, so there was a lot of rain and the officers, as I recall, they were sloshing around in their areas because there was a lot of mud. But in any event, we got packed and we got going opposite San Francisco Bay, and veered west going toward Hawaii. At that point a tremendous storm came up that lasted the better part of the week it seemed like. This was, I believe, a troop transport, and I don't recall, I think it had an APA listing or something like that as a prefix, and I may be getting all of this incorrect and I should eventually do some research and find out more adequately what, more correctly what this transport was called, it's official lettering and so forth. But in any event, the storm came up, this was the maiden voyage for the ship and the rumor had started and it was a very rough storm. The rumor had started that the sister ship of this ship had hit a storm just about like this, in the same place, and had broken a part, and had sunk, and there was some loss of life, but most of the fellas had been rescued. But, the ship actually had broken up in a storm. Well, I could almost believe it, because this ship would rise out of the water, come up almost to what it would have been, I would say maybe a 80 degree angle, it seemed almost that high, probably wasn't, probably a 45 degree angle, but in any event, that was still quite high. And, then what would come down and this bounced on the water, I mean it bounced even before it had settled, and everything in that ship would shake. I mean, you can imagine the size of these squalls, when a ship of that size would rise up and then fall down, and then kind of bounce on the water when it hit. So, the troop's bunks, which were in the hold, were welded to the bottom of this, they were welded. They soon broke loose, and so these tiers of bunks were sliding back and forth, up and down, from side to side. There were mainly soldiers that were in the bunks. They had taken their helmets and had tied them on the side of the bunk so that they could vomit into the bunks because they were so sea sick, and they were hanging on to the side of these bunks as the tiers were going back and

forth, and up and down in this hole. Some of us held off fairly long before we got sea sick. What finally got me sea sick was, we would have our, we would describe it as our mess, we would say, "Where is the mess hall?" to the sailors, and they would say, the, of course there was 'chow' to the Navy, and I think they called, down in the hole. Anyway, we were using, there were some young sailors there too, and of course we were using the nomenclature of the plane and the nomenclature of the Army, so instead of saying going up to the bow, we would say we were going up into the nose, nose of the plane. Instead of going back to the stern we would be going back to the tail, so I think, I guess the young guys in the Navy kept their identity intact because they were surrounded by all these Army troops, so pretty soon they were saying up in the nose instead of saying up in the bow, they weren't old salts, they couldn't stand their ground on their this nomenclature so they were accommodating to our mislabeling the parts of the ship and things like that, and where is the mess hall, and so forth. You went down to the mess hall they would say instead of saying chow. They had a name for where they would have it. I guess the galley I believe.

Mark: I think so.

Cullen: I think it was the galley. Instead of the mess hall it would be down in the galley. And then we would say, of course we picked up some of theirs naturally. I'm sure we picked up chow along the line. We would say, "where is the 'latrine'", they would say the 'head' because it was at the head of the ship, they stuck their ground on the latrine versus the head sort of thing. Anyway, there was this battle of nomenclatures which was interesting. Back to the seasickness - I held off pretty well until I was going down in the galley and getting my tray, and I had set my tray on the table and the ship was shifting, and the tray of a fella right to the left of me, had gotten loose, and was sailing down this table, and he had lost his lunch on this tray, and it had come right by me and some of it splashed on my tray, at that point I got sick.

Mark: That was enough for you. That would be enough for anyone. So pretty much everyone was sea sick on this.

Cullen: Everyone was sea sick. One of the fellas, one of the officers became so sick, officers and enlisted men both, the officers didn't get any favor treatment. They were on this troop ship the same as we were. One of the fellas in one of the other crews, the officer started to hemorrhage, he vomited so badly that he started to hemorrhage, so our pilot was among those that had the blood type and I guess they actually had to do surgery on him I guess because he had broken a vein or something in the digestive system. Anyway, they were asking for transfusions, so our pilot gave this other, one of the other officer's, a blood transfusion. That's how severe the storm was as far as making people ill.

Mark: I'm sure you were glad to get to Hawaii.

Cullen: Many of us, we thought we'd let our beard grow, and so many of us came with a 7 or 8 day, or 10 day, whatever it was, beard when we got to Hawaii.

Mark: I suppose it was dangerous to shave.

Cullen: I think it was, and just the idea, just to see what we look like because we certainly wouldn't be able to get by with that later on, so we thought that this was our first opportunity to break tradition.

Mark: So, how long did you spend in Hawaii?

Cullen: We were assigned, we got into Honolulu, saw some of the leis being tossed and so forth, but didn't go through the tradition most people did, we saw at that time that the Waikiki Beach was dominated, if you will, by the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. I mean it stood out, I mean it was a big structure. Today I guess they say that in Honolulu you have to look to find it, I mean it is a tiny diminutive structure with these huge high rises all around dwarfing it and the view from there, the Diamond Head no longer exists and things like that. But anyway, we saw all that and had a brief time going over to the Royal Hawaiian and having a big dinner and that sort of thing, but then we were assigned to the garden island of Kauai. Kauai is the furthest west of the isles, and a more beautiful island you could not imagine. More beautiful than Oahu, where the main, where Honolulu is because it was not that built up. In addition to having just the natural wonders like a canyon that looked much like the Grand Canyon except that it was grown over with all the vegetation from the rains, tropical, really tropical rains. We were at a little base called Barking Sands. Barking Sands was named in reference to some sand dunes that were on the more or less dry part of the island. They were stationed on the dry part of the island that had only about twenty to twenty-five inches of rain a year, but these were in rains during the time that we were there, and also very short rains. The rains would last maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. Some would come out and you wouldn't even know that there was a ..., but anyway. The other side of the island, about forty miles away I would guess, was one of the highest and wettest points in the entire world. There were over 400 inches of rain that fall a year at that other point of the island, and apparently it had a high enough promontory it would snag the clouds going by from the trade winds blowing and they would get this rain, and the pattern was such that it never went to the Barking Sands area that we were. Anyway, we did some training from there. We practiced ditching planes for example. We would go out and we would take a plane that was designed for that, which would set down a amphibious type plane. We would set down in the water, we would throw open the bomb bay doors and then we would throw out a big square kit that had life rafts in it and we would toss that out and then we would jump into the water and inflate our Mae West's and then we would swim toward this big packet and take it apart and inflate it with CO₂ cylinders, cylinders, and then blow up this rubber raft and then climb into the raft, and then we would practice using sea marker, planning what the sea marker was so that we could put the sea marker out in case we ever gone down. So, we had to practice. We practiced ditching several times, so if we did have a shot down, if the plane did land, we could get out of the plane. We would throw this thing out, or however we would do it, they would be used to getting into the water, so we didn't practice parachuting, but we did practice the ditching procedure.

Mark: I imagine sharks would have been a concern.

Cullen: Yes, and as I recall I believe that we had [interruption] shark repellent. I think that came in the kit as I recall. I may be mistaken on that, but it seems in the lodging in my memory, I have a sensory that there was shark repellent as well as sea marker that was in that kit.

Mark: So, when did you leave Kauai?

Cullen: We left Kauai, one thing prior to that which I think I should mention, was that on occasion we would have duty and run out of things to do, and a more perfect place, you could not imagine, I mean the humidity at fifteen percent, beautiful trade winds blowing, temperature maybe 78 degrees, this sort of thing you know, maybe 80 finally at top, and it was so beautiful, pineapple juice, raw pineapple, whatever, we used to go around the islands, it would be a nickel a glass and this sort of thing. We would go down, and they would have little towns nearby, we would have island steaks, they would grow their beef on the island, have island steaks that would fall over the edge of the platter, I mean an inch thick, and of course you could actually eat something like that. If I had something like that now, I would say give me a hamburger instead, I mean this was a huge steak for maybe a dollar or a dollar and a quarter. They would have desserts, it would be an island fruit bowl. They would take a half of a pineapple, chop it up, put in three scoops of ice cream, pour all kinds of sweets and stuff over it and charge you about a dollar and a quarter for the Hawaiian fruit bowl. So anyway...

Mark: Sounds pretty good.

Cullen: Yeah. I was going to say about the memorable thing before we left there, after we would take these runs back and forth from Honolulu and run out of things to do, we would work in the post office, the Army post office for example, and various other details of that sort. But, one morning our pilot came around and said fellas, came into our area, the enlisted men's area,

[End of Side B, Tape 1]

we gotta go search for General Harmon. I said, "I don't know about all of us, but who is General Harmon?" He said, "Well, he is the CO of the whole 7th Air Force, and maybe even more than that." Anyway, he is lost at sea and we have to go among the crews to go find them. So anyway, we said, "General Harmon, well that seems like a very important deal." So, we left Barking Sands, which was the little base in Kauai, flew out to Johnston Island, which a little atoll about the size of probably, at that time, about the size of Capital Square. Maybe a little longer than Capital Square, but not much. No wider certainly than the Capital Square, and maybe about, again, as long as Capital Square, and that was the Coral Atoll, built up, which is a refueling station. They did manage to get tanks and things there, and it was a stop off point. It had a coral built runway, which could accommodate B24's at that time. I don't think it could accommodate the B29's, I don't think they ever stopped at Johnston. It wasn't that long. But anyway, that was the rendezvous point to begin the search for General Harmon. General Harmon, who

incidentally was the commanding general of the Pacific Ocean areas for all the Air Forces, and had a record prior to that as Lieutenant General, Three Star, was the commanding general of the Army, and the Army Air Force in the South Pacific, that worked with Admiral Halsey, was very instrumental in the, was a strategist, had gone to War College between World War I and World War II, had been a group to combat in, with the French Army in World War I and so forth, won the Croix de Guerre. I mean a fella at age 57 was still flying P-38's on missions to see how the Jap fires and doing things like that. Wasn't engaging in contact, but I mean was up with the fighter pilots flying formation with them and things like that. I mean, that sort of guy, you see. So, I mean they wanted to find him very badly. Everybody in the Pacific loved the guy. The Navy liked him because he got along with Halsey. They worked beautifully. They got the Marines, the Navy, and the Army working together for the first time because he was a diplomat who could get this sort of action going.

Mark: That was very rare I'm told.

Cullen: It was. I mean the commands prior to that were very parochial, and Harmon had, he could have been a diplomat of the first water, I mean he had that type of natural diplomacy, and was a very likable guy, and still could, when need be, when there was a rather recalcitrant Marine general who was digging in his heels in on taking a certain mountain in Guadalcanal, called this guy in who, he had, was a star above him, he said that this General Vandegrift who was very well liked, he said "General Vandegrift," he said, "I'm going to be here for a very short time." He said "I want to find out from you before you leave here this morning when you plan on taking this mountain in Guadalcanal." And Harmon, who is to say a normally very likable, very jovial guy, very much of a diplomat, had just enough in his manner, but this tough-bitten gyrene Marine general said, "tomorrow general," and they went out and they took it. So, I mean he could get action when he wanted to, but at the same time he could, but anyway. The point was he was very much the fella that they were seeking. He had left the forward area this was in March. They had moved up from, his headquarters had been in New Caledonia in the South Pacific, in Noumea, the city there, French. They had moved up into the forward areas into Guam. His advanced headquarters, Fort area was in Guam. His administrative headquarters was in Hickam Field in Honolulu. He was at the Fort area, was having turf battles with LeMay, who wanted to, and Arnold. LeMay had been assigned by Arnold to handle the B29, the 21st Bomb group. Harmon had begun to handle that. The Navy was playing a strong part in that. The, Nimitz who Harmon was under him, Admiral Nimitz, had appointed Harmon as the commanding general of the entire Pacific Ocean are, which would be Central Pacific, South Pacific, and so forth, and then moving into the Western Pacific with his duties there. So, under Nimitz, see the Navy wanted to, since there was a lot of ocean out there the Navy wanted to have with the joint chiefs and their joint chief on the staff was Admiral King, wanted to have a strong part in this ball game, so they were constantly fighting to get more recognition and more clout. They were being fought by Marshall, who was basically the General Marshall, it was the Army, who is the head of the joint chiefs, and Arnold who was the Air Force chief. Well anyway, Harmon was enough of a diplomat that he could work with and get this cooperation with Halsey and Nimitz and so forth and so on so that, not so much Arnold,

but LeMay who was his underling, his 'gopher' in a sense, who later distinguished himself by, many times by taking an all out fire bomb raiding as Tokyo, in which eighty thousand civilians were burned up in his first mission, well, not his first mission, but anyway. He had a different mind set, but he was the results guy so Arnold liked him pretty well. Later on he demoted him when he wanted to because he felt that his time had passed, the time he was, anyway. LeMay and Arnold were butting heads with Harmon about who was going to have to call the shots on the B29 flights. And so anyway, Harmon was on his way back from Guam to Kwajalein to Johnston Island to Washington, I mean from Honolulu, to San Francisco, to Washington, to get the turf battle straightened out. So, he was on this mission with his staff. He left Guam, went to Kwajalein, started off in Kwajalein there was a problem with the plane, apparently a gas leak or something, came back to Kwajalein and stayed over night. They started out the next day, they started a night flight, they made one report to Honolulu. Hickam was their radio point. They wired Hickam at this, it was, "five of us were okay," an hour and a half out. Another two and a half hours, so a total of four hours from the time we left Kwajalein the message came, but there was interference. They couldn't get it, but the length of the message was such that they thought that it probably was just a report in because it was the same normal length, and that was the last they heard. The first shift listening on Hickam, he didn't call in after that interval. The guy on duty said, when he was getting off – the next relieving shift – he said, "Did you hear from General Harmon?" He said, "No. He didn't call in." He said, "Didn't you report that you didn't hear?" He said, "No. We didn't realize." So anyway, they lost some hours, but somewhere between Kwajalein and Johnston Island they surmised that the plane may have sprung a leak in the bomb bays. It was a converted B24, C87, and everybody in the crew smoked, including the general, and somebody may have lit a cigarette, and boom that was it. So anyway, we searched. The Navy had aircraft carriers out searching for him between Kwajalein and Johnston Island, which was a couple thousand miles, and so, maybe not quite that far. Anyway, we flew missions for five or six days and finally we went back.

Mark: Did you find him?

Cullen: Didn't find him. So, to this day. So anyway as an upshot of that coming back on some of the things that went on. Anyway, some of the other little pieces of that mission for General Harmon, if I'm not taking too much time on that. He was so much sought that the crew that found him was offered a months furlough stateside for any crew that found him. One of our replacement crews from Barking Sands was searching for him was trying to transfer some, because we were getting some long stretches of looking and had some wing tanks, was trying to transfer some gas from the wing tank into the bomb bay and the plane lost balance and crashed, and several of the crew members were lost in that search for General Harmon. But, our pilot who said, we were reminiscing about it, he said that he deserved a reprimand. He said why he never got it. He said the Navy must have been looking the other way or just didn't want to, they had other things to worry about. For a while an F4 Hellcat was flying formation. We would fly formations in looking for him. We would fly anywhere from a hundred to five hundred feet off the water. Some of us who were up, I couldn't see the top turret, I was looking out of the waist window. We would be looking through the waist windows, the bombardiers and

the nose turrets were looking, they had glass to look through, so the engineer and myself, even and the ball turret for a while was down and was looking. That wasn't very good. Now that I think about it, I don't think the ball turret was looking on this search. But anyway, this Navy plane was flying formation with us, so he would peel off, a carrier showed up and so he peeled off our formation and went back. So, we were off to the side of our formation so the pilot, who was 23 years old then, he said "Oh, this would be great fun, but four or five days of looking is getting a little bit slap happy." He thought it would be great to play games with the Navy, so he flew toward the carrier, let his landing gear down, and started to drop down just a little bit, and then wagged his wings like this, put the landing gear back up and flew back into the formation. He said why he didn't get a reprimand or get a demotion for that, he'll never know, but they didn't. So, that was one of the little side things from that search. But, I was saying in regard to that search, I began asking around if anyone had any information about General Harmon. I asked people in our bomb group and they didn't really know. Our bomb group reunion people didn't seem to have any notion, so I set about to find some information. So, for the past couple of months I have been working rather diligently on gathering information. I contacted his children, who are still living, it turns out that his younger brother, his name was Millard Fillmore Harmon if you will, shorten it down to Mif, Mif Harmon, he was named after the thirteenth president of the US. His younger brother Hubert became the first superintendent of the Air Force academy. So anyway, I have been getting information from the Air Force research agency, historical research agency in Montgomery, Alabama at Maxwell, the National Archives, and various other places, and I'm putting together a piece on General Harmon which may even turn into a book. So, it was something that lingered over from my having been looking, peering out of a bomb, out of a waist window for him fifty years ago.

Mark: So, it wasn't a waste of time after all.

Cullen:No. Not really. So, I suppose you are wondering how many went into combat.

Mark: Yeah.

Cullen:All right sure.

Mark: Is that coming up now?

Cullen:Yes. About time. We left Barking Sands, we went back to Barking Sands and picked up all of our gear and so forth, and went down to the Palau Islands. They are the western most of the Caroline group.

Mark: That's P-A-L-A-U?

Cullen:P-A-L-A-U. They probably now have a new fantasized Palau or something, I think they change these things down through the years. But, Palau, that's the western part of the Caroline Islands. Part of the general Pacific strategy was to get close as you could to the Japanese home islands to make bombing the home islands more practical. So, that was,

and of course the initial ring of conquest of Japan had gotten fairly far east you see, so bit by bit they had the two battles going through the mid Pacific area, taking the Marshalls and things like that, getting the others, the Marinas and the others coming through the Admiralty ... of the Guadalcanal and up through New Guinea and so forth and working up that way you see, Solomon Islands. So, these were meeting so the Palaus were probably closer to the Philippines than anything else, west most. We were the southern most island called Angaur, which some of our bomb group has gone back to in recent years and now there are probably, maybe two hundred people on the island, maybe seven or eight miles long. And at that time, when we were there, there was an entire bomb group, probably what, three or four thousand, now there are maybe a couple hundred. The air strip which we had built up is now all grown over with coral, there are several wrecked planes there. The lagoon, where we used to swim at, it was a beautiful lagoon, we used to swim in it when the tide went out, several typhoons have hit and that was also full of junk from some planes and things that are crashed near there. And so, it's now reverting back to a jungle, but it was a very thriving island.

Mark: When you were there, did the natives live on the islands?

Cullen: Yes. They lived, they were kept very much apart from us. They were the Melanesian, I'm not sure, maybe Micronesia, maybe Micronesian, I'm not sure which they would be. They were fairly darkened skin, fairly straight dark hair, most of them. Those islands had been protectorates of Spain, of Germany, and then after World War I, Japan, I'm sure mostly grabbed it from Germany, which, and then I guess the Germans didn't really fight them on because they didn't have many protectorates out there, and so it was a Japanese protectorate. One interesting thing that I noticed was the, there was a girl, a young woman, probably I guess at the age of the rest of us young fellas that were there in the air crews, maybe a shade younger, but it looked like she could have been late teens or early twenties, who was a little fair skinned, so we called her the chief's daughter. We don't know if she was the chief's daughter or not, but that's what we called her. She had a reddish tint to her hair. She would seem to reflect the occupation, probably by the Germans or someplace along that family tree line in one of their families of that earlier time. There may have been one or two others with just a little shade lighter skin. Most of them were, I mean they were pure Melanesian stock. I say Melanesian because I think that's what they were. Anyway, but they were kept quite separate. We had some contact with them, mainly, you know, sometimes they would buy cigarettes or something from us, things we could get from the PX and things like that. They were very nice people, and some of the older fellas on the crews, on the ground crews and things, I think they got to know them a little bit better. But, however, they could go to our movie. We would have outdoor movies and they could attend our movies and so they would sit off in a section by themselves, a roped section, so it was quite fascinating. They would see movies that, from the stateside, and we would see movies from there, so we seen stateside. The things that did not, that we thought might impress them did not impress them at all. For example, there would be pictures of our urban civilization, big boulevards of cars speeding along, airplanes flying, and big city, big huge, you know New York and things like that, and they would look at it, but I mean of course they were taking it in, but they were not particularly aroused by it until they showed a western. They would have these

galloping horses and these natives, almost to a man, or at least half of them would jump out of their chairs, out of their seats and point at the screen and look, look, look at those horses, they had never seen these fast living creatures, and these galloping horses were the most exciting thing imagined to them. They couldn't get over the thrill of these galloping horses, which was kind of a strange observation. But, no our times there where we flew missions over the northern part of the Palau Islands were Japanese held. The next Island up was Peleliu. There was a terrible battle there. That was the one in recent times they have admitted finally that they really didn't have to, see they didn't have to take that battle [silence].

Mark: First mission huh?

Cullen: Yes practically. I can't recall, I think we were in the Palaus and I was mentioning that the northern part of the Islands were still held by the Japanese. Peleliu, which is the island immediately above us was secured at great loss. In fact, it was one of those times, a lot of people don't realize it, but it was somewhat aside from my particular history, but I think it would be of interest, but the Marine landings and so forth were highly publicized and rightfully so. They were very self sacrificing, I mean there were a tremendous amount of men lost and some of those things, but they did not have the material, the supply lines, that type of thing to really hold a place, a position, an island, whatever, because they weren't designed for that. So, what happened on Peleliu, apparently, the Japs were so entrenched and they had the, you may have read about that, they had this place called Bloody Nose Ridge.

Mark: I'm not familiar with that.

Cullen: I see. And, they managed, they were very adept in these island bastions to getting themselves into in little rocky areas and digging like bees and so forth where they could get their gunfire. So, they had to literally get taken out one by one and so the, this got into a terrific war of attrition and the Marines were taking quite a whipping. So, the Army, which was less spectacular, more methodical, had taken Angaur, which was more lightly defended and not nearly as large an island. So, they, I guess they finally pressed the emergency button, so the Army came in and more or less rescued them because they had the supply of lines and the troops and that sort of thing, material to get in there and make more of a determined show of it. So anyway, be as it may, there was some question about whether or not that whole area of the Caroline's were necessary for the attack on Japan, but these were policy questions which the arguments have been raging ever since and before, so ours was not, we were not on a policy the debating situations ourselves. We knew that the biggest force of the Japs was up on Babelthaup, B-A-B-E-L-T-H-A-U-P, which was the northern most and the largest of the Palau group. So, we would, and they had the most armament and aircraft and so forth, so part of the tactic or strategy, rather, in attacking these places that had been more or less quartered off was to reduce their fire power down to where they were no longer a threat for planes coming over and also to generally just make sure that they were quarantined off and would not be players in the war any longer, I mean we didn't try to go in there or get the Army or anybody else to go in and try to route them out and destroy them, just to put them off. So anyway, part

of our strategy was of course, bombing, of all things, the aircraft insulations. So, we had to spot those. Then things like, if it looks as if they were starting to build up an airfield or something, they had further down on the Solomons they had a slot right through their, that they called the Tokyo Express, where planes and material could then being shipped from anywhere were coming right up and down pretty much at will for a long time and the first part of that campaign, and so they wanted, and that was because there was several good airfields along the lines that the Japs could land in that I guess re-supplied and so forth. So, the idea was to keep any of those situations like that from developing in the Carolines. I suppose that was part of the strategy. But anyway, we did manage to lose some crews. The 494, which I may have mentioned, was the newest of all the bomb groups of the Air Force I believe. It was practically, I think it was the newest of the Air Force and our bomb group was the newest of the groups within that new Air Force, which I formed in, I think, late '43. So anyway, we did like I say, we bombed those areas.

Mark: So, what was your first mission?

Cullen: It was over a place, an in-between island called Koror, K-O-R-O-R, and that was, still that was near Peleliu and that still had some pretty good anti aircraft and I guess had some pretty good fields or things, or storage areas and things that they wanted bombed, so we bombed those and didn't have too much trouble. The bombardier kept pretty good records of what was hit, and then back in the squadron rooms they would compare the notes as to how effective and then they would have reconnaissance flights and so forth to see if in fact there were other guns and things still there. So.

Mark: I'm interested in your thoughts and your reactions on your first mission.

Cullen: On my first mission. Well, it's hard to recreate it originally because those things tend to get blurred in with the later things. So, I suppose, I'm just guessing now somewhat what my reaction, but I don't think it made that profound of an impression on me. I think it was one of those things that naturally there was a certain amount of apprehension and nervousness, but it wasn't something all consuming. It was the sort of thing that we realized that we were not flying over a prime target where there were hundreds or dozens of anti-aircraft, but it was still out there in the far reach of the Pacific, and you never knew what was there, so there was apprehension. But, in fact, one of the crews, they were hit and there was a picture taken which has shown up in a number of Army aviation books and recapitulations where one of our squadron, it was a direct hit between the point of fuselage and the wing and it tore the wing off and the plane spun down and somebody got a picture of it. So, it was a dangerous area, and in fact it did affect a fella who was a very good friend of that crew lost, it probably crashed. So, a fella, a pilot, who was a very good friend of the pilot that went down just plain withdrew. He ruled himself out and I guess, just took his lumps I don't know if this is exactly what happened to him, but he said he would no longer fly, and of course now, that was a pilot. I never heard of any, although there may have been and I suppose he felt maybe I suppose a combination of fear for himself but also the responsibility, you know of those other things, but I never recall any, and again I have no way of knowing, enlisted men who said I ain't going up no more. Now, that could have happened, and there may have been ways in which they real

or otherwise or feigned or had some other psychological block and couldn't do it. But, as far as anybody in my acquaintanceship ever doing, I don't know, just the one case I can remember that you could call the less kind way of cowardice was this pilot just plain withdrew himself. There was some debate at the time whether that was cowardice or what it was. I mean there was a lot of other pilots thought maybe it might be.

Mark: So, I get the impression that the morale was pretty high.

Cullen: Yes. You see, we had the advantage, our particular crew, we were a replacement crew. Everybody that came down from Barking Sands at that time, we got over there in January, and we finally after six weeks went down to the Palaus. We were still fresh at state side. We had not had the enervating heat, the tropical diseases, the tedium, the flying over endless, although on our searches we've had some notion as to the vastness of the Pacific when we were searching for General Harmon, but there wasn't quite that battle fatigue which people who had been there for quite a while had. In fact, they used to have the term that was used, especially I think it applied to the enlisted men of the permanent party as being "rock happy". In other words, they were out on those rocks all of the time and their expressions and so forth. I mean they didn't, you could tell the people that came from the states recently, I mean I could see it after I had been there for a while. These guys came and there was a certain brightness of the eyes and quick movement and so forth and these guys hadn't been out on the Pacific stretches for a long time. You could tell. Their skin tone of course they were fair, they hadn't been exposed to all of that sun, but just generally they had not reached that fatigue which I think, which the Pacific developed. Not only because of the heat, but because of the remoteness. In other words, and the fact the latitudes were so unusual for people, especially people of the northern European extraction, and even so, Europeans generally. You got down into this tropical area, and it wasn't even sub tropical it was a really tropical area. Because, I think we were four degrees from the equator or something like that. The performance of tasks after a while became slower because in addition to which the earlier crews, see we missed a lot of that. They didn't have the people coming in to kind of give them a break because there were fewer crews and they had to fly sometimes almost every day. You see, when you get up and you fly five or six hours a day, sometimes usually not on oxygen because we weren't up in that, we didn't have to go that high in that part of the Pacific. But anyway, you would get worn down, so that was the big thing, one of the big things was the fatigue factor and then of course later on as we moved up, and especially when we got to Okinawa, by then we started running across the serious gunfire and aircraft fire, and then the propaganda from the Japanese mainland on Tokyo Rose, especially, would come up with all types of things telling us what was going to happen to us.

Mark: When did you start moving up north because I see on your separation record here it says southern Philippines ...

Cullen: Yes. See, we were in the bomb group. What they did on these campaigns and for the ribbons and for the battle campaigns and so forth was to have an opening and starting date and so we were in, see our bomb group did bomb the Philippines, in fact it bombed Clark Field, which by the way was named after the brother-in-law of General Harmon,

Charles Clark, who died quite young in a plane crash down in, what had been in the Philippines, but who died actually in Panama. But anyway, on Christmas day of '44, the 494th bomb made a very successful bombing raid on Clark Field which had been seized by the Japanese when they seized the Philippines, and more or less disabled it as a flight, I mean they really came in and really bombed all of the control towers and the main runway, I mean big gaps in it and so forth, and supply tanks, so our group was engaged in Philippine campaigns. So, we came along, we were in there as a replacement crew, in fact I think our pilot flew one time just on one of his first times there to get used to seeing what it was like when they went on a mission. I think they went on a mission over Mindanao, which was right west you see in the line of the Palaus, you see we were very close to the Palaus. And, so, ... think about that about oh, so anyway, yeah, about the cut off days. We were not, technically our crew wasn't on any Philippine bombing mission. However, our group was and we were in the theater at the time of those dates, so that was the reason we got the Philippine liberation.

Mark: So, you were in the Carolines for a couple of months, I'd say.

Cullen: We were there from it would have been March, I believe, yes, late March of '45 until July. So we would have been, let's say April, May, June, and half way into July, so about three and a half months.

Mark: So, when you were in the Carolines, what did you guys do for fun?

Cullen: See, that was another thing about the Pacific as opposed to see the people say how much rougher it was in the ETO, European Theatre Operations, that there was no place to go. In other words you are out there on those rocks, in fact, a fella wrote a book on the Seventh Air Force called "One Damn Island After Another". I mean, you were out there and you, the natives were often times, I mean were not English speaking for various reasons, I mean for us not to take advantage of them and us not to risk disease or whatever. We never associated, hardly at all, with the native population at all, so as opposed to Europe where, especially in England you had these terrible raids where you have awful attrition loss of these bomb groups. At least when you were in those, in fact, you could go into London, you could go various places, you had association with people of a similar level of culture and so forth and a degree of urbanization and things like that so that psychologically you could kind of, however temporarily, you could kind of escape from that and get a kind of a fresh attitude on a weekend or two. In the Pacific you didn't get that. So, to answer your question, there was nothing going. I mean there was nothing doing. I mean, you simply, you went swimming, you played soft ball, there was always a card and dice game going. There was one guy that was a mechanic, his name was Duke if I remember, and I can remember he was older, probably by older I mean I suppose pushing thirty, and he had a, most of the flight mechanics wore like baseball caps and kind of khaki, so I can remember he always had a baseball cap, but he had the bill turned up. He was the guy among the enlisted men who was always presiding over the card games and dice games and so forth and so on. So, those were always going. There was sort of a PX, you know kind of a place, I mean it was sort of a charade, I mean it was a joke. There was swimming in the lagoon when the tide would come in. It was really

quite a pretty lagoon, and quite nice, and maybe at the most it was shoulder high so you could, there was a lot of room to swim around. But,---

Mark: Was there drinking? Did you have access to alcohol or anything like that?

Cullen: There was very terrible beer. I'll talk about the beer first. There was a very terrible beer that came from New York, Brooklyn I think, but where else, called Schaefer's Beer. Schaefer's beer was probably the greenest beer that was ever canned. I mean, I don't know why they didn't just call it green beer and let it go at that. I mean, I'm sure there was no, I mean to have a bottle of good, not today's Wisconsin beer because they all taste like they have all been put under the same tap, but they used to have, I think about the only thing going today that tastes like it was Leinenkugel, for example, it had sort of that taste. To find a beer like that would have been a totally mind boggling experience because it was such terrible stuff. That used to come in cans. We used to drink it you know, but then the officers used to get a liquor ration and so what they could do was to, many times they did, was simply to, they would take the best of things, and there may have been sources that they could buy from, there may have been some kind of a sale, I mean a stock of hard liquor at the officers club that they could purchase. But, it was rationed. They could only buy so much each crew and so forth. So, then they would sometimes get extra and then they would give the enlisted men a bottle. So, what I had done, just a little aside on that it will relate the anticipated Okinawa experience and I won't disclose that, so I'll just take the first part of it. I bought, prior to leaving the states, a fifth of a very cheap booze of the day called Three Feathers. Three Feathers was advertised pretty highly, but it was a rather low grade alcohol, a whiskey, and quite reasonable, I mean comparatively reasonable. I mean it wasn't a Johnny Walker, it wasn't the stuff that was a blend of great things. And so anyway, I nursed that and husbanded it very carefully so that I was going to, my point was to have it for a celebration at such a time as the war was over and/or when we finished our mission runs, which at that time I think we were scheduled for something like forty, although I think they cut it down to, our tour of duty would have so many missions then we could go back and either be reassigned or whatever they were doing. See, of course the war was, they could see it was running down, but they didn't know how long, I mean, Europe was getting pretty well under control, didn't know how long the Japanese were going to hold out, so anyway that was still a big question mark. But anyway, I had this, but I saved that, kept it in my barracks, but I kept towels and things around it all the time so that it wouldn't get broken. I'll tell you what happened to it later when I get to Okinawa.

Mark: So, let's go to Okinawa. You went to Okinawa, you said July.

Cullen: In July.

Mark: So, the European war had already been over.

Cullen: Yes. The European war was over and so at that point they were starting to send dribbles of the crews that didn't have too many missions in or whatever in Europe to come over to complete their tours of duty in the Pacific. However, they were not about to, since those

guys had, I'm, some of this I'm editorializing and some of it I am imagining, but I think they felt that they were in these highly, big reputation, glamour Air Force like the 8th. They weren't about to come over and join the 7th and say, "hey we want to join you guys," they were going to want to come over as the 8th. I mean, in other words, not only the crews themselves they probably felt a certain organizational pride and that is rightfully so, but their CO's, their Commanding Generals, their Command Pilots and the rest of these things you see wanted to come over and say, "hey here's the 8th Air Force coming over. We've come over to finish up the war, okay you guys? You've been fooling around long enough here now, let's have some professionals take over and do the job." That's a little bit of editorial side. I don't know that they really felt that way, but I had the feeling in retrospect that the ETO experience in retrospect, I was thinking of Mr. Clinton's recent remark on D-Day, "Western Civilization was saved by D-Day." Well, I'd like to see, if I were to make that statement I probably would ask that he might qualify just a little bit, say maybe a few other places might have played a part in, but be that as it may. We, the European War, to get back to your point, the European War was over and we were set to move up, to get ready for, there was some debate among McArthur, who had moved down to Australia and then worked his way up through New Guinea and so forth and then joined with the people coming from the South Pacific into the Solomons and worked up you see. The question was, they were neutralizing and cordoning off these various airfields and concentrations of Japanese troops, whether to take Formosa, now Taiwan, and/or the Philippines, or to, and a couple places along the line that they were thinking about taking that might be the spot. Well, they had a big battle royal among the chiefs of staff as to whether or not they should go in and take Formosa. Well, fortunately, I think, they did decide that instead they were going to take the [unintelligible], they were going to continue the move across, the Mid-Pacific boys were going to continue across, the Marines and Army, across and instead of coming up from the South Pacific at that angle across like that taking the Philippines. Doug got back in the Philippines and said, "I have returned." So, he made good on his promises see. So, to give him his due he would be much maligned because of his manner, you know he was a very haughty guy, very imperious and did some things which some felt that took him out of being a nice guy mode, but none-the-less, he was a guy who made some very strong, some very solid strategic moves and buttressed 'em with some good reasoning, and later on because he became very good friends with Halsey was willing to work with the Navy, as was Harmon prior to his missing. I mean, Harmon fortunately, I would guess, didn't have to cope too much with Doug you see. He was, Doug had the, down starting in Australia and then moving up to New Guinea and so forth, had the 5th Air Force with General Kenney. His counterpart was Harmon who had the 13th Air Force starting in the, initially starting in New Zealand, and then out of New Caledonia and then into the Guadalcanal. But anyway, so fortunately Kenney, McArthur apparently you could reason with. He was, he worked very well with Kenney. Kenney who was an old timer, too, who had the same rank as Harmon went down there and McArthur was saying you know, "it is going to be this and this," so Kenney was quite a bit smaller and so forth, but an old timer, a seasoned guy said, "General McArthur I tell you, he said I want to respond to your points. I will do the best I can. I am a man of considerable experience in the Air Force with the running of campaigns, but working with various Air Forces, various commands, I've studied strategies and worked with strategies with airplanes I guess from World War I even," and

he said, "I would ask to let me do what I can do best if my performance does not meet with the standards and with the philosophy that you have, I'll be very glad to simply pack my gear and leave," and I guess McArthur was just ever so slightly and paused and said, "George, I think we are going to get along very well." So, apparently if you made your point and

[End of Side A, Tape 2]

seemed to have it with performance and with references McArthur could be reasoned with. He met Halsey. Halsey was a fairly strong personality as well, but a likable guy. They said after, both of them, both of them in their reminiscences said that after about ten minutes it was like they had known each other all of their lives. So, McArthur got along with Halsey and so forth. Anyway, the point was that then all they had to fight was Hap Arnold and Marshall who first of all didn't want to put anything in the Pacific, I think they got something like twenty percent of the fire power and troops in the Pacific and McArthur and Nimitz and all the rest of them had to really lean on these guys, and finally Roosevelt intervened and said, McArthur of course had a big following because he was a symbol and said, "you are going to toll the chiefs of staff," even though they didn't like McArthur. But, you are going to have to send him troops, you're going to have to have more Air Force and more ground troops. Anyway, getting to the question that maybe you were asking, but anyway we moved up then. We went to Ulithi atoll. Ulithi was in the Carolines, but it was a huge, huge, huge lagoon. It had the, it was fairly deep. I never seen such smooth water like this, like the top of this table. I swear that if you were down closer to the water, we were in the ship all this time, but you could see your reflection in the water. It was that still. I suppose because of this huge coral reef that was around, but they formed a - I mean we joined the convoy that was being formed as far as, literally, the eye could reach. I mean you look out at the ends of it and it was like the curvature of the earth and there were still ships. I mean it was that huge of convoy and I was going to go to Okinawa, so that was forming with air crews, with ground crews, with aircraft carriers, everything. It was this huge, huge thing because Okinawa was in the process, I mean it pretty well had been secured at a great loss of life, as you probably know. That was one of the most severe battles of the war, too. So, an interesting thing in getting on the ship before we got into this convoy Ulithi, Ulithi Atoll they called it U-L-I-T-H-I. We had our first taste and only taste of climbing aboard a ship as the attack troops, as the assault troops would do, the Marines, the Army, and so forth and so on, and we climbed up these rope ladders. You know what their term was called? They were called cargo nets. They were things that they would use in back in civilian days. They would get a large cargo and there would be just enough of these squares, I mean they would be just close enough together so they would hold a large cargo. So, the cargo nets were used as the rope ladders and they would throw them over the side and so that was our, and we had everything we could carry and everything we owned that they didn't want to bring aboard with other things. And so here we were climbing up these cargo nets, and they were quite a pull and I could at that point empathize very much with the fellas who were hitting those beaches and they were climbing aboard their ships to go on those things. But anyway, we got on the Ulithi and after about a week I would guess, maybe ten days, we steamed up to Okinawa, landed at I believe the base was called Naha, and the airfield that

we occupied was called Yontan. Then the other elements around the country, I mean around the, some of the CBI boys came over, and I think some of the 14th Air Force for fighter escort and things like that came over. Certainly Kenny's boys from the 5th came up here, they were the 5th Air Force came up. The 13th which had been the ones that Harmon was, and then his various people including Twining who I believe came from Monroe around here I think, General Twining. Twining was one of Harmon's boys. I mean he picked him up all along. He was younger and they had pictures together quite a bit of time. Anyway, so you had the 5th, you had the 13th, you had elements of the 28th coming over, but not too many, and then of course the 7th which was getting larger. At that point then you had the B29s coming from the 20th and the 21st who were, some of them were getting there, but they were mainly staying on Guam and Saipan to pull those long range missions you see, and then we started on the shorter missions. We started to bomb the China coast, Shanghai, in fact, we lost a plane over Shanghai, and we would bomb Kyushu down before we got to Honshu the southern most of the Japanese islands, then we.., and so forth. Well anyway, at that point we were there. Things that stuck in my mind about Okinawa - the red soil. In this country Oklahoma, I don't know if you have ever traveled down there, but Oklahoma, especially in the spring time, all that red mud is just all over the place. Maybe it's a lot in the south, whether it's volcanic or I don't know what it is, but the more recent volcanic or something isn't like the stuff we have here. It's just red, red soil and in fact I think when the A-bomb was struck I think some of that red out of Japan they always had that kind of reddish soil. But anyway, was the red mud, then the level of relative humidity was very high. Much more than down in the islands that we had. It was hot, but it wasn't a high relative humidity. So when we get up on Okinawa, we started developing we called it "The Crud" for one of anything better, which was a form of fungus and it liked to locate in the armpits and they dressed it with a purple merthiolate type stuff, there was a name for it, but it slipped my mind at the moment. And so, almost everybody was walking around with purple circles all over them where this kind of ring worm and fungus mainly from this terrible moisture. I mean this humidity was extremely high.

Mark: Now, this had recently been conquered from the Japanese.

Cullen: Yes.

Mark: Just like a month or so before.

Cullen: Right. A very short time. The Okinawa natives were a rather primitive sort, and that was an island that was not heavily settled by the mainland Japanese. They were probably, I suppose they were, if they were an ethnic Japanese type they probably would have been a little more primitive rural you know, maybe an island mixture or something, but no they were not really Melanesians, I mean they were definitely Asian people, but I think that they were not the same level, certainly not the same level of culture. I mean, there was a definite cultural distinction. And, they did not have a tremendous, they were not highly educated and they did not seem to have an intrinsically great love for the Japanese. So, our being there then was generally, although we didn't associate with them too much. We didn't seem to have and it wasn't engendered in us an apprehension of those people.

What we did have to be on the lookout for and several did not heed the warning to their own sorrow was that many times the Japs would hide in the, they had above surface or half buried graves with keystone entrances to these graves and people would have their burial crypts. And, the Japs would hide in there, the Okinawan burial crypts and they would hide in there. So, a lot of our boys, not a lot but a few until they got smart enough to not do it. They wanted to go souvenir hunting. They would go into these burial crypts and a Jap would be waiting for them and they would give them a grenade as they came in and that was it. So pretty soon those burial crypts got off limit.

Mark: And that happened a couple of times?

Cullen: Yes.

Mark: So, there was still some stragglers.

Cullen: There was still some stragglers, oh, yes. There was also a, there was a, there was the regular, quite regular to break up our sleep and to do minimal damage. Air raids from Japan. By that time, the Japanese Air Force had pretty much been blown out of the sky. In other words, the combination of the gunners were very good and the, I mean the bomber guns were fairly good, but the fighter planes, the US fighter planes. For example, in some of those exchanges with the carrier planes and with the land based Army air corps there would be kill ratios of 5 to 1, or 10 to 1, 15 to 1. At first the Japs had some very nifty, very skilled pilots, but toward the end they were running in high school kids practically, and their main contribution to these very young college boys was that they were not critical enough or did not, could be conditioned more. They did not want to say, "I don't mind if I do die." They were doing the kamikaze and things. But anyway...

Mark: I've got this note here about washing machine Charlie. Is this what you were talking about here?

Cullen: Yes. That was, they were annoyance term. They would come over. That was a term that was initially coined, I guess, in the Guadalcanal where the Japanese would come over and would make a wake up call or annoyance call, whatever, or would come over as a recognizance or something so they started calling these sort of generally non dangerous but annoying planes who mainly came over in inopportune times Washing Machine Charlie, so we picked up on that. Usually it was a very low grade aircraft that sort of went putt-putt-putt along, and it woke me up, it woke the island up. All of the anti-aircraft guns would go off and pretty soon we got, some of us could almost sleep through it. I never did, but. I remember our pilot was telling me that they finally gave up because they got so tiresome. But, the anti aircraft guns would go off fairly near where our quarters were and they would boom-boom-boom-boom (making sound effects). It would sound almost like bombs hitting. I mean there would be the vibrations and so forth. So, they would wake up and people would run toward these foot trenches with their helmets and so forth to get in there in case they were bombs being dropped. And sometimes, they would come in below the levels of the hills, usually they would circle mountains around the base of Okinawa and they would come in about fifty feet off the water one of these

low grade planes and up and into little skip bombing on one of our airfields, drop a couple things that would leave a crater about the size of this table and then move up and then be half way back to Japan. All the anti aircraft guns would start going off and this of course effectively woke up the entire island. But as far as any serious raids, there weren't.

Mark: I also have a note here about Tokyo Rose.

Cullen: Yes.

Mark: You remember listening to her?

Cullen: Sure. Yeah.

Mark: In Okinawa.

Cullen: Yes. In Okinawa. Some heard her, they thought they heard her down in the Palau, but I never did and I don't know whether that would have been relayed, but the Tokyo Rose had two ploys it seemed like in her approach. One was to give us a sense of the tremendous espionage the Japs had by saying, "well this is being beamed to you boys in the 494th bomb group and the A66 squadron. I understand one of your planes got shot down on its' mission such and such today." Where in the hell did she hear that?

Mark: Was she fairly accurate?

Cullen: Well, sometimes it was bluff. You could tell it was bluff. Other times there was probably just enough infiltration in how they managed to get it. Maybe through some sort of decoding of messages, maybe there was somebody there, but usually I don't think there was anybody that we could physically see. I don't think there were any Caucasians that I know of that were, and we didn't have any Asian troops. The only Asians we saw of course were some of the Philippines in the Navy. Filipinos. And, I don't think that there were, if there were Chinese troops. I don't think there were any great quantity of them, so I never really recall seeing any Asians in our battle forces. So, but anyway, she would try to unnerve us with this intelligence coup you see. And then the other one was to make us concerned about a pending takeover of Okinawa by the citizens of Japan who were going to, according to her, they had over a million or two million volunteers who were straining at the leash wanting to take whatever private planes, ships, motor boats, whatever, and make the trip down to Okinawa and retake a million and a half troops armed to the teeth with as much as they could give them to actually have a citizen force in addition to the well trained, and at that point apparently not too terribly decimated, see there were still a lot of trained Japanese that stayed on the home island. They did not go out on the islands, as they began retrenching as they began losing, they retrenched, so a lot of those people had been retrenched and so they had a pretty good ground. They had a very poor Air Force. The Air Force was almost non existent. So anyway, there was just a little element of concern, but not serious. I figured we had enough dive bombers, fleet planes and everything else, they wouldn't have gotten very far you see. But anyway, it was just a

ploy. And the other things were such as diseases. There was one time she told us about the epidemic of elephantiasis. Elephantiasis is something where the glands and so forth would swell to gigantic proportions and one time for example I saw one of these, I'm sure a fairly well doctored photograph, where a fella, a native islander somewhere in the Pacific was sitting in a, a somewhat older man, was sitting with his legs spread apart and had a wheel barrel in which his testicles were resting and these had swollen to, I'm sure it was some trick photographer took a picture and then enlarged it and then superimposed it, but it had this shock value you see. Maybe that was prepared by the Japanese Propaganda mission, I don't know. But anyway, it was things like exotic epidemics and so forth.

Mark: Was she very effective? Did she effect morale at all?

Cullen: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think she was more entertainment because she did play a fairly good selection of music, and some fairly recent. I don't know how with that isolation that they must have had how they would have had so many hit records, but they had a lot of fairly recent, I mean within let's say six months they would have things. They had this program back in those days, on the radio, called the Hit Parade sponsored by the tobacco company Lucky Strike, and one of their big tags was during the war, it used to be a green package with a big red dot and they cut the green out, so when they were advertising was "Lucky Strike green has gone to war." So, anyway, to get back to Tokyo Rose, no. It was mainly just a, and I don't know how seriously the Jap high command took to think that she was being effective, but. I met her after the war, I don't know if I mentioned that to you or not.

Mark: No.

Cullen: Yes. I met her. Her name was Toguri and, in Chicago, this was maybe twenty-five years ago. She was running a little shop, I think that's where she was from originally, and I should do some research and find out what the story is on her, if she is actually still living, maybe. She would be I guess at this point probably in her late seventies because she was older than myself. But, she was over visiting in Japan and the war was declared, and I think that maybe, who it was, anyway, they seized her and simply said it will be easier on you and your relatives if you simply play ball with us. She did undergo a certain amount of repatriation and debriefing after the war was over, but she... and I think was generally forgiven because I don't think that there was too much shown that she had that adverse effect. It was the idea of the certain amount of disloyalty which she had to be rehabilitated. But, she was a very witty woman. I remember she ran this little shop about a mile and a half north of the loop in Chicago and there, in a little Japan town there, and she was very witty and charming and really a lot of fun. Tokyo Rose... (tape cut off)

Mark: I don't know what the problem was. Okay go ahead.

Cullen: We had some rather severe, we had a couple of bad missions that the Group did. The 494th by the way was the first bomb group to send Liberators over Japan. The other Air Forces had them, but we got there first, and we were the prime B24 attack force. I believe. I think we had the largest number, and we had fairly good success. We struck

the, of course the heavy work on much of the industrial power of Japan was done by those earlier raids, B29's with massed fleets of two to three hundred B29s going over at a time with those larger bombs and so forth. So, there was a tremendous amount of damage done the... I guess the Japanese high command realized comparatively early it was a gone deal, but they in the mean time had created this monster of their own which was Japanese public opinion. They had done such a successful job of brainwashing the Japanese populous into believing that they should fight until the very last man, the civilians should, and that these heathen Americans and so forth were going to totally destroy the island and so forth so they had whipped up a kind of do or die mentality among the Japanese populous. So, one of their problems in winding down the war at this point was to try to convince the public as I understand it, Japanese public, that indeed there is such a thing as an honorable peace and so forth and I guess they were not having all that much luck until the A-bombs were dropped and then the populous could... see despite the fact, even after LeMay had come in with his somewhat debatable in some corners, not everybody of course, Hap Arnold didn't disagree with it, the fire bombing of Tokyo with this great loss of life. Even that, apparently even as much as it terrorized people did set a certain amount of resolve that terror bombing did not necessarily break the will of people. There were people in other parts of Japan who weren't getting those. They were saying well, we sympathize and so forth, but we are going to stay and fight and so forth. So, there was that.

Mark: So what sort of missions over Japan were you involved in?

Cullen: We would strike airfields so that there would be no remnant of any Air Force that may get off and we had fighter escorts. We would... naval bases, any refineries, and things like that, anything that would be a potential military target or would have a potential military significance we would bomb and it would be the idea again of delaying and containing. For example, the kamikaze planes were headquartering not so many, but anyway, they would land based planes you see. I don't think there were any carriers left by that time so they would land deep. So, when they came down off of Okinawa, striking Okinawa, they were coming from the Japanese home land you see. And, so, the idea among the intelligence, among the reconnaissance was to find out where those reconnaissance planes were and then to try to, kamikaze planes rather, and to try to bomb out those kamikaze airports. Those were among the things that we were doing. And, the...Japan was getting some material, its raw materials and so forth from the Asian main land because they were, of course they had conquered Asia and so in addition to mining the harbors, which Harmon and Nimitz had wanted to do, General Harmon and Admiral Nimitz which was becoming very successful. The Japs were losing, were losing material with these air strikes on the main land so, among our reason for hitting, they had some of the shipping points from China where the Japanese would be bringing their supply ships, so in other words it was a very strategic bombing thing. But, the bad missions that we had, the one bad mission fortunately, I think providentially I missed it and our crew did was bombing the Kure Naval Base in the Embassy of Japan. The Kure Naval Base was the single best defended spot in Japan. Much more than Tokyo ever was, and it had filled, they figured, someplace between four and five hundred anti-aircraft installations right around the main target was the battleship Haruna. That was their, that was the top of the line. And so, our

squadron, on the 23rd of July our squadron was scheduled to be the very first, was scheduled to be the lead squadron going into the Kure Naval Base. They had, in addition to the four hundred aircraft installations, they had every ship in there. They had many ships including the Haruna that had something like 14-to-15 inch shells that there these things that they could turn those cannons right smack up like that. And so, we were scheduled to be the lead squadron. Whether it was weather, whether it was an act of providence, whatever it was, the mission was called off that day. It was rescheduled later. In the mean, time our pilot was to make room for some of the B29's on Okinawa. They began taking some of the 24's off and sending them down to New Guinea, to a big supply depot for the whole, for that whole part of the world called Biak. It was an island up in New Guinea. And so anyway, the pilot, the co-pilot, navigator, radio operator, and engineer took that plane down. (tape cut off).

Mark: Go ahead.

Cullen: Yes. So when they rescheduled the mission, is it showing out on the tape?

Mark: It's moving.

Cullen: When they rescheduled the mission on the 25th of July our crew was at a (tape cut off again.)

Mark: Let's just keep plugging away.

Cullen: Okay. [Tape difficulties. Couple minute silence]

Mark: Well it seems to be working again. We're getting near the end anyway. I rewound it and now we are on side four.

Cullen: Oh I see. This is on another side. I see. Okay. All right. Sure. Let's see where were we?

Mark: About the mission you missed.

Cullen: Oh yes. Well anyway, that mission was rescheduled on the 25th. At that point of course our crew was, the flying part of our crew was in New Guinea, so providentially we missed that. What happened was that apparently the fact that maybe we were still in the lead position, I'm not sure the A-66, but our squadron was the only squadron that lost planes and there were a number of planes that some that kind of skirted... There were some Navy planes that got shot down and it was probably the most, certainly the most dangerous mission that the 494th ever flew. Two got shot down and what happened was, a strange follow up to that, well anyway, the strange experience for some of us was we had not had, we lost people in Palau. They were not immediately next to us in lodging and in our housing, but on either side of our tent were these two crews that were shot down, so here were fellows that we had known for a couple years. Both sides were no longer. I mean you know, they were gone. And so, that was quite, that kind of brought

the war home to us. Later on it was discovered that those, both those crews that were shot down, one crew especially was captured. They managed to get out and in fact, I think both of them, but then I think that a couple got out of the others, but I think they were killed someplace along the line by guards. Sometimes I guess that the Japanese populous was, were not kindly disposed at that point to taking prisoners, American prisoners. Where as the Japanese soldiers would, strangely enough, because they wanted to get information from them and so forth. So that was the idea. So, what happened was that the pilot of the one crew, Cartwright his name was, was they thought that, they had been hearing some rumors about this testing of this bomb, so Japanese intelligence must have been fairly decent. These stories about some big bomb. This was before Hiroshima, and so he said he didn't know anything, and he didn't. But, they were going to take him up to Tokyo and question him more by more scientific questioners or whatever, so he was taken away from there. However, the Japanese military had a barracks at Hiroshima, the closest to where this Kure was. Kure wasn't all that far from Hiroshima, so they took the rest of the crew and sent them to this barracks in Hiroshima. The story is whether, the Pentagon supposedly would never fess up to it, that the, and I think there was one person who sort of let the cat-out-of-the-bag, and I don't have all of the details on him, but I do have some literature on him that you may want to see some time, that it's okay, we know that there are American troops being incarcerated in Hiroshima, but hey, that's the way it is. And, so anyway, when the A bomb was dropped all of the crews, the remainder of the crew of our squadron was killed by the A-bomb. One of those strange ironies of fate. And, it has taken about forty years for the Pentagon to admit that they knew that there was, you know, that they even were there, not that they, I don't they have ever officially because they are –

Mark: They're not that honest.

Cullen: They're not that honest. That they knew before hand. They at least acknowledged that it happened. That there was American loss at Hiroshima. It took, it was 35 to 40 years before they actually acknowledged it. But anyway, it was just one of those side things. But um yeah.

Mark: I have a couple more things.

Cullen: Sure.

Mark: We're getting near the end here.

Cullen: Sure.

Mark: I've got a note here that you were, first of all, do you remember when you first heard the news that the bomb, that the first bomb had been dropped in Hiroshima?

Cullen: Yes.

Mark: What was your reaction to it?

Cullen: Yes, in fact I first heard about it because I went to the squadron room and they said, "let's come down to the squadron room, I want to show you some things." And, their pictures were pinned up all around in the squadron room showing the effects of the bombing. And so, I recall personally thinking, and I guess apparently they gave us a talk. It was a lecture on what had happened and I kind of, I was wondering to one of my cohorts there as to, it seemed why were they had to drop it right in the middle of the city? Why couldn't they have demonstrated this if it was such tremendous power wouldn't it have had the same effect by dropping on the edge of the city? And, it's funny, even among people who were otherwise fairly, I would describe as moral people and so forth, I think the ends and means question became somewhat of a division there between people who felt, I mean were in the same boat, but some felt that the end justified almost any means. In other words, that the Japanese would have done that to us, we got there first and that's the way life is, and then a follow up to that was that leadership was so fanatical, that was the other argument that the leadership was so fanatical that they would have, they ... it would take something like that to do it. Follows up after the war, I read something, I think it was a strategic bombing survey. Publications came out in the late '40's which was along the lines of what I had been talking about earlier about the real problem that the Japanese leadership had would be to try to condition and get an orderly face-saving withdrawal with a civilian populous. So, whatever the reason for that, I mean, you know, these were ideas that were attempting to in a sense justify if you will, but the other was, I think more so from again some of my peers who I happen to myself, I questioned it. Many of my peers seemed, I don't know what majority or whatever, felt that, "it was us or them," for them and so...

Mark: Did you question it openly, or did you keep it to yourself?

Cullen: No, I questioned it to the, nobody was really, you know at the time as I recall there were just a few of us there that were kind of discussing it a little bit and I didn't say now hear this, (?) or anything but just casual conversations. It seemed like it was kind of a non committal in some cases. Some were very much in the other way saying hey they weren't mad at me for saying that but the idea of saying anything, no that's, look at what they would have done, trying to argue that there was justification of it. And, but, ...

Mark: Were there others that felt like you?

Cullen: There probably were, but I don't recall any large number. No, I don't recall any large number. I think the thinking was, and I suppose to this day is still, maybe I'm here today talking to you because of that. I don't know you see. I mean, the Japanese would have lost the war, I mean there is no question about that. Whether they would have been able to talk the populous and the rest of them into a surrender prior to an invasion of Japan, who knows, you see. Whether they would have had to continue the missions, what would have been the degree of prolonged and duration of involvement. And so, I suppose that's it. I mean, the question of them being beaten and surrendering I don't think that was a question. I think it was a question of doing it sooner or later, and literally how much did we save on men and material by doing that.

Mark: So on the day of the second bomb you were up in the air.

Cullen: We were up in the air, that day yes. And, the first day we, our pilot was thinking that we were, but we have proved with formation sheets and mission reports that we were not in fact up against, I knew we weren't, but he was kind of confusing at times. But, yes, we were up. We bombed a target, to answer, I think which was west, I'm sorry east of Nagasaki and it was at the time when, and we were, our mission was completed. We were apparently advised, I'm told, to stay within some distance of Nagasaki or from the area near there. I mean. Not to, instead of continuing to go back over Hiroshima to look at everything else, to turn around and go south, and Nagasaki was just west of there. So anyway, we were coming back from that mission and the pilot, the co-pilot, the bombardier, not the bombardier but the navigator, the tail gunner, the radio operator, about two thirds of the crew remember very definitely seeing this formed cloud, this huge cloud just off to the right. Our target was more to the east as we were coming back west and then made the turn to go on down to Okinawa, they saw out of their right hand window. They remember seeing this cloud right up to the top, as far, as high as they would see almost because we were at maybe ten-thousand or maybe twelve thousand feet is all, and this cloud was about they figure about forty miles away. So, we could accommodate that we could see it you see, but if it was right along the side we wouldn't have been able to see the top of it because it was so much higher, but they definitely remember seeing it.

Mark: But you don't.

Cullen: I don't, and several others of the crew didn't. That could have been that I was getting out of a turret or something or just didn't happen to be on the side I was looking out of the other side or, going out of a turret or coming out of a turret, I think I was probably going out of it, but I'm not sure what it was. But, I didn't see it and there were I think three others besides myself, so six out of the ten saw it, or claimed they saw it, and four didn't. But, what we did see, and I remember very vividly on that mission was seeing the debris from the first day bomb dropping. The sky was full of red dust. I mean it apparently had sucked up enough of the soil and so forth and this cloud blew up and spread it out and it floated out and the co-pilot said especially it just looked like there were just streaks of it. Just layers of it and just streaks of this red dust.

Mark: In the air.

Cullen: Still in the air from the first bomb that had thinned out and was still up there and hadn't quite, see because it had gone up to fifty or sixty or whatever thousand feet it was you see and then it was so spread out it was just taking days for it to settle. It didn't just blow right away, and so it was up there and in fact one of the pilots from one of the other crews was saying that we flew through three hundred miles of dirty red dust. So, it had really quite spread out, so that was one of the by-products a lot of people don't... Whether that dust was radio active, I suppose it was. I remember our pilot, our co-pilot was saying, he was talking about some of the symptoms, "I often kind of wonder if over the years if I had

a certain symptom or a certain ache someplace”, he said if I had got that from flying through all that radio active dust.

Mark: And this was on the same day as the Nagasaki?

Cullen: Yeah, this was the same day, but this obstacle course was from the, because the Nagasaki thing was further away and that didn't have a chance, that cloud hadn't had a chance to disintegrate by the time that we saw it. Our mission time was probably around ten thirty there or something, or maybe it was even closer to eleven than that because I think that the bombing date and time on the Nagasaki bomb was something like eleven o'clock, it was later in the day and Hiroshima was about eight. And, so the, it was very close. Our mission time was very close to the time of that explosion, so we saw it fairly soon after the mission.

Mark: And when you got back did you find out what it was, or did it take a couple of days?

Cullen: The time we got back, that was on the ninth, by the time we got back I was in a very unique situation. For whatever reason, I don't quite know why it was, maybe because I didn't have enough other attainments I presume was part of it and sometimes just maybe just a matter ... one of the guys that was a real career gunner was ... I wasn't needed anymore. So, after that day of Nagasaki, the ninth of August, I was called in the next day and said, "We don't need you anymore. We are going to send you back to Hawaii for reclassification. The war isn't over yet, but we don't need anymore top turret gunners." I think that was probably it as I think back

[End of Side B, Tape 2]

because you see my position, I was looking for fighter planes coming in, there weren't any fighter planes coming in anymore. And, up there I couldn't be very much help in other surveillance and things like that you see. So, they probably felt that my position was ... and I did not, I was not an assistant engineer, I was not assistant radio operator or anything like that. So anyway, they said, "Say good-bye to your friends and take off for your, your first stop is going to be Guam."

Mark: The very next day?

Cullen: The very next day. They told me that ... the bombing was on the ninth, they told me on the 10th that I was going to be sayonara, and so I gave the American equivalent to sayonara to my buddies and then I got this air transport command plane to Guam. I got to Guam and that was on the 11th, and I was just going to be there until I could get a plane to Hawaii because Guam was a big depot at that point, a big focal point for sending planes of all kinds out and that had become the far Eastern headquarters of the Mid-Pacific. And, so, anyway, I was on Guam and the war was over. I mean it was in the evening and I will never forget, I was watching a crazy comic put on a show, his name was Danny Marlow from Brooklyn and he was one of these knock-yourself-out type comics. He would get up on the back of two chairs and the chairs would collapse and he

would fall down and he would say “Gee, I will never do that routine again”, and that type of thing, strictly slapstick. So anyway, he was entertaining us and they said, all of the sudden we heard gun shots going off and there was a colored group next to us, if I may, who were using live ammo in their celebration and I guess, I mean they weren’t the only one, but they were the nearest to us. So, we decided to stay inside because I guess not only was, there were a trajectory of the 45’s and things like that going, but other things including I guess small rockets and things like that were going up. There were on Okinawa the same type of celebrations going on and there were deaths in the celebrations. There was the first celebration on the 12th, then apparently there was a delay, and then there was a more formal celebration, I mean capitulation two or three days later. There was also a celebration that time. By that time I had left, I was on a plane, the next morning, the morning of the 13th I took off then for Honolulu and so I stayed in Hickam long enough for a ship to be set up to take those of us who were going back to the states to be again to be reclassified or await for the points to drop or whatever. The point system had started. I suppose you have been...

Mark: Yeah.

Cullen: Whatever, the point system. But anyway, so that was my rather quick and ignominious departure. What I was going to talk about this fifth of Three Feathers booze that, I will just talk briefly about that. The rest of the crew members knew that I had that and so, getting a good tent set up, getting a place set up to take care of, I mean to live in was not that good because of all the rainfall, so what we wanted to do was to get if we could, was to get some flooring, get some timber for floors and also for some side things around this squad tent. So, I was out on a detail around the island doing something and they assigned us to all kinds of, you know, doing menial jobs and so I came back and I see this guy putting this floor in. I said, “hey that’s great,” and I hadn’t seen my duffel bag was still off to the side and so they said, “Oh yeah. We have something to tell you. We didn’t have any money and there was a Seabee that came by and we saw some of the guys from one of the other crews who were making some trades with these Seabees.” You know the Construction Battalion. And, so they were Navy. And so, “We figured that you wouldn’t mind if we took your bottle and bartered it.” I said, well, it’s for a good cause I guess, but it would have been just a little bit more gentile I think to have asked me, you know, rather than just taking it out of my barracks bag. But anyway, they described what they did. They simply took one, I don’t know who the ring leader was, and to this day I’m not sure, and stood by the side of the road when he saw a Seabees coming by with this big load of lumber. Held the fifth up like this, screeched, the truck stopped, they went through the sign language, you want this. So, they got... take off as much reasonably, take off for your floors, see how many feet and so forth. So anyway, that’s what happened to my fifth. So, like I say, it was for a good cause and so we celebrated at Colorado Springs fifty years later.

Mark: [laughs] Okay. We have a little bit of time left here. I want to skip ahead a little bit.

Cullen: Sure.

Mark: Your homecoming back to Madison. Why don't you describe the steps of coming back to town. What you were thinking, what you were feeling at that time.

Cullen: Sure. That was ... they talk about ... I suppose it must have been a carry over from World War I or something about well, the Vietnam boys were saying well there were no bands, parades and things like that. Nobody met most of us, either. I came back, took the plane, the boat back to, the ship back to San Francisco, train to camp, it was then called Camp McCoy, and then Camp McCoy was a sign, the given of my orders was read. Report to San Antonio, Texas SAC on November 9th. The thought was what you would do is wait on what you call a 45 day TDY, Temporary Duty, furlough in other words. I was to wait in Madison. If the points were dropped, I would simply go to Truax field or some of my nearest military post and get my formal discharge at that point. That did not take place. The points were dropping. I had a fair number because I got them from those campaigns, battle stars, months overseas, all the rest of the things, missions and everything, all factored in, I had more than the average person, of my time in service, but I still didn't have enough. So, anyway, they kept dropping the points but not quite enough, so I took a train back to San Antonio, was there just about two days and the points had dropped, so I turned around and came back to Madison and actually got my separation in San Antonio. But, coming back to Madison was very inauspicious. I came back through the twin cities, took the train back. I think the Great Northern or Southern Pacific or whatever it was. By the time I got to the twin cities, I called my folks up and said I'd be coming in on such and such a day, I think, I have to go to Camp McCoy first, or maybe I called from Camp McCoy, whichever it was. They were there to meet me at the railroad station. There were others coming in from Camp McCoy at the same time. There were no bands, there was no formal greeting. There were so many of us and we came back in various ways and so I simply came back and left my uniform on for a day or so and then took it off and then I started going back to the University. I could have enrolled as a somewhat late student, but I figured I didn't know if I was actually going to have to be reassigned, so I didn't enroll until the following semester, but I did come back and I started working out with the boxers because I was going to be on the boxing team, or was going to go out for boxing. There was Wisconsin Players. I had been around Hollywood so much when I was at Muroc. I was going to be an actor or so I thought. (Speaker chuckled). I was in a play for Wisconsin Players. My time came up and I went down and then I came back and I kind of picked up so I had had a period of integrating myself into civilian life. It was comparably easy. I was still 20 years old, I didn't turn 21 until March and so I had 2 years and 3 months of combat service, I mean, and was still not 21 years old.

Mark: Did you use GI Bill benefits or anything like that?

Cullen: Oh, sure. That was a very much thing - that financed my education.

Mark: The whole thing?

Cullen: Oh, yes. For a degree. I still had some time left after the degree, so I went on to do some grad work with it. That worked out quite well. Wisconsin, either the University or the State got their comeuppance. They were going to charge those of us who were veterans

the same as if we were out-of-state students. To show you the difference in cost, a civilian would pay an in-state civilian student would be \$65 a month tuition. As opposed to \$49 when we went in, before. So, the out-of-state only charged \$165 dollars. So they charged all the Wisconsin veterans \$165. Finally, Uncle Sugar finally got wise after a number of years and made the State of Wisconsin pay all that back, as I was delighted to see. I felt that they had ripped off enough people and I mean, this is my own feelings about some of those legislators or whatever. So, I felt that the feds shouldn't take that kind of a licking. But anyway, I don't know if I'm answering your questions or not.

Mark: Absolutely. I suppose on campus, most of the students were veterans.

Cullen: Yes, that was a fascinating thing to observe. We did have a veterans club. The Wisconsin Veterans of World War II Club, something like that.

Mark: Was it a small group?

Cullen: Yes, it was a small group. We tried to cross the ties and were never too successful. We put on a couple of ... Do you recall the newspaper comic character called Sad Sack? Well, he was a prototype of the beleaguered, bedraggled GI. So we had a dance the first year back, called the Sad Sack Shuffle. Just as a doing homage to Bill Mauldin's character. I think it wasn't Mauldin, I think it was somebody else that was Sad Sack. Anyway, we had a few little events like that. There wasn't quite enough motivation because of the common experience for there to be a great outpouring of interest or enthusiasm for joining veterans clubs. There was an Amvets, I think it was the American Veterans of World War II Club. There was a VFW which my dad belonged to. He was in France in World War I. There was the American Legion where you didn't have to go overseas. But, these tended to ... For some reason, the impression was given to some people, I don't know how large, that the World War I Vets wanted to still run those organizations and somehow they felt, which I suppose to a certain extent made the Vietnam vets feel the same way, that the World War II Vets would want to run the show when the Vietnam Vets come in, but I don't think quite the same because there was so many more World War II Vets that came in you see, that they would outnumber the World War I vets. Most of the organizational power was still in the hands of the World War I vets. I don't think there was that attraction toward it, besides which it was a different kind of war. We came back more piecemeal, there wasn't quite the celebration and all that and I remember all the hijinks and all the things that went on in my dad's generation. They would have national encampments. They had the old 40 in 8 cars. Forty men and eight horses and little box print box cars and they would go around the square and things like that. Anyway, there wasn't any of that for World War II vets to any extent at all. Maybe because of the sheer numbers. Maybe the war was a little grimmer, war was longer and all that sort of thing, you see. It was something that was more wide-spread. The fellas from the ETO and the Pacific, although they would compare notes and things, I don't think there was - I mean there was a divergence there. I have good friends, but I mean we never said my conflict was worse than your conflict or anything like that. There wasn't the mutuality of experience to talk about, other than, maybe common problems. The other thing I observed about a couple of the 'Nervous

Nellies' in the civilian population. We did have this young group coming in, we were older, they would be the same year with us but they would be so overwhelmed by the sheer numbers and the fact that we would take over in discussions and things like that and draw on our experience and generally would make references to some service phenomenon and laugh and these kids wouldn't know what the hell we were talking about. So there was a degree of estrangement. I remember one little kid getting up, a freshman, and he wrote a whole thesis (a real bright kid from New York or some city in the East) and he was saying "Obviously, because of their militaristic training, they may be the precursors of a fascist state. They want to take over. You can tell by the way their whole manner is such that they want to exploit and to beat down all over voices and points of view and so forth." We were sitting there and we just looked at this kid and we were all looking slack-jawed. What in hell is he talking about? The fascist state? We want to take over and turn this into a dictatorship? What did we just get through fighting this was for? So, you had that type of mentality who were eventually, they like to maintain their purity, so they started forming such things as the Labor Youth League. This was sort of the beginning of some of the leftist organizations on campus. A bit of the concern that the veterans were going to form a fascist state. This was their rationale which we thought was extremely humorous. Some of the little things that we encountered. The practical problems were ones more of ... Well, you saw mixed uniforms, for example, I went through two or three pairs of GI clothes, khakis and drabs, some of them I even dyed to get different colors so that I could get rid of the olive drab look. We would wear these things out, so you could see the number of veterans around campus. Hundreds of them wearing parts of their uniform, wearing them out, because they were so sturdy you could go two or three years and then as affluence became more common, they would say now "I can afford to buy some real clothes rather than wearing out my old uniforms." So that's probably one reason you don't have quite so many donations, because most of us wore out those old uniforms.

Mark: Especially the combat uniforms, I bet.

Cullen: Yes, although I think more of those may have been preserved because of their sentimental value. Because of the things on them. They were kept. It was more the shirts, the wool shirts and the blouses.

Mark: I'm interested in the veterans group you were trying to form? What were the things you were trying to do?

Cullen: Well, I suppose to a number of things that are common to most groups of that type, to find out and catalog benefits that might be accruing someplace that we would like to make known to the veterans at large, to have a social focal point, so that for those who maybe weren't married and so forth, or wanted to get together for social reasons for a beer party, or something, that there would be...as the fraternities were formed and the various other interest groups, that we would have another social group on campus. For a social group the purpose of having a clearing house of information and that type of thing. So there were those various reasons and mainly just the civic, camaraderie and that sort of thing. I suppose among the guys who had been a former West Point man, as a matter of

fact, it was just a sense of organization and kind of a love of the military and thinking back on some of the things. But, we'd get together and have dances and things. We'd get comics to come in and they would have a whole string of GI jokes. The guys sometimes would explain to their wives and girlfriends and sometimes they'd say "You don't want to know what that means" and so there was this type of thing. The mutual experience gave a basis for this. As time went on, people became interested in their own fields, they were married and moved, and so on. The numbers in that organization dwindled and dwindled and dwindled.

Mark: At it's largest, how many members? How big?

Cullen: I think at first, because of the fact that it almost sounded the way the guy made it up, in the presentation, it almost sounded like it was something everybody either had to or would definitely want to or you'd be missing something if you didn't. We probably had I would think, four or five hundred. By the time of its demise, there probably were a couple dozen. That was maybe in a period from the Fall of '45 and didn't start school until '46. I think it had begun maybe in the Fall of '45. By the Fall of '47, I graduated in '48 because I had a year before and I went to summer school, by the Fall of '47 I doubt it was even in existence any longer. I think we had a little quonset hut (they had built quonset huts all around lower campus) you know these corrugated steel roof things. They were down by the lower campus where the fountain is, there were quonset huts all along there, maybe you've seen pictures of them and there was a quonset hut over between the Union and there used to be an old campus YMCA over from where the Union building is where the parking lot is, there was a big high (about 4 story) brick building, that was the campus YMCA, but between that and the Union was a quonset hut and that's where the Vets of World War II had our headquarters. We had a couple of ex-WAVES and ex-Wacs (the girls) they were primarily secretaries and things. But it was a congenial group. There was some fighting and bickering. One guy was kind of outspoken was our titular head. He alienated two or three other people with his rather overbearing manner and a nice guy basically, but he was a bit outspoken and so these other guys became members of the Cardinal staff and so they attacked him in print one time and so all the organizations being mismanaged and so I think that hastened the demise of it. It's demise was written, I think, in the stars because of the fact that there wasn't enough common bond, the common bond we had wasn't quite enough in the school situation, on a regular basis, to warrant our having a viable ongoing organization.

Mark: Do you remember a group called the American Veterans Committee at all?

Cullen: Not that clearly. No I really don't. Was that strongly political?

Mark: Yea, they were kind of New Deal oriented.

Cullen: There were a number of things like that. There was a group called the American Student Association, or whatever, that came out on campus. I've had an awful lot of veterans. That was national. That had some very high-powered people in it. I can remember there was a guy who had the very common name of Jim Smith from Texas. That guy was an

absolute genius at politicking and presenting emotions and things. They held a national meeting down at the lower campus at the Union Theater. That had a lot of very politically oriented guys. I think this guy could easily have run for Congress or Senator and become a Senator from Texas anytime he wanted to. He was just a natural. He was a guy who had organizational sense just oozed from this guy. He could pull off things. You had that type and I think it was called the American Student Association or something like that or National Student Assn. Whatever happened to that, how long that went on, whatever happened to Jim Smith, the guy I thought was gonna maybe be President some day. We didn't have anything on campus with people of quite that stature. Some of the guys that came, some of our people got into the organization and comported themselves pretty well, but we didn't have any natural born guys who could have say, kept our little vets organization going. Besides, the climate for it wasn't right. No, the American Veterans Committee I don't recall. There were various things, some of the left kind of splinter groups showed up.

Mark: Among the veterans?

Cullen: Yes, not so much among the veterans. Slightly, not too much. Maybe somewhat, but I don't recall a really left wing Veteran's group because most of the time they would be arguing with these young guys coming out of the big cities about there is such a thing, I mean patriotism is real. People feel that way about their country. There were some of us who actually fought for our country, as strange as it may seem to you. Things like that. It was a kind of an ongoing attempt to educate some of these young civilians who had not had the experience of feeling the dedication to an ideal, if you will. So that was the beginning of that.

Mark: As you grew older did you join any groups like the Legion or anything?

Cullen: I didn't, strangely enough. I should have I suppose but my dad was a commander down in Janesville and also in Eau Claire. He was always fairly active and moving around a bit later on, and he had belonged to the Legion at one time. I never, for some reason, I didn't want to take the time, or I didn't feel that I had a personal need for it. I had this brief affiliation with the campus group, but I didn't really feel any personal need or desire to join either of those. As I say, maybe I should even later, in this stage of the game, but I just for some reason didn't.

Mark: But you've attended reunions, and just came back from one.

Cullen: Yes. That was my first one. Our crew got together. The bomb group has been having reunions for almost twenty years.

Mark: Have you gone to any of those?

Cullen: I've gone to none of those. They are too structured for me. They say, "Gee, we've got this golf tournament scheduled, we're going to go and see this tour and this tour and this tour, we're going to have whatever. There was a lot of extraneous entertainment features

which I felt why should I go a thousand miles or whatever, for these things. I'm not a golf player in the first place, and some of these other things didn't appeal to me. For that reason, I never went to the group meetings, however, I was always very interested in getting our crew together and so I gave the impetus to our co-pilot, who lives out in Washington state at this point, I said "You know, Doug, why don't you see what you can do, I think the rest of the guys may want to do this if a few kind of follow the lead". I said I'm sure Tom, our pilot is interested. He kind of postpones things like this because he thinks he doesn't want to seem taking over and so forth and see if you can get something going." So anyway, he contacted the pilot and the bombardier and so they did it rather scientifically and said let's think about having this next year when it will be fifty years since we were first a crew and why don't we consider having a reunion and let's send out a ballot and see where you want to have it and when you want to have it. They did that and at this point I offered my services and said that I had worked on two high school reunions in the past two years, one in California and one in Madison and was on the Committee and was the Master of Ceremonies in the Madison one. I said that I organized one for grade school: I'm sort of on a reunion roll and am up on some of the problems. I said if you want me to work on the arrangements, I'll be glad too. However, do not take my offer as any kind of ultimatum that I won't come unless I am. That's just a little parenthetical offer. They said they'd be delighted so I organized this thing and we decided to go out to Colorado Springs and I picked out a hotel and we got together, after about a half-hour together it was as if we had never been apart. Many of the same responses were forthcoming. The people were the same as they always had been. Our pilot was a suave guy, very much a gentleman who could get things done without seeming like he was getting it done at all. He would just make some sort of little suggestion and you could see that this had some merit to it and he thought about it but he wasn't about to say "Okay, this is the way its going to be". He's not that kind of guy. The co-pilot was a very reflective guy. He would analyze what you're saying and then he would come and start cross-examining you, that kind of guy - very analytical mind. The radio operator was always just a little bit of a clown and a comedian, a little bit off the wall. Very little changed, the same sort of guy. Observations being the big laugh - sometimes appropriate sometimes inappropriate. A lot of fun. Everybody enjoys them. The navigator was one of those buys nobody could even make an effort to dislike. Some people they couldn't be unlikable if they tried and he was one of those kind of people, same way, just an extremely likeable guy. The bombardier and I had a special relationship because

[End of Side A, Tape 3]

when I was at Muroc before one of my bouts I had there, I was working out in the gym so I didn't realize that this guy, this bombardier, he's a husky boy from Rockford, name was Gustafson, he was half Swedish and half Irish, so he'd been a football star at Rockford High School, he was a sprinter who had run the hundred under ten seconds and was actually an Olympic aspirant in the sprints, had the war not come along. So anyway, he was a very husky guy, very well coordinated, so when I was working out there, the officers all came along and watched me work out. He said "Well, I think I want to take this guy out and see how good he is and so Doug Collin, our co-pilot who was kind of a

fancy Dan and pretty good footwork and so forth, but had never really boxed, said “Why don’t I try him out first Gus and you kind of watch and see what’s going on here. So, Doug boxed and I didn’t remember but he brought it up during our reunion. Apparently, I must have caught on a pretty good left hook, because he said “I got this tremendous headache and I said ‘enough of that’ and so he pulled the gloves off and said ‘Gus, he’s all yours’”. So Gustafson puts on the gloves and he was a football player and a husky kid and so he comes winging in and landing a couple now and then, pretty strong punches. He had his head down so I brought up a fairly stiff upper cut and caught him right on the nose. Blood came out but the bad part was I knocked his two front teeth out. Foolishly didn’t put in a mouthpiece or anything like that, so later on, he became well-up in the FBI. He ran the Cheyenne Office for a number of years, he was a senior superintendent in Washington DC for a while and so forth, and when he was in Cheyenne I came to visit him one time. He was in the hospital having a deviated septum straightened out – you know this thing between the nostrils. It was broken and so forth, they had to break it down, get the cartilage and kind of reshape it. His nose with missing and so forth. His wife took me out to visit him. As I came in, speaking through muffled bandages he says “You see what you did Cullen? It’s been like this ever since the war. See what you do when you hit me?” We had a big laugh over that. When we had our reunion I took one of my pictures (I boxed varsity for a year at Wisconsin after I came back from the war with indifferent success. I won some, lost some, but enough to get a letter. But we had some very tough guys coming back out of the service, some guys with 50 and 60 fights. I wasn’t in that league at all. Anyway, I had my picture taken.) and I inscribed on the back of it “To Gus, a young guy who shows a lot of promise. With a little practice maybe you could go somewhere. In the meantime, I still consider you a treasured friend and so forth, Your Buddy, the Champ” and I signed my name. So we all had a big laugh over that. We made videotapes of our get together. We had a lot of fun. The spouses acted as if they had been sisters. They got along beautifully. It was a marvelous experience. My reunion thoughts were that I was glad that I had gone to this one first because I thought in the larger group we would tend to get drowned and wouldn’t be able to devote the attention to each other that we had. Nonetheless, it was remarkable that we had maintained this feeling of affection and interest in each other down through the years and got together after not having been together for approximately a years time, that after fifty years we still felt this close bond.

Mark: That’s interesting.

I just have one last thing. Quick. Vietnam veterans came back with a different readjustment problems. I’m wondering if perhaps you experienced any or noticed any among your fellow veterans, psychological problems, bouts of drinking, whatever.

Cullen: There may have been some of that at first. I think there probably was a readjustment. I think I could tell the difference between the fellows who had been in serious combat. I mean, the guys who had had life threatening things, who had been wounded, who had been on maybe 40 missions and so forth, guys hitting the beach heads, guys who had been wounded. As they said in World War I the shell shock. That sort of thing. I think those fellows and maybe the fellows who were a bit older, who came back, maybe their

livelihoods were interrupted and they had come back and maybe their job had been taken, maybe by some younger guy. There were readjustments that I had observed. As far as myself, I suppose I did resent and maybe to a certain extent still do, who knows for the better or not, my intellectual momentum was broken up. I was a fairly good student when I went in to service, I had always had pretty high grades and that sort of thing, and in my first year of college I had very good grades. When I came back, I had a totally relaxed attitude toward these things, I felt somewhat smug and superior because of the experiences I had had and my first semester back I went on probation, if you can imagine, after coming out practically an A- standing when I was a freshman. With a notation, this man could do very much better work than this. Then I shaped up after that. But I never quite caught fire to the extent that I would have had I stayed in and probably channeled in an unbroken sense, my intellectual energies. So I suppose in that sense, I felt that the interruption of the war gave my life a direction it might not have had, had I stayed in civilian life in the formative period. So in that sense, I did feel questioning, perhaps a resentment of that breaking up of the momentum that I had earlier.

Mark: That's all I have. Do you have anything else to add?

Cullen: Not really, I think the thing I do notice is the interest that those of us had, in our crew for example, maybe the interest in the veterans generally, although I don't say that it's necessarily wide-spread, but among some people I know, that because of the passage of time now, some of the bitterness, some of the guys saying "I got a raw deal" and so forth, I think some of those things have kind of been buried. I think even my attitude toward the bomb group, for example, I felt that I was given, my last promotion was in 1944 at Muroc training, to a corporal and after almost ten missions I'm out of the service still a corporal rating whereas everybody else in the crew got Staff Sergeant. As I mentioned this was traded off... the bomb group was being phased out. I could see all these things in retrospect but at the time I was kind of angry. I felt that some of the things about the bomb group, that there was a distinction between officers and enlisted men. Some of this was engendered by one guy we had who made an artificial separation said that we came down to Palau took, I don't care how you handle things in the state. Maybe you went out and got drunk together and what else. He said "Forget it. That's in the past. He said any business now when you're on the ground you conduct in the military manner. Just salute and stay in your respective areas. I couldn't believe it. Some of the other officers were quite intimidated by this and so there was a little bit of estrangement there. So I think it took the period of years before some of this thing was caused by this one character and the officer who felt that we would sacrifice discipline if we became too chummy you see, caused a certain estrangement which some of the guys in the crew took more seriously than I did. I didn't because I went on to college and things like that and it was a different thing. Some of the guys held a certain kind of lingering reservation about the closeness that they would have prior to our going overseas, but what happened after they got in the Palau islands you see. But again, coming to the 50th year, most of those things have gone by and in fact, one of our guys because of pilot discipline for falling asleep, rightfully so, last ... [tape goes silent].