

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Gordon Marlow
United States Navy Pilot, WWII
1994

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Marlow, Gordon V., (1920-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (77 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (77 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Gordon Marlow, a Madison Wis. native, discusses his World War II service with the United States Navy as a dive bomber with the first Flying Badger Unit, and later war service at the Naval Air Station at Pensacola (Florida). Marlow joined the Navy before the war began and tells of the Pensacola base reaction to the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor and reactions in Madison to a uniformed serviceman. He talks about carrier training at Coronado (California) and the high causality rate there, dive bomber training, and escort of boats to Guadalcanal. He describes his first encounter with the Japanese while flying cover when the Cruiser Chicago sank. He touches upon equipment problems, Army-Navy rivalry, effectiveness of the Japanese Army, daily life, interactions with natives, and dive bombing on Guadalcanal. Marlow was wounded and returned to the United States. He became the assistant operations officer at the Pensacola base. While in Florida, he mentions rationing, race relations, V-E Day, and V-J Day. At the war's end, Marlow returned to Madison and tells of the effects of WWII on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus including courses and housing.

Biographical Sketch

Marlow (January 27, 1920) served as a dive bomber with the Navy in the Pacific theater during World War II. He achieved the rank of Lieutenant and was honorably discharged in 1945.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, n.d.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2001-2002.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Mark: Mr. Marlow would you please tell me what year you were born in?

Gordon: I was born in 1920. In Bloomington, Wisconsin.

Mark: I don't know where Bloomington is. Where is that?

Gordon: Hardly anyone knows where Bloomington is--

Mark: I thought I knew all the towns, too.

Gordon: Out near Patch Grove and Cassville.

Mark: Oh, southwestern part of the state, then.

Gordon: Yeah, down near Mississippi River.

Mark: That was in 1920.

Gordon: --20. Believe it or not my mother was a school teacher and my father had been a school teacher, he's a dentist. My mother made my dad move to Madison when I was age two, so I could get a college education. As it happened I went to college during the depression and if it hadn't been for my mother's move the years before I never probably couldn't afford to go to college.

Mark: You were at the UW here?

Gordon: Yes I was at the UW. I was there before the war and I had three years of pre-med and one year of medicine and then, frankly, I ran out of money. They had a program at the time, Join the Navy/Air Corp, the pay is good and the life is glamorous, and so they formed the Flying Badger Unit, and I was in the first Flying Badger Unit. We were presented by special wings with badgers in the middle of them by Governor Goodland, I remember. So, I dropped out of medical school and went into the Navy, I didn't know they were going to shoot. This was before the war started. I wasn't any special hero but I loved to fly and this was one way to do it.

Mark: Was this after 1939?

- Gordon: Yes, it was 1941 the year the war started. I joined in May before the war.
- Mark: And that was into the US Navy?
- Gordon: Went in as Seaman Second Class \$17.50 a month, board, room and laundry. They sent us down to Glenview, Illinois. There was about 18 from the University of Wisconsin that went with this group, the Flying Badgers and we soloed there and took some ground school and they sent us to Jacksonville, Florida. Interesting story, I think, when we got to Jacksonville, 18 of us, took up a collection for the porter who had ran the train all the way down, made our beds and all those things, we had six dollars, between 18 of us.
- Mark: It was the depression.
- Gordon: It was a trying time. We spent about three or four months at Jacksonville and there we took ground school, communications, engineering and so on and so forth. Actually, they were also holding us until a opening opened up at Pensacola. Then we were transferred from there to Pensacola. I remember so well the cadets hanging out the windows and they were yelling 'Go back, Go back,' famous lines of that. A month later we were yelling out the windows at the next group coming in, same thing, we really didn't mean it. It was a tremendous experience; I wouldn't have traded it for anything. They worked us hard, the war hadn't started yet, there were shortages of materials. They were bringing more and more training planes in all the time, but we were kept very, very busy.
- Mark: That brings up a very interesting point. War production hadn't really picked up yet, I was going to ask you how that affected your training, you hear stories of soldiers, infantrymen, training with brooms to rifles and that sort of thing.
- Gordon: Right, we had old World War I [WWI] rifles that we marched with, I didn't realize why they had us march around all the time, I found later on it's so when they say "about-face" you about-faced. I mean it was just a matter of teaching you to take orders. I thought it was for exercise and to learn the manual of arms and songs, but it really wasn't at all, it was so that when somebody said something you didn't question and we learned that the hard way. If you did question or something you spent a little extra time walking the

beat. I had my time with that too, just like all of us I guess. It was very interesting at Pensacola and we had quite good aircraft, but, some were pretty old. All of the good stuff was out on the East and West Coast. Then of course when the war started I was at Pensacola. I came out of a movie and someone said they'd attacked Pearl Harbor, I just couldn't believe it. They locked the gate that night; they were on a war footing inside of just a few minutes. Mail was censored all leave was cancelled and then we were moved even faster. Interestingly enough, I was still a cadet and I was sent to Opalaka, Florida, just north of Miami and there we were flying really old planes. I flew the oldest dive-bombers ever built. I think the German dive-bomber was patterned after, it's called a BT-1 made by Northrop I think it was. In order to get the wheels up after you were off the ground you would have to pump them up with a pump, a hydraulic pump, then you'd turn a little lever and that would go to your flaps and then you'd pump the hydraulic pump to pump your flaps up and then when you wanted your cowls closed you'd turn a lever and pump again. These planes were so old they would ice up on the take-off, in other words ice would form in the carburetor, due to the way that it was made. You couldn't get off the ground with preheat on, preheat would melt the ice out of the carburetor. So, you'd go roaring down the runway and the sooner you got your wheels off the ground you'd turn on your preheat to melt the ice out of the carburetor and then you start pumping your wheels up and then you start pumping your flaps up, so it was quite an experience. I don't know if you remember these little airplanes, they show them in movies once in a while that they used to hook them into dirigible and the pull them up inside.

Mark: I've seen that.

Gordon: We flew those, that's how bad they were. There was a little sign on the dashboard, 'In case of power failure, bail out, these planes do not glide.' So we were using old aircraft for our training and, believe it or not, we were flying patrols against the German submarines and they had convoys coming down the coast then. At this was January, February, right after the war started, just a few months and convoys were already coming down the coast.

Mark: You're still technically in training at this point?

Gordon: No, we were still cadets. I had a 500-pound depth charge sitting underneath as my armament and a couple of 50 calibers up above. We'd fly up and down the coast escorting these ships. Actually, some of them were being hit by torpedoes, we never saw the subs, they knew the waters better than we did. The word was around that they had been there before the war with their yachts and they chartered all the waters along in that area, whether it's true or not I don't know. But, I remember one thing, the people in Miami complained bitterly because the oil washing up on their beaches. Also, the men's bodies were washing up on the beaches and plus the oil, I thought that was rather ironic. But, we would escort them down beyond the Keys, and then some planes down at the Keys would escort them other ways, they would take them down, I imagine, to Brim Cyrus and then they'd cross over there. That was my beginning and after I had flown for 2-3 months at Opalaka, they called me in the office one day and they said, `Well, Marlow, you have enough flying hours. You are now a Navy pilot, here's your set of wings, congratulations. No bands, no parades.

Mark: No parades.

Gordon: No family, no nothing. Just report to San Diego for your carrier training. So they gave me thirty days off and I went home. I married my college sweetheart, which is incidentally one thing I want to mention, in order to go into the Navy Air Corps and I assume the Army Air Corps at that time, you had to have four years of college. Later on the rules were relaxed until it was two years and then finally near the end of the war it was high school education. The four years of college didn't necessarily make you any smarter but it did make you four years more mature. That made a lot of difference because some of the young guys coming out of high school I didn't want them flying behind me. I was up to a leading mode at that point.

Mark: So, you came back to Madison then? Let's back track a little bit. Just briefly,

Gordon: I came back to Madison for my leave.

Mark: Right. When you were training in Florida, I'm sure its changed a lot in the past 50 years.

Gordon: Oh, yes.

Mark: Could you perhaps describe just a little bit about what Florida had been like in the 1940's?

Gordon: Well--

Mark: Have you been back there since?

Gordon: Oh, I've been back three or four times. Been back to three reunions, other things there at Pensacola. Well, its like your college life, you don't really give it all up you have a certain feeling for your old school ties. So, yes we've been back. There's been changes made, of course, the jet came in and that made change. The runways were made longer because of that, but we were treated very well, we had good food, the Navy already had a discipline because of Annapolis. I really had no complaints and I won't say it changed an awful lot. I've been back to the Officers Club there and been welcomed aboard and had dinner there. It seemed very similar, the uniforms changed a little bit, the men are much younger. Young kids flying these big jets now, I just look at them and I'm just in awe ever thinking that I was that skinny and that young myself at one time. I wouldn't say it has changed a lot. The quarters have been updated; the bachelor officer quarters that is, have been updated. They have new facilities for rebuilding and testing jet engines, outside of that many of the same fields are open that were open 50 years ago.

Mark: The second thing I wanted to ask was, after you left Madison in 1941 and you come back in 1942 before you ship our for overseas, I'm wondering if you noticed any changes here on the home front in Madison, in that time you had been in training after the war had broken out. Did you notice was the atmosphere different and that sort of thing.

Gordon: Because I came back in uniform there was change. There weren't a lot of us around yet and see I had gone in before the war and that made a difference. When I came back I had my wings and uniform. I came to the campus, of course, a lot of my friends were still going to school and that made an impression if I may say so.

Mark: What kind of impression?

Gordon: Well, people were like, "My gosh, who's that?" That kind of impression. And there was uniforms on the campus of course, because they were starting to train here in that period of time so you did see other uniforms here. I think things were picking up in a little more of a hurry. I know in medical school, you see I had finished one year of medicine, and those people had all graduated in three years, instead of four years. So they compressed medical school, they took one year out of that so that was a real push for those fellows who stayed. They had no spring vacation, no summer vacation, no vacation. They just went to school. So they were really getting pushed. I imagine engineers were the same way.

Mark: Everybody but historians! Okay, so then you go on to San Diego?

Gordon: Yes, so there we took our carrier training and went to Coronado. Coronado is made up of two islands, North Island and South Island. North Island is the Navy base; South Island is the living place. Quarters were very difficult to find, of course because they were crowding in, of course. We had about 125, I think, taking care of your training there. They were from Corpus Christi, Jacksonville, Pensacola and we held services for those killed during the week, every week. I was there about three months and we buried about 2 to 11 a week. Which was horrendous. Now, they weren't all pilots, some were gunners, who when the plane went down or if they had a mid-air collision why the gunners went with them. That was a little something hard to explain, but every week you'd lose one of your friends. We were being pushed a little bit, flying a lot. And then too the equipment wasn't the best. The best planes were all going overseas, because the war had been on six months then. That was only natural of course; we were flying planes that were older, not with all the new attachments.

Mark: What type of planes were you flying?

Gordon: I flew SPD's, in fact by the time you got out there you got to pretty well pick out what you wanted, in other words, torpedo bombers I wanted nothing to do with those, that's just a low, slow way of getting killed. Fighters, I flew fighters for a while but, I'd black out a little sooner than some of my friends so I thought that really wasn't for me, so I took dive bombers. Dive-bombers were really Scout bombers and we did more scouting than we did dive bombing. The dive-bombers are what won the war over in Japan,

by sinking the carriers, which eliminated their air arms. The fighting was of short duration and their main job was finding out where the enemy was. So, we'd be out scouting. Ten times more than any combat type of thing. That was dangerous flying over the ocean by yourself, I did have a rear gunner, he sat in the rear. I always remember the young high school boys, I'd look around ready to take-off and he'd have his feet propped up and he'd be reading a funny book. He had Batman or Tarzan, something like that. They must have had their own ready room, we didn't mix with them much, they had their own ready room. They must of had just piles of comic books there, they'd grab a handful and go out on flight. We'd go out, oh, there would be planes figure fighting in front of the fleet.

Mark: Now this is from San Diego where you--

Gordon: No, I'm a little ahead of myself here. We were flying out of San Diego and we were flying to the various islands, San Clemente and so forth on our overseas navigation runs. San Clemente, I think was one of our bombing sights, too. We would tow targets over the ocean and practice gunnery runs and then ships, destroyers, would tow targets and we would practice dropping bombs on them they'd have the long cables going and hopefully we wouldn't hit the towing device. Then after we finished there we were sent to Hawaii.

Mark: When was this?

Gordon: I went to Hawaii in October '42. I was with Bombing 11th in Hawaii until January. During this period of time they had the Battle of Midway there was losses of pilots during the Battle of Midway so I actually was a replacement for the loss of Battle in Midway. That's when we got into the long searches and so forth. That was another interesting thing, there was only one front-line carrier left at that point and that was the Enterprise. The others had all been sunk. They had a few jeep carriers, I flew off the Copahay, the Long Island and the Altamahaa, in fact I think it was the Copahay that took us down into the Guadalcanal area. But, they were a jeep carrier and small, the frontline carriers were so, a lot of them on the waves. As a result, the Enterprise, was used as a training ship. We had 5000 men aboard ship, I mean it was a complement, usually 3000 that size a ship, as I recall. So, we retreated an enormous amount, we didn't want to fight, I'm not

talking about myself, I'm talking about the command. Halsey was on the ship, he was the flag, and I'd see Wild Bill Halsey almost everyday, but they were preserving this ship and using it to train other men, because as the carriers were coming off they had to have a nucleus of people who knew, had experience. The Japanese were licking their wounds too. They weren't real anxious to fight, they were trying to get Guadalcanal and we were trying to keep them out of parts of Guadalcanal and that was our main duty down there. We were escorting tuna boats and boats like that, that were taking supplies and gasoline into Guadalcanal. These tuna boats were--came out of San Diego a lot of them Point Loman and that area over there, where they had a lot of fishing. They'd have 55 gallon drums of gasoline on their deck and they'd go as close to shore as they could and they'd just kick them off and they'd float to shore. The marines would bring them in and use them for fuel. So, that was our main job, was getting supplies into Guadalcanal.

Mark: Would you characterize that as difficult? Did you run into the Japanese?

Gordon: Frequently, and it was difficult in the fact that we weren't allowed to use our radios, unless we saw the Japanese fleet or a Japanese submarine. So, we'd lose a fellow every month that would just go out and never come back. You'd go out over the ocean, there's not many sign posts there, if he'd made a mistake in wind or the wind shifted direction and he didn't pick it up, we had certain radio aides. What they did is they would send out A, B, C, D from the ship and you would have to go way up in the air to pick these codes up and then you would have to know for the day which code would be where. It was easy to get mixed up. We weren't allowed to open up our radios, except to listen, because the Japanese could swing a loop on you and locate our fleet. So, that was always a little scary. When I was there we had some weather but not some of the horrible typhoons like they did later on. The weather wasn't much fun, and of course when you're coming in they wanted us to bring our bombs back if we could, because we were short of ammunition. So you have a thousand pound bomb sitting between your legs and your deck is moving up and down 15-20 feet that sort of gets your attention.

Mark: I'm sure it must.

Gordon: So every day operation had a certain risk, but for a young man 22-23, why, it was an acceptable thing. Didn't bother me really it was, well I guess what you would say it was a hot-rodding days and we enjoyed it.

Mark: I was wondering if you could describe for me the first time you did combat experience. When you first ran into a Japanese plane.

Gordon: It was kind of a sad one. We were down there and there was an area in Guadalcanal called, The Slot, and they called it--there were so many cruisers and everything that sunk there. The cruiser, Chicago, had been hit the night before, so we were launched and we were covering its retreat. It was coming from the west to the east; I could see it down there. I was at about 5,000 feet, the Army was in on it they had P-38's up high for high cover, they were up at 25,000 feet or so, then we had our fighters there to and we were just going along and then all the sudden the Chicago rolled over and sunk. It must have gone down with 1500 men or so. Just Boom down it went. I didn't know what went on, no radio communication. So, we finally we were, I suppose by radio, told to go home, signaled to go home. So, we went back to the ship. What had happened, twelve Betty's had come in their torpedo bombers, Japanese bombers, and they came in underneath our cover. I never saw them, obviously the radar didn't pick them up and they sunk the Chicago. It was kept very quiet, in fact, it wasn't until a year ago, a friend of mine who is very interested in history, found a clipping, or an article in a book, sent it to me, it said that Nimitz was so furious at the sinking of the Chicago, that he said if anyone talked about it or let the news out, he'd have them hung. Apparently, because it wasn't until a year or two ago, that I read about it. But, it was kept very, very quite. It never should have happened. Accidents of war, they should of had some of us lower, we shouldn't of all been up as high, but you flew where they told you to. I didn't get shot at, at that point. It was kind of a scary thing to be in on. I think the most frightening thing, for me, was coming back aboard ship. Getting off wasn't too bad, although we were so overloaded that the engineers figured out that we could have self-sealing gas tanks. So they put self-sealing gas tanks on which mean extra weight and less gas. That was all right. Then they figure out we could take a sheet of steel, a half inch thick, behind our back and underneath our seat, well that was okay with me because that's where you usually got shot was from behind. So, they put that half inch plate of steel and then they figured we could

carry two thirty caliber guns on the rear instead of one, so they added one more gun with 1000 rounds of ammunition, well that's more weight. Then we were designed for a 500-pound bomb and some guy figured out we could carry 1000-pound bomb. So we didn't fly off the ship, we dribbled off the edge, I mean it, when you went off you'd go out of sight and you'd quick pick up your wheels

Mark: Hope you'd come back up--

Gordon: Yeah, you'd pick your wheels up real quick to keep them out of the water. But also to give you little less resistance and then you'd stagger, just literally hanging on for five miles or so until you get up to flying speed and then you could keep climbing up.

Mark: Now, I'm not sure I asked, when you were at Guadalcanal, what kind of planes were these?

Gordon: These were SPD's and they were SPD 3's and 4's. See the original ones were BT's that I flew in Miami and then they had SPD 1's that was the first model, then finally, 2's, I flew some 2's out in San Diego. But, here in the fleet we were flying 3's and 4's and at the end of the war I think there was even a SBD 5. Or 6, I can't recall that or not. But, I wasn't flying so much near the end of the war.

Mark: Now, at Guadalcanal, it was an Army and Marine operations, I'm wondering if you could comment on, there's a lot of inter-service rival, McArthur didn't get along with the Navy etc., etc., and I'm wondering at your level if you could comment on how things were between--

Gordon: There was a lot of rivalry, we always claimed the Army got the best equipment, and they did get better radios, honestly, and they had better airplanes than we did. But, a lot of it was friendly rivalry, they had their P-38's up at 30,000 feet and I'm down here at 5,000 feet and when we met them on shore or some place, we'd say you and your damn flying fox holes your sitting up there and all the fighting is down here, and your way up there and your a foxhole, but, most of it was friendly. There was very definite rivalry, between the two services, very definite.

Mark: But, it really didn't get in the way of operations?

- Gordon: I would say no, not from my point of view, I never saw anything but very, very good, very good.
- Mark: I wonder if you could comment on the effectiveness of the Japanese military, do you remember your thoughts, or the thoughts of your comrades?
- Gordon: They were good, we just thought we were better. They of course had been flying combat for years, through Manchuria and China and all that, and they had a superior plane, the Zero, as maneuverability and speed and everything else. But we had the, I think, as good of fire power and of course we had these protective devices, like this big sheet of steel behind my back, it was a half inch thick or more. That was wonderful, it just gave you a sense of security. So, we had a lot of things going for us that way, there is no questions that the Japanese were fine pilots, and I didn't fight them one to one, because I was a dive bomber, but I had friends who were flying fighters and they flew them one to one, but they didn't mess around with them, we could dive faster and our planes were stronger. So, you'd take one pass and just keep right on going. We got more than our share.
- Mark: Did you get to do any dive-bombing at Guadalcanal?
- Gordon: Yes, we had targets there. That described where they wanted you to go and give you the coordinates and you had a map of course and it would show you where they wanted something dropped but I didn't get a chance to drop on what I'd call a live target, like a ship, because we were edging around and so where the Japanese at that point.
- Mark: Who did you attack?
- Gordon: Just ground targets. I was in no big, large battle at all. We were getting ready to go into Munda. You didn't fly every day you'd fly every three days; they'd rotate you around. We were getting ready to go into Munda, that would be our first stop, and so we'd have classes every day while you were on ship. You just weren't free. Then of course the next up the line was the place that we eventually bypassed, and now it's quite a diving place, for everyone to go and dive, in the Harbor there, all the ships that are down, I forget the name of that there--

Mark: Is it 'Truk'?

Gordon: `Truk', yes. And that was the second target so we were getting information on that over flights and photography and things like that. They eventually bypassed Truk and let Truk kind of starve itself out and then they came back and cleaned it out later on, but we were planning on those things, and then I unfortunately slipped on the flight deck and fell to the hanger deck and tore my shoulder out. We had taken some shrapnel metal holes up above the battle of Midway and I wasn't at the Battle of Midway. I was coming out of my state room, and it was metal decks and the water dripped there and I just skidded and fell all the way down to the hanger deck, they sent me to New Zealand the shoulder was too bad to repair there, so they sent me home on the *Mansonia*, with about 5,000 casualties out of Guadalcanal. These young men out of Guadalcanal looked just awful. They were all yellow from . . . they all weighed about 110 pounds and they were young boys. I laughed, one of them said, "what do you do?" I said I fly dive bombers off a ship, he said, "Oh, my god I wouldn't do that for anything!" They are going through the jungle and eating rations from a package, and here I have, they treated us like kings aboard ship, we had silverware and linens, you get up at 4:00 in the morning for your first flight and they'd come around in a white mess jacket and ask you what you wanted, I had a minute steak, maybe and some scrambled eggs, toast, coffee and melon, and we had these things on the big ships of course, slept in linens, showers were salt watered, use fresh water to soap up on so you had to be a little careful of the usage of water, but those poor guys, I mean they had terrible time. The ones they were shipping home on the *Mansonia* with us, they had really seen the section of the war.

Mark: Guadalcanal was a pretty vicious battle.

Gordon: Yeah.

Mark: One of the early ones too.

Gordon: Yeah, at least one thing about being a flyer there, mostly you were either dead or very much alive. So, I was one of the fortunate ones that way.

Mark: Question 9 here, did you have much contact with the people on the Pacific islands?

Gordon: Some, yes. Natives were interesting, they were short in stature and the men dyed their hair red some how or other. If I may say so they were not pretty people, they were ugly savages. We were told they were cannibals and we had two stripes of the island we flew off, we flew off the Mia, see we weren't always on the ship, the stripes were called, Dagwood and Blonde, I would sneak around the shore line, I did not want o fly over that part of the island and I sneak all around the shore line in order to get into Blonde or Dagwood instead of losing an engine. I had one engine of course and I didn't want to go down in the jungle, there. The natives were very good to some of us, the government rewarded the natives for returning the pilots, and they disliked the Japanese intensely. The Japanese treated the natives very badly. So, if one of us went down, I had a good friend that went down, he was picked up by the natives and was taken to the coast watcher. The coast watcher was Australians, left behind. They had been farmers, by farmers I mean they had the Copra plantations for the coconut and things like that, this one guy spent a few days hiding with the natives then he spent a few days hiding with the coast watcher and then they rang for a PBY to come in and pick him up. He said it was the darndest thing, they got right close to shore and the PBY just came in a stopped and grabbed two of them and pulled them aboard and they kicked out a case of scotch and off they went. So they had there arrangements and the coast watchers were fine and the natives in those cases were very good. Of course, I might have been spooked, you know, that's what the older men tell you when you come in, "Go Back!" and so forth. The natives, we didn't have too much there. They were kept away from the flying fields. I imagine for a safety factor, fear of fire, we had gasoline; things that they didn't understand, they were primitive natives.

Mark: I wonder if you could comment a little on some of the men in your unit. Some of your fellow flyers, what sort of backgrounds did they come from, your impressions of them.

Gordon: Well, most of them were just great guys. Of the ones that came out of Wisconsin here, we had a lot of athlete's, Claude York was one of them, Cliff Phillips, he was all-American from football, J. Dudley boxed here, Little Ross was a boxer here, we all graduate and these were kind of trying time and war was not underway but it was in the air. So, they thought it would be better to go into the flying business. So, the ones I went through with, most of them,

see, they all had to have four years of college and they were more mature and they were nice. We rarely had any personal problems, rarely. Then to we were a unit, we went in as a unit and they kept us together as a unit until the final assignment and then they had to split us up because some were fighters and some were bombers.

Mark: This was at San Diego.

Gordon: That was at San Diego, mostly split up.

Mark: Were you in the Pacific with anyone you knew from college?

Gordon: Oh, yeah, sure.

Mark: Quite a few?

Gordon: Oh, three or four. Half a dozen from Madison. Some on destroyers some on sub chasers and a few I went to school with were on the Enterprises, myself.

Mark: What did you do for your entertainment, your free time? I put a question here, 'How did you spend your holidays,' trying to get some anecdotes about what you guys did and what you talked about.

Gordon: Well, we played an awful lot of cards. The Navy has an old game 'Acey, Duecy,' and we played a lot of acey duecy, like backgammon, we had acey, duecy tournaments. I played a lot of bridge; we played a lot of nickel and dime poker. We weren't supposed to gamble, in fact, there are stories of officers coming by and picking up the money and giving it to the chaplain. Most of the time they looked the other way. I read a lot; they had a library aboard ship, about half as big as this room here.

Mark: That's not a bad size.

Gordon: I think I read every book in that, from one end to the other. You see, I even brought a book with me now. I carry a book with me wherever I go. In case someone keeps me waiting, well, I don't mind I just haul out my book.

Mark: What did they have in the library.

Gordon: All the good classics, from 'Moby Dick' right on down. They were all fine books, and some detective stories, sure, and things like that.

Mark: Mostly, fiction?

Gordon: I'm guessing, but I would say about 25% non-fiction and about 75% fiction.

Mark: I see my typos on this questionnaire, I didn't notice all these when I sent it out. Should have run it through the spell check. So, you came back to the States in 1943 after you hurt your shoulder.

Gordon: Yes, I was operated on in San Diego. Then they sent me to Pensacola. Every Navy pilot had to have two tours overseas, I had one. I wasn't flying yet, again because my shoulder, and so, I was quite a hero. I came back to Pensacola as a combat pilot and here were all these Admirals, Lieutenant Commanders, Captains and they'd never flown combat in their life. So, here I am this young, far behind in the years, giving talks on combat flying, and on maneuvering and things like that, which was just astounding. Then I got up into the instructors school and then I started flying again and then I was instructing instructors on how to instruct, teaching teachers how to teach. Then, I guess because of my qualifications, you see, I had three years of pre-med and one year of medicine, so I had all the organic chemistry and mathematics and everything you needed for an engineering type of thing, so then I ended up on the staff at Pensacola and then I ended up the assistant operations officer of the biggest air base in the world.

Mark: Where was this?

Gordon: Pensacola. We had two thousand planes in the air every hour of the day, unbelievable. Here I am 23 and I got a phone here to Miami, Florida the direct line to Jacksonville, Florida the direct line to New Orleans and then I got squawk boxes here, I controlled all of the Gulf Sea frontier and it was just an amazing situation. Because of my discipline in medicine, pre-med, a lot of them would knock off at 4:00 to go play golf; I never left until my work was done. I remember these guys saying, "Oh, Marlow the South will get to you eventually, and you'll get like the rest of us!" But, the discipline in pre-med, you get your work done or you're out of school. Just as simple as that. I never went home without

finishing up my work and as a result I just kept climbing up the ladder faster than some of the others. I enjoyed my work, it was challenging. I handled all the crashes there, up to 120 a month, those weren't deaths, some of them would run into each other and chop off a tail or they'd tip up and ruin an engine or I sent home 5-6 bodies a month from mid-air collisions and walking into propellers, things like that, because this was a big air base.

Mark: I've got a note here that you were ferrying aircraft.

Gordon: No, I didn't ferry aircraft, but I have a, I don't think I have it here, but my brother-in-law ferried aircraft. He had a faring aircraft booklet almost like this, and he could open it up and its got every airplane listed and how to start it and how to stop it and what its characteristics are, its the darndest thing, I've been trying to get it from him. He did give me a copy of it and I have that at home someplace I thought I brought it but I guess I didn't.

Mark: I would imagine that book would have been a controlled substance.

Gordon: It was used, I can't answer that. It was used mostly after the war, they were moving aircraft around, you see, and getting them to where they junked them. It was just a shame to see all those planes chopped up and instruments gone, but that's the way it went, some of them were saved, of course.

Mark: The Confederate Air Force probably.

Gordon: Yes. That's like I had a flight in a SPD about 5 years ago, that was with the Confederate Air Force, of course they didn't let me take it up but, once they got it up they gave it to me. My son got me that as a Father's Day present.

Mark: No a bad one.

Gordon: Yeah, not a bad one. They wouldn't let me buy gas or give them anything for it, but it was quite a thrill, needless to say.

Mark: So, you spent 2 years in Pensacola?

Gordon: Yes.

Mark: What was wartime America like? By this time rationing had set in.

Gordon: Rationing had set in, we were treated very well, we had good food, I lived at the BOQ we each chipped in on the BOQ Fund. We had an officer that we picked and he would buy the food and see that it got cooked and things like that. So we were a little bit away from the Navy as officers, you see. We had our own thing. In fact, down in Noumea we had a Quonset Hut, There was our tent, our officers fund, and you paid 20 cents a meal, breakfast, lunch and supper was 20 cents and as you were taking your tray out there was a cash register there was a bowl of dollar bills a bowl of 50 cents a bowl of dimes and a bible and that was the cash register and so I'd throw in a buck and that gave me 5 meals, but I always laughed at this bible here. So we lived very well that way, we had to be a little careful with the gasoline, I unfortunately being in charge of all the crashes, not all the planes that went down burnt, a lot of them went down badly out in the fields and so I'd send my Chief out. He had two 5-gallon cans, empty, because all the gasoline was drained on the ground. It was too costly to bring it back and fill it.

[END OF SIDE ONE; SIDE TWO BEGINS WITH GORDON TALKING.
THE QUESTION ASKED IS NOT KNOWN.]

Gordon: --to Plymouth then, I was very lucky to get throughout he ration board. So, you'd put that hundred octane and it would just kick it to start. So, I was very fortunate by the way, I'm afraid that's there is all kinds of little deals like that going on. I was very lucky to have the little--gasoline, which was very handy.

Mark: Was there much of Black Market that you noticed? There is a lot of talk about that sort of thing.

Gordon: Yes, there was. We had a girl that one of my friends dated, she was an Officer in the Navy, we would decide to have a picnic so Black Market Lucy would show up with 6 steaks and we never asked her where she got those 6 steaks. But, she would get six T-bones, there was three of us, three couples, and the six of us would go out to the beach and build a fire, then we were aloud to buy a bottle of liquor a week, I think it was and sometimes you'd have take Rum and sometimes you'd have to take something else. So, we were fortunate that way. The quarters at Pensacola being older and more established as compared to some of the newer one, where

they didn't do that. I'm sure there was Black Market, I didn't have to, I guess I had my own. Black Market Lucy was a very nice girl.

Mark: As a northern guy, you were down in the south, was that difficult? Did you find any cultural clashes or any of that sort of thing.

Gordon: Yes I did. Mostly things that I was ashamed of, for instance at one time I had a colored maid down there, she says I won't be in Friday, and I said, 'Well, why is that?', she said, Well, that's bump day,' and I said, Well, what's bump day?', and she said, Well, once a month we do not get off the sidewalks for the whites, we bump them.' Twenty-nine, thirty days a month they step aside so the white could pass, I couldn't understand that being from the North. Then when we were cadets, Louie Armstrong came down there, and there was a beach and beautiful dancing place out there, we cadets all chipped in and bought tickets, you didn't have to go, it was just for fun. We went out there, we will got dates, they would bring down bus loads of girls from Mobile, Alabama, there was a girl school up there, they were as lonesome as we were. So, they would bring down a busload of girls and we went out there to see Louis Armstrong, here he was, now think when this was, this was 1941, maybe before the war started, he's up there with his typical handkerchief and everything, he was a young man, I read later they couldn't stay at the hotel downtown, they had to stay at various coloreds homes all around Pensacola. Well, among the group that we were with there were a lot of Texans, they had the same arrangement, the University of Texas, from Austin, like Wisconsin, so, the University people were together, and they brought their girlfriends over from Austin, they could do that easily by train, were as we couldn't do it from North to South. Anyhow, all night long these Texans were ragging him and I guess I could use the word they go by, they says, 'You black son-of-a-bitch, who do you think you are?' and he never cracked and he never broke down he kept right on playing, and the next guy would say, 'You black dumb-ass, who do you think you are playing down here?', and they ragged him until 1:00 at night, I was ashamed. Here they all were in their dress white uniforms and looking like 4 million bucks and acting like a bunch of bums. That was my first really education into that type of thing.

- Mark: We got about 10 minutes left here. So, VE Day, do you remember where you were when you first heard the Germans had surrendered?
- Gordon: I sure do. I was at Pensacola again and they locked the gates, locked us up tighter than a drum, we couldn't get out of there. The Navy had a war to fight yet, there was no celebration, oh, there was a little celebration, but of course we weren't really fighting that war, some of my friends were over there, carrier escorts and so forth, and I lost some friends over there. Of course in the Army, but they just locked the doors and they kept us locked up for 2-3 days as I recall until things kind of settled down and then we were off and running again. It didn't take them long until they shipped me down to Appalachia, you see. Wait a second, no, I'm a behind myself now. They shipped me to Apelike before I got my wings, now, on VE Day I had been in for four years, and they locked us up, yes, they did lock us up and then pretty soon they opened the gates and we were aloud the normal activity, but the leaves were a little shorter and a little closer and so on and so forth, I stayed right on there until VJ Day.
- Mark: Which I suspect was very different.
- Gordon: Very different, they opened up the gates, they opened up the filling stations, they took off rationing and the whole area just went wild, just went wild. Everybody in the streets all night long and the whole ball of wax. But, VE Day was an entirely different thing for the Navy.
- Mark: So when were you actually discharged from the Navy.
- Gordon: Well, that was interesting, I had my time a shore and now I was very well and I was flying all the time, not all the time, but as much as I wanted to. So, it was my time to go overseas again and so I got a set of orders assigning me to the Army in Seattle, Washington. Well, obviously I am now a full Lieutenant, of Lieutenant-Commanders, I made it right along in there some place, I was going to be a liaison officer with the landing in Japan. Here the war was over, August, and I'm debating whether to stay in the Navy or to go back to school. So, I went in and asked the Commodore, who was the head of the base, if I could go back home, I have all the points in the world, being in before the war, he

said cut yourself some orders and go home. I'm not so sure I was one of the first guys out of the Navy.

Mark: No.

Gordon: I had already trained a man for my job, I had my orders, I had my bags packed and Truman dropped those two beautiful bombs, probably saved my life, so I came back here and went back to school. That was an interesting thing.

Mark: You came back, I asked this on the questionnaire, September '45.

Gordon: Yes.

Mark: Did you get back in the fall semester?

Gordon: I came in here I went up to see the Dean, I said, the Dean of the Men's school, I said I didn't think I'd been gone this long, I thought it would just be three year hitch, I said I ought to take my first year over. He said, 'Well, Gordon, we are very short of instructors, because the war and all, I would like you to instruct histology and neurology. So, I instructed, I went into professor. I was an instructor in histology and neurology and then on my spare time I took some anatomy and I sat in on some classes in physiology and other things. Then the next year I joined the class that I had been instructing. So, I was just the right time right place all the time. I was just ahead of the bunch. It's like a pyramid, I got in here then all these millions came behind me and kept pushing me up the ladder, I got home before other guys got home, same thing I went in before them.

Mark: So when did most of the vets start coming back? Home and onto the campus?

Gordon: I would say six months to a year. Oh, you'd see a dribble here and a dribble there but, it was until they really started flowing in.

Mark: So, you had been on campus before the war and then when the vets came. How was college like or graduate school like, in your case, how was that different before and after the war? How did the vets change the University?

Gordon: Oh, they changed it a lot. Here were mature men who had been gone and for instance, when I took my one pathology class the professor was new from Canada, he said now, we will have lecture from 8-9, and then we will go directly to the laboratory. Three of us had been instructing the year before and had been in the service we would go to the lecture from 8-9 but we did not go directly to the laboratory, we went across the street to Lawrence's restaurant and had a donut and a cup of coffee.

Mark: Where, just out of curiosity,

Gordon: On University Avenue, where the old hospital is, they use it to teach medical students, nurses, and then we'd come in and by golly he'd be standing by our desks, one of these guys had never gotten anything less than an in high school through college, the other one had gotten a couple of B's the rest A's, and I was a little lesser than that, we all three got C's. That was hard to handle some of the guys. We had been around, some of us had, jobs that were rather important we did our work, but we didn't want to be treated like children. We were a little wilder, a lot of things went on like that, I was hoisting a girl into Emery hall one night and I felt this tap on me shoulder, she left a window open and I thought, oh god, then I looked in this box and there was a dollar bill in it with a note saying would you please get us two with, that was 3 in the morning, the Toddle house was down there and I was very delighted to go down there and get two with. There was just things like that going on, of course, normal college does it too. Then I should say the other side of it, these guys, a lot of them were married by now, and some had children and they were pretty serious about there schooling.

Mark: Right there was the big trailer park down, the camp ground.

Gordon: The biggest one was up at Baraboo, you know, they took over that ammunition place. I was talking to some friends there the other day, it costs them \$24 a month for a bedroom and bath and so forth. They said they could sit in the living room put their feet in the kitchen sink. They'd drive that thirty-five miles up and back everyday, they took turns, they had a carpool.

Mark: If I'm not mistaken there was a bus too.

- Gordon: I think so, I think maybe they took turns driving the bus, they were older and they wanted to keep cost down. So they took turns driving the bus.
- Mark: This is for my own personal curiosity, but I lived for three years in Eagle Heights, and do you remember when they built that?
- Gordon: Yes I do. That had to be built after the war. I would say fairly shortly after the war, because, you see, there was very little construction during the war and it was hard to find a place to live and they needed a place for their instructors. As I recall that was built for the instructors and their young families.
- Mark: There was the University house where the young professors lived and then there was the Eagle Heights for graduate students, and they are all up on the hill.
- Gordon: Yes.
- Mark: I can't believe that the genesis of that wasn't the trailer parks in Baraboo.
- Gordon: Yeah.
- Mark: One last thing I wanted to get at, on campus there were active veteran organizations, were you involved in the AVC, or the Legion.
- Gordon: No. I wasn't involved in that. See, med school took up so much time we were carrying 18-20 credits most of the time. You just didn't have much time, I was working besides, I worked in the library. In fact, when I was a junior in med school I had three jobs and the dean called me in, he liked the military men, he was a military man himself, he said, 'Marlow, I know you have three jobs you're grades are going from B's to C's, how about dropping one job?'. So, I dropped one job and finished up. But, he was a wonderful man.
- Mark: When did you finally finish your medical school.
- Gordon: '49
- Mark: 1949. Then you went into practice here in Madison?

- Gordon: No. I went to the University of Minnesota. I took a preceptorship there, four years, one-year internship and three years in proctology, colon rectal surgery. So, all together I had about 13 years of college.
- Mark: That's quite a long time.
- Gordon: Long time when you look toward it, but when you look back it wasn't so bad.
- Mark: Good, because I've spent way too many years in school. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Gordon: I would just say, I wasn't injured badly, I still pay the price on this shoulder at night it wakes me up, but it was an experience I would never want to give up. It was something, the camaraderie, flying the aircraft, flying off carriers, traveling, going where we did, sure there is a lot of heartaches, but it was something, well, I wouldn't want another way, but I wouldn't give up my experience.
- Mark: Excellent. Thank you very much.
- Gordon: You bet.