

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Veterans Project

Combat Veteran

O.H. 265

WILLIAM CRAWFORD, JR.

Interviewed

by

Mark Dittmer

on

December 11, 1978

WILLIAM CRAWFORD JR.

William Crawford Jr. was born in Beaverdale, Pennsylvania on July 12, 1917 to Mr. William and Mrs. Janet Crawford. He was raised in Niles, Ohio and graduated from Niles McKinley High School in 1935. He enrolled in Youngstown College for two years, then transferred to Ohio State to work for his B.S.

In the fall of 1941, Mr. Crawford joined the Army air force in hopes of becoming an airline pilot. However, Pearl Harbor and the U.S.'s intervention in World War II changed the horizons of his military career. He served and fought in the pacific theatre with the 19th and 43rd Army air force bombardments based in Australia and New Guinea from June 1942 to June 1943. For the duration of the war he was based in the states.

In 1944 Crawford married his wife Margaret and published a personal history of his adventures in the South Pacific entitled, Gore and Glory. Since 1946, Crawford has worked for Wean United Corporation. Mrs. and Mr. Crawford presently reside in Warren, Ohio and are the parents of two sons, William and Lawrence R. Crawford. Mr. Crawford is involved with the Boy Scouts of America, the Lions Club, and many other professional affiliations in the Warren area. He has a special interest in woodworking, and golf, and track.

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM CRAWFORD, JR.

INTERVIEWER: Mark Dittmer

SUBJECT: Army Air Force Bombardment Group, Australia,
New Guinea, Gore and Glory

DATE: December 11, 1978

D: This is an interview with Mr. William Crawford, Jr. by Mark Dittmer for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. Today's interview is located in Warren, Ohio, on December 11, 1978 at 7:30 p.m. The topic for discussion is World War II Combat Veterans.

The first thing I would like you to do is to go back and start thinking of things prior to the United States' involvement in World War II. I understand that you got into the Army Air Force prior to Pearl Harbor. Why was this?

C: I had been going to school at Youngstown College and it was also just immediately after the Great Depression and the employment opportunities were not too great. I had some difficulty, at that time, raising enough finances to keep up with my education. I had worked in New York City for one year after I was out of high school before I started to college.

D: What year was this?

C: This was in 1936 and 1937. At the same time I had become involved in private aviation. I had taken some private flying lessons and I had difficulty in trying to finance my private flying lessons as well as my education. I did have some interest in aviation. I saw that getting into flying, into military flying, could serve two purposes: I could further my education in flying; I would get some military training; and I could then plan on finishing my education. So really I

had several motives prompted by the Depression, by the financial situation of my family, and by what we felt would be an upcoming war. Keep in mind this was in late 1937 and 1938 and yet we weren't involved in the war until December of 1941. However, there were indications four or five years prior to the war that there would be some sort of conflict with Japan.

- D: Up until Pearl Harbor it seemed that negotiations were tense, but it didn't seem like we were going to have a war. Do you think as you were in that training period that if it wouldn't have been Pearl Harbor, it would have been somewhere else?
- C: Keep in mind, although there were some indications there would be some hostilities with Japan as long as four and five days prior to the war starting, I did intend to join the military even if there were not any hostilities. Going to war was not my motivation. I was not particularly interested in going to war. My motivation was getting into the military or having them teach me how to fly, and then furthering my education. Actually, when I signed up for the military, there really wasn't an Air Force at that time. They had what they called a branch of the service called the U.S. Army Air Force. It was not a separate entity as it's known now. So actually, I applied for aviation training. Now keep in mind there was no Air Force at that time and there was no Air Force Academy. I could not apply for an Air Force Academy position. It wasn't available.

During that period of time, I had accumulated about three years of college credits and, therefore, I qualified academically for the so-called Air Force. However, we had to join what they called an Air Force Cadet Program, which was the forerunner of the Air Force Academy.

I actually signed up to become an aviation cadet. No sooner had I signed up for that and became involved in the pre-testing criteria, that the advent of war came about which in effect shortened up that military training and condensed what was to have been five years of cadet military training, particularly as related to flying, condensed it into about one year.

I had actually signed up for the U.S. Army Air Force Cadet Program in August of 1941 and, of course, war wasn't declared until December the 7th. I had no intentions at the time I signed up for the Air Force Cadet Program that I would actually be fighting in the war.

D: Let's talk about the mood of the country at that time. Being in the military, you must have had more or less an "in" to what was going on in Europe, a more close view of what was going on in Europe. How did you feel at that time?

C: Actually, during that period of time, at least my feeling and the feeling of those that I was associated with--that is my family and my relatives and friends--did not view a global war, or a big war as it turned out to be. We all recognized from our studies in school that Japan had expansionist tendencies; however, I don't think anyone realized that they were going to pursue the war as they did. We all felt at that time that the war in Europe would be confined to continental Europe. The United States really sort of had an isolationist posture at that time. So, did we actually feel that we, in the United States, would be involved in a war in 1941 or 1942? I don't think so. I don't know. I didn't; I had no feeling that way.

But we were concerned about Japan's attitude and we were concerned about the attitudes of Germans. Keep in mind, we, in this country, had just come out of the Great Depression and things were starting to look good for us. The stock market had rebounded; the job opportunities were opening up; and industry was doing well. People were really preoccupied with making the industrial giant of the United States expand and grow. But there was not too much stock at that time in the late 1930's of actually being involved in the war. We were hoping really that someone else would fight it for us.

D: Where were you on December 7th, and how did it affect your training period?

C: In recollecting, I had already signed up for the Aviation Cadet Program and had been to Columbus, Ohio, and had been inducted, and had all my pretesting and training completed, and I was waiting for a civilian assignment within the Air Force wherever they chose to send me. I was actually back in my home in Niles, Ohio, on December 7th when we heard the news on the radio that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Actually, it didn't strike me at the time that I would be involved so quickly. It didn't seem to register at all. I felt, so, there was a surprise attack and all Japan was trying to do was give us a message. That message was that even though Hawaii was thousands of miles away from Japan, that Japan could get there if they ever wanted

to. We thought it was more or less of an object lesson rather than the beginning of a big war. Actually, I was at home. I didn't give it too much thought; however, it was only four days later that apparently our government had considered it much more serious than some of the rest of us had, and I was notified then that I was to report immediately to Columbus, Ohio, for assignment. I went into a hurry-up type of military training program. In repeating, I indicated the program was almost four and a half to five years. From August of 1941 until December 14, 1941 we became so desperate that we shortened that program into less than one year, actually nine months. So we worked on our program literally 24 hours a day around the clock to shorten up the activities.

Here I was, I knew how to fly a civilian aircraft, a small civilian aircraft, when war was declared, and within three months I was flying the best trainers that the Army had and within six months I was flying the largest airplane that they had in the entire Air Force.

Now that was not because of my innate ability or my intelligence level, that was due to the urgency surrounding the situation due to the time of the war.

D: Let's talk about your training period. What was it like? What did you go through?

C: The training period, I enjoyed it because I enjoy being with people. We were small groups. The military training I had was in a group no larger than . . . Well, the entire population on the base wasn't over three hundred. The number of pilots in training on that base was something like 35, so it was a close-knit family.

D: Where was this located at?

C: My training took place all in California in three principle cities. I had my primary training, that's my early training was in Visalia, California. I spent two months there. Then I spent two months in Merced, California. Then my final training prior to going overseas was in Stockton, California.

D: So what was a typical day like during this time?

C: The typical day started about five o'clock in the morning. We had our academic work until noon with literally no breaks. Then, after lunch at noon, we went through our pilot training as opposed to the academic training, keeping in mind at that time that we were also schooled

in many related subjects to flying. We were taught geography, advanced geography; we were taught meteorology and we were taught the configuration and the makeup of some of the military aircraft, so that the pilots, during in-flight missions could attempt to make some minor repairs to the craft if possible.

Every morning we had this type of training, our academic training and our technical training, and in the afternoon, we had our manual flying activities. Our day was as I indicated, about five o'clock in the morning until dinner in the evening, which was at six, then at seven o'clock, we then went through a series of reviews covering the day's work.

We literally had a test, as we might know it now in college or in school, from seven o'clock till ten o'clock every night on what we had learned during the day. Now the purpose of this was to accelerate this program and condense it because they were in desperate need of pilots.

They were trying to get us through complete training and flying school with all the academic credentials in seven months. They succeeded in getting us through in eight months.

D: Let's move into your book now, Gore and Glory, which was published in 1944.

C: Right.

D: This is more or less a recollection of your times from the time that you set sail in July of 1942 till coming back in July of . . .

C: Oh, you did read the book! You know a lot of dates!

D: Yes, I did read the book. For you to do a book like this, did you keep a log at the time?

C: No. We have to put things in perspective, and I'm not trying to be humble, but by the same token I don't want to leave the impression that everything I did was special. Timing was all important. You must remember that early in the war, in December of 1941, when war was declared, up through 1942, the United States hadn't really gotten into the war. We had declared war; we were trying to fight a war, but we weren't prepared to fight a war. Our industrial complex hadn't been geared up as yet to meet the needs of a war. As a result of it, we had very few aircraft. We had very few pilots. I'm speaking of the

Air Force, the air activity. We got into the infantry; they had the same type of problems, but I can only relate to the flying activities.

We didn't have enough aircraft; we didn't have enough pilots; we didn't have enough bombardiers; and we didn't have enough navigators. There were so few of us involved that anything we did was publicized and glorified. Now keep in mind that the civilian population was greatly concerned about being in a war. We had no victory, so to speak of, in 1942 and in early 1943 to write about. We were still gearing ourselves up for war.

The newspaper and the magazines needed something to talk about. We couldn't talk about a victory in the Philippines; we didn't have any. We couldn't talk about a victory in Hawaii; that was a disaster. We had nothing positive to talk about as far as what our people were doing in the war. We hadn't done anything. We were involved, but we hadn't won any battles yet. So how did they compensate for that? They picked a few of us and watched our activities and anything that we did that was noteworthy they recorded and publicized. So I had the advantage, if you might want to call it that, of every time I made a move, someone was watching. Since they needed something to write about, to satisfy the population back here in the United States, to satisfy those people, they had to write about it and glorify it.

Now, they had not exaggerated. They didn't create missions for me. They didn't write that I bombed targets that I didn't really bomb. But if I had been in the war perhaps in 1944 or 1945, I would have been one of maybe fifty thousand people they could have written about. I just happened to be in the war early in the ball game, where there were so few pilots and so few accomplishments that anything we did was noteworthy. So it was timing and not personal achievements so much.

- D: There are parts of the book I want to go through. Now, the first part when you set sail from San Francisco to join the 19th Bombardment of the 5th Air Force in New Zealand, you've recalled some experiences at going over. I would like you to rehash some of those from your initial standpoint.
- C: Well, we left the west coast of the United States on a converted freighter, actually it was a converted passenger liner, into what they called a troop transport. Now this was not a large vessel. There were as many qualified nurses aboard as they could round up that fast after war was declared. There were some pilots, some navigators,

some bombardiers, and there were a few Marines. There was a mixture of all branches of the service. In other words, they had policed the United States and grabbed what few people that they had a record on that were qualified to serve and gathered them together. Now, I say that opposed to later on where all the Marines were aboard one vessel and all Navy personnel on another and Air Force on another. At that time, it was a mixed bag of tricks. We did have a wide variety of people with different occupations, military occupations, aboard that vessel, which made it very interesting.

- D: Weren't there close to twelve hundred people on the ship?
- C: Twelve hundred people on the ship. But there must have been thirty or forty different occupations, military occupations, that were represented.

The trip was not as boring as it may sound. The Japanese actually had infested the waters off of California. Of course, we went toward Hawaii and then over toward the Philippines. Well, the entire Pacific Ocean was infested with Japanese mines and Japanese submarines, so we were in a state of constant alert where you could never get bored. We never found ourselves looking for something to read or wishing the days would go faster. We were excited and there was always some activity. We could see the mines in the water, we could see the missiles being fired that would miss us, and submarines missiles that would miss us, so there was some type of activity all the time.

Secondly, the war was a novelty, and the crew of the ship treated the military people on board great. I can't say that lasted very long, but it was great early in the war. As a result of it, the food was great and plentiful. The atmosphere on ship was crowded. We slept in hammocks stacked four or five deep, but it wasn't bad at all. The thing that made the time go so rapidly was the fact that we were constantly listening to the radio and listening to the war activities on the radio and watching for the Japanese mines and Japanese submarines.

It was rather uneventful. We had seen a lot of activity. Our vessel had stopped; some nights we didn't move at all, not to stir up the waters and to avoid detection. It was uneventful and we eventually wound up in New Zealand. From New Zealand we went over to Australia.

- D: Talking about eventful events, there was one event that was surprising in your book when you crossed from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere

and you talked about . . . Now what exactly was this? You more or less were able to get back at the commissioned officers or whatever because you said that everybody had to go through more or less a hazing thing.

- C: Yes, we went through a hazing period. There seems to be in the Navy especially, not so much the Air Force, a tradition that when you cross the International Date-line, you add the equivalent of a fraternity-type hazing arrangement. They would make the non-Navy personnel, of which I was one, the non-Navy personnel who had never crossed the dateline before go through this hazing. This hazing was typical fraternity-type stuff. It was making you swallow live small fish, not goldfish but fish, and they would put you in a barrel of slime. They would blindfold you and drop you in a barrel of slime and things of that nature. They would make you go through paddles, and this type of thing. At one particular point in time there was enough military personnel on board, and you have to admit that most of the military personnel had some degree of education. They were all specialists in one form or another. They weren't the type that would go through this hazing and sit down very quietly. So after two days of this hazing, we as a group got together and we forced the officers through the same hazing program. They didn't feel that the junior officers, so to speak-- at that time I was a lieutenant--could ever do that to the captains and majors and the colonels. But we did, and that was quite eventful.
- D: So it was more or less being able to get back at the high . . .
- C: Get back and get the high brass, but only through sheer numbers, not through rank. Now during this hazing period, fortunately for the officers, your rank lost its identity and you didn't have to worry about repercussions later on. Anything that was done during this hazing period was immediately forgotten. You could talk to an officer, at that period in time, that you wouldn't dare talk to later on in that same tone of voice and in that same manner. So by sheer numbers, there was enough of us that we then forced the officer in command of the ship to go through the same hazing program.
- D: Let's go to the point where you get to New Zealand and you were more or less put under command of General George C. Kenney. I don't know where the base was, in New Zealand?
- C: Right.

D: Where was this based?

C: New Zealand was just a staging area for a matter of a day or two to get us off the vessel, get us organized. Some of them stayed. Keep in mind there was a lot of different people aboard this ship. The pilots, the copilots, the bombardiers, and the navigators were destined to go to Northern Australia and eventually to New Guinea. About fifty of us then went from New Zealand over to Sydney, Australia. We went to Sydney only because it was the closest big city on the Australian continent adjacent to New Zealand. That was the shortest ocean voyage. We spent a few days in Sydney, then we started up the east coast of Australia.

D: Now, isn't this the Barren Coast?

C: No. The Barren Coast is the west coast, the north and the west. Sydney, Australia, and Melbourne are the two largest cities. They are very big metropolitan cities. But there are no variety or cluster of cities between these two. After you get north of Melbourne, Australia, from there on up the east coast, on north towards Japan and towards New Guinea, it's very barren. You can fly through there for several days and not see anybody. The last civilization, so to speak, north of Melbourne, Australia, literally was the Army camps that we were in the process of building, the Air Force camps.

D: In the spot in Northern Australia where you were based, was this Moresby Base?

C: No, Port Moresby was actually the only U.S. held territory on the island of New Guinea. I was based in the most northern point of Australia, a little town called Townsville. Now, it was not a city; it was more or less like a small rural community that the U.S. Air Force had taken over and had appropriated the land and had built an airstrip.

D: This was done under the 19th Bombardment when they first went in?

C: That's right. The U.S. engineers, military engineers, and the 19th Bombardment Group had carved this piece out of the so-called jungle. Northern Australia is primarily all jungle. It's not too much different than any other jungle. So they had taken this piece of real estate on Northern Australia so that we could house our troops, Air Force troops, and our military planes, so that we could fly out bombing missions against the Japanese from that base. Now why from Northern Australia? At that

time Japan had taken over all the islands south of Japan and were on the verge of invading Australia. Therefore, we were assigned to that spot to fly our missions out of there and to bomb all the shipping channels coming into Northern Australia to protect Australia. The first five or six months of the war that I was involved with over there was primarily for the protection of Australia from being invaded by Japan.

How did we hope to protect them? We hoped to protect them by going out and finding their military transport vessels and their bombardment vessels, and bomb those vessels and sink them before they could arrive at the coast of Australia, and that's literally what we did.

After we had done that for several months to where Northern Australia became fairly secure, we moved to the only non-continent base we had over there, and that was one city, one little town in New Guinea, called Port Moresby. The Japanese held all of Port Moresby for one town. After we secured, in effect, the fact that Northern Australia was not going to be invaded by the Japanese troops, we moved over to Port Moresby. The purpose of going to Port Moresby was to get a little bit closer with our planes so that we had the range to bomb some of the Japanese outposts, such as Rabaul, and so forth.

C: Let's talk about Port Moresby. What was the place like? Did you have to build the airstrip yourself?

D: Port Moresby was an aboriginal village. Outside of the U.S. military people, primarily Air Force people and some U.S. military engineers that helped us build the base, there were literally no, as we might call them, civilians. There was no industry, of course. They grew fruits, bananas, coconuts, and so forth that the aborigines lived on. There were a few Australians there, but civilian Australians, under the control of the military government of Australia, to help us, to show us around and to help us. Primarily, Port Moresby was just a small, aborigine community, taken over by the U.S. government so we could station some planes there.

D: Did you have any trouble by the Papuans that lived there?

C: Not really. We had so many things that the Papuans had never seen that they were very friendly to us. A string of beads, a glass of milk, or a glass of orange juice could make them your friend forever. Although we didn't have many luxuries there, anything we had, we shared it a little bit with the native population and they would do almost anything for us.

Now I have to describe Port Moresby to you. Port Moresby is a city in New Guinea. New Guinea itself is not a very big island. Port Moresby was the only allied-held territory, non-Japanese held territory in the entire South Pacific at that time. We actually went in and carved this area out of a jungle. The military command housed themselves in grass huts that we had the Papuans build for us. The soldiers and the few sailors, and the Australians, and the pilots, such as myself, lived in small pup tents. We had no barracks, no dormitories. We didn't have any dining halls. We had what we called field kitchens, which was primarily a trailer that they hauled out there with propane burners on it that cooked our food. We slept in small one-man pup tents almost like a little Boy Scout tent. That was our total living conditions the entire time we were in Port Moresby. Now I'm talking about in 1942. Later on, the military got in there and we expanded our base. They brought in supplies and built some barracks and so forth.

But at that time many of us actually slept in our own airplanes or on the ground under the airplanes. The Japanese at that time were so close to us that at night they would infiltrate our campgrounds and be no more than fifty or sixty feet, not yards, away. For an alarm system, we had rigged up around our planes to protect them from sabotage by the Japanese the only alarm system we had at that time, which was a series of stakes with strings strung between these stakes and tied with tin cans with stones in them. If the Japanese would stumble in the dark over one of these strings or cans it would rattle and we could alert ourselves to try to protect our planes.

Actually, there were so few bombers available at that time, each one became very precious. I think at the time I was in Port Moresby the entire allied force of bombers, B-17's, long range bombers, which was the biggest bomber that the U.S. government had, were only twenty-three in the entire South Pacific in that area. So they were very precious to us. We couldn't afford any sabotage.

D: Was a Flying Fortress a B-17?

C: A Flying Fortress was a B-17. The U.S. Military had one other four-engine bomber and they called that a B-24 Liberator; however, at that time in the South Pacific we did not have any of those. We had the B-17 Flying Fortress, which, by the way, was the largest plane in the military command.

D: Okay, Let's talk about some of these missions that you did

fly. Most of them did more or less concentrate on hitting Rabaul, which was the main Japanese land post at that time?

- C: It was a supply post. Keep in mind that it was too far from Japan. Japan had tried to dominate so much territory in the South Pacific that they had difficulty with their supply lines. They had plenty of manpower, plenty of airplanes, and plenty of ships, but keep in mind they were getting pretty far away from home trying to keep those areas supplied. What they had done, they had taken over this area of Rabaul and they used that as a depot. They would fly and transport their supplies out of Japan to Rabaul then actually conduct the war in the entire South Pacific from Rabaul. Rabaul Harbor had as many as ninety and a hundred Japanese vessels of all types in there all the time and just hundreds and hundreds of their military planes on the ground at Rabaul. They could not fly from Japan over to Guadalcanal or over to New Guinea or back over to the Philippines; it was too far. They needed a staging area, and Rabaul was their staging area.

Now, we had many Japanese targets. We had Japanese targets that were only fifty miles away from our base, but it became more important, since we had such a limited number of aircraft and a limited number of pilots, not to waste our bombs on a small Japanese settlement someplace, or one or two vessels. We made the eight hundred mile trip one way to Rabaul, and if we ever successfully got over Rabaul we could drop our bombs. Then we couldn't miss, there was such a concentration of military equipment and manpower that you couldn't miss. We did good by flying eight hundred miles away than going to targets that were only forty, fifty miles away. What was the secret of us flying to Rabaul all the time? We hit the hub of the wheel as opposed to one of the spokes or the rim.

- D: Could you pinpoint some of the major missions you did under the 19th Bombardment, more or less tracing a couple of the milk runs.
- C: Well, I think the most memorable mission I had was that the Japanese decided to launch a massive invasion of Guadalcanal and a second attempt of Northern Australia. They had a mass in Rabaul of just hundreds and hundreds of warships. I'm talking about troop transports as well as their cruisers and destroyers. We were constantly watching for when they were going to make their move. Apparently, although I was not related to intelligence so I really don't know, our intelligence was unable to determine when they planned to make their move again.

So then they sent us military pilots out to shadow them. We used to fly on these so-called milk runs, up in the area of Rabaul, try to conserve our fuel and just fly around for hours, not attempting on some cases to bomb a target, but to plot their activities. While on this one mission, I happened to see this large convoy of Japanese vessels, battleships, destroyers, cruisers, and probably fifteen or twenty troop transports heading south. When I say heading south, I mean towards New Guinea and towards Australia. Now what their true intent was we don't know, but they were headed our way, so to speak. Then I shadowed those as long as I could, and then went back with my report. Keep in mind we didn't have the radio communications that we have today. We had some radio, but the range of the radio was not great enough for us to communicate back from Port Moresby to the area of Rabaul. So our most reliable transmissions were to follow these movements as long as we could, then hurry back and tell what we knew to another group of pilots.

I can recall seeing this group of Japanese military vessels assembled. We followed them for about seven or eight hours, staying out of sight where they couldn't see us. We would dart in and out of the clouds, get a look at them and go back in the clouds. If you stayed where they could see you they could have come up and shot us down. Where they were, they could put two or three hundred zeroes in the air in a matter of fifteen or twenty minutes. So you couldn't fly in an exposed condition. You had to fly on instruments in the clouds all the time. We would dart out of the clouds till we could see where they were going. We used to plot their movements. I was lucky enough to see that group leave Rabaul and head south. I shadowed them as long as I could until our fuel became low and had to go back. Then when I went back they sent another plane out to shadow them for awhile. That second plane couldn't find them.

You have to keep in mind in the South Pacific it's a tropical climate. It rains sometime every day. It's very warm, very turbulent in the skies and there are clouds all the time. They come and go.

The second plane they sent out couldn't find them so I was asked to go back out again after about five hours on the ground. We were lucky enough to find them and we shadowed them for another six or eight hours.

As a result of that intelligence report that we turned in, we had four days to assemble all the aircraft we could find. They called in aircraft and ships from all over the world that they could get there that fast that weren't too

far away. As a result we were able to mount an air attack against that Japanese convoy and wipe them out. Now not me, but we, the entire Air Force. Actually we were able to stop the convoy from reaching New Guinea and reaching Northern Australia. That, in itself, just may have turned the tide of the war because they were in complete control. You can well imagine, had the Japanese landed in Australia we wouldn't have had anyplace to launch our war from. Hawaii is too far away. That was the secret of Australia. That was our launching pad and the only place where friendly troops could assemble to put a counterattack back against the Japanese.

- D: Were there any Japanese air squadrons that the 19th Bombardment feared or were amazed with?
- C: Not particularly. We feared them all of course, but there was none more than others because the Japanese pilots were very dedicated. As you've since read, and we learned by firsthand experience, they would take risks that we couldn't take. Number one, they were dedicated to give their life for the emperor and they flew that way. They were very reckless. They would fly up to . . . I can recall very vividly. Now keep in mind I'm the pilot of a bomber, and when you're on a bombing run, you have to hold a steady, steady course. You can't have any abrupt movements in your plane or the bombardier is going to miss his target with the bombs. No matter what is happening around you, you have to not close your eyes to it, but block it out and stay on your bombing run. I can recall very vividly where these Japanese fighter pilots would fly right into you, roll over on their backs, shooting at you all the time, and get within eight or nine feet, and pull away from you. Now, we American pilots couldn't afford to do that. We had to value our aircraft more. We didn't have that many. We had to be constantly thinking about, if I lose this airplane then we won't have any airplanes to fight with. That was our primary consideration. The Japanese had plenty of aircraft. They became very reckless and if they couldn't shoot you down they would often ram you. Well, we may have wanted to ram somebody, but I don't know if we had the courage to that or not. Even if we did have the courage, we wouldn't have done it because we were protecting the number of aircraft we had. We had so few. So, yes, they were a very aggressive group of people and a very brave group of people and well-trained. I, personally, hated the Japanese, but by the same token, I had to admire their skills.
- D: So when did you change from the 19 Bombardment to the 43rd? You mentioned that the 19th went back, but you

stayed on with the 43rd?

C: The 19th Bombardment Group was the first heavy bombardment group to go into the South Pacific. They had been in the Philippines as a bombardment group during peacetime. When war was declared, as you know, we were chased out of the Philippines fairly quick. So the 19th Bombardment Group then went to Northern Australia where I joined them. Now this group had been assembled for several years and actually had been fighting the war since December 7th until I joined them in July or August of 1943. They weren't that large and they hadn't lost, in the early part of the war, a lot of their pilots and a lot of their planes. Actually, the 19th Bombardment Group had come to where they were a good, dedicated group of people but their numbers were diminishing through casualties. When the numbers got down so low, they brought in another bombardment group from the United States called the 43rd Bombardment Group and absorbed the remnants for the 19th Bombardment Group, such as myself, into it. There weren't enough of us left in the 19th Bombardment Group to conduct a war, so we were absorbed into the 43rd.

D: You mentioned in part of your book that, when you talked about fears, you seemed to fear more being shot down over the jungle than being captured by the Japanese. Now why was this?

C: Actually, you didn't want either, of course, but if you had to make a choice, many of us preferred, at least we indicated we preferred, to be captured by the Japanese as opposed to being shot down over the jungle because survival in the tropical jungle would have been totally impossible. With the Japanese at least you had a chance that they may treat you right and keep you alive. We had a number of pilots that had to bail out over the jungle, and there was just no way that they could ever get back. First of all, much of it was swampy, much of it was alligator infested, and deeper in the jungle were hostile aborigines. The Japanese had been there and had in effect bribed the local natives to turn in any American pilots they found, dead or alive. The aborigines would kill you if they found you just to take your weapons, your shoes, your coat, and your hat. Actually, our theory was, and thank God many of us never had to make that choice, that if the Japanese captured us, you had a chance; if you went down in the jungle, you didn't have a chance at all.

D: All right, let's go on to more or less the aspects of this point at Port Moresby. You've mentioned some people called "Fuzzies" and "Lulu Belles". Were these

the people that lived in the area?

- C: They were the aboriginal natives. The "Fuzzies" primarily were the male population and the "Lulu Belles" were the females. They were truly "natives", very, very primitive. They could climb trees almost like monkeys. They had no clothing except the loincloth. Later on in the war they wound up with bits and pieces of clothing but they considered them as trophies that they got from the Americans. Their diet was principally melons that they grew, coconuts, and bananas that were native to that country.
- D: Were they able to help at all for living conditions or anything?
- C: They were a very tricky people in that they blew back and forth with the wind. Those of them close to our particular camp at Port Moresby would do us many favors and would work, do the manual work for us in helping us clear little roads and the airstrips. However, the Japanese were only thirty or forty miles away with the base. If the Japanese would get to them, they would change their allegiance overnight for a trophy or a trinket. So they were undependable. They were not hostile to the point, at least in the area around Port Moresby, where I don't think they would ever have murdered any of the Americans, but they would tell the Japanese all about our installation. So they were unreliable more than they were vicious.
- D: Okay. Let's go back to the missions with the 43rd. Could you describe the Battle of Bismarck?
- C: Yes. I flew several missions in the Battle of Bismarck Sea. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea is where they had the Japanese Armada moving in on us.
- D: Now what point of the war was this?
- C: This was in mid-1943.
- D: Okay.
- C: Here again the Japanese were trying to literally chase the allies out of that hemisphere. Had they been able to chase us out of Australia, then the closest place would have been thousands of miles away from Japan. There would have been no threat of bombing Japan, or an invasion of Japan, or taking back many of those islands they had taken from us if we did not have a foothold in Australia. So they were preoccupied over trying to get the Australians,

the few that were there, and the Americans, out of that area of the world. They had this Japanese armada in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea descending on, we didn't know what their target was, but they were headed south. That could have been our port at Port Moresby. That could have been our airfield at Guadalcanal. Or, it could have been the Australian continent. So of course, our objective in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea was don't let them get too close. Wipe them out before they can get that far. So we mustered every pilot we had, and every airplane we had, some of them not mechanically sound but would fly, because we knew this was the last ditch stand. We either knock them out on their way down there or else we had to get out. As a result, all of the crew, the gunners, the flight attendants, the maintenance men, the pilots, the bombardiers, and the navigators flew continuous missions.

We would load up with bombs and fly out over this Japanese armada and drop our bombs trying to sink some of their vessels. That was all we were after at that time. They had many aircraft carriers in that armada, but we weren't particularly after them. We wanted the troop transports. Those were the people that were going to hurt us, the troops that were going to take over Australia or New Guinea, not their airplanes. If we saw three vessels in a row, and I as a pilot had my choice which one I was going to drop my bombs on, we would take the troop transport. Not that we weren't concerned with the human life aboard that troop transport, but they were the very soldiers who were going to fight us hand-to-hand later on if they landed. So we flew mission after mission and literally wiped out that armada.

Now, during the process of bombing them we were not unmolested. They had aircraft carriers and these aircraft carriers had many Zero aircraft's support. While we were trying to bomb those vessels out of the ocean, of course, we were being attacked in the air by the Japanese fighter pilots. Their planes were called Zeros. They were highly maneuverable planes with very, very good pilots, which made our mission quite difficult. But really, although you were in the air, it was almost hand-to-hand combat. I can remember vividly looking out the windshield of my plane and I could describe the features of that Japanese pilot in the fighter plane. That's how close you were.

D: So they were just right outside your . . .

C: Right outside.

D: Okay. Probably the most vivid chapter in your book deals

with a mission that was called the "Flying Holocaust".
Could you go into detail on that?

C: Well now, keep in mind that you're going back thirty-five years or more. You're referring to the mission where we were hit by an anti-aircraft shell in the bomb bay?

D: Right.

C: Yes, I can describe that one because it was rather frightening. Although, strange as it may seem, you were not frightened at the time. You were frightened when you got home, when you got back. I don't recall that I was frightened to where I couldn't perform my duties because I think the shock hits you later on, like when you were back on base or when the thing had quieted down. But we were on a bombing run over a Japanese transport vessel loaded with troops. It was accompanied by a couple of destroyers. I'm not too sure there wasn't a battleship in that small convoy. While we were making our bombing run with the bomb bay doors open, the anti-aircraft batteries aboard their battleships and destroyers were firing at them. Now, of course, you can't hear them because of the noise of your own propellers in your plane, but you can see when those anti-aircraft shells explode. You can see them outside the window of your plane. They make a big puff of smoke as they explode. You can feel the remnants of the shrapnel bouncing off your plane and hitting your plane. You can hear it and you can feel it. You can hear your plane being hit, but you can't hear the explosion. You see the white puffs of smoke. You can really tell as they're tracking you. You're flying and they're tracking you with their guns. You can see them get closer and closer because as you look out the window you see a puff of smoke here then you see another one getting closer and another getting closer. They're finding you. You see that by these puffs of smoke. Well, actually we were hit in the bomb bay by an aircraft shell and it started a fire.

Before you start a bombing run you go through a procedure of what you call arming your bomb. That is, literally, you pull the firing pin. When you do that you're at the point of no return. You can't take that bomb back home. You can't land that plane with that firing pin pulled; it'll explode on the impact of the landing. Any slight jar will cause that bomb to detonate. Before you start your bombing run, naturally, you have to arm all those bombs. Well, we were in that condition where we were hit by that anti-aircraft shell that tore the whole front nose off the plane and started a fire down in the bomb bay and in the nose of the plane.

Well, if I recall, we went to them when we saw that fire to jettison the bomb. We weren't worrying about hitting a target, we were worried about saving the plane. We pulled what we called the salvo handle, which is an automatic release for all those bombs to fall. It wouldn't release; it was jammed due to the aircraft fire and the damage it had done. So then our bombardier from the nose of the plane, who sat in the nose of the plane, walked back and he started to beat this fire out with his clothing, jackets and so forth. Then our copilot crawled out of his seat alongside of him and he went down into the bomb bay area and tried to beat this fire out. Finally, they were able to among all those flames. Now the bomb bay was open, one move and they would have fallen down into the ocean.

The fire had done a great deal of damage and the most pitiful part of that entire mission was the fact that the copilot, a fellow by the name of John Gibb, who was an accomplished pilot in his own, crawled back up into the pilot's seat and his arms were literally burned to a crisp up to his elbows. He had to sit that way for four hours till we got back to base. It was burnt flesh.

Now, in the meantime, I had been hit in the leg. I don't know whether by an aircraft fire or a gunshot from a Zero fighter plane.

We wore sheepskin boots that came up just below the knees because we flew at high altitudes. Even though it was 120 degrees on the ground it might have been only fifteen or sixteen degrees where we were. So we wore sheepskin clothing for the high altitude, when we had to go that high.

My boot actually had filled up with blood and my leg was numb. I really wanted to scream and cry and complain, but when I looked over and saw the condition the poor copilot was in, I didn't have the guts to say anything. The sad part of that flight was that when we got back to Port Moresby . . . Keep in mind we were landing on primitive type airfields. We weren't looking at O'Hare National Airport with runways five miles long and a half a mile wide. We were looking on primitive runways with very little clearance to get in and get out of it. Most of the runways were made from these steel landing type mats that they laid down just on the ground. When we got to Port Moresby we found that our hydraulic system had been all shot out; therefore, we had no hydraulic control of the plane functions. Now the aileron of the plane and the flaps of the plane are all run hydraulically.

We couldn't control those. I can't recall now, thirty-five years later, our landing speed, but let's assume that our normal landing speed might have been about ninety to a hundred miles an hour. Since we didn't have flaps and we didn't have ailerons, we had to attempt to land at about 170 miles an hour, something like that. We had no brakes. We made about two passes at the field. I wanted to make a third one, but I saw all the crew members were shot up and the copilot was literally burned to a crisp. So we made a shot at the landing field and when we came down on the landing field we went clear down there and then I had to put power on it and turn around and go back down. We couldn't get stopped because there were no brakes.

D: So that was more or less the last terrifying mission you had to do before going home?

C: Yes. It wasn't so much the bombing mission over the Japanese vessels, but the fact that the plane was damaged so badly that we didn't know if we were going to get back. Even that was not so critical as the fact that some of the crew members were shot up and, as I said, the copilot was burned very, very badly. The only reason he was burned so badly was that he was really trying to save the rest of his crew members. If they hadn't got that fire out, the whole plane would have caught fire and we would have all been gone. So it literally was a sacrifice on his part, which made the rest of us feel probably more deeply than we would have felt. He was just trying to save the rest of the crew. But, in repeating, then when we got back, we landed much, much too fast because we didn't have hydraulic service and didn't have any brakes.

Literally, we had as big a scare on the ground as we did in the air. We had radioed in when we became close to Port Moresby that we had an emergency on board. We asked them to clear the runway and give us clear passage, make sure there were no other planes down there because we were in a hurry. Word had spread through the camp there that we were in deep trouble in coming back. Then a lot of the native villagers heard. So what they had actually done, everyone had lined up alongside the runway, which actually handicapped us. When we got the plane on the ground with no brakes, we couldn't stop it. In order to keep from running off into a marsh, we had to keep giving it more power on two propellers or the other two propellers to turn it. The only way we could steer it or guide it was through the use of propellers and a little more power to the engine. Every time we did that

we gained a little more velocity. Well, we looked around and there were people lined up on both sides of the runway and they didn't give us any room to maneuver. That was probably the most difficult time we had.

D: You mentioned in your book that a lot of the Japanese dropped American propaganda leaflets. Now what was this, and was this addressed to the Australians?

C: No, they were addressed to American troops, but by the same token, we dropped leaflets on the Japanese as well, many times. As a matter of fact, I think probably in the book I may have an example of one or two of the leaflets we dropped. The leaflets the Japanese dropped were to the effect that your commander put you out here; you don't have a chance to survive, they're sacrificing you, and why don't you give up. That was the theme or the tone of what they were telling us. They were indicating that there were no other Americans around, there were no other allies around. They put you few people up here at Port Moresby. We're within thirty-five or forty miles from you; we can come and get you anytime we want you. You've been sacrificed. In other words, your own American government has abandoned you, why don't you give up? That was the tone.

D: Did this bother anybody?

C: Not really. At least to my knowledge it didn't bother anybody. Keep in mind, we, at the same time, were dropping, when we would fly over Rabaul, leaflets with the same type of messages, saying that Japan cannot win this war; and even though you feel you have a few victories now, you're eventually going to lose the war and we're going to recapture all these South Pacific islands.

It was war propaganda, so to speak. I don't think it had any real effect. We used to be able to listen to the broadcasts of Tokyo Rose. I have to assess, from the attitude of the people that I was with, that they laughed about it more than they worried about it. It was more of less a joke.

D: There are a couple of questions I would like you to answer about censorship. Was there much censorship on your book after you had it done?

C: I wouldn't say an excessive amount, but probably twenty percent of what I had to say was censored, and I understood it. Actually, we felt it would be, simply because the war was still in progress when I came back. I went

overseas in mid-1943 when the war was in its infancy in the Pacific. I had been shot up a couple of times in several planes, banged up, and served my time, and I was released. I think it was one year later of 1943 when I came back to the States, not released from the service, but I had reached the point where I had picked up a lot of the tropical infections. I wasn't ill, but I had become subject to a lot of the tropical infections. I had served all my missions and apparently someone thought, well, he's reaching a point of battle fatigue, although I didn't feel that way. So in effect, they said, "Well, look you've had your crack at this war. Let us give somebody else a turn. You go on home."

So they sent me on home and I became a squadron commander in training pilots and crews in B-17's to go to England. They sent me to Dyersburg, Tennessee, and I was a squadron commander with an entire training squadron, a flight training squadron in Dyersburg, Tennessee. I had been there for a short while when the U.S. Government had placed a lot of demands on the civilian aircraft companies who were hauling a lot of supplies overseas. The Trans World Airlines, TWA, was in desperate need of pilots. They had planes, and they had these military contracts and they couldn't fulfill them. They had appealed to the military for some pilots so a few of us who had been overseas and had served our missions, our combat missions, were given the opportunity to fly for TWA as commercial pilots. If we would sign a contract to fly as a commercial pilot, they would then release us from the military. Well, I was never really a career military man. First of all, it was serving my purpose to get an education and get some training. Later on we had a war and I think I was sort of gung-ho. I wanted to do my part. But, nevertheless, after I had done my part, I didn't want to make the military a career so when I was given this opportunity to fly commercial aviation and then be released from the service, I accepted it. I was actually released from the service and signed a contract with Trans World Airlines. I flew as a commercial pilot for TWA and I was domiciled in Kansas City, Missouri, and flew commercially then as a commercial pilot until 1946. Then I left that to take up where I left off back in my college education, which was in metallurgy and mechanical engineering and then went to work in that field for industry.

D: Can you pinpoint any specific incidents of censorship that you could say now that you couldn't say then?

C: Well, my memory is getting a little foggy. I can give you general recollections; the details I don't recall. But

I know I did when I dictated for the book.

D: How about page fifty-eight?

C: I'm talking here about a way of locating enemy convoys. Of course, the only publicized way at that time of locating enemy convoys was through what we called the milk runs or shadowing. At this time in the war we were much further along with our sonar devices than we led the Japanese to believe. Our sonar devices were actually operational at that time, but nobody knew they were operational. I knew they were operational, but I couldn't talk about it. I dictated some information into the notes for my book concerning the sonar, but then they were deleted from the book. I understand why. I think that was the right thing for them to do.

D: Were there any other examples?

C: Yes. We had some examples. I had some notes that I put a caption around and indicated they were not to be used without checking back with me in any manuscripts for the book. That was actually that we had some men, American pilots, who bailed out of their military aircraft over Rabaul. They escaped detection and they lived as a community of five men: two pilots, a navigator, a bombardier, and one enlisted man. They escaped out of this B-17 that had eleven people on it. They were able to salvage the radio out of their B-17. They were able to get messages right out from under the Japanese at Rabaul. Now keep in mind, Rabaul is the staging area for the Japanese to conduct the war and we had five American Air Force people in Rabaul sending messages. We were too far away at Port Moresby to get those messages, but our aircraft on their bombing runs as they neared Rabaul could pick up pieces of those messages and enough pieces that we knew some of the ship movements going out of Rabaul. These five people had no intelligence, but they were in an area where they could see the vessels arriving and the vessels departing. They could see the deployment of all the military aircraft and tell us whether they were going north, east, south, or west. They never knew what they were up to, but that, plus we had others elsewhere, could help us put the pieces together.

So that was naturally headed out of here. I had information on that that couldn't be used. Here again, I fully understood. If we would have let the Japanese know through this book somehow that we had five people in Rabaul, you know what would have happened. They would have gone looking for them and they would have eventually found them.

- D: Do you think the Japanese ever got a hold of the book?
- C: Oh, I don't know. By the time the book was published, anything I was saying was passé. The war had progressed very rapidly. Keep in mind that in 1941, when war was declared, we were very poorly prepared. We didn't have any trained people. The American ingenuity did a very good job, but it took almost a year before we had any numbers of anything. Now keep in mind, I'm referring to the war back in the primitive stages when we didn't have many of anything. By the time my book was written and published, our industrial complex had produced so much war material that it changed the complexion of the war completely.
- D: Well, since you were back in the States by 1945, how was your reaction to the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Do you think the war would have gone on that much longer if we wouldn't have done it?
- C: Oh, I think probably, from my limited point of view, that was the turning point of the war. It was more psychological than it was anything else. I think the real damage that we did when we bombed Japan was negligible. I'm talking about Doolittle's first bombing raid and not the dropping of the atom bomb that came after.
- D: Oh, okay.
- C: Let's take the first bombing raid over Japan. If you recall, General Doolittle had taken some bombers off the deck of an aircraft carrier, which was unheard of, fighter planes yes, bombers no. Bombers are normally too big to go off the deck of an aircraft. When he flew over Japan and dropped those bombs it did very little damage, but psychologically it shook the Japanese.

The Japanese thought that they were thousands of miles away from everybody. There was no enemy plane that was ever going to reach their shores. Basically, they were right. Well, then when General Doolittle dropped the bomb, although it cost a lot of planes and a lot of people lost their lives, psychologically that turned the thing around. The Japanese population then began to have second thoughts about the war. Before, they were all for Hirohito. He was their saviour. At that time, many of them began to doubt the emperor of Japan. Of course, that was climaxed then. The atom bomb caused horrible damage, no question, but that bombing raid in itself didn't do enough damage to change the complexion of the war. It changed the psychological attitude of the people towards the war. The Japanese then knew that they

could be hurt in this war and they could lose the war. That's the first time they realized that could happen. Here again, although you know of the cities that were bombed, you need to bomb a lot more than two or three cities to win the war. So it was the psychology of the thing.

That was really the turning point. I think that was a masterpiece on our part. I admired President Harry Truman for having the courage to go in and drop that bomb. Many people have criticized our president for that, but when you criticize, you have to remember this, we were losing Marines, sailors, and airmen by the thousands on all those little islands down in the Pacific, thousands of them. So what are we going to do? Be a gentleman and let them die every day and not bother Japan? No, I think that was the only thing to do. I think in the end he saved more lives by far.

D: Are there any additional comments you would like to make about your book?

C: No, but I want to apologize for my incoherent rambling here in that this information was compiled by me back in 1941, 1942, and 1943. That's some thirty-five years ago.

D: Did you keep a diary at all when you were over there?

C: No. You raised that question before and I apologize for not having answered it completely. I think I went off on a tangent. Now what had happened, if you recall, I indicated that there weren't too many pilots over there fighting the war. Those of us who went over weren't sent over because we were the best. We were the only ones they had, good, bad, or indifferent. Since there were so few and we did need something to feed the American public about what was going on in the war, if they wanted to report a bombing raid over Rabaul, then we had, maybe on any given day, fifteen or sixteen people they could talk to. I happened to be one of them. As a result of that, my name kept cropping up frequently in the American papers. With all the papers in the United States and with all the reporters around, there were only fifteen or sixteen people that they were going to get anything from. So what the reporters would do, they would hang around our dispatching area, where our flight squadrons flew from and they would see which pilots were leaving on a bombing run and which came back and they would write about it. When fifteen planes went out and eight came back, they would report that seven were missing. They would report some names if they were allowed to. Then of the eight that came back, they would try to say

well where did you go, and so forth. So it was a matter of numbers.

D: Who motivated you to write the book?

C: Well, of course, I was not aware of a lot of the news clippings that were printed. I didn't see these news clippings, but they were being accumulated back here in the States by my brother-in-law. He had the collection of these news clippings for that period of time. As a result these news clippings formed a diary, an unofficial diary. So it was a case of sorting out these news clippings and reconstructing the intervening events. That was the basis of the book.

D: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW