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Interview With

RICHARD E. COLE

August 8, 2000

Tape #1 & 2

Place of Interview: Comfort, Texas

Interviewer: William J. Alexander

Terms of Use: Open

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Oral History Collection

Richard Cole

Interviewer: William J. Alexander August 8, 2000

Place of Interview: Comfort, Texas

Mr. Alexander: This is Bill Alexander, and we are in the home of Mr. Richard Cole to get his remembrances of his duty in World War II. We are in Comfort, Texas, and this is August 8, 2000.

Dick, I'd like to ask you, if I may, where and when you were born.

Mr. Cole: I was born in Dayton, Ohio, on September 7, 1915.

Mr. Alexander: What about your mother and father?

Mr. Cole: My father's name was Fred Cole, and my mother's name was Mabel Louise Bowen, until she married my father. Both of them were raised on farms.

Mr. Alexander: Were they from Ohio originally?

Mr. Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Did you go to school in Dayton?

Cole: Yes. I went to grade school and high school in Dayton.

Alexander: When did you graduate from high school?

Cole: I graduated in 1934.

Alexander: That was right in the middle of the Great Depression.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Was that a pretty difficult time for your family?

Cole: Yes, it was. I took a job working on a farm in Shelby County for $75 a month, plus room and board. I worked there for two years.

Alexander: You got $75 and room and board. That wasn't too bad. That was really pretty good.

Cole: It was enjoyable work. I had a good time.

Alexander: What were you doing?

Cole: I was working on a farm.

Alexander: There weren't too many farms in Dayton, were there (chuckle)?

Cole: No (chuckle).

Alexander: So, this was your first experience in the farming business. You were there until 1936.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: How did you happen to leave there?

Cole: At that time I returned to Dayton and got a job working at the National Cash Register Company. I signed an affidavit saying that I wanted to be an apprentice toolmaker, and I was very happy. The pay was $12.35 a week.

The exultation of having a job didn't last too long because I found out that all I was going to be doing was passing out rags and stuff like that to the old "codgers," who had been there for years. So, at the risk of getting fired, I went to my boss after a month and asked him if I could get a job in one of the departments where you were on piecework. You could make up to $40 a week.

Alexander: When you say "piecework" in a company like that, what would that be?

Cole: You would get a box full of all kinds of parts, and you would have to drill holes in them. The more pieces you put out, you got paid so much by the piece. Depending if you worked hard, you could make money.

Alexander: Did it make any difference to them how long you worked on the job each day, or did you

have to just work a certain number of hours?

Cole: You generally worked an eight- to ten-hour day.

Alexander: So, as a young man, that was a pretty good time, with pretty good wages?

Cole: Yes. That was early in 1936. I worked there for a year. In the fall of 1937, I had enough money to go to Ohio University [in Athens, Ohio].

Alexander: Good for you. Was this something your parents would hope that you would do?

Cole: Yes. My sister graduated from there. My oldest sister was a schoolteacher. I had three sisters and two brothers.

Alexander: Older or younger?

Cole: One was older, and one was younger. I am in the middle.

Alexander: You're the middle boy?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: How about sisters? Are they older or younger?

Cole: Yes, they were all older. In fact the youngest one is going to be ninety tomorrow.

Alexander: Ninety years old tomorrow? Was she the youngest?

Cole: Yes. The other two have passed away.

Alexander: You had enough money to get a year's college?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Did you have a major in the first year?

Cole: I had a little plan that had I conceived. All the time that I was a kid, except when I was working on the farm, I built model airplanes. I wanted to fly. In 1936, I also applied at Wright Field to get into the Army Air Corps, but I was turned down physically because, when playing hockey as a kid, I broke these teeth [gesture]. I still had my tonsils, and they wouldn't pass me physically.

Alexander: That was in 1936?

Cole: Yes, that was 1936.

Alexander: Would you have gone into the Aviation Cadet Program at that time, if they had taken you?

Cole: I guess, if there was one. I don't think there was one at that time.

Alexander: I don't think so.

Cole: Other people were doing it, so I thought I would give it a "whirl" [try]. Anyway, my plan was that, if I couldn't fly the Army

airplanes, I was going to be a forest ranger. Besides the basic things I had to take as a freshman, I took courses in botany.

Alexander: Very good idea. Did you get to go into the second year?

Cole: Yes, I went the second year and took the required courses and some advanced botany courses. I went a half-year in 1939. Financially, I wasn't able to subsist, and there was no means coming from home. As a matter of fact, some of the money I made in the summertime went to help out at home. My dad had just a third-grade education, but he knew a lot about construction. He and another man had started a construction company, and they built roads and bridges in Montgomery County there in Ohio. Just before the big crash [the New York Stock Market crash of October, 1929], they had "gone out on a limb" [took a chance] and bought a big concrete mixer and a lot of stuff, and they lost everything.

Alexander: That was the crash of 1929?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Did he continue as things got better? Did he go back into that business?

Cole: No, but we didn't have to go on relief. He did get a job with the city of Dayton as a sidewalk inspector. He lived until he was ninety-eight years old. I attribute that to the fact that, as a sidewalk inspector, he would go to an area, and he had gridded out that area. He would keep track where he was and where he was going all the time. He would park his car and walk the whole grid area. He would have special stuff that he would mark on the sidewalk or on the curb. Then the workers would come around and repair it.

Alexander: So, do you think it was all that walking [that helped him to live so long?]

Cole: I think the walking contributed to his longevity.

Alexander: What did you do in 1939?

Cole: I stayed home, and I got a job working at Lear Aviation, at the Dayton Municipal Airport.

Alexander: What kind of a job did you have there?

Cole: I was working in the machine shop. I wasn't really doing a lot of machine work, but it was bench work. In the meantime, I had heard about the Civilian Pilot Training Program that the government had, so I signed up for it. I got approved to take that.

Alexander: Was that the name of that program? I don't remember.

Cole: It was a program they developed where you had to sign a paper, if you were accepted, that if there were any kind of government emergency, you would make yourself available.

Alexander: If war broke out or something, you would be available?

Cole: Yes, a national emergency. They called it the Civilian Pilot Training Program. I worked in the daytime and drove up to Springfield [Ohio], at Wittenberg College, to take the ground school course. It was night school. I got my pilot's license through that.

Alexander: So, you not only had ground school, but you had flight training as well?

Cole: Yes. Bill Lear was good enough, when he

found out that I was taking pilot training, to let me take off time during the day to go and fly without losing any pay.

Alexander: That was quite a nice thing. How big of a company was Lear at that time?

Cole: It wasn't big at all. It was just the beginning of Lear Aviation. It was in a building about the size of 400 feet by 600 feet.

Alexander: Was he involved in making airplanes at that time?

Cole: No.

Alexander: I didn't think so.

Cole: His product then was radio communications. They made an automatic compass, or loop. It sits up on the airplane.

Alexander: You could adjust it, could you not?

Cole: No. That was inside that black streamlined...it was a loop of wire on the inside, and when the signals hit it, one side would have the tendency to turn toward where the signal was coming from. When it hit that, why, they equalized, and you were pointing toward the station.

Alexander: So, this was an ADF [automatic direction finder]?

Cole: Yes, that is right.

Alexander: Historically speaking, he was a very interesting part of aviation, was Bill Lear.

Cole: My job was to take that loop and stick it inside the bakelite, or some kind of a shell.

Alexander: What airplanes were you putting them on?

Cole: Most of them were Howard airplanes. They were commercial airplanes. They were not military airplanes.

Alexander: How long did it take you to get your private pilot's license?

Cole: I don't know. I think it was nine hours of solo time. I got a total of thirty-eight hours.

Alexander: Plus your ground school. What kind of an airplane were you flying?

Cole: It was a Taylorcraft.

Alexander: At that time, I don't imagine you had a lot of hood time, did you? You didn't do any instrument time?

Cole: No. A Taylorcraft didn't have a directional gyro or anything in it.

Alexander: Where are we on the timeframe? Are we in 1939 or 1940?

Cole: This is in 1939. I continued to work there. Upon my application in the CPT, they asked if I would go into the military. I put in one for either the Navy or the Army Air Corps. In November of 1940, nothing had come, so I went to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, and enlisted.

Alexander: Just as a private and not as an airman?

Cole: No, I just enlisted.

Alexander: So, this in 1940?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: What made you do that?

Cole: I got tired of waiting, and I figured something was going to happen.

Alexander: By 1940, you certainly did.

Cole: I was only there for a short time, and the thing came through.

Alexander: You were there in Kentucky, and what came through?

Cole: My orders to get into the Aviation Cadets came through. It said I had been accepted.

Alexander: Did you do any basic training in Kentucky?

Cole: No, I worked in the kitchen. My job was

running one of these big centrifugal potato peelers where you dump the whole bag of potatoes in. Real heavy stuff (laughter).

Alexander: Where did you go then?

Cole: I got orders to Parks Air College in Saint Louis, Missouri. We started out with Stearmans and then switched to the PT-19.

Alexander: How did you like the Stearman?

Cole: I liked it. I liked both of them. Anything that flew was fun.

Alexander: That was all you cared about.

Cole: Then from there we went to Randolph Field.

Alexander: In San Antonio.

Cole: And I went from Randolph Field to Kelly Field. I graduated in July, 1941.

Alexander: What were you doing at Randolph?

Cole: I was going through basic training.

Alexander: You were flying, were you not?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: What were you flying out of there?

Cole: We started out in BT-9s and then switched to BT-14s.

Alexander: Those hangars are still there.

Cole: Yes, they are. When we went to Kelly, we

started out in BC-1s.

Alexander: A BC-1 is what?

Cole: It was almost the same as an AT-6, except that they were canvas-covered from the cockpit back. They were almost the same. Then we got the AT-6.

Alexander: That was manned by two people, right?

Cole: Yes, both of them had two places.

Alexander: One was a gunner and radio operator, is that right?

Cole: No. They were both instructor and student.

Alexander: I understand. What did you learn in the AT-6?

Cole: I learned advanced training. We learned how to make long approaches like they do in bombers, and we learned formation flying and instrument flying.

Alexander: Did you have any combat training?

Cole: Only what we did with other students, when nobody was looking (laughter).

Alexander: That was a lot of fun, if you didn't kill yourself. How long were you at Kelly Field?

Cole: I was there until July, 1941.

Alexander: Then what did they do with you?

Cole: I got orders to the 17th Bomb Group in Pendleton, Oregon.

Alexander: The 17th Bomb Group. Now, you hadn't been in a bomber yet, had you?

Cole: No. I think that's the reason they taught us these long approaches.

Alexander: Because they knew you might have to do be doing that?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Where was that?

Cole: It was in Pendleton, Oregon.

Alexander: What were you flying there?

Cole: They had B-18s and B-23s, and they just started to get B-25s [North American-built Mitchell medium bombers], the A-model.

Alexander: What were you flying? Were you flying all of those?

Cole: Yes. I was flying co-pilot. We were all co-pilots. Sixteen of the people who went on the raid [the Doolittle raid on Tokyo, Japan, on April 18, 1942] were all in the same class.

Alexander: Was that at Pendleton, or was that also at Kelly?

Cole: Part of us were from Kelly, and part of us were from the Gulf coast, which was Montgomery, Alabama, and part of us were from the West Coast. We were all out of the same class--Class 41-E.

Alexander: Same class but in different locations. How long were you there learning how to fly? You flew all the planes in Pendleton?

Cole: Yes, with different pilots. They were running a bombing range at what they used to call Ephrata [a city in central Washington].

Alexander: Is that an acronym?

Cole: No, that was the name of the place where they had a bombing range. I am trying to think of the name they call it now...it was Larsen Air Force Base. It's now closed.

Alexander: In Oregon?

Cole: No, it was in Washington. Let me go back a little bit. When we reported in to Pendleton, the group itself was on maneuvers and was stationed up in Felts Field in Spokane, Washington. We went up there and reported in. They started putting us on the schedule.

Alexander: Of flying?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: You were flying bombers then, and you were a co-pilot? How many other crew members were flying with you? Were they working up crews right now?

Cole: No, it was more or less a training crew. We didn't have an assigned crew. Like, you were given an airplane, and that was it.

Alexander: I was thinking that they were training the non-coms [non-commissioned officers] in machine guns and so forth.

Cole: No.

Alexander: What about bombardiers and navigators?

Cole: For some reason, they kept the navigators and the bombardiers away. As a matter of fact, after we got up there--we reported there in July, or maybe it was around August--most of us had some leave time.

Alexander: We are talking about 1941 still?

Cole: Yes. In September, 1941, we were moved to Jackson, Mississippi. They were having maneuvers with the Army. We flew bombing missions into Louisiana, and then we moved

over to Augusta, Georgia.

Alexander: When you were doing this, at that area, you said you were doing bomb runs and so forth. Was that still just with the pilot and the co-pilot?

Cole: Some of the crew chiefs were qualified bombardiers. I guess they were doing it. The navigators and some of the officer bombardiers, we didn't have.

Alexander: It was just a matter of how many people were available.

Cole: We were dropping these blue training bombs.

Alexander: They didn't explode, did they?

Cole: No.

Alexander: They were just powder?

Cole: That is interesting. I don't know if they exploded. I know that they came apart (chuckle).

Alexander: Because you could see the residue on the ground.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: How long did you do this?

Cole: From September until December 4, 1941. On December 5, our particular squadron began the

return trip to Pendleton. We ended up spending the night in El Paso [Texas] at Biggs Field, on our way to the West Coast. On the December 6, 1941, we flew into March Field.

Alexander: Where is March Field?

Cole: It is in Riverside, California. Everybody was given open post.

Alexander: Open post?

Cole: It is the same as shore leave. That is what they called it then. Everybody went into Hollywood [California]. We were in the Hollywood Plaza Hotel. We made a night of it, and the next morning we woke up, and we were in trouble (chuckle).

Alexander: For two reasons: one, too much carousing the night before, and what was going on [because of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941].

Cole: That's right.

Alexander: I understand that very well (laughter). When did you first hear about Pearl Harbor?

Cole: I heard about it at 8:00 on Sunday morning.

Alexander: So, it was really just about the time it was

happening. [Editor's note: The attack on Pearl Harbor and the surrounding military stations on Oahu began at about 7:55 a.m. Hawaii time, which would have been approximately 10:55 a.m. on the West Coast, which is around the same time that the second and last wave of Japanese planes returned to their carriers.]

Cole: Yes. Right away, we went back out to March Field. I don't know what the delay was, but we were on alert until 4:00 on Monday morning. Then we took off and went to Pendleton.

Alexander: Can you remember what went through your mind when you heard about Pearl Harbor? First of all, did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

Cole: Yes, I knew where it was. I knew I was probably concerned, and I knew this was a time where you either had to "fish or cut bait" [make a decision], one way or the other. There was something that we were training to do, so we were going to have to take part in it.

Alexander: So, you went back to Pendleton?

Cole: Yes. We were there for two or three days. Part of us got transferred over to Portland [Oregon] to the submarine patrol. They sent part of them up to Everett and Seattle, Washington.

Alexander: Flying what?

Cole: We were flying B-25s. All of this training in the Southeast was in B-25s. Part of them went to Everett, Washington, and part of them went to Seattle, Washington. Part of us were at Portland, and some of them were down the coast farther, all on submarine patrol.

Alexander: Did anybody at that time feel like they had seen a Japanese submarine?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: There was some activity, wasn't there?

Cole: One of the pilots in the 95th Squadron, "Brick" Holstrom, sunk a submarine in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. That was before we were transferred to Columbia, South Carolina. [Editor's note: Everett W. ("Brick") Holstrom was a pilot on the Doolittle Raid and ultimately rose to the rank of brigadier general before retiring from the Air Force.]

Alexander: She was on the surface, apparently?

Cole: I don't know the circumstances, but I know he sank one, and he got credit for it.

Alexander: You don't know what size it was? It wasn't a two-man submarine probably, although it might have been.

Cole: I really don't know.

Alexander: Interesting.

Cole: We did that for about a month, and then around February 1, we were ordered back to Pendleton. On Valentine's Day in 1942, we were transferred to Columbia, South Carolina. On the trip from Pendleton to Columbia, I received my check-out on the B-25 as a first pilot.

Alexander: By this time you were still second lieutenant?

Cole: Yes. The group commander was only a lieutenant colonel; the squadron commander was a captain; the operations officer was a first lieutenant.

Alexander: That is interesting. Early on there weren't a lot of promotions going on like they had later.

Cole: We were trying to get situated in Columbia. It was a new base. We lived in tents. One day on the bulletin board, there was notice that they wanted volunteers for a dangerous mission. It didn't say what or when or anything.

Alexander: Where were you?

Cole: I was in Columbia, South Carolina. So, I stuck my name on it. I stuck it on to either go as pilot or co-pilot, either one.

Alexander: When was this again?

Cole: It must have been right around March 1, 1942.

Alexander: March 1, 1942.

Cole: Yes. Then the ones that volunteered were sent to Eglin Field, Florida. That is where we connected up with Colonel [James ("Jimmie")] Doolittle.

Alexander: Did you know, before you met him, what the thing is all about?

Cole: No.

Alexander: You just volunteered, and they said, "Here! Get your gear and get on that airplane, and you're going to go down there!" That was it.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: When you first met Colonel Doolittle at that time...

Cole: He was a lieutenant colonel.

Alexander: Yes, that's right. How did you meet him? Were you all gathered together, and he walked in and said, "Hello."? How did you meet him?

Cole: There was some conflict in that. I don't really remember the first time I met him. As a matter of fact, the navigator, Hank Potter...did you know him?

Alexander: I've heard the name. Did he go with you?

Cole: Yes, he was on our crew.

Alexander: That's right.

Cole: He says they had a meeting. I don't remember. What I remember is that I stuck my name on the list, and the pilot who checked me out put his name there, also. So, we were crewed up.

Alexander: Oh, together?

Cole: Yes. Which was fine with me because he was a good pilot. Anyway, we were sent to Eglin Field. We went through the short takeoff training and got qualified. Each one of us

had to take a physical examination. He had a problem with an ulcer, so he was disqualified.

Alexander: Was this Potter?

Cole: No. The other pilot was Captain V.L. Stinzi.

Alexander: The guy that had been your instructor?

Cole: Yes. That left us without a pilot. Realizing that there were twenty-four crews there, I guess maybe eight or ten of them had already qualified, one of which was us, so we had to do something, or we were out of business because we didn't have a first pilot. Being the second in command of the aircraft--I was the co-pilot--I made a beeline for the "ops" [operations] officer and told him we still wanted to go on the mission. I told him we were qualified, and we wanted a first pilot. He said, "Well, let me look at my list. The 'Old Man' is coming in this afternoon. I will crew you up with him." [Editor's note: "Old Man" is military slang for the commander of a unit, base, ship, etc.]

Alexander: The "Old Man?"

Cole: Yes, Doolittle. I didn't know who the "Old Man" was.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Cole: Anyway, he said, "I will crew you up with him, and if everything goes all right, you have got yourself a pilot."

Alexander: I guess (chuckle)!

Cole: That is the way it was.

Alexander: That is how you got it. Isn't that something! Let's continue. One of the things that historians will be very interested in is what your first impression of Colonel Doolittle.

Cole: As soon as I found out who it was...I knew of him, because as a kid I was a member of the Airplane Model League of America. We built rubber-band models, and we had competitions to see who could make one fly the longest. You used to put glycerin on the rubber bands so there wouldn't be friction, and a whole bunch of stuff like that. Since I was raised in Dayton, and I lived not too far from McCook Field, where Doolittle used to train and do experimental work, I knew who he was and all about him.

Alexander: How did you first meet him?

Cole: It was in a meeting where they got everybody together, when he came down there to let us know what we would be doing. He didn't tell us where we were going.

Alexander: What did he tell you?

Cole: One of the big things about the group was the secrecy of it. We weren't even supposed to talk about it among each other.

Alexander: That's understandable.

Cole: Yes. We were crewed up with him. We flew around the States with him.

Alexander: Did he like having you as his crewmen?

Cole: I guess so. He didn't kick us off.

Alexander: Okay. I didn't know, because he had not met you before, had he?

Cole: No.

Alexander: He probably knew about you, though, by the time he got on board with you.

Cole: We were just happy that we were able to perform the way he wanted us to.

Alexander: To his standards.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: How was he as the chief of the airplane?

Cole: He was very good. In the first place, he was real smart--very smart.

Alexander: He was an intelligent person.

Cole: Yes. In the second place, he had a natural knack for calculating things.

Alexander: Such as what?

Cole: I think that he could solve any kind of problem.

Alexander: You are referring to a problem concerning flying an airplane?

Cole: Yes, but not only the airplane. He was a businessman, too. He knew the "ins and outs" [was knowledgeable]. He had a doctor's degree in aeronautical engineering. He was the first man to do that, from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Boston]. Besides that, I think that he was probably the world's best pilot in a propeller-driven airplane. He called us all by our first names.

Alexander: Did he?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: All of the crew?

Cole: Yes, and all of the people whom he worked

with. He was very congenial, but if he needed to make a correction, he did it with class. He wasn't a blustery-type. He was firm, but in a social situation, he was a lot of fun. He liked to tell jokes on himself.

Alexander: How old of a man was he by that time?

Cole: He was forty-six years old.

Alexander: Tell me what it was like to learn for the very first time what this whole thing was all about. How long into this had you been before you knew it?

Cole: We did not know what we were really going to do until we were two days out at sea, and they announced it over the public address system.

Alexander: Okay. You were aboard the *Hornet* at that time. [Editor's note: The USS *Hornet* (CV-8) was the carrier from which Doolittle's sixteen B-25s were launched for the raid on Tokyo.] Let's go back, then, because you had to learn how to fly on and off a carrier. Did you have to fly back to the carrrier?

Cole: No. There was no way we could fly back on the carrier.

Alexander: But you did have to get that sucker [plane] off the deck.

Cole: While we were at Eglin, they had assigned a Navy lieutenant to teach us the techniques of making a short field takeoff.

Alexander: Could you explain that a little bit?

Cole: His name was Lieutenant Henry Miller. They marked off the different distances on the runway. At first you took off with an airplane that was not completely loaded. It was light. Then we gradually built that up until we could take off fully loaded. We were getting off of the simulated ground "carrier" before we reached the end of the "ship." They knew then that with the speed of the carrier and with any wind that we were fortunate enough to have, we could get off of the aircraft carrier.

Alexander: They found out that it was going to be possible. Before anybody tried it, they didn't know whether or not it could be done.

Cole: The maximum distance on the carrier was 450 feet because all of the airplanes were behind us.

Alexander: Your airplane was in the front.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: So, you had the least amount of room for takeoff.

Cole: No. Everyone was taxied up to the same place. Everybody had the same distance, the reason being that we were in very rough water and they had to put down some kind of special abrasive pads under each tire to keep them from slipping on the deck. The deck had gotten wet because the waves were coming up over the edge. They were afraid that somebody might slide into the island [the carrier's superstructure]. So, everybody had the same distance.

Alexander: So, they just pulled the chocks when you got ready to go. In that particular type of plane, you had two big engines. Let's get to what it's like to take off in an airplane with only 450 feet of runway. How much did the airplane weigh?

Cole: The complete weight of the whole plane with fuel, bombs, and the rest was 31,000 pounds.

Alexander: Tell me how you do that.

Cole: Well, you use full throttle, full RPMs [revolutions per minute], and full flaps. When your engines and propellers reach the maximum of their power, you release the brakes, and you start down the runway. The procedure was to rotate back so that your tail skid was about a foot off of the tarmac or the deck. In that position, the thrust would pull you off, and you would break ground and be airborne somewhere between sixty-five and seventy miles an hour. If you lost an engine, then it was all over; but if you didn't, you just kept going. In the meantime, the co-pilot's job was to pull up the landing gear and the flaps as soon as the signal was given. I had to pay attention to the cowl flaps, to keep them open enough so that the engine didn't overheat.

Alexander: When you're up to full throttle, do you remember what that manifold pressure was on those engines?

Cole: Yes. It was around thirty-some inches, and we were running at about 2,600 RPMs.

Alexander: So, you were really hammering that thing.

Those were three-bladed props. You had full flaps, and you had tail gear. So, you had a lurch when you let the brakes up. Were both of you on the brakes?

Cole: No, it was just the pilot.

Alexander: He was in total control of the whole plane, and you were keeping your feet on the floor. When he reaches a certain point, when he gets the manifold pressure and the RPMs up, then he's got to go.

Cole: Yes. When he released the brakes and we got airborne, I brought the RPMs back to 2,450--which is climbing. The manifold pressure was at about twenty-eight inches or something like that.

Alexander: Were you airborne before you left the deck, or do you know?

Cole: Oh, yes. We got off the deck before we reached the end of the ship.

Alexander: Did you come down after you left the deck?

Cole: No. The way the deck officer did it was to start us down this run when the waves were coming at him. The incoming wave brought the end of the deck up, and it kind of catapulted

us. We were off before that thing even hit.

Alexander: You weren't taking water over the deck, were you?

Cole: Yes, we were.

Alexander: Judas Priest! That's really frightening! I've only seen films of that, but it seemed to me that once they lost the ground effect of the deck, they really sank down somewhat.

Cole: They had told us how much trim tab to use, but that was a mistake. It was too much. On the second ship, Travis Hoover took off with full nose-up trim. On the third ship, they held up a sign telling them to go to trim tab neutral.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Cole: Travis and the co-pilot, [William N.] Bill Fitzhugh, pushed forward on the column and straightened it out.

Alexander: It really went straight up, didn't it?

Cole: Yes. Ted Lawson, who is the author of *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, and his co-pilot [Dean Davenport] put the flaps down, and it apparently...

Alexander: Full?

Cole: Yes, like they were supposed to be. But when he returned it to neutral, he either pushed it too far, or something went wrong with the airplane, because he took off without flaps at all, and he got off.

Alexander: He had no flaps?

Cole: No flaps.

Alexander: That is incredible! He must have had an awfully good gust of wind somewhere. How many planes were there?

Cole: There were sixteen.

Alexander: All of you got off safely?

Cole: Yes. The only accident of any consequence was Bill Farrow's last airplane. The tail of his airplane was sticking out over the ocean.

Alexander: On the backside, the stern?

Cole: Yes, on the trip. While he was taxing up to be placed for takeoff, a sailor got caught in a big gust of wind, and it blew him under the propeller and severed one of his arms. That is the only thing of consequence that happened.

Alexander: He was lucky to be alive.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: When you found out where you were going and what you were going to do, you were three days out on the *Hornet*.

Cole: We were two days out.

Alexander: Two days out on the *Hornet*. Where did you leave the coast on the *Hornet*?

Cole: We left from Alameda, California.

Alexander: You just hoisted the planes aboard the deck?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: They couldn't have put that ship anywhere they wanted to.

Cole: It was sitting right out in the open. That was one of the things that...we flew from Eglin to Biggs and gassed up, and then we went directly to McClelland. We did some compass swings and some other stuff there.

Alexander: When you say compass swings, you are talking about in the air?

Cole: No, we would take it out on the end of the runway. The crew chief turned the little screws up above.

Alexander: You were boxing your compass.

Cole: Yes, compensating.

Alexander: Well, I think we call it boxing.

Cole: From there we went to Alameda, and the co-pilots taxied the airplanes up alongside the ship. They had this big crane that came down...

Alexander: Wait a minute. Alameda was a Navy base?

Cole: Yes, a Navy base.

Alexander: You flew into Alameda?

Cole: Yes. I was talking about after we landed. The co-pilots taxied them down to where the ship was berthed.

Alexander: Down to the wharf.

Cole: Yes. They hooked the big crane to them and stuck them up on the carrier. They were all up there nice and neat. They gave everybody shore leave until midnight that night. Everybody went across...

Alexander: On a ferry?

Cole: No, it was a Navy deal. It wasn't a ferry. What do they call them?

Alexander: A captain's gig or something.

Cole: Yes, something like that. We went up to the "Top of the Mark" [a nightclub on the top floor of the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco], and we were sitting up there

having a drink and looking down, and seeing the airplanes.

The next day everybody reported in, and we took off. It was a nice, bright, sunny day. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay Bridge. I don't know if anyone suspected anything or not, but it didn't show up.

Alexander: Apparently not. I am sure that if anybody was just casually looking at it, they would think they were just ferrying those planes out to somewhere. What about the armament? They weren't armed?

Cole: No. They had it on board the ship, but we didn't have it. They loaded the bombs on the ship.

Alexander: How many bombs did you carry, and what size were they?

Cole: We had four incendiary bombs.

Alexander: Were they all incendiaries?

Cole: No, but we were supposed to "light up" [set afire] Tokyo. The original plan was that we'd take off on the April 19, instead of April 18.

Alexander: And it was April 19 when you took off?

Cole: No, it was April 18.

Alexander: Was that because of the Japanese fishing vessels? [Editor's note: Japanese picket vessels sighted the American task force about 800 miles away from Tokyo and reported its position before they were sunk, forcing an immediate launch of the bombers.]

Cole: No, I don't know the reason. We were supposed to take off around 4:00 in the afternoon.

Alexander: How far out from Tokyo were you?

Cole: We were supposed to be 400 miles, but we never made it. We had to take off before that. We were supposed to "light up" Tokyo so the rest of the pilots would have some kind of reference.

Alexander: Because it was dark.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Had you been aware of the fishing vessel out there that probably alerted the Japanese?

Cole: No, because this happened during the night, and we were all asleep.

Alexander: They saw the ship. They didn't see you flying

over it?

Cole: No. They saw one, and they were able to get by it. Then they saw another one around 6:00 or 8:00.

Alexander: In the morning?

Cole: In the morning, in daylight. They sank it.

Alexander: I knew they had sunk one of them.

Cole: It took 900-and-some shells to do it.

Alexander: (Chuckle) I could tell you a story about how that was fixed later on. When the proximity fuse came out, that was a done deal.

Cole: Is that true that they shot 900-and-some shells?

Alexander: I have heard they just blasted away at with everything they had. If they were counting, that is probably what they had.

Cole: The paradox of the thing is that they knew the thing got off a message, and, just like Pearl Harbor, nobody paid attention to it.

Alexander: It was unbelievable because there was no way you could have gotten that close. That in itself was a pretty good naval strategy to get there because you went through an awful lot of Japanese territorial waters.

Cole: While we were flying in, we stayed on the deck, and we saw a Japanese patrol aircraft up above us. I know he didn't see us.

Alexander: Was there an overcast sky?

Cole: It was partially overcast, and there were frequent clouds, and it was kind of hazy.

Alexander: My next question is, how dangerous it has always seemed for such a basically--in today's world--small carrier...how many feet did you have ahead of you?

Cole: We had 450 feet.

Alexander: We think in terms of runways that are 2,000 to 3,000 feet in the small airports.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Now, here you are loaded up, and your plane is going to be the first one to go. You've got how many thousands of pounds?

Cole: We had 31,000 pounds loaded.

Alexander: That's the whole load of the airplane. You are going to get that airborne in 450 feet?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Can you describe how that is done?

Cole: The pilot applied full power to both engines. The propellers and the throttle were at

maximum settings. The flaps were down, complete full flaps. He was holding the brakes...

Alexander: When you say, "We had full throttle and full power," what do you mean?

Cole: Full throttle, which means, he had thirty inches of...

Alexander: Of pressure?

Cole: Yes, and 2,600 RPMs.

Alexander: On each engine.

Cole: Yes. He released the brakes, and you started down the runway, or the deck, and he rocked the airplane back to where he thought the tail was about a foot off of the deck.

Alexander: On a tail-dragger, does one push forward on the yoke [steering control] a little bit to get the tail off?

Cole: Yes. On a tricycle-gear aircraft, you pull back.

Alexander: Oh, that is right.

Cole: He held that attitude, and the airplane literally flew off, just based on thrust and that was all. As it flew off, you were picking up speed, and on signal the co-pilot

pulled the wheels up, and the flaps, and paid attention to the cowl flaps to keep the engines from overheating.

Alexander: You have a certain amount of ground effect on the deck? You don't have any when you lose the deck? You wouldn't be very high off the deck. In your particular case, did you not have any...

Cole: In our particular case, we were well off before the end of the deck.

Alexander: That is really amazing, isn't it?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: There were how many planes?

Cole: There were sixteen planes.

Alexander: They all moved up to a specific point to take off. What was that for?

Cole: It was about 450 feet.

Alexander: The reason for everybody taking off at the same position was what?

Cole: They were afraid that one of the airplanes would drift over. If they started from the complete rear, which they couldn't do from the first airplane, because all of the other airplanes were behind, they might drift over

and hit the island and put the thing out of commission.

Alexander: That would be a very real tragedy. You all got off?

Cole: All of the planes made a safe takeoff.

Alexander: You are how far from Tokyo?

Cole: The Navy log says 625 miles.

Alexander: Nautical miles.

Cole: Yes, which is about seven...

Alexander: It was 720 statute miles.

Cole: Yes, 720 statute miles. [Editor's note: A statute mile is 5,280 feet; a nautical mile is 6,076 feet.]

Alexander: Yes, it's about that. What were the conditions? You took off early in the morning.

Cole: We took off at 8:20 in the morning.

Alexander: At 8:20, is that when you rotated?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: When was the last one?

Cole: It was approximately an hour later.

Alexander: When the last one got off?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Because each one had to get up to that spot

and then clear away, and then go.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: What kind of weather did you have?

Cole: It was overcast. It wasn't raining, but water was coming up over the bow, and it was very rough. There were hazy patches all around, and low overcast. It was just an ordinary, drab day.

Alexander: Was it a pretty bumpy ride?

Cole: Yes. The destroyers that were with us would disappear from sight because the waves were so big.

Alexander: Where was your landfall in Japan?

Cole: We shored in north of Tokyo.

Alexander: About how far?

Cole: About twenty miles. We were using a magnetic heading all the way.

Alexander: What do you mean by magnetic heading?

Cole: After we took off, the procedure was to make a circle around overhead and fly directly down "on the deck" [just above the surface of the water]. They would hold up a big sign telling you your magnetic heading of the ship. You set your compass with that.

Alexander: That is a good point because it could be different. You got up, you circled, and then right straight down "on the deck."

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: You got the compass heading?

Cole: Yes, then just held that heading.

Alexander: So, everybody had the same basic heading?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: When you got to Japan, you were north of Tokyo. At what altitude were you flying?

Cole: We flew in "on the deck" between 200 and 500 feet, and shortly into the island [Honshu], about twenty miles north of Tokyo, we flew maybe another five minutes inward and turned directly south and flew down a main street of Tokyo. We pulled up to 1,500 feet, dropped the bombs, went back down "on the deck" and flew at a southerly heading until about twenty-five or thirty miles offshore, and then we turned to a southwest heading toward China.

Alexander: There was a reason for you to be going south.

Cole: So that they wouldn't get the idea that we were heading for China.

Alexander: I'm sure they didn't have any idea what it could have been because of the surprise at that time. Did you happen to see any of the other planes behind you at all?

Cole: Yes. Travis Hoover was the second airplane off, and he flew on our wing pretty much all the way into Tokyo. I saw his bombs strike, but after that we didn't see him again.

Alexander: You didn't?

Cole: No. [Editor's note: Hoover's plane crash-landed in China after the raid.]

Alexander: You're away from there, but was there any interdiction? Was there any antiaircraft fire or any other type of fire?

Cole: No, we were not intercepted. We saw quite a few airplanes in the air, but none of them accosted us.

Alexander: What did you think about not being accosted by the enemy?

Cole: Well, we weren't jumped by any...

Alexander: Why wouldn't they have jumped you?

Cole: Because, I figured, they were mainly training planes, and the visibility was strictly vertical only. It was very hazy, even though

it was a sunny day. They didn't see us. We were shot at by antiaircraft guns, but we received no hits. There were a few bumps, but no hits. We avoided some observation balloons.

Alexander: They were tethered balloons.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Where were headed, then, specifically to get into China? What was your destination to get into China?

Cole: Chuchow, which was about eighty miles inland. It is about eighty miles south of Hangchow. We flew the southwesterly heading. I would like to go back a minute.

Alexander: Yes.

Cole: The extreme farthest southwest island of Japan, we flew directly over it.

Alexander: Is that Okinawa?

Cole: No, it wasn't Okinawa.

Alexander: Kyushu, then?

Cole: Kyushu, yes.

Alexander: You flew right over Kyushu?

Cole: No, we flew over the...there are two or three peaks. I guess you would call them volcanic

islands that stick up. One of them is called Kagoshima.

Alexander: Yes, cones.

Cole: Yes, cones. We flew directly over those. From there we went straight across the China Sea, toward China.

Alexander: From this point on, you were over land, then?

Cole: No, but we were pretty close to where we would have been able to land, had everything been all right.

Alexander: By saying that, you are saying that, if everything had gone just exactly the way it should have, you would have had a landing strip to go to?

Cole: Yes. We would have gassed up and gone on to Kunming.

Alexander: I see. But, instead of that, what did you do?

Cole: Instead of that happening, we were on instruments at 9,000 feet, and it was raining. There was no homer. We just had to fly until we ran out of gas, and then we bailed out.

Alexander: What were your feelings about this? Was it:

"What else can we do?"

Cole: Really, there was no other alternative. It didn't take much to make up your mind (chuckle).

Alexander: Tell me about bailing out. You are second in command, and you have how many aboard--five crew members?

Cole: Yes, there was a crew of five.

Alexander: Two of you pilots and three others?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: So, they had gone on ahead of you, and then it was your turn?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Tell me about jumping out. You couldn't see the ground, right?

Cole: No. They were "socked-in" [covered by clouds] from the ground up. We were at 8,500 or 9,000 feet, and it was way above us. It was a big, warm front.

Alexander: You just jumped out and said, "Alleluia!"

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Did you see the colonel jump out, also?

Cole: No, because I had already left.

Alexander: I didn't know if you could look back.

Cole: No, you couldn't see. I tried using my flashlight, but it was like being in fog, and it just reflected back. You couldn't see anything. I thought I would be able to see the ground, but I couldn't do it.

Alexander: It was daylight, too, was it not?

Cole: No, it was night.

Alexander: Oh, it was night.

Cole: Yes, it was night.

Alexander: That made it even worse.

Cole: It was 8:20 in the evening.

Alexander: So, you really didn't have much daylight? Well, in April you probably didn't have any daylight.

Cole: No, because it was dark, or pretty close to being dark, when we hit the coast. The lights were just beginning to come on.

Alexander: Do you have any idea how far you fell before you pulled the ripcord?

Cole: No, I don't. We counted "1,000, 2,000, 3,000!", instead of saying "3,000!" right off of the bat (chuckle).

Alexander: Did I understand that you busted your eye as you pulled your cord?

Cole: No, I had a flashlight in my right hand, and I changed it to my left; and I ducked my head down to pull the rip cord, and I pulled it so hard that I gave myself a black eye (chuckle).

Alexander: Did you have glasses on at the time?

Cole: No.

Alexander: What was it like landing?

Cole: It was very nice. My 'chute drifted over a pine tree, and I stayed there all night.

Alexander: So, it was a real soft landing?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: How far off the ground were you?

Cole: About twelve feet.

Alexander: So, you spent the night in the tree?

Cole: Yes. The next morning I woke up and got down on the ground and started walking west with the compass I had.

Alexander: What did you do with your 'chute?

Cole: I carried it. I had a lot of practice in flying school. If you goofed up, why, you had to walk on the ramp with your 'chute on. I had a lot of experience (chuckle).

Alexander: Did you attempt to make any noise enough to

catch any of your other crew people?

Cole: No.

Alexander: You had no idea where they were.

Cole: I figured that would be useless because I didn't hear anything, and I was in a pretty remote area. I also figured that, if I stayed in a remote area, my chances of getting captured would have been reduced.

So, I started walking west, and I walked all day. In the evening I came out on a precipice. There was a compound of Chinese Nationalists.

Alexander: Because you saw the flag?

Cole: Yes, I saw the flag. I went down there and knocked on the door. A young man answered it and took me inside, and on the table was a piece of paper with a drawing of a two-tailed airplane with five 'chutes coming out of it. I pointed out that I was the fourth 'chute. He took me to another building, and it turned out that the person who had drawn the picture was the "Old Man."

Alexander: He had drawn that picture?

Cole: Yes. In trying to make himself understood,

he drew the picture.

Alexander: Good idea. Did you all have the jacket that had the flag on the back--the Chinese flag? On the flight jacket, where they had the Chinese flag on the back?

Cole: No.

Alexander: I know at one time they decided to stop using it because it became kind of a target.

Cole: We got those after the raid.

Alexander: I didn't know if it started with the raid or not. Did he take you in to see him?

Cole: He finally took me to the place where the colonel was. Later on, they brought in the rest of the crew.

Alexander: So, you were all together?

Cole: Yes, we were all together.

Alexander: Did they feed you?

Cole: They fed us, and we had a place to sleep. After a few days there, why, they started to move us out of the occupied territory by horseback, by walking, and by bus, by seating chair, and by boat.

Alexander: Bicycles?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: What kind of boat was it? Was it, like, a sampan or something?

Cole: Yes. We arrived at a river, and they put us on a boat. There was a sampan, and we were in the bottom of it. They went down one river and back up another river. It was late at night and early in the morning. When we arrived at a place where we could be seen, somebody knocked on the boat and said, "Are there any Americans in there?" The crew chief said, "That doesn't sound like a Chinese to me." It turned out it was John Birch.

Alexander: John Birch of the John Birch Society? [Editor's note: John Birch was an American missionary in China when the U.S. entered the war. Birch became an assistant chaplain with the American Volunteer Group (the "Flying Tigers") and then a second lieutenant serving as liaison officer between the Chinese and U.S. forces in China. On August 25, 1945--eleven days after the war had ended--he was killed by Chinese Communists. Robert Welsh, a well-known anti-Communist of the 1950s,

named his organization after this "first victim of the Cold War."]

Cole: He obviously didn't know anything about the society. It was named after him. He volunteered to Colonel Doolittle that he would do his best to see if he could help get the rest of the crews out into safety.

Alexander: Because they were all going to be taking the same route?

Cole: They were scattered all over. He could speak Chinese. From there, we ended up in a place called Hang Yang. They sent a C-47 in to pick us up and take us to Chungking. At that point the "Old Man" got orders to return to the States immediately.

Alexander: When you went to Chungking, was that not where the general [General Claire Chennault] of the Flying Tigers was?

Cole: No, he was at Kunming.

Alexander: Oh, he was at Kunming. That is right. I forgot. Did you not see him, or go there?

Cole: Yes, but that was later. We went to Chungking first, where we met the Madame [Soong Mei-ling, wife of the Nationalist

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek]. That was the provisional capital at the time.

Alexander: You met the Madame?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: What did the Madame have to say?

Cole: She was very pleased that we had bombed Japan. She gave us each a medal.

Alexander: That is interesting.

Cole: She wished us well, and that was the end of that.

Alexander: By this time, was it just you and your crew, or were there more crews?

Cole: No, it was everybody.

Alexander: Everybody is now together?

Cole: Everybody except the injured people.

Alexander: You said Colonel Doolittle was sent home?

Cole: Yes, he was sent home. The rest of us were sent to Calcutta, India, where we got new uniforms and so forth. Then we were sent back to China.

Alexander: Oh, you were?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: With an airplane?

Cole: No. We were assigned to the 11th Bomb

Squadron. One of the raiders, "Brick" Holstrom, was the commander of the 11th Bomb Squadron. They brought in some B-25s. We flew bombing missions out of Kunming.

Alexander: To where?

Cole: Down over Burma and eastern China.

Alexander: I was wondering if you were in the CBI [China-Burma-India Theater].

Cole: We made a couple of raids. I made one of them on Hong Kong, and some of the places in eastern China.

Alexander: Did you get into Burma at all in support of the troops there in Burma?

Cole: Not then, but I did later on. I flew the B-25 until July, 1942. Then there was an overage of pilots because that was the end of the supply lines, and we didn't have any airplanes.

Alexander: You flew B-25s?

Cole: Yes. I volunteered to go on the "Hump" [Himalaya Mountains] flying transports. I flew that until June, 1943.

Alexander: So, that was for a year?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Tell me a little bit about that, because most of the time when you were flying the "Hump," you were transporting gasoline, weren't you?

Cole: I flew everything: gasoline, ammunition, foodstuffs...

Alexander: And some people?

Cole: Yes, people. We flew a lot of supplies over and brought Chinese soldiers back. They were trained there in India, and later on they became part of "Merrill's Marauders." They helped take back Burma. [Editor's note: The 530th Composite Unit (Provisional), led by Major General Frank Merrill, was a U.S. commando force that operated behind Japanese lines in Burma.]

Alexander: Merrill's Marauders was a less than a division-size unit and came early on, because we had just made a provision with the British to assist in keeping the Japanese from taking Burma. [Editor's note: The Japanese seized most of Burma between December, 1941, and May, 1942. Allied forces retook much of the country back by the end of 1944, but fighting there continued until the end of the war in

August, 1945.]

Cole: I came home in June, 1943, and in October I volunteered to go back over in the 1st Air Commandos.

Alexander: Tell me about the 1st Air Commandos.

Cole: It was an organization that was commanded by [Lieutenant Colonel] Phil Cochran and [Lieutenant Colonel] John Alison.

Alexander: What did they do?

Cole: I went back over in C-47s. The idea was to cut Burma in half with gliders. The procedure was that we would haul two gliders in on each airplane loaded with this small engineering equipment, bulldozers, and tractors, and so forth. By the next night, they would have a runway built, and we could go in and land. We hauled in all kinds of ammunition and troops, and donkeys. It was in support of General [Orde C.] Wingate, who was a British general. We built about five or six airfields across the middle of Burma. [Editor's note: Wingate was originally posted to India, where he organized the Chindits, a mixed force of Ghurkas, Burmese,

and British, which launched raids into Burma in early 1943. The Chindit raids proved that such forces, if supplied by air, could operate successfully in such terrain.]

In the meantime, Merrill's Marauders made a sweep south, and we cut Burma in half. They also brought in B-25s, P-47s [Republic Thunderbolt fighters], and P-51s [North American-built Mustang fighters]. They shot up the Japanese air force that was over there.

Alexander: Was that a pretty good-sized air force?

Cole: It was just about the size of one big squadron. They all belonged to the 1st Air Commandos.

Alexander: No, I meant the Japanese.

Cole: I don't know for sure. But what they had, they were all based down in Rangoon [Burma]. When that happened the Japanese started to pull back, and they went all the way and took Burma back.

Alexander: If we had lost Burma, we would have lost China. That is what the historians say today.

Cole: Yes. Then I came home from that in July.

Alexander: It was in June, 1943, when you went back over.

Cole: No. I went over in October, 1943. I came home in July, 1944. I was stationed in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as an acceptance test pilot at the Douglas Aircraft plant.

Alexander: Oh, that is right. What were you flying?

Cole: Anything they had there. They had a modification center, and they were making airplanes, also. The big factory was manufacturing the A-26, and the "mod" center had B-17s, B-25s, P-61s, C-47s--just about anything. It was a good job.

Alexander: You were doing a lot of flying.

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Did you do any instructing at all?

Cole: No.

Alexander: Did you run across Doolittle after this time? Did you hear from him anymore?

Cole: Oh, yes. First off, he wrote a letter to every parent, telling them where their son was and what he was doing. That was the first thing he did when he got back. Then he had

told us before that, if we all survived, he was going to throw us a party when we got back. So, in April, 1945--at his own expense--he threw a party for us down in Miami, Florida.

Alexander: Really?

Cole: Yes. That is how the reunion thing evolved.

Alexander: What time in 1945 did he throw that party? Do you remember what month?

Cole: In April.

Alexander: Oh, that was before I got there. It was a pretty good "bash" [party], I'll bet.

Cole: Yes, it was. A man by the name of Bernard McFadden, who was the owner of McFadden Deauxville Hotel, and was also the publisher of *Collier's* magazine, was there. Anyway, that is how the reunion was born. Then we had one more, and we decided that if we were going to do this, we needed to have some kind of purpose other than having a party, just to party. We decided that we would give out a scholarship. We went to a town and would ask them ahead of time if they would select people who were deserving students. We would

give them a scholarship. We have been doing that ever since.

Alexander: Since from 1946 on?

Cole: Yes. Maybe from 1948 or 1949.

Alexander: Sure, I can understand. What an awfully nice thing to do.

Cole: The scholarship started out at $1,500, and then it went to $3,000, and then up to $5,000.

Alexander: Wow! Pretty darn nice! How many survivors are there now?

Cole: There are twenty-seven, I think.

Alexander: Twenty-seven out of how many?

Cole: Out of eighty.

Alexander: Out of eighty. So, you are still having your reunions?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Let me ask you this. Were you at the Douglas plant in Tulsa when the war ended?

Cole: Yes, I was at Tulsa when the war ended.

Alexander: Both wars [meaning the European and Pacific Theaters of World War II]?

Cole: Yes.

Alexander: Was there anytime between May 18 and July

that somebody said, "We may need to have you out there."

Cole: No.

Alexander: That never came up? There was no concern about that?

Cole: No.

Alexander: What did you do after you got out of the service?

Cole: I had bought twenty acres down in the Valley.

Alexander: In the Rio Grande Valley?

Cole: Yes. I retired from George Air Force Base. We were in California.

Alexander: George?

Cole: George Air Force Base.

Alexander: You stayed in for how long?

Cole: I was in the Air Force for twenty-six years.

Alexander: What rank did you come out as?

Cole: I came out as a lieutenant colonel. Anyway, we bought these twenty acres because we always wanted to build our own house. It had orange trees on it, so we built a house right in the middle of an orange grove. We got together with another retiree, who had an acreage of grapefruit, and leased a packing

shed and began to pick and pack and sell our own fruit. We bought a "semi" [truck]. We had a route up through San Antonio up to Dallas, and west to Sweetwater, and back down to Kerrville [all in Texas], and then back down in the Valley.

Alexander: And load up again.

Cole: He took the trip one time, and I took the next. It was a profitable deal. When they started to give out food stamps in the Valley, you couldn't get the help, so we got out of it. I had pushed all my orange trees out and planted avocados, and some ex-Marine came by and wanted to buy the property, so I sold it. The next winter all the avocados were frozen.

Alexander: What a shame.

Cole: He got a divorce from his wife.

Alexander: Something very good for you but nothing very good for him. That is too bad. I know you have children, so you had to have gotten married.

Cole: Oh, yes.

Alexander: When was that?

Cole: I got married on the October 11, 1943, and went back overseas.

Alexander: Whom did you marry?

Cole: I married a young lady by the name of Lucia Martha Harrell [?]. Her family was from El Paso, Texas. Her sister was married to a Navy lieutenant pilot. He was an All-American from the [Texas] School of Mines and Metallurgy [now the University of Texas at El Paso]. He got killed "right off the bat" [immediately] at the beginning of the war. His folks lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They came to Tulsa to help their parents with their bereavement. While they were there, they decided that they were going to do something for the war effort. So, they went out to the Douglas plant, and they both got jobs.

That's where I met her. The way that I met her was that I was going to test up a B-24 [Consolidated Liberator heavy bomber], and it had the APQ-13 radar in it. You had to take it up to altitude to see if it would work, and it was pressurized. She came up and asked if she could go along. I told her,

"No," because we couldn't take passengers. In the meantime, the co-pilot and I got up in the airplane and cranked up and took off. At about 12,000 feet, she came climbing up to the cockpit. She had talked the crew chief into letting her get on the airplane.

Alexander: (Chuckle) That's tenacity for you.

Cole: So, we had to abort and come down. When we got on the ground, Major Hughes, who was the co-pilot, was a "rounder." He took out a matchbook and gave it to her. He told her to write her phone number on it. So, she did, but she turned around and gave it to me (laughter).

Alexander: That's a great story (chuckle). What about children?

Cole: We had five children.

[Tape ends abruptly]