

Thomas Schoolcraft Oral History Interview

EDDIE GRAHAM: This is Eddie [Graham?]. Today is September 19th, '09. I'm interviewing warrant officer Tom Schoolcraft.

THOMAS SCHOOLCRAFT: Flag officer.

EG: Flag officer, Tom Schoolcraft. This interview is being taking place here in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of 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. Okay, let's start off. Tom, where were you born?

TS: I was born in Shelbyville, Indiana.

EG: Okay. And what was the names of your parents?

TS: My father's name was William G. Schoolcraft. My mother's name was [Chloe?] Schoolcraft.

EG: Okay. And where did you go to school?

TS: I went to Shelbyville High School.

EG: And how did you end up being in the service?

TS: Well, I had an older brother that couldn't find employment during the Depression and joined the civilian military training corp. He liked so when that ended he just joined the Army. He was stationed in Fort Benjamin Harrison in

Indianapolis, Indiana. He heard about Randolph Field being built so when he had a reenlistment in 1936 he wrote to the personnel office at Randolph Field to see if they would accept him. They let him know they'd be glad to have him, so he and three or four of his buddies that were in the Army and getting discharged at the same time came to Randolph Field. I was a senior in high school in '38 and '39 and my brother kept telling me what a wonderful place San Antonio was. So when I graduated from high school -- during my senior year I saved my money and when I graduated from high school I got on a train and headed for San Antonio.

EG: And what was the date that you did this?

TS: Nineteen thirty-nine.

EG: Nineteen thirty-nine. Okay and where did you take your basic?

TS: Well, I should go back to living with my brother. He had quarters on Randolph Air Force Base, about that time Army Base, and I lived with him in his government quarters. I got various employments, one in the mess hall of just regular barracks, and another in the NCO Club, and I wanted to enlist but I had another brother who had gone in -- who had come down and gone into the service with my oldest

brother, and he had gotten out of the service in '39, I think it was. He came back home and lived with my folks. He drank, he gambled, my dad thought the Army ruined him, so when I talked about enlisting my dad -- you had to have your parents' permission back in those days if you weren't 21 years old -- when I've talked about enlisting in the Army Air Corp, my father would say it ruined your brother, it's not going to ruin you. But, of course then in 1942 I had gone home to Indiana for Thanksgiving and Christmas and December the 7th happened, so just as I got on the train New Year's day of 1942 and headed back to San Antonio. I started immediately to enlist because I didn't need my father's permission after the war started.

EG: Okay, now let me ask you something. Where were you and were you doing on December 7th, 1941.

TS: That was a Sunday morning. I was piddling around the house, can't remember exactly what I was doing, but we had the radio on and I remember hearing that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. It was 11:00 in the morning when I heard it.

EG: Okay, let's go back up now that you've joined the Army Air Force at that time. It was the Army Air Force at that time, right?

TS: No, it was Army Air Corp.

EG: Army Air Corp. I knew there was a difference there. Okay, and let's start out, where was your first assignment?

TS: Right there at Randolph Field. They had a tent city and they had basic training and immediately after you completed basic training knowing how to march and follow military courtesies and so forth, they also had technical aircraft maintenance schools and so I went to those and --

EG: So you did your basic and then you went right into --

TS: Aircraft maintenance.

EG: Aircraft maintenance.

TS: I heard about the aviation cadets and you could take an examination even though you didn't have two years of college. If you passed the test you could become an aviation cadet and I wanted very much to fly. So I took the examination and I passed it. They were very crowded over at Kelly Field where they were training aviation cadets and they didn't have room for me so they sent me home on a 30 day leave. I was real anxious to get back and learn to fly and I got a telegram that said your leave was extended for 30 days. That really upset me because as I said I wanted to get back and learn to fly. That 30 days was about up and I got another telegram that said your

leave is extended indefinitely. Do not report until notified. Ten days later they notified me. I came down to Kelly Field. They didn't have any place to send us. All the training schools were already filled up.

EG: And of course Kelly was in San Antonio.

TS: Yes, and they were making arrangements to build Lackland so we spent a lot of time up on the hill from where we were down at Kelly we were cleaning the brush for Lackland Air Force Base. I did that I think for about five weeks and then they called me in for a physical examination. I had enjoyed excellent health and as I filled out the forms I thought they're going to think I'm lying, I better check something and I had walked in my sleep a little bit, so I checked that. Then when the flight surgeon reviewed me he said, "Tell me about your sleep walking," and I told him I sleep walked a few times and found myself out of bed. He said, "I'm going to classify you ground duty only." Well, they asked me then where I wanted to be transferred and I said any place but Randolph. I don't want to go back and have my buddies know that I washed out before I even started and he was a pretty smart personnel officer. He said, "Oh, you'd be better off just to go back to your

organization," and I did. I became an aircraft mechanic.

Do you want me to go in now to the B-29?

EG: Just tell us what happened next.

TS: Well, I had quite a lot of experience. I became a hangar chief and an inspector. I had gotten the rank of staff sergeant and in early 1944 I was asked to go to the hospital and take a physical examination. There were 40 of us non-commissioned officers out of this organization to go take physicals. We soon knew something was up when the base personnel officer was there watching everything and seeing who passed and just as soon as the flight surgeon said I had passed the physical examination I was told to report to the base personnel officer. When I reported to him one of the first things he said was, "Have you heard of the B-29," and I said, "Well, that's an extremely large bomber where you can crawl out through the wings and work on the engines and so forth," which turned out to be false. They said, "Well, yeah, it's a great big bomber and they have a flight engineer that has to be aware of how much fuel is being used and really have a lot of control over the airplane. How would you like to be a flight engineer on a B-29," and I said, "I think that'd be great." As soon as I said that he said there was a railroad station out in

front of Randolph at that time. As soon as I said yes he said, "Pack your bags and be out at the railroad station tomorrow morning at 8:00." From there it took four days to get up to Seattle, Washington. We went to the Boeing factory.

EG: You went to where again?

TS: The Boeing factory in Seattle, Washington. And for three months there we learned all about the airplane. They had one in the hangar there. We did various things to it. We learned everything you could learn about it, the engines and the aircraft itself, and then after three months we were transferred down to Lowry Field in Denver, Colorado. There they had what they called a flight engineers school, and you get all kinds of more or less technical training. One of the main things was what they called fuel control. You had 6,000 of fuel in the B-29 and you had at least 3,000 miles to fly a mission up to Japan and back. So the flight engineer had to control practically everything. The aircraft commander, which was the pilot, he was called commander because of such a big crew, but the flight engineer had all of the instruments, flight instruments, engine instruments, a very large panel and all the controls. The flight engineer started the engines, kept

track of what fuel was being used to the second on takeoff and climb a little later during the cruise up about every minute and they kept a very complete log on everything about what the engines were doing. The aircraft commander, pilot, had the main instruments, engine instruments, which was manifold pressure and RPM, but I had the oil pressure, cylinder head temperature, cowl flaps, everything else. I had to control the cowl flaps that cooled the engine. So the aircraft commander and the flight engineer worked very closely to know exactly how much fuel had been used, and the reason this was so important was the B-29 wings would bend seven feet either direction, down and up.

EG: Sort of a flapping back and forth.

TS: Yeah, when you fly through a rough area you could see the wing tip actually going up and down, and the wings tapered up and they tapered from very large, [next?] fuselage out small, and they just didn't have any fuel gauges that could keep track of the amount of fuel in the tanks with the wing moving and tapered like it was. So that was why it was so important for the flight engineer to keep track of the fuel because he had to be ready to warn the pilot any time you were using too much fuel. I had a very good aircraft

commander and he consulted me before anything out of the way.

EG: Now where did you meet with this crew that has this particular plane and commander and such, where did this happen?

TS: This was different from the way most crews -- the 504th Bomb Group was training at Fairmount, Nebraska and when General Tibbets was forming his 509th Bomb Group in Washington, they told him that he would have to train with another bomb group that was training now. So he said he thought the 504th Bomb Group was the best and he'd like to train with the 504th. They didn't have enough airplanes for three squadrons in the 504th and Tibbets' outfit, which was in the 393rd squadron. So they transferred a lot of the crews down to Pyote, Texas to train as replacements.

EG: How do you spell Pyote?

TS: P-Y-O-T-E, I think. It's out there by [Pecos?]. It's called Rattlesnake Air Force Base, Army Air Base at that time. I don't know exactly why but I met Captain Franklin, A. B. Franklin there. His flight engineer and bombardier had stayed at Fairmount for some reason or other, so they let him interview various people so flight engineers to see who he wanted. A lot of the B-29 pilots weren't captains,

of course some of them were majors, but he was a captain and an extremely good pilot and they let him kind of pick his men. Then we trained there until early February. Then we were transferred out to Tinian.

EG: Before that, tell us something about at the base.

TS: Training?

EG: Tell us how you lived and everything. How was it?

TS: I'm glad you asked that, it's kind of interesting. Pyote is out there on the west Texas desert and we were there in the fall, and one of the things that I really remember about it is that tumbleweeds grow out there and they die in the fall and they break loose and the north wind starts blowing them south and they would keep rolling until they hit a barracks and they'd pile up until the next one's coming could roll right up to them and over the top into the next barracks and by the time Christmas was there, a tumbleweed could roll all the way across the barracks going all the way across the base going over the barracks.

EG: That was a unique situation.

TS: Actually we kind of enjoyed it. You had to kind of keep everything closed up because the dust blew a lot in the winter. We did all sorts of training. We had P-63s attack us for the gunners to make tapes. I don't know that

anyone's ever told people how the gunners didn't handle the guns. They had a sight --

EG: Tell us about it.

TS: They sat in a blister, as probably most people know, but they had a sight and the guns were in turrets. There were four .50 caliber guns in the upper forward turret, two in the aft turret, upper turret, and then two in each of the lower turrets and then of course we had a 20 mm cannon and two .50 caliber guns in the tail. The gunners had a knob on the sight that controlled a ring of dots around the enemy fighter coming in, and then they had crosshairs. They would put the crosshairs on the fighter and as he came in and got bigger, they would change those dots and the B-29 actually had a computer even back in those days. The gunner on top was called central fire control gunner. He would get all kinds of information from me, altitude, air speed, temperature and they put all of this into a computer and then when the gunners did what they had to do keeping these dots on that fighter coming in, it automatically led the shots to meet the fighter, and of course that was a lot different from what the B-17s and B-24s where they only had a gun and had to do their leading and everything. But

that's why the B-29s were very accurate and Japanese fighters kind of hated to face them.

EG: Okay, that's good. Now what happened -- you got transferred and --

TS: We finished training late January, early February, I'm not remembering just which. We were transferred out to Tinian and we were transferred to the 9th bomber group.

EG: Tinian is where the Philippines or where is it?

TS: It's in the Marianas north of Guam. Tinian is the base that the 509th bomber group that dropped the atomic bomb. They came and they were still kind of close to us. They lived within a half a mile of us. But let me go on with us arriving in the 9th Bomb Group. Franklin was really well liked by the people in the headquarters 504th group. So about the second night, maybe even the first night that we were there, he went to visit the 504th which was just about a half a mile north of the 9th Bomb Group location and he got to talking about Colonel James Connally, who was the group commander and who James Connally Air Force Base in Waco, Texas was named after, Colonel Connally talked him into transferring back to the 504th. So we left the 509th, I mean the 9th and went to the 504th. This might be interesting to people but not necessarily in combat. About

the second or third night on Tinian, my right gunner and I who were very close, we were bridge partners, and we heard that a USO show was coming to a Seabee battalion camp on the south end of the island. It was easy to hitchhike, there were weapons carriers and Jeeps running all over Tinian and we got down there to the bomb group and watched the USO show, it was really great, and when we started walking out to go back to the 504th Bomb Group and we didn't have any idea where to go, but everything was so nice on Tinian you could lie down on the side of the road and go to sleep if you wanted to. But a Jeep pulled up beside us and there were two chief petty officers in the Jeep. One was in charge of the ship's store which is like our base exchange, and the other one had supervised the construction all over the island, and he was [Monte Cluthy?] he was driving a Jeep and Monte Cluthy said, "Where do you want to go," and we said, "504th Bomb Group." He said, "Where is that?" We didn't know, but we started describing what we could remember about the terrain and a tree line close and so forth and he found it, but on the way there we got talking about bridge and they said we'd like to play you guys bridge. Well, (inaudible) was in charge of ship's store had to live in it, protect it because wasn't a very

well built building and had a big nice living room and a nice round table and chairs. So we went over the next night and played bridge and it got to be kind of a standard procedure. We lived more with the Seabees than we did our own bomb group if we weren't flying a mission or getting ready for a mission. We even had bunks there. We had mess trays instead of mess kits. We had the regular coffee mugs instead of that tin thing that comes with a mess kit. We really enjoyed life with the Seabees. After a mission or two, we had to tell them how sorry the mess hall food was, it was ham or cheese sandwiches with very little mayonnaise or mustard on them and oranges. And for 14 hours that's what we had to eat, and after they heard that they had ice cream machines and everything on the Seabees. After that, when we'd be playing bridge and said we had a mission the next day, they'd say "What time are you going to take off?" and we'd tell them. And about 30 minutes before takeoff, a Jeep would roll up and we'd have a big cardboard box full of fried chicken, steak sandwiches, all sorts of good food. And that went on for the rest of the war. Let's see.

EG: Talk about some of your missions.

TS: I guess then I should talk about some missions, and I don't know whether anyone has ever said anything like what I'm going to say or not.

EG: It's not important.

TS: Our first three missions were daylight raids. We were making precision bombing runs, what was supposed to be armament plants and so forth. We didn't have fighter protection, so a Japanese fighter plane would fly just out of gun range on each side of the formation and radio down our air speed and altitude to the anti-aircraft batteries, and the anti-aircraft fire was extremely heavy. The airplane was continuing to bounce, and enough of it would hit the fuselage it would sound like you're driving an automobile on oily road and picking up rocks and hitting them. After the third mission, we had it so bad with various planes being shot down and us catching so much flack. I was lying in my bed after the third mission and I was I guess 21 years old at that time -- no, I was older, I was 24 -- but I didn't come from a wealthy family or anything and living had been kind of hard and I loved my mother very much and I thought there was no way I was going to live, so I had tears coming out of my eyes and it wasn't because I was going to die, it was because of what it was

going to do to my mother. I was her baby out of seven children and I knew it was going to be bad.

EG: Keep on talking.

TS: Well, I guess the next thing would be to go to our ninth mission. It was going to be a daylight precision bombing mission. We got attacked by fighter planes and one fighter plane got real close and hit us several times. The first thing we noticed was the number two engine, it quit running. We feathered that prop and increased power on the other three engines and stayed in formation. The pilot hollered at me and said the rudder control cables were out. I don't know whether he thought about the automatic pilot or I did, but he put it on automatic pilot to control the rudder, then we stayed in formation. But a little while later one of the gunners in the back called and said there was a bomb on -- we were making an incendiary raid, said there was a bomb on fire in the bomb bay. We hollered for the bombardier to drop the bombs and soon as he opened the bomb bay doors we couldn't stay in formation and we fell back, and then the fighters really jumped on us because we were all alone. The bombardiers salvoed the bombs but two on the back right hand bomb rack were still hanging in there, and we were pressurized, the bombardier tried

everything to get those bombs to come loose and they wouldn't. So I hollered at the navigator and the left gunner to pull the pressure release. They had a handle that they could pull that handle and raise pressure so that they could open the bomb bay bulkhead door going into the bomb bay so they could get out there, and some mechanic instead of using [5,000?] brass safety wire that goes on anything like fire extinguishers, anything of a safety nature, had [safetyed?] it with 30,000 steel wire and they couldn't get them open. I had a valve under my seat that I could crank open, and of course I'd been cranking it, but then it cranked real hard and finally got the pressure off and I thought sure that -- an incendiary bomb has a whole lot of small bombs in it, either napalm or what's the metal that burns hot? Anyway, I just -- I could see that blowing all over the bomb bay and setting the center wing tank on fire. We were sure to go down, but finally got the pressure off and the right blister gunner, my best friend and bridge partner, went down into the bomb bay. We were 17,500 feet over Japan with the bomb bay doors open. He couldn't wear a parachute because he wouldn't be able to get behind the bomb right, and this bulkhead door was in the middle of the bulkhead. It was a long step over to the

side to get on the little walking step of the bomb bay, but he took a fire extinguisher and a screw driver and he managed to hold that fire down enough that he could release the bomb with a screw driver. He released the bomb. The gunners had shot down four Jap fighters and the others had decided that they'd be best to leave. One had tried to ram us from the front and the bombardier's guns -- I didn't see it, but the pilot and co-pilot saw it, as the fighter plane was coming up over our left wing and he was heading right for the wing, could see the bullets hit him, could see his body go back, and that evidently caused him to pull the stick back and he went just zoom over our left wing. We got the doors closed and with four of them shot down, the other fighters decided they better go home and so we made it back to the island Tinian on three engines still alive and when we landed the wing commander, every big wheel had already heard about it because we reported on the way back, every big wheel on the island was there to meet us. The right gunner was awarded the Silver Star for saving the B-29 and ten other men. He's buried now in Arlington National Cemetery. That's where they want to bury you if you've been awarded a Silver Star or higher, maybe even the Bronze Star. Anyway, that was a hair-raising experience.

The only one we had similar was another daylight mission and this time we were going to bomb an air field down on the lower, I guess you'd call it, island of Japan called Kyushu, and during the battle at Okinawa, all these fighters, dive bombers, maybe even bombers would go down to Okinawa to fight us. So in order to have them not have a place to land when they came back we would -- different groups would take different airfields and areas and go bomb it and we used thousand pound delayed action bombs and as the Japs would be trying to close up the holes to make place for their fighters and dive bombers to come back, other bombs would be exploding with the delayed action fuses. That was that mission. We got close to our target and again we were attacked by the Japanese fighter planes. The Japanese had some different types of weapons that I've never heard of anybody talking about. One of the things that they would do to us, especially on this mission, the fighter planes would fly above us and drop -- can't think of the word now -- it was a bomb that exploded above the formation -- I'm having a hard time remembering (inaudible) -- when the bomb exploded, all these little particles of I believe it was called phosphorus, would come down and it was green and lighted and you could see it real plain, and

when they first started I kept watching out the wing at the (inaudible) it was covered with fabric and I wondered if it would set it on fire or burn a hole in it or what. It didn't damage the airplane in any way except a particle of it went into the air intake and number two engine and caused the carburetor to explode, and so here we were on three engines again. We hadn't dropped our bombs yet. When we opened the bomb bay doors to drop the bombs and we couldn't keep up with the formation on only three engines and the bomb bay doors open, so we fall back and here again we had 12 fighters this time attack us. The gunners shot down two of them, and shortly after that the others decided it would be best to go away. One reason it's funny about this story, we were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and I always thought we got it for that first mission we got all shot up, but then I found out it was the second one, which wasn't nearly as bad, but we had such a good group commander that he didn't award the other members of the crew the Distinguished Flying Cross because he wanted [Berget?], the one who kicked the bomb out, to get the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross. So, we got the Distinguished Flying Cross for that second bad mission where we got shot up kind of bad.

EG: Once again, let's go back to that weapon that the Japanese fighter planes, you say they dropped it and then it kind of exploded with a lot of -- what was the purpose of it?

TS: Well, to damage the B-29s.

EG: What kind of damage?

TS: I don't know what the Japs expected it to do, but it did cause us to lose an engine and almost get shot down.

EG: So, in other words, it possibly -- the whole purpose of it was to drop it in front of you where your engines would suck up those --

TS: And they may have thought like I, that it would burn the fabric. The rotor, the elevators that make the airplane go up and down and the (inaudible) that banked wings, those were all covered with fabric, and they might have thought like I did that that phosphorus was going to burn the fabric off of it. But I'll tell you about night missions now. When we started the night incendiary missions, I think it bothered our group commander's people that detailed our mission the day before we flew it. I think they thought that it would be bad when we were bombing the cities and burning them up, so they tried to make us feel better by saying that a great amount of Japan's armament manufacturing was going on in the houses, so you had ladies

in the kitchen and they made aircraft parts and things and took them to the factory where they assembled them. When we were getting ready for a mission after we had pre-flighted the airplane, we would gather like a football team up by the nose and one of us, usually the aircraft commander, would say a prayer and ask God's blessings. This right gunner that was a good friend of mine and had been awarded the Silver Star, every time we would start to break up after the prayer he'd say, "Now we're going up and kill a bunch of women and children," and of course that upset the aircraft men. "Shut up, Berget!" The night bombing missions were sometimes especially bad, the very first ones. The very first one we went on was Tokyo and I think it was the first fire raid, I think it was March the 9th on Tokyo. We were flying at 8,000 feet loaded with incendiary bombs, and in order to put them on our target, which the radar operator was (inaudible), we had to fly right into the smoke and heat from the fire that was ahead of us had already set. There's never been anything like flying into that smoke and heat. Did you ever hear of it?

EG: No.

TS: That smoke was -- and the flames were going up almost 8,000 feet; they were real close to our airplane. The smoke was

going up to 17,500 feet. We flew into it at 8,000 feet. The climb indicator was going up and down so fast and it was going to the extreme end on both ways, going up as fast as it could, down as fast as it could. The heat would carry us up and then there'd be a downdraft of air trying to get to the fire, and you'd zoom up 800 feet or a thousand feet in a matter of a couple of seconds and then you'd go down just as fast. We went into that at 8,000 feet, went up and down and we came out at 17,500 feet without increasing power. I never did time it how many seconds.

EG: Well, how did you get a very good aim with your bombs with the plane jumping up and down that much?

TS: Radar. He usually dropped them shortly after we hit it, but we still had to try to fly out of it and we never did get out of it until we were just shoved right up to the top. It was so bad that they figured some of the airplanes got tossed upside down, some probably got damaged to where they quit flying in that. So they told us to miss the target if necessary but not to fly into it. I think it was that same mission. After we got out at 17,500 feet and we headed east and then we turned south to go back to Tinian and of course we were looking right down on Tokyo burning.

The Japanese had another weapon that I don't know if anybody's ever talked about. In our intelligence briefing before a mission they would tell us what to expect in the way of anti-aircraft fire and so forth, and at night if it was around Tokyo especially, they'd say, "Well, you can expect to see some balls of fire," and that's all they called them was balls of fire. You could see a B-29 in the search lights and then all at once you'd see what looked like a ball of fire fly into it and a tremendous explosion. We didn't find out what they were until after the war was over and they called them Baca bombs. They were a flying torpedo and the ball of fire was a ram jet engine, a ram jet -- you probably know what a ram jet is -- it was mounted behind the pilot and out in the open because it got red hot, and of course that engine glowing red hot made it look like a ball of fire. We were after that bad time we had in the turbulence when we turned and headed south, everybody used Zippo lighters, and Zippo lighter made a great big flame and we'd kind of settle down and headed home and the aircraft commander took a cigarette and hit his Zippo lighter to light it and that's all it needed for this Baca bomb to spot us, and immediately the right gunner says a ball of fire is coming after us. We increased power

all the way, everything we had, and he just kept gaining on us. The right gunner kept shooting at him. Our instructions were if they got within 300 yards don't shoot at them because the flack and so forth coming from them would still knock you down. He got within 300 yards. The aircraft commander started diving and turning and twisting and made it difficult. Wasn't like a bomb run where you have to stay right on course, and so we managed to stay away from him until we got out over the ocean and he started going down and we all watched him going down and that engine was so hot and that red fire so bright you could actually see the waves on the water from the light of that ram jet engine.

EG: Let me ask you something else now. The Navy, of course I don't know about in your case with your planes, but the Navy suffered a lot of damage with the kamikaze planes. Did y'all have any of them that tried to attack y'all's planes?

TS: Well, as I mentioned on that mission where the fighters stacked formation and we got knocked out with the bomb on fire, I really think that the kamikazes might have been just pilots that were so wanting to kill us so bad that they'd commit suicide because there was one of them just

coming in from the front and if the bombardier with his guns hadn't slapped him back and caused him to pull the stick back and just go over our left wing, he would have been a kamikaze.

EG: That's as far as you know, that's the only incident y'all had with the kamikaze?

TS: Yeah, well, it was really kind of interesting, a lot of them were like that, wanted to get us so bad that they would kill themselves, but when there was a whole formation and they would come down on the attack and all these .50 calibers would swing up and when you had a chance to see it, it would seem like the gunners had some sort of a device that was telling them when to fire because they all knew when that thousand yards was so well that a flame about three feet long would be belching out of every one of the guns on all those B-29s and it'd be an awesome sight and quite often that fighter pilot would pull back out. He'd see that and think I don't want to face it.

EG: It scared him away.

TS: So there were some that weren't kamikaze type suicidal. Well, there was another experience, something kind of comical to go along with this, when we had that real bad jolting over Tokyo incendiary raid, when we got out and

away from the ball of fire and everything and everybody was checking up on how things were, the radar operator called me and said, "Tom, we've got water dripping back here some place," and I thought about it a little while and his name was Hank, and I thought about it a little while and I said, "Hank, this airplane's not just air tight, it's water tight. There's not water line back there any place. I don't know where that water could be coming from." The relief can was right next to him. One of our next incendiary raids was to [Nagoya?] and when we got there and headed into the smoke and heat, our aircraft commander was very conscientious and we voted on things, the crew, come on the intercom and whoever had an idea of this type, but it was usually him, he called on the intercom and said, "I think we can hit the target and still miss the heat. We'll be flying in close. You guys in favor," and one by one everybody would come on the intercom and say yeah, let's go. But we tried to do it but he didn't back away soon enough and we ended up in the smoke and heat. I think we were going at 7,000 feet that time, and not only were we getting all this bouncing but he was banking at that time when we're sideways going up, but it wasn't as bad as Tokyo, we came out at 14,500 feet without increasing power.

We got out a ways from there and the radar operator, Hank, called me up and said, "Tom, I found out where that water's coming from. The whole can hit me this time."

EG: (laughs) So you had another problem besides the enemy, huh?

TS: Yep. What else can I tell you?

EG: Well, let me ask something else. You've had experience with a lot of different people, different people that you've worked with. Was there any special people that you remember something about (inaudible) funny or something like that? Do you have any particular characteristics about somebody that you still remember?

TS: Well, our tail gunner was a little Jewish boy from Brooklyn, and I think he was just 18 years old. He was tail gunner because he was kind of small. But we kind of got a bang out of him. I don't know whether I'm getting away from the war --

EG: No, that's fine.

TS: -- but when we were still in training at Pyote, we didn't think there was any way we'd get off for Christmas. But four or five days before Christmas on a weekend, they came on the loud speaker to all the barracks and said anybody who wants Christmas leave report to the order room and there was a mad rush. They even gave us partial pay if we

wanted it. But anyway I was standing in line, this first lieutenant that lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming came walking by and said, "Anybody want to help me drive to Denver?" Well I knew that the Colorado Eagle, real speedy train, they had a speedometer in the car where the bar was, I think, had a speedometer in there and from Denver to Kansas City went 110 miles an hour and from Kansas City to St. Louis went 90 miles an hour, no stops in between, and to go home to Indiana I thought, man, that'd be a whole lot better than taking that little old train going out of Texas that stops in every little town. So as soon as he said does anyone want to help me drive to Denver, I stepped out and said, "Yeah, I might go with you." The tail gunner was right behind me and he had to go to Brooklyn, and he kind of tapped me on the back and said, "I can't drive, but could I go with you?" And so this lieutenant's name was (inaudible) and I'd known him previously, and I said, "Can my tail gunner go with us and I'll do the driving for him," and they said, "Sure." So, he was like a little brother to all of us, kind of a little pet.

EG: So, do you remember any special funny jokes or anything like that happen during training or just anything unusual even in combat that you remember?

TS: Well, I remember that the left gunner, we gave him a hard time because when we were training at Pyote, we had a practice mission to an island on the south side -- it might have been Guantanamo, I don't remember, to an island on the south end of Cuba, and they were even going to let the gunners fire their guns to just get them used to it before we even got overseas. And I'm pretty sure it was the left gunner that got carried away, and those .50 calibers, if you fire them too much at one time they could burn out the barrel, and he ruined both of the -- I think of the lower forward turret. He was getting his practice shots -- they really weren't shooting anything, just letting them get the feel of it.

EG: Okay, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't covered?

TS: I'll think of it after awhile, probably.

EG: Then on behalf of the Nimitz Museum, I want you to know that we really appreciate you sharing your experiences with us.

TS: Well, I'm glad people will -- well perhaps some people here, there are too many people that just don't understand the war, they don't understand the activities of foreign nations, they don't understand how important it is to be

ready to fight like what Jimmy Carter did to Armed Forces while he was in office. I think there's always going to be somebody out there who's ready to take us on.

EG: So we've got to be ready.

TS: Yep. And I just hope that the presidents remember that and then of course the congressmen, senators go along with him to help him, but it usually starts with the president.

EG: Okay, that sounds to me like a lot of advice that a lot of people would agree with you on it.

TS: Nowadays for sure.

EG: Well, then is there anything else you'd like to add?

TS: I'll think of something later, nothing now.

EG: Okay, well, once again, thank you for sharing your experiences with us.

TS: I'm glad to do it.

END OF AUDIO FILE