

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Walter Crafford**

Date of Interview: September 13, 2007

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Telephone Interview in progress.

Interviewer: ...need to wind up...okay. This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Walter Crafford in his home in Santa Cruz, California by telephone. I am located in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So I'd like to start, Walter, by thanking you for spending the time to share your experiences with us today and let me get you going by just asking you to introduce yourself and tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your early life.

Mr. Crafford: Okay, why...my name is Walter Crafford. I...excuse me...I'm 88 years old. I was born 88 years ago in Bridgeport, Nebraska and came to California when I was about two after my mother died and lived in San Diego, California until the start of World War II.

Interviewer: Okay, now were you still with your father or...?

Mr. Crafford: No, I lived with my grandparents during most of that time. My father did remarry when I was twelve, but I didn't like the arrangement, so I...I didn't stay around very long.

Interviewer: Right...now your grandparents...were these maternal or paternal grandparents?

Mr. Crafford: Paternal.

Interviewer: Okay, and what did...what did your grandfather do for a living?

Mr. Crafford: He was a crafts...carpenter, I think, although there wasn't much business during his life that was during the 20s.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was tough times.

Mr. Crafford: (unintelligible)...much business, so he didn't work much.

Interviewer: And where did you go to high school?

Mr. Crafford: At Hoover High School in San Diego. And I did graduate although I didn't ever...I just never attended my graduation.

Interviewer: Oh, you cut graduation exercise!

Mr. Crafford: (unintelligible)...wasn't going to get it. (laughter)

Interviewer: Okay, now so when did you graduate? Was that before the war started?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, in 1937.

Interviewer: Okay, so you graduated in '37 and then what did you do?

Mr. Crafford: Well before and after I was a gardener essentially. I was doing...oh, some landscaping, but mostly lawn maintenance and...in a nice section of San Diego...not...not too far from where we lived. And then I was doing that up until September when Hitler moved into Poland, and I knew that my...I wasn't going to get a deferment for gardening...and I didn't...wasn't anxious to join the Army, so I joined Consolidated Aircraft factory in San Diego who were building the B-24. And so I worked on...from '39 until '41...early '42 at Consair and worked on the B-24s.

Interviewer: And what were you doing actually?

Mr. Crafford: Well...several things.

Interviewer: I mean...were you shooting rivets or what?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, well I did some riveting but...and then I...and I worked sort of between engineering and final assembly doing things that go...they were always changing plans...changing something on...on the aircraft....(unintelligible) building it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was...that was a pretty good job back then, wasn't it working in...?

Mr. Crafford: Well, I could...yeah, I could...I had a lot of freedom in it that was the good part.

Interviewer: Right. And so you were working there when Pearl Harbor happened?

Mr. Crafford: Yes. The morning of Pearl Harbor, December 7<sup>th</sup>, I was playing golf with a close friend of mine that I golfed with and when we came back to the clubhouse and heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, we...we both got emotional and full of beer (laughter), and decided that...we committed to each other that we were going to go join the Air Corps.

Interviewer: I see! (laughter) So the beer did a little bit of the talking, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, we...we couldn't get out of it. But we did; we both joined the Air Corps. I took an exam because I had no college and he had his two years of college. But we both joined the Air Corps; we both flew B-24s...we satisfied the...the flying lessons and we flew B-24s. He went to Europe and I went to the Pacific.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Crafford: I happened to have a break in the...in my...experience as a cadet and somehow they decided I was material for first pilot rather than going out as a co-pilot which they generally sent us...the new cadets out as...as co-pilots.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Crafford: I went to Fort Worth, Texas and was trained as a first pilot immediately. And then after that I did some flying duties but mostly I was trained with...got a crew and I was trained with a crew in Pueblo, Colorado to go overseas.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Crafford: And then the end of...

Interviewer: So tell me about the B-24. You not only helped build them but now you are flying them. What...what kind of an aircraft was that? I mean, I know the details but I mean...good aircraft, dependable, ugly, slow...what?

Mr. Crafford: its alternate name was the Flying Boxcar.

Interviewer: That's correct, and that's exactly descriptive, too.

Mr. Crafford: That was a horrible airplane to fly. The...it was...demanded muscle as much as anything...intellect.

Interviewer: Is that right?!

Mr. Crafford: Compared to the B-17 for example, it was a different thing. It had been designed and built as a cargo plane initially in New York. And then the...when they built it as a military plane they did all sorts of things...moved the nose out further; put the turrets on and this sort of thing, and it was very clumsy by that time. It flew very slow...about 165 miles an hour.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Crafford: ...top speed. And...but it had...its main advantage was that it had a very long range as a cargo plane...that was what it was designed for.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And it...it was sent to the Pacific because there was no place to land.

Interviewer: Yeah, you needed that range when you're in the Pacific.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, and the B-17, of course, it...it didn't fly high...the B-24, if...if you got it up above 20,000 it was hardly manageable. And then...but the B-17 could go up to 30 which is better.

Interviewer: So the B-24 was difficult to handle above about 20,000 is that what you say?

Mr. Crafford: You could hardly control it; it was just so...wallow all over the place.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, so we didn't...we never bombed at that altitude. We bombed usually between 15,000 and 18,000 feet.

Interviewer: Now it didn't have pressurized cabins, so...so it's cold up there and you got all the gear on and everything, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, but we could keep warm. In the Pacific it wasn't much of a problem.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true. Okay, so you said you did your what...your final training in Colorado?

Mr. Crafford: In that...in Pueblo, Colorado. This...this was the whole crew training together.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had, I guess, what...what is it a crew of ten or eight or what?

Mr. Crafford: Well the crew would be the pilot and the co-pilot, and the navigator and the bombardier – these are the four officers.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And you have an engineer...engineering officer or engineering...he was an enlisted man.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And he was the highest ranking enlisted man and the radio operator. And then you had four people that was just gunners.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's right...you had guns stuck all over the place on that thing.

Mr. Crafford: Yep.

Interviewer: So how long were you in Pueblo then?

Mr. Crafford: About...we went...probably about five or six months.

Interviewer: Okay, so that long.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: So when...so where did you go from there?

Mr. Crafford: Then we went to Kansas, Herington, Kansas about Christmas time in '43...we arrived there and we received...we got our airplanes...new airplanes were given to the crew...each crew. And we were to take off to...for overseas mission. And I noticed when I got my plane that it had had mosquito netting and I said, "Oh boy, I'm not going to Europe!"

Interviewer: Oh, it came equipped with mosquito netting! You didn't...you didn't want to go to Europe?

Mr. Crafford: I sure as hell didn't!

Interviewer: Why is that?

Mr. Crafford: Well, for one thing the...the flak is a lot heavier.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And...no, it's...it's cold and I...been raised in San Diego...I wasn't interested in cold weather! (laughter)

Interviewer: You're a southern California boy!

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, but they...no the...it was...just a different kind of war...that's all.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: So...then once you picked up your airplane, where did you go?

Mr. Crafford: I flew (cough)...excuse me...to Travis Air Force Base. It's called...it's now Travis, it was called Suisun Air Field back then...and where we dropped off our tanks and flew to Honolulu.

Interviewer: Okay, now you said Travis...it was called S-u-i-s-u-n?

Mr. Crafford: Suisun...

Interviewer: Fairfield?

Mr. Crafford: Fairfield, I think that's what it was called.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm looking at this email that...that you guys sent. Suisun-Fairfield Air Force Base...now called Travis, okay, go ahead.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, well we took off and the wind was permitted because we flew against a headwind to get to Honolulu. It was a tricky time to get into the...when we was going over to get to that...get that far in a B-2 even with our two bomb bay tanks full of gas.

Interviewer: So you...so...

Mr. Crafford: And...but we...we did and it was a 15-hour flight.



Interviewer: My goodness!

Mr. Crafford: Fifteen hours! It was...really...a...that's a long time!

Interviewer: That's a long time, to be in a droning B-24.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, at 165 miles an hour! (laughter)...all the way! But we had an interesting incident on the over that...my co-pilot had already learned that I liked to sleep a lot. And that...so he...as we took off, and we got...said goodbye to San Francisco...on the way over...the...he said, "Let me sleep for about an hour," ...and...'cause we were taking off about 2 o'clock in the morning, and he said, "then you can...you can sleep all you want, and I'll watch it all the way over." It was on automatic pilot. And so I said, "Go ahead, Ted, and I'll watch it." Well, Ted went to sleep...I promptly went to sleep, too, and the navigator always wanted me to turn of the automatic pilot because he...when he took his celestial sights, he wanted ...the wings to be as stable as possible. And so he couldn't get us on the telephone, an inner phone. He looked...from his position in the nose and saw that we were both asleep!

Interviewer: Oh, no! (laughter)...Both of you were asleep at the same time and she was just on autopilot?!

Mr. Crafford: On autopilot...well, it was not...no, no, nothing to worry about as long as the autopilot...

Interviewer: As long as nothing happens...right.

Mr. Crafford: But anyway, it didn't take him long to get up under the flight deck and wake us up! (laughter)

Interviewer: And you wrote this up in your flight log, right?

Mr. Crafford: And, yeah, and my co-pilots had...never went to sleep again in the airplane!

Interviewer: Yep, that is interesting! Who...who was your co-pilot?

Mr. Crafford: Uh, his name is Ted, and I can't remember his...

Interviewer: Oh, that's okay.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, so after fifteen hours you make it to...to...

Mr. Crafford: They thought we were down in the water someplace because it was...so many of the ships had to turn back to San Francisco or to...to Travis because of the...the headwinds...were such they wouldn't make it all the way to Honolulu.

Interviewer: Okay, but you made it?

Mr. Crafford: But we did; we made it. And...and then we...we...when we got to Honolulu they did...make some more changes on the B...our ship...changed the turrets and things like that.

Interviewer: So now this is a group of aircraft...this is what in the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force?

Mr. Crafford: Yes, this is the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force...

Interviewer: And did you have a squadron number or anything like that?

Mr. Crafford: Uh, we had one when I was...we had one when I got down into the forward area.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Crafford: But I have to tell you, I can't really remember the...

Interviewer: Oh it doesn't matter; that's not important. So, how...roughly how many aircraft accompanied you when you guys went as a group over to Hawaii? I mean was it...?

Mr. Crafford: How many did...companies were?

Interviewer: Yeah, how...how many aircraft were flying with you? I mean of the B-24s?

Mr. Crafford: I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. But I mean it was a bunch...I mean it was a group, right?

Mr. Crafford: Quite a few of us were taking off; they were trying to get us overseas as fast as...as fast as they could. And the B-24s were only going to get there by flying.

Interviewer: Yep, that's right.

Mr. Crafford: And the...the weather was the thing that...that controlled everything.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. So they made modifications you said to the B-24 when you were there in...in Hawaii.

Mr. Crafford: They...they had to take...they took the tail turret out because it...for some reason...they didn't need it I guess. And that tail gunner just...moved his gun around...by himself; he didn't need the turret, and they did some other modifications on the airplane....mostly I think had to do with the turrets.

Interviewer: Yeah, so...

Mr. Crafford: During that period while we...we were waiting for our airplane, we did sub patrol...usually. And...

Interviewer: Okay, now you're doing sub patrol in a what...in another aircraft?

Mr. Crafford: Another B-24.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, just something to keep us busy.

Interviewer: Right, and to keep you sharp. Did you ever...ever see anything on sub patrol?

Mr. Crafford: No.

Interviewer: Yeah. So then your aircraft was ready and then you headed out again. Where did you go?

Mr. Crafford: When the aircraft was ready, they...we went to the forward area...we called it...which...our island base was Abemama...which was about...oh, very close to Tarawa.

Interviewer: Yeah, now is that also called Johnson Island?

Mr. Crafford: No, Johnson was the one we stopped at and got some gas....

Interviewer: On the way?

Mr. Crafford: to make the trip...the rest of the trip to Ebemama.

Interviewer: Okay, Ebemama, I've got here is spelled A-b-e-m-a-m-a...or something close to that.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, I guess...close to that yeah. My wife looked it up on the map and...

Interviewer: Well I tell you what...that's good.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, she (unintelligible).

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm impressed she did all that work for us...good! So...

Mr. Crafford: We didn't stay at Ebemama very long. We...shortly after that...one of our missions was to bomb Kwajalein and...as soon as Kwajalein was secured we bombed it and...and the military took over. But the...as soon as it was secured, we moved to Kwajalein.

Interviewer: Now when you were bombing Kwajalein was this what...before we invaded it?

Mr. Crafford: Pardon?

Interviewer: I...I know Kwajalein was invaded...you know...and taken over by the...

Mr. Crafford: We were...we were involved in the...in the invasion.

Interviewer: Okay...in the invasion, and so...

Mr. Crafford: (unintelligible)...military took over.

Interviewer: So...so when you go...when you went in there for bombing runs...what were these...low level runs or what?

Mr. Crafford: Oh no, no, no...not too high...but...I don't remember...we...we dropped...dropped pretty big bombs and they were mainly (unintelligible), I think, we didn't hit any Japanese but they were big bombs and they would shake the hell out of them!

Interviewer: Yeah, scare them anyhow, huh?

Mr. Crafford: When...when the military went in there was...they didn't find anything alive.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Crafford: No.

Interviewer: So sounds like you were pretty effective in getting the job done.

Mr. Crafford: Well, they had...they had taken a near-by island...it wasn't...militarized and they had put in lots of military ordinance into the island...the Kwajalein island itself. Kwajalein was an atoll...a ring of islands...and that was one of their main...military islands.

Interviewer: And so then once Kwajalein was secured then that became a base of operations?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah, and most of my missions were flown out of Kwajalein.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, so what kind of facilities did you have there? Are you living in tents or what?

Mr. Crafford: No, they were...they were...it wasn't tents but it was...things that they could put up quickly.

Interviewer: Right, kind of...

Mr. Crafford: military managed to do it...I don't remember, but we had eating facilities and it was nice; it was a pleasant island.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Crafford: They...they had messed it up with the bombs and stuff so it wasn't quite as pretty as it might have been.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: But...we were comfortable there.

Interviewer: Did you have any problems with tropical insects or diseases or anything like that?

Mr. Crafford: No, no, boredom was the only thing that...(unintelligible)...(laughter).

Interviewer: Yeah, the...the time in between missions, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, we flew about one mission every five days I think.

Interviewer: I see.

Mr. Crafford: And...but...but our missions were long. We had...most of them we had to fly to Enewetak which was considerably west of Kwajalein and a little south.

And we would top off our tanks...this is a Navy island...and we would eat Navy beans and...and whatever they had and then we would...fly our missions...and then come back to Enewetak...top off our tanks again and...and go home.

Interviewer: Yeah, now were the Navy guys good to you?

Mr. Crafford: Pardon?

Interviewer: Were the Navy guys good to you fly boys?

Mr. Crafford: No...no, we didn't have much to do with them except go to their place where they ate...served their SOS...you know what that means.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah I do. (laughter)

Mr. Crafford: And then we would...yeah then we would...when the time was right...we took off and flew to the target.

Interviewer: Uh-huh, and so what targets were you operating against?

Mr. Crafford: The...the main target that I flew against was Truk. And I had thirteen missions, I think, over Truk. Some of them were night...sometimes we flew individually...just to keep them awake I think, and other times we flew as a squadron and dropped our bombs where we could see...well we could still see a little bit, but they would never turn the lights on for us!

Interviewer: Yeah, amazing! So Truk was another atoll?

Mr. Crafford: No, there was a series of islands...wasn't really an atoll...but I remember it...series of islands that were close together...probably...it's probably did have them...a...some similarities to an atoll, but it wasn't quite the same.

Interviewer: Yeah, now this was...

Mr. Crafford: It was big and it was well fortified and their most fortified island in the central Pacific and that's...I presume the reason we never tried to take it.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think we were in the mode of skipping occasional islands so you didn't have to do each one...you could just go around the really tough ones. Truk must have been one of those tough ones.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, that was at...yeah we...considering thirteen missions, that's...that got a lot of...lot of flak!

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me...tell me about the flak.

Mr. Crafford: Well, the...it was not a...not a difficult mission at all because we...compared to Europe. If...if you had to...fly...fly over a target in Europe, they just put so much flak up you had to fly through it...there was nothing you could do.

Interviewer: Right, you couldn't avoid it.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, but we could...we had good intelligence. My...Mannie (spelling ?),...my navigator...looking out...looking out the...waste window of the airplane where all the guns were firing from...and so we could plan our attack in a way that could avoid most of the flak.

Interviewer: Right. Now did you say most of these were night missions or just some day...?

Mr. Crafford: No, just some of them...most of them were day missions.

Interviewer: Okay, most of them were day missions.

Mr. Crafford: But we had...my...when...missions...I guess...I don't...not sure...but they...they were easier because we just flew individually at different times and we bombed at different altitudes...came in at different directions and



things like that so we didn't drop bombs on each other. And that was very simple. In the day...day missions we would plan the mission very carefully to avoid the flak.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And as long as we didn't fly straight and level for over 30 seconds, the flak was always away from the airplane.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: I never had a piece of flak in the airplane.

Interviewer: Ah, that's great! Did you ever run into any opposition fighters?

Mr. Crafford: Yep, yep. The fighters...in the day time...they would...they would meet us after we had dropped our bombs...at all these...the question I had, "why didn't they get us before we got to bomb?" They could have confused us a little bit if they'd have been attacking before...they...they should have known we were coming, but they never attacked until after the bombs were gone...and then we could concentrate on defensive actions...against the fighters.

Interviewer: Right, yeah. Well did they ever shoot down any of the...of the B-24s in your squadron?

Mr. Crafford: None, no. No, I don't think we ever lost an airplane to...to my knowledge...as I recall. We never lost an airplane to enemy fight...enemy fire...whether...anti-aircraft or...airplanes. We lost most of our airplanes to weather.

Interviewer: To the weather?

Mr. Crafford: Weather...yeah. We had to fly through a...a front that didn't dissipate...it just moved back and forth between Kwajalein and the...most of our targets. And the weather fronts in the Pacific can get very, very violent. And to fly through them you...if you...it...they...you had to be...to learn the difference between the smooth air and the volatile air. I mean...they...the updrafts and the downdrafts...and you could see it in the texture of the clouds when you flew through it.

Interviewer: So you learned to read the clouds then?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, but it...so the most of their...most of our losses were from new crews. We could never tell them what it was like; they had to learn it.

Interviewer: That's right. You have to experience it.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah. And so they...if they didn't experience it soon enough and then they were liable to lose their airplane. No, the...the...when you went through it, it would just tear the tail off the airplane.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Man! So that must have been kind of one of the weak spots in the total construction of the aircraft then.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, I...I'm losing you a little bit.

Interviewer: Are you? Can you hear me now?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, good. So you never really had a close call then during the combat missions?

Mr. Crafford: Not...not really except I got caught in one of those clouds...in my first...early missions and got the hell scared out of me, but I didn't...I went...I went in at about 10,000 feet...that's where our usual cruising altitudes were to the target and it was a night mission and I went in at about 10,000 and I hit an updraft that took me just in a few seconds up to about 16,000. My co-pilot and I...we had power off and we had to yoke back...we were trying to reduce the speed because that's what would tear the tail off...and we went from about 10 to 16,000 seemed like a few seconds.

Interviewer: My goodness!

Mr. Crafford: And..yeah...and we popped out and we didn't go back through that cloud. We went underneath it there!

Interviewer: Yeah, you...you went around that one next time!

Mr. Crafford: Yeah!

Interviewer: Wow! My goodness!

Mr. Crafford: Now that's the only close call.

Interviewer: Well that's...sounds like you were very fortunate! So after all the missions against Truk, what...where did you go to then? What was the next...?

Mr. Crafford: We moved to Saipan. We...we did bomb Saipan but in conjunction with the Navy. The Navy was mapping Saipan and Guam. We went over...in the mapping operation, I think we...the...probably...were defense for the Navy bombers. They were B-24s but a different version. And they were doing a mapping and then we flew to them...with to...on to Saipan. And then later after Saipan was secured then we moved into Saipan.

Interviewer: So when you were flying with the Navy aircraft to map Saipan, were you just kind of there on...to guard and protect them or what?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, we flew...we really...we were the wingmen on the...in the squadron where they were doing their...their mapping.

Interviewer: So they're taking photographs primarily?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, that's right. They were taking photographs. We just...we just slide down the island...cover the whole island...and at the same time we were dropping bombs...small bombs just to wake them up I guess. (laughter)

Interviewer: Alright! Keep them awake, yeah! (laughter)

Mr. Crafford: Anyway that...we did that and then they...we...they went back to Enewetak where they were stationed and we went on back to Kwajalein.

Interviewer: So then when Saipan was secured...did I hear you say you then operated out of Saipan?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, not very long. I don't even remember the islands that I bombed there except for...we did bomb Iwo Jima.

Interviewer: Oh, you did?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: That was in preparation for the invasions of Iwo?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, they went...that was in preparation...but the...I think it did them pretty well devastated by...by bombing and other things by the Navy before that.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, we'd just fly from one end of the island to the other and drop our bombs. They...they wouldn't turn the lights on either for us.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's amazing!

Mr. Crafford: The only thing...but we could see the...perimeter of the island...the phosphorous...it was in the bays and so we could see the outline and we would start at one end and go down the other...to the other end and just scatter our bombs all the way.

Interviewer: So most of those flights were at night then, is that right?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, these were at night, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, you never flew over Iwo during the day when you could kind of get a look at it?

Mr. Crafford: No, no.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So what about resistance then? Did you...when you're flying at night there's really isn't...you don't get any fighters or anything coming up?

Mr. Crafford: Well I did to one mission to Truk, but that was because I was...I don't know...I was interested in looking at the...the damage that we were causing...everything...the fire there. We hit some storage...fuel storage and it was mesmerizing...I didn't want to leave it so soon, so I was...kind of turned the airplane in a glide and looking at it and suddenly they vectored a night fighter up on our...my tail. And the engine...the engineer was up in the top turret and he says, "Pilot, get the hell out of here; he's (unintelligible) at us!" And so we did...I got out of there pretty fast!

Interviewer: Yeah...at 165 miles an hour, huh?

Mr. Crafford: No, I put the nose down; we were going probably 250 miles an hour!

Interviewer: Okay, so you went into a dive...evasive action!

Mr. Crafford: But we did...and then the co-pilot and I took...took both of our muscles to pull it out!

Interviewer: Oh man! That's...that's an amazing story. So operating out of Saipan, you had at least a couple of missions against Iwo. And where else were you...?

Mr. Crafford: I can't remember where we bombed out of Saipan. My wife...seems to think that she remembers me talking about Yap, and I think that we probably did bomb Yap, but I...I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you said you were in Saipan for only a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah...a relatively short period and then I...I came home from Saipan.

Interviewer: Oh you came home?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, what...?

Mr. Crafford: I came home...and the...went over to the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force in early January...and I came home in November...late November of '44.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Crafford: And...

Interviewer: Well the...the war is still going on big time then, so what did they do with you at that time?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah, both east and west, yeah.

Interviewer: So what was your assignment?

Mr. Crafford: (unintelligible)...Tinian which is...just a short distance from Saipan.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: And they were...they were already to do their bombing of Japan.

Interviewer: Right....with the B-29s.

Mr. Crafford: Uh-hum.

Interviewer: Uh-hum. I guess the B-24 didn't have the range to go to Japan?

Mr. Crafford: I...I'm not sure what it was, but I think that was the case. The B-29 was the later version of any airplane. It...yeah, it...(unintelligible)...

Interviewer: It was a whole new thing, yeah.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, longer distance but bigger bomb loads...everything.

Interviewer: Right, right. Had pressurized cabin...could fly at high altitudes, yeah.

Mr. Crafford: It's a bigger airplane, too.

Interviewer: Yes. So you came home. What did you do when you came home?

Mr. Crafford: Well I...I had devised a strategy to keep from going overseas again. (laughter)...and so...the idea was to try...try...I applied to as many schools...military Air Force schools as I could...to get into...just go to school...that was better than the other. And so I went...took...got into an engineering course at Chanute Field.

Interviewer: Is that...?

Mr. Crafford: In Illinois.

Interviewer: In Illinois.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, (unintelligible)...and...

Interviewer: Is that C-h-a-n-u-t-e Field...is...?

Mr. Crafford: Pardon?

Interviewer: You spell that C-h-a-n-u-t-e?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, I guess, it's Champaign...I don't know how you spell that...I don't know.

Interviewer: Well, that's close enough.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so you're in Illinois.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah. And then the...after I completed the course there, I had...the colonel...I had already been accepted for another school in Colorado and with the Air Force...was later...Air Force was later placed...headquarters. But the...then the colonel that was commander of the...the base at...Chanute Field...that's what it was called, yeah, my wife had to remind me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Crafford: And he was in charge. I played golf with him to keep out of the physical education and he wanted me to play golf...I think that was it. And his wife wanted to reform me...something. Anyway kept me...they kept me at Chanute Field instead of letting me go to the...my new base in Colorado. And that was where I ended my war. I got out as soon as I could. (laughter)

Interviewer: Well you said that that was an engineering school there in...in Illinois. So what kind of engineering are we studying here?

Mr. Crafford: Well it was...we had a lot of school...lot of...we had classes from 6 o'clock every morning until noon. And it was typical engineering subjects, theory and that stuff that went with it. And then in the afternoon, we'd...we'd have labs and...and the...most of the afternoon was spent was...was prepared...was on the line working with the airplanes. Sometimes as aircraft engines that we



were working with...sometimes it was something else. Just...they would...they had mock ups they could put in problems in an aircraft engine and you...we had to find out what was wrong.

Interviewer: Oh really?! So if the war had continued and you actually used your education at that engineering school, what would you have been doing?

Mr. Crafford: Well, if I would have gone to most schools, if I could have.

Interviewer: Yeah, I knew that was your plan, but I'm just wondering...

Mr. Crafford: It worked pretty well.

Interviewer: Yeah, it worked well.

Mr. Crafford: Till the colonel disrupted it. But the...no, I...I was going to get out as soon as I could. And so that's what...what I did. One incident that...sort of a story book incident was...my friend that went to Europe that I was playing golf with on Pearl Harbor Day.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was Bill Linsel (spelling ?), right?

Mr. Crafford: ...went to Europe. He was shot down on his first mission, and he spent thirteen months in a POW camp. And then, of course, by the...in '45 or '44, the...'45...when Europe was...when the war was over in Europe, he was released from the prison and he came home. He was back in San Diego and I had a short leave and I was back in San Diego, too, so we...we decided to play golf. We went to the Chula Vista Country Club...in south of San Diego and we were on the golf course when the whistle started blowing and the horns started blowing that the Japanese had surrendered.

Interviewer: Now was this the same golf course that you and he were on when the war started?

Mr. Crafford: No, no, it's a...it's another golf course. But we started the golf course...started the war on a golf course and we ended it on a golf course.

Interviewer: Well you know if it had been on the same golf course, I don't think anybody would have believed that story! So at least you have a different golf course. (laughter) What a...what a coincidence!

Mr. Crafford: It would make a hell of a move if it could be...find some (unintelligible)...sex and some women.

Interviewer: Well that's right! (laughter) You get some sex in there and you'd have yourself a...a blockbuster movie!

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Mr. Crafford: But that was about it. And then I went back to Chanute and...and got out of the military as soon as I could.

Interviewer: So they released you after that, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, well after the Japanese surrendered then it was...I had...well I had my duties that I had before but I...I started the process of getting out.

Interviewer: Right. Did you stay in contact after the war with any of your buddies from the war?

Mr. Crafford: No I'm sorry to say. The...you know we were close while we were fighting, but afterwards they were a little bit mad at me anyway because...my crew...because I...when we got out to Honolulu they were going to send us

back to the United States by boat and I said, "I don't fly in...I'm a fly boy...I don't want to... by boat...home...by boat from Honolulu." And so I went...I got a contact with a...Air Transport command Officer that I had known...something about earlier and I said, "Can you get me a flight home (unintelligible)...I want to go home?" And he says, "Yeah." So I said, "Okay." So I missed the boat...when it went back to the States and I missed two or three boats. But then as soon as I was ready to go home, he...he put me on a plane and flew me back to San Francisco.

Interviewer: Uh-hum, and so the rest of the crew was...not pleased...

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, mad at me because they thought I should go with them.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Crafford: And I...I guess it wasn't very nice, but it really wasn't...first of all I didn't want to get home too soon because I wanted to be there for Christmas.

Interviewer: Right, absolutely! So that was '44?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, it was...yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, hum, and when you were actually out on the...on the front or the forward position or whatever they called it out there and you were flying missions, were you able to stay in contact with...with people back in the States...your family? Did you write or did they write you?

Mr. Crafford: (unintelligible)...but I had left home so much I had no contact with my family really. So, I...I don't remember if I even wrote them.

Interviewer: Uh-hum, well you were pretty much out on your own when the war started anyhow, weren't you?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I see. And what was the food like when...when you were out there at those forward bases?

Mr. Crafford: We had very good food. They...the usual arrangement in the military is to serve the enlisted men the poor food and the officers the good food. But we'd put it altogether and we ate in different sections of the mess hall. But other than that, we ate the same food and we had good food. No, they took good care of us.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's good...that's good.

Mr. Crafford: Air Force got the best I think.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Crafford: And we got...we had to buy our own beer, but we could get that from Honolulu and have it shipped down to the forward area. But the flight surgeon always met us when we got off the...out of our airplanes...and...at the end of a mission and he would say, "Here, you need a drink," so he'd give us a bottle of whiskey.

Interviewer: Ah, a little bit of medication!

Mr. Crafford: I'd been asleep most of the way home and he said, "You need a...you need a drink." (laughter)

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Crafford: That's one comment that I would add to the whole story though...you know...you're flying over water...no mountain...nothing to worry about...except the front when you had to go through it...there's nothing to do;

it's really boring and so I did what I do best...I went to sleep and I slept most of the way. I would take off and I would be the...the pilot during...going over the target. Most of the time I was squadron leader; I'd be the lead pilot and everybody else would fly on my wing. I'd wake up for that and we fly our mission and have...always took beer and put it in the catwalk to get cold so that we could drink it after we rid of the fighters and then we'd have a lunch and then I would take a nap that would last as long as I needed.

Interviewer: Well I think that way you can stay sharp...that's...that's the way I'd look at it.

Mr. Crafford: Well people...were always talking about what a tough war it was and...and I said, "I don't know because I was asleep through most of it." (laughter)

Interviewer: You slept through most of World War II, huh? (laughter)

Mr. Crafford: That's right.

Interviewer: Well, I...you know...I...I've interviewed a lot of veterans and a lot of them tell me that they always thought...very highly of the pilots and the fly boys but they also said they also could be a little bit cocky. Do you feel like you guys were cocky?

Mr. Crafford: I...I suppose so; I don't know. There's a certain personality, I guess, that's required to want to be a flyer. I'm not sure... 'cause I think...I remember at that time they...they did a lot of public relations to try to attract people into the Air Corps. And for some reason people who'd rather walk in the mud...than fly in the airplane.

Interviewer: I don't understand that.

Mr. Crafford: And I didn't. But I suspect it has something to do with the...uncertainty.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Crafford: Maybe you could get patched up if you were hurt on the ground, but you couldn't if you were hurt in the air.

Interviewer: That's true.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah you usually...

Mr. Crafford: But anyway...the...now there was...quite a bit of publicity. I...I got some publicity photos during the time.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Mr. Crafford: They'd put...well, they would just put us together standing in front of an airplane or our own airplane if they...we had it, and then they'd take pictures and send those pictures back to the newspapers in the States to...and the publicity helped them a little bit.

Interviewer: Yeah, so your picture may have been on the front page of some newspaper.

Mr. Crafford: I...I don't know...I guess so.

Interviewer: They...they never told you, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah. This was...this was the regular...now I think they had trouble attracting...the...all the people that they needed.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you have nose art on your aircraft?

Mr. Crafford: Have what?

Interviewer: You know, the paintings or the cute sayings or the names of an aircraft that was painted up on the nose?

Mr. Crafford: We had a Varga...you know...the...there's an artist...name was Varga...had a very good sense of what the bod...what the female body looked like.

Interviewer: Yeah, yep, he's famous!

Mr. Crafford: We had a Varga gal on the nose of our airplane and...and the name of the airplane was *Salty Sal*. But the enlisted men made all this up; I had nothing to do with it. (laughter) They...they picked the gal and the guy...and the guy that could paint it...had a very good artist in the...in the squadron, so when we got down...overseas down under in the forward area that they put...they worked that up. And they...then everybody had something written under their positions in the airplane.

Interviewer: Salty Sal, huh?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah, you know I think under my window they had Peelut, P-e-e-l-u-t, I'm not sure what that meant.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Peelut (laughter) Did...during that period of time when you were make...doing the missions and everything down there, did you ever had any R&R where you went some place for...?

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah, we had...about once...I'd say about once a month...maybe a little less than that, but we went up to...went up to Honolulu and they had...rest camps there...in...for the...right next to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel...on the beach.

Interviewer: Right there on Waikiki?

Mr. Crafford: Right there on Waikiki beach, yes. And we would...yeah, we would stay there for a week or two...couple of weeks, I guess.

Interviewer: And then fly back?

Mr. Crafford: And then go back to the forward area, yeah. They had...they had the 24-hour kitchen open and they would feed you anything you wanted and...and we could look at the girls on Waikiki beach which was...that was important!  
(laughter)

Interviewer: Of course!

Mr. Crafford: The only thing that we lacked on in the forward area was girls.

Interviewer: Yeah, sound like they treated you pretty well otherwise though.

Mr. Crafford: It was...it was...an easy mission. In fact, after I got back I kind of missed it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Crafford: They used to tell us that we were...when we were overseas...you're supposed to get a little piece of Spam...you know that stuff that they used to feed us?

Interviewer: Right, right.

Mr. Crafford: Carry it around in your pocket and if you ever get a longing to come back overseas, take it out again and look at it! (laughter)

Interviewer: And smell it! (laughter) So did you do that?

Mr. Crafford: No, I was...when I came home I didn't think I was going to want to go back.

Interviewer: No I wouldn't think so. But...have you ever gone back to the Pacific area after you...you know...in your life after the war?

Mr. Crafford: No, not been through it...we've been traveling (unintelligible)...we've been to Japan and...

(end of tape 1, side 1)



Mr. Crafford: ...yeah, but you know...if we'd have insulation in the cockpit, then I don't remember it being so noisy. Maybe that's because...maybe that...part of the problem...my ear is still...was hurt, but not...not a piece of flak. It was just the...cause that's a lot of noise.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)...for a long period of time.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, do you have a warm spot in your heart for the ole B-24 after all these years?

Mr. Crafford: Uh, no I don't think so...no, it...it, you know...I've taken my grandkids and my kids down to see the one that comes into Watsonville...it's come in several times anyway...just to see it. But no I don't think I have any warm feelings. I never had any warm feeling about flying. A lot of people went into the Air Corps wanting to fly...that was something that was going to be very important to them. To me it was just an alternate way of transportation and I got out of the service...never flown an airplane since.

Interviewer: I see, okay.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well that's a...that's alright. Well, how do you feel about the Japanese as a...as a people after having fought against them for three plus years?

Mr. Crafford: I...I'm not hearing that...

Interviewer: Say it again.

Mr. Crafford: Can you repeat?

Interviewer: I said how do you feel about the Japanese as a people?

Mr. Crafford: Oh, I think they're fine.

Interviewer: Okay, so you don't have any leftover lingering hard feelings after the war?

Mr. Crafford: No, none at all. No, I...I didn't at the beginning either, because I knew quite a few Japanese in San Diego. And as far as I'm concerned, they were fine. And...you got political leaders that...crazy people like we have right now in Washington...need to send a message that we have to be...we shouldn't be in.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Crafford: And that's...but that's not the people. Fact is...my wife and I...we were married at the International House in Berkeley...that's where I went...finished graduate work...after the war. And the...the...the people in our wedding party were...three...three of them, I think, were Japanese. We had become very good friends with them at the International House. And they were...they were...never fighters during the war; they were...one of them was...a radio announcer and he...introduced Tokyo Rose who used to be on the...well they put her in the...beamed her into the Pacific to try to...I don't know what they were trying to do, but she was an American who that had gone to Japan...used her for propaganda purposes.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, now...they were...they were good friends.

Interviewer: Did you...speaking of Tokyo Rose, did you ever hear any of her broadcasts when you were over there?

Mr. Crafford: I never did, no.

Interviewer: Yeah, she certainly reached a lot of people, I'll tell you.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, well you'd have to have some special radios to hear her, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. I guess you had to want to hear her to hear her.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, yeah. We knew about her...that's about all.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well...what...what else can we talk about, Walter, from the war years that you'd like to mention while we've got you on the phone?

Mr. Crafford: That...that's about it. It was...the war...I can sum it up as saying 99% of it was boring and 10% or 1% maybe 2 or 3% scared the hell out of me, but that's...you know, I'd take off in the airplane and when it was loaded was full of bombs and gas, you know, it was a tense moment. And then when you...going over the target you had a little excitement...afterwards with the fighters, if you had them. And then the rest of the time, it was boredom.

Interviewer: Right, well, I guess its...its actually good that it was boring. You don't want to get too much excitement when you're flying like that.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, now I felt that I was very, very lucky.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes. Well I want to thank you for spending the time on the phone with me today and reliving your experiences. And obviously we're going to take this tape and...as I told you earlier, we'll get a transcript to you when we can, but it will be awhile.

Mr. Crafford: Yeah, okay.

Interviewer: But I thank you for your time and I thank you for what you did for our country during World War II.

Mr. Crafford: Well, I thank you for what you're doing back there, too. That's worthwhile.

Interviewer: Well I appreciate that. Now, we were going to...I'm going to...I'm going to...I'm going to turn the recorder off now, so...

(end of interview)

**FINAL** copy

CD – #1950– Mr. Walter Crafford

Transcribed by: K. Matras

Houston, TX

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