

Harold Uriah Leon Oral History Interview

PETER RIESZ: Okay, today is July 7th of the year 2000. It's 2:15 on a Friday afternoon. We're at the home of Mr. Leon at 2202 East Lorma Vista in Victoria, Texas. I'm Peter Reese interviewing for the Military Order of World Wars. Good afternoon, Harold.

HAROLD URIAH LEON: Hi, my name is Harold U. Leon.

PR: What is the u for?

HUL: I tease and say it's useless, but it's actually Uriah.

PR: Oh, that's right. How do you spell Uriah?

HUL: U-R-I-A-H.

PR: All right.

HUL: I was born January 14, 1918, Saint Joseph's Hospital in Houston, Texas.

PR: Where'd you attend elementary school?

HUL: I don't think you need all this.

PR: (laughs)

HUL: You really don't.

PR: Well, I just like to get it. One school, or did you move around?

HUL: I've got so much other stuff that's so much more important than the elementary school, and the this, and the that. But if this is what you want -- if you want some of this, I'll give it to you. The first five grades I went to Kinkaid, a private school in Houston. My folks

sent me to San Antonio Academy in San Antonio, Texas, and I spent the seventh -- let's see, the sixth, seventh, and eighth... Oh, the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade at Antonio Academy. I went to high school in Houston, Sanderson High School, and I graduated in 1935.

PR: All right! Did you have any other schooling after that?

HUL: No, I cut wood. No. I went to the University of Texas and the University of Houston. I got out in 1940.

PR: And when did you...?

HUL: Let me do it my way.

PR: Okay.

HUL: Because there are things that you don't know. It might be a lot easier.

PR: Well, I just like to lead up to how you came in the service.

HUL: Let me --

PR: Okay.

HUL: My draft number was 48, but in the meantime, I put in for the Army Air Corps Cadet School. Lyndon Johnson was congressman at that time, and he must've seen my name, and when I got approved to go to cadet school -- I have a telegram here congratulating me from him, and I kept this correspondence up for many years. At cadet school, I went to pre-flight at Ellington Field and from Ellington Field, I went to Kelly in San Antonio.

PR: What timeframe are we looking at?

HUL: I was getting there.

PR: Okay.

HUL: I graduated Kelly April 10, 1942, as a navigator, and I got my wings at that time. I was then sent to Esler Field, Louisiana.

PR: How do you spell Esler?

HUL: E-S-L-E-R, that's Alexandria, Louisiana. It was a B-25 outfit. Originally, it was known as the 12th Bomb Group and originally started in Tacoma, Washington. And it was a cadre there, and the 12th Bomb Group was split in two. The original -- my upperclassmen went on the Doolittle Raid. Twelve Second Lieutenants were sent to Esler Field in the flood area, and there were a number of army bases around. There were probably 240 military personnel around there -- 240,000 military personnel around there. But we were at Esler Field, it was a small outfit, and it was in the swamps. We were staying in tents, and the river came up, and they had to move us. And the 12 of us were sent to a house of prostitution called [Ma Hovell's?] House

PR: (laughs) In Alexandria?

HUL: In Alexandria, Louisiana. It was very famous because some lieutenant governors of Louisiana, and state representatives, and so on had married some of the girls. A very pretty place. Anyway, I got to Esler and we started training and the... The military had broken the

Japanese code, and they sent us to Stockton, California, and we would go out into the Pacific to look for the Japanese Navy. Instead of hitting the West Coast, they hit Alaska. They hit the Aleutians. Once that happened, we came back to Esler Field, and we were training, and the Germans had broken through at Tobruk Brook in Africa. We got new planes in Florida, and we were immediately sent to Africa.

PR: Is it B-25?

HUL: The old B-25s. We got our new planes in Florida, and we flew from Florida to Puerto Rico, a place called Borinquen from Borinquen to Trinidad, and from Trinidad to South America, to Belém and Natal in Brazil. And from there, we flew to Ascension Island. From Ascension, we went to Lagos, got on the Gold Coast, and through the middle of Africa. We couldn't go into North Africa. That was all at that time Vichy French, and Vichy French was actually under the control of Hitler and Germany. Anyway, we flew from Lagos to places -- I don't remember all of the names, -- but through Maiduguri, Kano, and to Khartoum, and then Sudan, and flew up the Nile River to a place called Ismailia. That is on the Suez Canal. It took us 10 days to fly this route.

PR: From Puerto Rico?

HUL: No, from Florida. In our plane, we had some of our ground crew, and the plane was loaded -- some of the kids

we had in our plane had never flown in their life. In Ismailia, we went to a place called Moascar. Moascar was in the desert there. The British had tents for us.

PR: Was this in the Sinai or in Egypt?

HUL: In Egypt, I told you. We go over to, I said, it's Ismailia, right off the Suez Canal.

PR: Right.

HUL: Okay, there. And Moascar became our base. In the meantime, Rommel and his troops -- having broken through Tobruk -- were getting to a place close to -- called Ismail-- called... Hold on... Is this on?

PR: Mm-hmm.

HUL: We might have to edit this.

PR: That's all right. This is just going to be rough.

HUL: Yeah. To a place called El Alamein. Now, El Alamein, between the Qattara Depression and the Mediterranean, was 40 miles big. And this is where the British troops or the British Eighth Army because there were more than just British. There were New Zealanders, Aussies, the Sikhs from India, and the Gurkhas. And we helped stop Rommel there. In the meantime, we did some night missions.

PR: Now, wait a minute. When did you start flying missions, as soon as you got there?

HUL: A couple nights after I got there.

PR: When did you arrive over there, at your final base, you know, approximately?

HUL: No final base.

PR: Well, the second one, off the Suez Canal that the British prepared for you.

HUL: In July?

PR: July of '42?

HUL: Forty-two.

PR: Okay.

HUL: Yeah. I mean don't think of... You're ground troop, your brain is not -- anyway. And we did a few night missions, but the flares on our aircraft, you could see them from a great distance. And the German night fighters knocked down a couple of our planes including our group commander -- a man by the name of Colonel Goodrich.

PR: Now, what group were you in, what Bomb Group?

HUL: This was the 12th Bomb Group.

PR: Twelfth Bomb Group? And were you a squadron then of the 12th --

HUL: What? Let me -- I'll get to it. The 12th Bomb Group and we had four squadrons, 83rd which I was in, 82nd, the 81st, and the 434. (pause) The 434 and our squadron were at Moascar, and the other two were at Deversoir on the other side of the lake. I'm going to go on and get a map to -- because this sounds very strange to you.

PR: No, I'm going to look all these places up.

HUL: Well, I should have gotten a map out. Anyway, when we

stopped Rommel, we got a new commander for the British 8th, his name was Alexander, and his field marshal was Montgomery. I can't give you the exact dates because I have to look it up. We then moved up right behind our bomb line, approximately 10 miles behind the bomb line. And we made some missions, but then we made a... Montgomery decided to make a full attack, and we bombed for 10 straight days. Each squadron bombed three times a day and the group -- let's see. I can't remember exactly. Anyway, this was for 10 days, we bombed the bomb line, and we bombed right at the bomb -- right in front of our troops. They told stories about us. That we were a couple hundred yards in front of our troops there at the bomb line. And we flew day missions. We flew -- called the Invincible 18. They were in a formation of 18. And we would fly between 10,000 or 9,000-foot elevation to approximately 12,000 feet in formation. And the reason we flew that was that the British 40-millimeter gun, their Bofors were contact shells, and they sort of played out, and weren't accurate at over 10,000 feet. And their 99-millimeter gun was a timing -- you set a timer on it, and it wasn't accurate until about 11,000 or eleven-five. So, we would fly in between it. We would have huge holes in our aircraft, but the shell would go on up ahead like they have a whole light like this.

PR: That's from friendly fire?

HUL: No! This is Rommel's anti-tank guns and he blew up -- they went up like that.

PR: But you flew in that distance, so you wouldn't get hit by friendly fire?

HUL: Yeah. That wasn't friendly fire. That was German fire.

PR: But you said about the 40s that would only get to 9,000 and the other British --

HUL: The 40-millimeter. That was all German.

PR: Oh, okay.

HUL: Yeah. We were not shot at by our troops. Our troops would watch us.

PR: They were captured British weapons then --

HUL: No --

PR: -- that the Germans were using?

HUL: -- they were German weapons, their German anti-tank gun. Have you heard of the --?

PR: Eighty-eight.

HUL: The 88?

PR: Oh yeah.

HUL: Okay. World famous. When I was on a lead crew, I'd be the navigator, and when we were sort of short-handed, I'd be the bombardier and the navigator; although, my MOS was navigation. Now, let's try to think. I'm sure I'm leaving something out, but we were -- This was at El Alamein, and there was about 40 miles' area where the

troops could come through, and that's why we kept pounding it. The place 10 miles behind our line was called El Daba. It was LG 99, a little place to go. The Germans still had quite a few -- fly their aircraft, and they would try to stop us on take-off, and we would be attacked on taking off. And we had our fighter support in the 57th and 79th, both Americans, and I think they -- well, most of them P-40s. Did have a few P-39s, originally, but they got a little slow, and that was medium cover. Top cover, we gradually got British Spitfires, and they would support us. We broke through on the Eighth Army, broke through at El Alamein, and chased Rommel across Egypt, Libya, Tunisia over a long period of time. And we kept moving up as we were chasing. They would send -- like in Egypt, the Egyptian women would go out there and pound them, rock into sand to make a landing place, and there was nothing for us to come right on in. And we would put our tents there. And this went on. We went to a place called [McGrinn?] and... Well, it was a whole area. I need a map, but anyway, I went on up and was fighting all the way. I lost my squadron commander near Sfax. On May 12, 1943, the Afrika Korps surrendered. By the way, we met up with the American troops at Medenine. I'm trying to think when, but I don't remember the exact date. They had come from Iran, and Casablanca, and so on. It was General

Mark Clark. From the North African campaign, we bombed a little Island called Pantelleria and they capitulated. And then, we went into Sicily, I went in Sicily, I think D plus three, at a place called Ponte Olivo on the southern coast. And in passing, we didn't ever have all our trucks, our clothes. During this whole campaign, we ate British food, I can still smell mutton, and had some C rations. Our ships, who had come all the way around Africa, and we didn't -- we never saw it. I heard that they got here in November of '43, over a year after. Anyway, we sent our ground personnel into this Ponte Olivo or Gela, the two places in Sicily, and who should be there? What's his name, Old Blood and Guts?

PR: Patton?

HUL: Patton, I would say, saw our troops and couldn't understand. And saw these burnt-out German trucks and British trucks, right-hand drive and left-hand -- they were all... And the troops wearing bush jackets and British clothes, and desert boots. He wanted to know who the hell they were. Well, the officer in charge told him. He was Captain Edwards, the name. Anyway, Edwards said -- he turned to his exec and he says, "Get these people food, clothes, and transportation within 24 hours," and we got it. We had been driving burnt-out trucks and... I'll show you some pictures of them.

PR: This is in Sicily still?

HUL: Right when we entered Sicily. We had --

PR: Harold, do you have a list of your missions in Africa and Sicily?

HUL: Yeah, I got them, sure.

PR: Okay. Well, you can summarize that for me some time.

HUL: You know, I would -- well, all together, I don't have it (inaudible). Well, I'll tell you later. I did 55 missions, and I did some path-finding missions, which is lighting up targets for others to bomb. I think I did 20 or 25 of those. The other thing, if you got a picture of the desert and sandstorms, and I have papers missing, and stuff like that... Well, I got a lot of papers anyway, but we were tactical. We weren't like the heavy bombers. We were always within distance of our troops.

PR: So, the tactical is more direct troop support of targets --

HUL: You never heard --

PR: -- versus the bomber group, which would be --

HUL: We're bombers --

PR: -- bomb targets...

HUL: --but there are two names and, you know, still to this day. I thought of it and then I forgot about it. Tactical and then -- I'll think of it. I had it in mind, anyhow... Strategic, the strategic bombers, like the B-24s, B-17s. Oh, by the way, through this African campaign, we did go on a mission to Crete. Had to go

individuals because a little long flight for the B-25s, and we had extra gas tanks. Anyway, we bombed Crete. I don't know whether, but right around that time was when Colonel Keller came, hit Ploiesti? In Romania. Anyway, in Sicily, I did night missions, and one night we lost a number of planes. I believe that some of them were killed by the -- knocked down by the German night fighters and others who had flown near a place called Syracuse right on the east coast there, and were shot down by Navy fire. Anyway, the Germans got holed up just North of Mount Etna and they moved us to a base -- our little field was called Gerbini Main, and that was about 20 miles from Catania. Does the name mean anything to you?

PR: Mm-hmm.

HUL: Well, part of Catania, but in the cathedral there, Columbus worshipped there. One of the trips that Columbus took, I think that he took it out to Catania.

PR: Oh, in Sicily?

HUL: Mm-hmm. Anyway, I bombed that time, kept bombing the troops, but they were all night missions at that time. And then, this was already the fall of (inaudible) -- I also got into Salerno and landed there, and the navy tried to shoot at us. I took some generals. And on take-off, we decided to take off over the German troops, and we didn't have any trouble. And then I, from there,

moved to Foggia in Italy.

PR: Your whole bomb group, the whole 12?

HUL: No, this was the 83rd, so --

PR: Oh, the 83rd.

PR: Well all moved, but we were all within the vicinity of each other.

PR: Okay. What Air Force was this by the way?

HUL: We went from the 9th, to the 12th, the 15th.

PR: Why the change in the Air Force, though?

HUL: Well --

PR: It was just part of the reorganization as things developed?

HUL: Well, one of the reasons. The command originally was General Burton in the 9th Air Force, so he took, I guess, his general staff, and all of that, not really the aircraft but the squadrons. The 98th and the 376th, the heavy bombers stayed with us, and the 57th and 79th fighter went towards the original 9th and the 12th. He went on to Britain, and that's when the 9th Air Force in Britain needed a tactical --

PR: Oh, I see. Most of the 9th went to Britain --

HUL: That's what I was saying --

PR: Then you --

HUL: But that's just their headquarters. I mean, I don't know how to explain to you. The main 9th went to the -- basically.

PR: So then, for orders, your purpose is you were assigned to the 12th Air Force then?

HUL: And also, we were assigned with the British and their outfits all together.

PR: About when did you get to Foggia, do you think? What time frame are we looking at?

HUL: I think it was probably in Se-- when I came back home right about then, about September.

PR: September of --?

HUL: Forty-three.

PR: Forty-three? Okay. [Where'd you fly your missions out of Foggia?]

HUL: We'd just land there. The reason why I'm having a difficult time here is Mount Vesuvius interrupted -- erupted, and we lost quite a few of our planes there. And they had to get new planes. And from there, we stayed on alone. They operated then went to India. I didn't. I came back home.

PR: Oh, okay.

HUL: I had done, like I told you, 25 pathfinder missions, which was flying in around 4,000, 5,000 feet and dropping incendiary bombs to light up the targets. And I did 55 bombing missions, of which a number of them, on the lead crew, I was the navigator predominantly. That's it.

PR: And was it true you needed 50 missions to rotate?

HUL: Oh, I think it depended on what happened. Not

necessarily, my best friend came back after 11 or 12 missions, but he'd been shot up quite a bit. He retired as a colonel. Harold B. Larson.

PR: And those 25 pathfinders really didn't count as a combat mission?

HUL: Well, I think they did, but the thing is that I was squadron navigator, and I was sharing group navigator. I was sharing that with a guy by the name... He and I had gone through cadet school and the whole way, and he was there, his name was Albert P. Muska, and he was from Perth Amboy, New Jersey. And we were sharing, and he wanted to stay, so he could become a major and he was wanting to stay in the Army Air Corps. And so, I said, "I'll go on home." So, I flew on back to a place called Ifrane and then -- a beautiful rest place near Fez, Morocco and then when the... It was called the Queen of Scotland, or whatever it was. When the ship came in, a very fast ship, they took us home. I came back with the commanding officer, one of the people of the 99th Fighter Squadron.

PR: From Casablanca?

HUL: Yeah, I came back to Fort Dix.

PR: Where did you land? In New York Harbor then?

HUL: I guess Fort Dix where --

PR: Did you come in convoy or just so fast, you didn't need to --?

HUL: Fast. We came fast and when we did -- one night, I think something on the sonar. We picked up something, and, boy, he made some 360 circles, and nearly knocked me out of my bunk bed. The commanding officer of the 99th fighter was Major Davis, and he and I played bridge together, and later became a general. This was the all black, the only black squadron. They were very, very good. They had given us some support.

PR: What was your rank when you started back?

HUL: Captain.

PR: Captain?

HUL: I have a copy of my -- they put in for major, but I don't know what happened to it. I have a copy of it. It's quite old. Within the desert and where we lived, you can't picture.

PR: Got blown away.

HUL: Well, I got a copy -- it's threadbare now -- somewhere.

PR: Mind if I ask you a few questions about the mission in Africa and Sicily there?

HUL: I don't know what you're going to ask, but --

PR: You mentioned a thing, a bomb line. What was a bomb line?

HUL: That's what I was looking for. You never heard that expression?

PR: Uh-uh. No.

HUL: Well, if your troops are lined up here, and your troops

are here, and these are the Germans here, that's a bomb line.

PR: Oh, okay. So, it'll just be a line in front of your troops, some pre-determined distance?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: How would you find out where the bomb line was? Was that part of your briefing for the mission?

HUL: Well, you knew you weren't supposed to drop bombs on your troops.

PR: But how do you know they're our troops though? From 10,000 feet, you don't see people. How do you know it's our troops?

HUL: Well, I just wish I had a --

PR: Is there a way of identification?

HUL: No --

PR: Or do your intelligence people tell you?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: Okay.

HUL: Let me see what I got.

PR: So, it's marked by your intelligence people then?

HUL: Well, don't put that down. I mean that's sort of in a -- people in the service know what you're talking about. That's like saying, "going to the head." Do I have to explain that that's a latrine?

PR: Why did you bomb at night so much? Was someone else bombing during the day? Or was it for defense?

HUL: You know, it just depends. It depends on what kind of --
what's the target --

PR: Well, you've mentioned most of your flying was at
nighttime.

HUL: No, no. Oh, no.

PR: Oh, okay. That's not --

HUL: No, I didn't say that.

PR: Okay. How did you become a navigator when you went to
your initial training? What steered you toward
navigating?

HUL: I think it was the test.

PR: A series of tests?

HUL: Uh-huh.

PR: Okay.

HUL: The navigator then went as a pre-flight.

PR: What sort of training did you have then for a navigator?
A lot of map-reading training, direction finding?

HUL: Oh, you are a civilian.

PR: Mm-hmm. Right, that's who's going to listen to this.
Well, I mean, what would your training be?

HUL: Let's see. (pause) You ever heard of pilotage?

PR: Uh-uh.

HUL: Ever heard of dead reckoning?

PR: Mm-hmm.

HUL: Ever heard of celestial navigation?

PR: Mm-hmm. So, these are the things they taught you as part

of the navigator training?

HUL: Well, also -- yeah. But it's a little deeper than that.

I was in the Korean War, too, and I've got some of this stuff, this. It's during the Korean War, and I was hoping I could find the -- (shuffles paper) World War II. I think this is it. As a navigator, you had the --

PR: When you went on a mission, they would have a briefing before the mission, and --?

HUL: You don't know anything?

PR: No. This is an interview. I want you to tell us about it.

HUL: It wasn't --

PR: Yeah, I know about it, but --

HUL: I don't know.

PR: -- I want you to record it with your experience of it.

HUL: It's normal deal. You always get briefed and then you get interrogated afterward.

PR: Now the briefing, would they have intelligence, or someone have a set of maps for the mission to spell out exactly what the target was and what directions you could --?

HUL: Of course, of course.

PR: Okay.

HUL: I mean, that's --

PR: Would they tell you where you might expect enemy resistance?

HUL: Whatever information they had available, they would give it to you.

PR: Okay. How many were on your crew now, on the B-25? What's an ordinary crew?

HUL: Well, I thought they weren't ordinary. You have a pilot and co-pilot, and you have an upper-turret gunner. You have a radioman, and sometimes I had a bombardier, and other times I was the navigator, and that's it.

PR: Okay. No other turret, just that upper turret on a B-25?

HUL: The radioman did that. The upper turret, you had two people in the back there, one who handled the upper turret and the radioman who handled that, I think.

PR: So, it was just one turret on a B-25?

HUL: No. It depended whether it was modified, whether it was C, the, or what -- anything.

PR: Oh, I see. They had a belly turret, or a rear turret, or a nose turret? Depending on the model?

HUL: Well, it had one in the tail, which the gunner in the turret on top could choose.

PR: Oh, okay. Would operate that also?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: Well, how many in your average crew when you went out then?

HUL: It was usually five or six.

PR: Five or six?

HUL: Look I said --

PR: Was it the whole thing?

HU: I said pilot, co-pilot, navigator, radioman upper turret, and sometimes the bombardier. It was usually approximately six.

PR: Did you stay with the same crew all through these missions in the same plane? Or would you rotate crews and rotate planes?

(break in audio)

With the same crew most of the time, or --?

HUL: Depends on whether somebody was shot up. One crew, a man out of, I think, Denver, he got a piece of flak in his -- tore his shoulder off. He was navigation. He was brand new. And I put penicillin powder and everything else on it, but he was already dead from the shock with a little piece of flak, this (inaudible). When I came down, they thought I was hurt because I had so much blood on me.

Yeah. I had all kinds... So, you say, "You had the same crew?" Sometimes. I mean, man, it isn't like you can draw it out perfectly.

PR: No, but I'm just trying to get a feel if you often went out with the same crew or if you changed--

HUL: Well originally --

PR: -- crews frequently.

HUL: Originally, I did. Is this all for just World War II?

PR: No, uh-uh. No, I want to get on to what you did afterwards, and see how were you briefed, navigation and

instructions. What kind of targets were you bombing, your strategic targets? Was it --?

HUL: Now, we're just switching wars.

PR: No, uh. In Africa and Sicily, was it --

HUL: That was not strategic.

PR: I mean tactical. What kind of targets would you be --
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HUL: Well, originally, we were bombing head on the bomb line, the German troops, and also their tanks, and so on.

PR: Okay. You wouldn't go for bridges, and rail yards, and things like that necessarily?

HUL: Occasionally, but it wasn't so. We were chasing after Rommel. In Sicily, it was different. You did hit bridges. You did hit places like that.

PR: But close into the bomb line.

HUL: Not in Sicily.

PR: Oh, okay. Got a little different then?

HUL: Different type of operation.

PR: Was there any British Air Force in Egypt assisting you at the same time you were doing missions?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: British Air Force did have some presence then?

HUL: It's called the RAF. RAF?

PR: Mm-hmm.

HUL: And the RAF, although they were flying A-20s, the Bostons, and they happened to be from South Africa.

PR: Oh, I'll be darned.

HUL: And we used to play [bock-bock?] and drink beer.

PR: Did you have an opportunity to go on leave at all while you were there?

HUL: Yes, I had an opportunity to spend 48 hours in then Palestine. I went back to Tel Aviv, and we went to Jerusalem, but it was only certain areas because that was -- I think it was Jordanian at that time. When I was there, King David Hotel was bombed by the Israelis.

PR: So that was off-limits then?

HUL: There were certain areas, yeah.

PR: How did you get there? Did you fly into Palestine?

HUL: Fly into a place called Lydda -- it's between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

PR: Did you get to see Cairo and the pyramids?

HUL: Well, I told you --

PR: On a visit?

HUL: Oh, that was in Egypt. The pyramids are in Egypt. A friend of mine and myself drove -- there's a place called Giza. Anyway, we drove our jeep into one of the pyramids.

PR: From your base?

HUL: Oh, yeah. Well, this friend of mine was from San Antonio, Texas, anyway. He was in the headquarters in Cairo, and he and I got together and when he told me about it --

PR: Oh, okay. Got a tour in?

HUL: Well, we got to know the area pretty --

PR: All the runways, from what it sounds, were just packed dirt runways out on the desert. No steel mat --

HUL: Packed sand, not dirt.

PR: Packed sand? No steel mats down, nothing paved?

HUL: We did have some steel mats someplace. I'm trying to think where.

PR: Oh, okay. Some of them.

HUL: Bust most of them were --

PR: And you lived in tents? These pyramids tents or something?

HUL: Our own tents. our own tents.

PR: You never were really at a fixed base, which was designed as a base? You just were in a select spot in the desert, which you flew by the seat of your pants out of?

HUL: That's right.

PR: How about your food? Did you have regular mess?

HUL: We had a mess tent, yeah.

PR: Regular meals, or in rations, or...?

HUL: I told you, there were British food, and also... In the desert, we were allotted two canteens of water a day. One canteen went to the mess tent; we never saw it. The other canteen I had, and I had a little stand, and I would put a little in the canteen water and washed my teeth. After I washed my teeth, I'd take that same

water, and I would shave in it. And then, I would take that same water and take a rag, and I'd wipe myself off, because in the desert, especially when you flew... Yes, Sir.

(break in audio)

HUL: Sorry.

PR: Yeah, water was scarce. And where do you suppose they got it from?

HUL: Well you know, there are oases.

PR: Oh, I see.

HUL: I think that had to take it on in and stuff.

PR: Well, you're the original recycler of water then.

HUL: Can I put this down here?

F1: Mm-hmm. That's okay. (laughter)

PR: That's fascinating.

HUL: I thought I was going to tell you something --

F1: I'm sorry I interrupted you.

PR: No, no --

HUL: But that was the water. But I wouldn't -- near that. I did have like a 24-hour deal in Cairo or Alexandria. I stayed in the hotel Cecil. In fact, it was a French hotel.

PR: What kind of money did you spend? Do you have occupation money or Egyptian stuff?

HUL: Well, you had English pounds, you had piasters, you had... I guess, later on, I had some American dollars,

and that was about it. In Italy, we had lira --
Sicilian.

PR: Would you get a regular pay allotment where you draw some
pay while you were there and send the rest home?

HUL: We got our money. We could do it any way you wanted.
First was the Lieutenant [Doddridge?] or something in
Fort Worth, Texas. He was our finance officer for the
9th Air Force, and he used to go in the desert and bring
the money. And I think when I came home, he was bird
colonel and we... But our money was in American dollars.

PR: Oh, okay. Then you'd convert it over if you needed to?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: When you flew now, you're flying between 9,000 and 12,000
feet? You had --

HUL: In day formations. You had night missions. Night
missions, you flew any altitude you so desired. You knew
where the mountains or hills or whatever you were
supposed to do.

PR: You needed oxygen, though. You had an oxygen mask on all
the time? Or could you do without it at those 8,000,
9,000-foot --?

HUL: I think we did have.

PR: Did you have electric flying suits or just the sheepskin
flying suits to keep you warm? Do you remember?

HUL: I came in my little old khakis, and I wore a leather
jacket. And the leather jacket, you'd sweat in it, but

you'd never see the sweat. It'd be caked white with salt.

PR: You knew you were sweating, but you didn't see the water.

HUL: I don't know. I think it's been cleaned now. I had a little overseas cap I would wear and...

PR: When you bombed on a mission, you said there were about 18 on a --

HUL: There were different formations --

PR: -- average formation?

HUL: Nine here, and nine here.

PR: High-low or side-by-side?

HUL: High-low, I guess.

PR: And how would you bomb, off one? The lead bomber would release his and you toggle off of him, or did each one bomb on his own?

HUL: Well, you'd bomb on the lead crew.

PR: Okay. So, when he cut his loose, you'd drop your load. Did you ever have any harrowing experiences with bombs hanging up, or not falling, or not doing what they're supposed to do?

HUL: Yes.

PR: What happened with them?

HUL: We went back over the Mediterranean, and I was flying probably around 200 feet or less. And with me, sort of, being the smallest one on the crew, and the B-25 had a hole in the bomb bay from the top. I took my harness

off, the parachute, and they held my -- I went into the bomb bay. Of course, the bomb bay doors were open, and they would hold my feet.

PR: They're holding your feet up above?

HUL: Yeah. Hold my feet there where I come up, and I'd jiggle. They had an arming switch, and I'd jiggle the wire.

PR: So, it finally dropped down?

HUL: Up in the water. Mm-hmm.

PR: What would the arming switch do? As the bomb fell, it would arm the bomb or were they pre-armed?

HUL: Electronically, you would pre-arm it. Never on takeoff but once, say, you were over enemy territory you then could turn on the arming switch.

PR: Oh, okay. That would mean that if they hit something, they'd explode. That's what arming does?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: What kind of bombs did you have? What size?

HUL: They had it in all sizes. I mean, we even carried some bombs on our wings. Normally, quite often, we carried 500-pounders, and since you're going anti-personnel, it would have a stem about this big on it so that it sort of dig into the sand. It would go out and spread around the 200.

PR: About how many 500-pounders could you haul?

HUL: I was trying to think. I think I carried eight. I

carried eight and then on the wings, I could carry only 200 or 250, something like that, two of them on each wing.

PR: And would you drop those along with the 500-pounders, or would you have a different select target?

HUL: No, same.

PR: Usually, all of you would be going after the same target?

HUL: Yeah. You have an area here that you want to bomb in this area.

PR: Did you ever have any close calls getting shot down, any damage to your ship enough that endangered it?

HUL: All the time. I mean that's... Oh, yeah. You're fly through flak. That's why to this day, I don't care for fireworks.

PR: Did you have any scary experiences on landing? Things shot out that you were close to crashing?

HUL: Yeah. I told you about when [Melman?] was killed (inaudible) full of blood. One time, we belly landed in at a place called Marish, and it was an old airfield, and, of course, the trip -- this was way behind our lines. Anyway, we had ended up landing in the middle of a minefield. And my co-pilot, I forget, Nickelberry? about to step down, and he goes, "Hmm, hmm, hmm..." He had a jeep. Anyway, we got out, we got in the jeep, and he took us right --

PR: You know the way through?

HUL: We had to leave the plane there. They got it out.

PR: What do you mean you belly landed, no wheels?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: Just skidded in?

HUL: Yeah. Not there, but one other time, we had lost an engine and we just tried like hell to make it back. Our fighter escort -- we were the lead crew -- we were the lead and anyway, we had to break silence and tell the rest of the bombers to go on. And little brother said, "We got you. We care." They stayed with us until we bellied in. And we were by the plane, and there was the Scottish 7th Light, which was in jeeps. They had been down to Lake Chad, a little Scotsman, smaller than I am, feisty. They never took any prisoners. They just killed them. Anyway, they came, and they picked us up and took us through our bomb line, through the pyramids and everything, and we made it back. We spent the night with the troops, our troops, and they had already... Anyway, within 24 hours, they wired back home. My mother had already gotten a telegram that I was missing in action.

PR: No kidding? What's the rush?

HUL: Within 24 hours.

PR: You didn't come back from the mission?

HUL: Not dead or anything, they just said "missing in action." I think they sent somebody to the house to tell them that I was okay, or whatever they did, because I don't

remember exactly what they did.

PR: That's something.

HUL: When I came home, my mother went to me, and kissed me, and fainted afterwards. This was long after that particular mission.

PR: That's something. Now, you came back to New York. Where did you go from New York?

HUL: Home.

PR: Back here to Texas?

HUL: To Houston. And from Houston, I was sent to rest and recuperation in Miami Beach, Florida. And I had all kinds of tests and everything. And then I had new orders to go to Selman Field in Monroe, Louisiana, training, a training command, and I was going through instructors' school and from instructors' school, I finished there. They sent me to Hondo, which was originally the Kelly... Remember I told you when I graduated, the Kelly navigator school? They had moved to Hondo. And when I got to Hondo, they gave me -- I think about a month, I was -- they had me as an instructor.

PR: In navigation?

HUL: Oh, yeah. That's all just navigation school. And then from there, less than a month, they had started field training me. I became a group commander there, and I had about 1,900 navigation cadets, and we trained them. Some of them became generals later.

PR: I'll be. Isn't that something? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) You were the group commander? As a captain still?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: How long did that last --?

HUL: You've got to realize that in the States, there are very few promotions. Promotions were overseas. I stayed there -- I don't remember the exact. Anyway, I was then sent to Ellington to the 82nd Bomb Wing, and I was on staff there, and then they sent me -- I think I spent three weeks or six weeks, and I set up a navigation school for bombardiers in Big Spring, Texas. And then back to Ellington, and I stayed at Ellington until I was put on inactive duty. This was in '46, I guess and then in '50, I was called back.

PR: Were you in the active reserve between '46 to '50?

HUL: I guess I was.

PR: Did you go to summer training and all that business?

HUL: Well, you had all that at Ellington. We did all that. It wasn't different.

PR: Every year though, did you have to go for two weeks?

HUL: Well, I was going out there, I think, once a month alongside the training.

PR: Because that was the active reserve. And then you were recalled?

HUL: Mm-hmm.

PR: When was that, when were you recalled, do you remember?

HUL: In '50.

PR: Fifty? Where did they assign you then, for how long?

HUL: They sent me direct to Langley Field, Virginia, in tactical again. And I stayed there, and they had me take some 26s. I flew them to Japan and Hawaii, and then... Let's see how. I went through to Hawaii, to Johnson, to Kwajalein. From Kwajalein, I don't remember -- but on into Japan, and then from there, I don't remember what was the name of the landing field in Korea.

PR: You actually flew the B-26s into Korea? Was this just a ferrying operation to get them over there, or were you assigned to a bomb group?

HUL: No. I came right back. Because I was in an outfit, then we then got B-45s. You've never heard of it?

PR: No, I forgot the B-45.

HUL: Anyway, it was a jet bomber.

PR: Oh, really? Four-engine?

HUL: Yeah. But they had a lot of trouble. We had two of them, or it was three. Two in Japan, and we did cruise 90 days on and 90 days off. I spent 90 days there. There were --

PR: On a B-45 crew?

HUL: Yeah, taking photo.

PR: Oh, photo recon.

HUL: Came back, and then I got back, and they sent me to

school. I went to Ellington, navigation, and then I had radar. And from there, I was sent to Mather Field, California, where I got bombing. And from bombing, I got radar bombing, and I've got radar navigation there. And from there, I was sent to a SAC outfit at Travis Air Force Base. And Travis Air Force, I was there in SAC. We would spend 90 days on Travis and 90 days on Guam. We flew B-29s, and we flew, at that time, no armament and just plain bomb. I knew my targets as well -- better than I know Victoria.

PR: Were you in the air all the time, in a plane in the air, or were you just on alert on the ground?

HUL: Air.

PR: Because that was --

HUL: I was flying all over the country. And we'd be air-to-air refuel.

PR: Oh, I see. Huh. This is in the B-29s?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: Would you fly your B-29s from the United States to Guam?

HUL: Oh, yeah. From Travis.

PR: From Travis to Guam. And then they'd rotate you back and another squadron would go in. What air force and what bomb group was that in? Is it still organized that way?

HUL: It's called the -- I'm trying to think of it. It was the 90-something. I got it --

PR: Yeah. Okay, sorry.

HUL: And it was top-secret.

PR: How long did that last then?

HUL: Until I was having -- and I still do -- I have blood pressure problems and I kept on (inaudible). I took all kind of exercises, and I was weighing about what I do now. I weighed -- at one time I played football -- over 200. I weigh 172 today. And they didn't want me to get out, but I kept my reserve. I didn't get out.

HUL: When --?

PR: Well, we transferred from Travis to Mountain Home.

PR: Oh, okay. In Idaho?

HUL: Yeah. And that was kind of hard on me. When I'd come back from a flight, I would be... Then we were getting B-47s, while I was there. We got them in sharp time, and then I got a couple flights in B-52s. I was on a -- I don't know what it's called -- was it Redding, I guess a lead crew through that. My crew, I mean I don't know. You know anything about SAC?

PR: Mm-hm.

HUL: What do you know about it?

PR: Strategic Air Command, it was? Well --

HUL: Well, what do you know?

PR: It's where all B-29s were on alert all the time, engines running. Waiting to go at targets, I think. There were bases all over the place.

HUL: Anyway. (pause) Our aircraft, some of them were always

in the air. In 1952 -- I was born in '18 -- I was 34 years, and I was getting old and tired.

PR: Enough's enough, huh?

HUL: So, I went back on reserve. They said, "They'd spent a lot of money on me." I said, "Right. Well, I'll go after women and children if you want me." And I never had a place to settle down all these years. That's when I married my first wife --

HUL: Oh, okay. In '50--

PR: -- in '35 -- in '55. In '53.

PR: So, you got out in '52? Where did you go, back to Houston then? Oh, okay. And you weren't in the active reserves anymore, just whatever?

HUL: The active reserves.

PR: Oh, really?

HUL: At Ellington and Houston, until I think my son Larry was born. And Sally said, "Now --"

PR: Once is enough?

HUL: Yeah. "Make up your mind."

PR: Yeah.

HUL: That's when I went on inactive. I have any discharge.

PR: They didn't give you a discharge paper?

HUL: (inaudible)

PR: How many years' credit for active duty do you think you have?

HUL: I don't know. Maybe 10 years, I guess.

PR: By the time you add both --

HUL: Yeah.

PR: -- both stretches up?

HUL: I hope I've given you enough information.

PR: Oh yeah, that's fascinating. I'll have to look up some of these places. Now if I can't find them, you're going to have to help me on the map.

HUL: Well --

PR: But I'm going to write this up as a rough draft and then we'll go over it together if it's all right, and then you can steer me to the right places. I'll probably have half the places messed up where they are. I like to document pretty -- as close as we can where and when you were. Okay, well I'm going to discontinue --

HUL: Yeah, hold on --

PR: -- the interview now.

HUL: Hold on.

PR: I'm going to discontinue.

HUL: Hold on, I'll give you... You asked me what was the number of the outfit of SAC.

PR: Oh, in SAC?

HUL: See, everything was so secret. You've got to realize that I carried a pistol on me in civilian clothes.

PR: Really?

HUL: Yeah.

PR: SAC group... What kind of clearance did they call

whatever you had?

HUL: I had a top secret.

PR: Top secret? I'm going to discontinue the talk part of
our interview for now.

HUL: Here, here, here.

PR: It's 3:30.

HUL: Look at this.

(break in audio)

PR: What's your serial number?

HUL: AO659060.

END OF AUDIO