



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Interview of **JOHN C. CULLEN**

Conducted by **DR. WILLIAM THIESEN, LANTAREA HISTORIAN**

Also Present: **MRS. JOHN CULLEN**

March 30, 2006
Chesapeake, Virginia



MR. CULLEN: It's John, not "A" but "C."

INTERVIEWER: Good.

MR. CULLEN: Cornelius.

INTERVIEWER: Great.

MR. CULLEN: I have an Uncle Cornel.

INTERVIEWER: Good. All right. Let me go ahead, and I'll comment where we are in everything. Today is Thursday, the 30th of March 2006, and the time is about 2:15 in the afternoon.

MR. CULLEN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And I am William Thiesen, Historian for Atlantic Area, and we are here today at the home of John C. Cullen for an oral history interview.

Okay. Great. Well, we can just start from the top, I guess, John, if you don't mind.

MR. CULLEN: Okay. Not at all. You got my name?

INTERVIEWER: Yep.

MR. CULLEN: You got that.

INTERVIEWER: John C. Cullen.

MR. CULLEN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: And my rank in the Coast Guard was -- when I got discharged was First Class Boatswain's Mate.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: And I was born in Manhattan, in the lower West Side of New York. My mother came from Ireland, and my father was a veteran of World War I.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Now, is there any special event or a person that led you to join the Coast Guard in the first place or some influence?

MRS. CULLEN: Pearl Harbor.

MR. CULLEN: Pearl Harbor.

INTERVIEWER: Pearl Harbor?

MRS. CULLEN: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: A friend of mine, John Edwards -- he's since passed away. I went in the service with him. Him and I were in together, and we went to Jamaica in the post office where the Navy and the recruiting offices were.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: We wanted to enlist in the Marine Corps. So we lined up. There must have maybe 30 or 40 men, and a little sergeant came out, and he said, "Any of you fellows ready to leave? If so, tonight is the time you'll leave. Otherwise, take an about face, and leave."

Everybody left, because this was December, after Pearl Harbor.

MRS. CULLEN: Just a couple of days after.

MR. CULLEN: Couple of days after Pearl Harbor, and nobody was that anxious. So we said, "Let's go."

So we went out, and John says, "You know, there's a Coast Guard [office] over here. I'm sure you can work out a much better deal." So we went to the Coast Guard in New York and said, "We'd like to join up, but we want to be here for Christmas at home," and the fellow says, "Well, we can arrange that if you pass a physical."

We said okay. So we went and had a physical. and both of passed. And they gave us until December 26th, 6 a.m., recruiting office in Manhattan.

Okay. And that's where we went. We were quite anxious to go, and there was quite a few, maybe 30 or 40 men there. So we all lined up, and the recruiter took us on a ferry over to --

MRS. CULLEN: Ellis Island.

MR. CULLEN: Ellis Island, that's where that base was, before the big one there now.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: So we stayed there for a couple of weeks, getting uniforms and shots and whatever, and there was quite a few men there. We were sleeping three high. So that meant there was a lot.

INTERVIEWER: So it was dormitory-style sleeping?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: It was also commissaries when we ate right there.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And there was a lot of enlisted personnel being instructed on what to do and whatnot.

So, after we had completed a couple of weeks there, they said we were supposed to go to Louisiana, but things got too crowded. So we wound up in -- where did we wind up? Oh. We went across on the ferry, and we were into the Seaman's Institute.

Do you know what the Seaman's Institute is? It's the Merchant Marine.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the old Webb Academy or the Merchant Marine Academy or --

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Maybe it was at one time.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: But that's where they lived, going, coming from sea.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: So we were there. And from that point, they shipped us to different locations. So my friend, Edwards, John, -- they came up with Jones Beach. So we were familiar with Jones Beach because we used to go there in the summer.

INTERVIEWER: Is that on Long Island?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, Jones Beach. So we -- the next morning, we were going to ride the truck out to Long Island, Jones Beach, and Short Beach Lifeboat Station. There was maybe 30 enlisted, like ourselves, and they separated us there. So I went to Coast Guard Station, east of Short Beach, for lifeboat training.

MRS. CULLEN: Was that Amagansett?

MR. CULLEN: No.

MRS. CULLEN: No?

MR. CULLEN: No. That was Jones Beach. Then, a couple of weeks there, we stayed in a boathouse. January, no good, cold.

INTERVIEWER: How many were there? How many of you were in this boathouse?

MR. CULLEN: Oh, we were actually in a garage boathouse, with -- upstairs where the bunks were.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: So you put your hand out, and it would go up like that. That's how cold it was.

So, after we were there, we completed that in three weeks. We were happy to get out of there.

INTERVIEWER: So that was in January that that --

MR. CULLEN: That was in January.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Could have been February too.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: But we were sent out east on Long Island to another Coast Guard station in Georgica. That's in East Hampton. That's where we were.

INTERVIEWER: So that was before Amagansett?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: It was nice. It was new. The food was pretty good. Had no complaints there. But it was a ride. Hitchhiked home for me and John. That was no problem.

So being there for awhile. Let's see. This is May -- April, May, June. Yeah, June. I was in that lifeboat station, and that's -- no, that's at the Amagansett.

INTERVIEWER: So you were sent to Amagansett in February, and you were there for those months up until June.

MR. CULLEN: In February? No. March, April, May, June, I was -- April, I was in there.

So, in June, June 13th, I met this German on the beach, and he was -- let's see. I had been walking the beach for a couple of months. Once in a while, you might run into somebody but very rare. That's almost the end of Long Island.

INTERVIEWER: That's right on the point there.

MR. CULLEN: Almost.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. There was two more stations after that, Map Hague [ph] and --

MRS. CULLEN: Montauk.

MR. CULLEN: -- Montauk.

INTERVIEWER: You probably had your own routine set up at the station where others had patrol duty, beach patrol, certain watches, and you had a certain watch time-wise. You kind of switched off?

MR. CULLEN: Well, we had -- Gee, it was so long ago.

INTERVIEWER: Sure, I understand.

MRS. CULLEN: You had four hours, back and forth.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. We had --

INTERVIEWER: About four hours.

MR. CULLEN: We had two hours in a tower, and two hours to walk the beach. That's six miles.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MRS. CULLEN: And you had to check in at the end. At the end, you had a clock down there.

MR. CULLEN: You walked three miles. There was a clock. You punched the clock.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: So that they knew you made it.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And then you came back, and then you went in the tower and spent two hours in the tower. This was 12 to 8, 12 to 4 and so on, and split it up that way.

If a fog was there, you had to go back out again, but there was enough of men that it was split up in eight hours, so that everybody had their turn.

INTERVIEWER: So when did you first start out on your watch? That was in the evening, wasn't it?

MR. CULLEN: This incident, we're going to refer to --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: -- I was in midnights, take-off. A fellow that I relieved was late. He hadn't got in yet. So I had to wait, maybe a half hour or so.

Anyway, when my time was ready to go, I proceeded down the beach. It wasn't too far to get to the beach, but it was a station right there.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: So it took us -- took me five, ten minutes to get there. I started walking, and it was so foggy that I couldn't see my shoes.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

MR. CULLEN: So you moved very slow.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: You walked along the water?

MR. CULLEN: Pardon me?

MRS. CULLEN: Did you walk along the water?

INTERVIEWER: Along the surf or in the dunes?

MR. CULLEN: I would -- you would walk the surf when the tide was pretty low because it was solid, and you could make time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, right.

MR. CULLEN: The idea was to get it over with as fast as you could. I did.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: But the fellows -- after I proceeded to walk, I wasn't gone too long, maybe 20 minutes, half hour from the station, and I spotted a civilian -- two civilians talking down by the water, and I was up in the sand dunes.

So I watched them. So, finally, I moved down slowly, and I asked -- I called out to them. And then the guy turns around, and he says, "You Coast Guard?" I said, "Yes, I am. What are [you] doing here?" He says, "We're boating. Our boat ran aground, and we're going to stay here until daybreak."

MRS. CULLEN: Fisherman.

MR. CULLEN: What?

MRS. CULLEN: They were fishermen back then.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, fishermen.

INTERVIEWER: And this was how long into your patrol? It was like an hour or 45 minutes?

MR. CULLEN: My patrol would be two hours.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. So you were halfway there.

MR. CULLEN: Halfway, two hours there and two hours in the tower.

MRS. CULLEN: When was it that you met these fellows then?

MR. CULLEN: Going on patrol. Just starting out.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: So the one fellow says -- put up his hands and he says, "You Coast Guard?" He kept walking up to me.

So I backed up a little. I says, "What are you going to do?" He says, "Well, we'll stay here until daybreak." I said, "Gee, that's a long ways off, could be five or six hours." I said, "Why don't you come up to the station and have a cup of coffee?" I said, "There's just the two of you?" He says, "Yeah." So I said, "Yeah, why not? Come on up."

So he turned around, and he walked down to the other guy, and then he came back, and he says, "Look. You got a mother and father?" And I says, "Yeah. What's that got to do with it?" He says, "Well, it's best that you don't know too much. You just do what we tell you, and everything will be fine."

MRS. CULLEN: You had said he would kill you.

MR. CULLEN: He said my mother and father, and then after we discussed a few things, the weather and the fog was so thick.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: He says, "We want to -- don't want to let you know too much, other than you got a mother and father, and you" --

MRS. CULLEN: You want to see them again.

MR. CULLEN: You want to see them, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have any kind of an accent at all, or could you tell --

MR. CULLEN: A slight, but it doesn't mean anything.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: No.

The other fellow, he never came up. He stayed down with the -- I think they had a rubber raft.

INTERVIEWER: So you only saw two of them at any given time?

MR. CULLEN: That's all I saw.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MR. CULLEN: I later found out that there was four of them, and two were burying explosives in the back, in the sand dunes.

But to finish with -- this fellow's name was Dasch [George John Dasch]. He was the head of the group.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: And he says, "We'll give you some money, and you forget about this." So I said, "Gee, I don't want to be implicated in this. I don't want any money."

And I thought -- I said who's going to believe this. I'd better get the money. So he offered me a couple of hundred bucks.



George John Dasch

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Twenty-one dollars a month. It wasn't too bad.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Sure, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: But you better state you didn't keep it.

MR. CULLEN: Oh, well, they took that. They took everything.

MRS. CULLEN: But you never gave it to him. You'd think after the war, they would have given it to him.

INTERVIEWER: Deserved.

MR. CULLEN: They never give you anything. They take and take and take.

INTERVIEWER: Well, were you armed at all, or what kind of equipment were you wearing that night?

MR. CULLEN: I had what they call a flare gun.

INTERVIEWER: A flare gun.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. Insert a cartridge in it, and you hit it on the bottom, and it shoots a flare up. We were never instructed as to what we were going to find or do. Just look mostly salvage from -- they were hitting freighters, the German submarines, and they got quite a few.

INTERVIEWER: So they never prepared you for the prospect of saboteurs or spies --

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: -- coming ashore at all. They had no idea?

MR. CULLEN: No idea. It was a changeover from a big thing in the Coast Guard when it happened.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Then they -- I think they took two men. They gave them horses.

MRS. CULLEN: Dogs. Some of them had dogs.

MR. CULLEN: Dogs.

MRS. CULLEN: And I guess guns, they had then.

MR. CULLEN: Guns, .38s, pistols. Everything thing changed. That was after.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: So he says to me, "Well, we'll give you the money, and you forget about seeing us." I said, "Okay, it's a deal."

MRS. CULLEN: Didn't he ask you to look at him carefully?

MR. CULLEN: Oh, he said to me, "Look in my face."

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. Do you -- "Will you recognize me again if you saw me?" And I said, "No, I never saw you before. I don't know you." I says, "Just let's get out of here."

MRS. CULLEN: Don't forget the streak in his hair.

MR. CULLEN: He had, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Remember the white streak.

MR. CULLEN: Gray streak.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: And I never forgot it. Never forgot it. It's amazing how many times you think about different things. After all these years, it comes up where you say, "If I'd have done this, if I'd have done that." If. . .

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: So I took the money, and he didn't know where I was going, east or west. So I went up to the sand dunes, and I ran like hell for the station.

INTERVIEWER: So you kind of sauntered away casually until you were out of sight?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And then you ran?

MR. CULLEN: I backed up most of the way. I didn't trust them. I didn't think I was going to get out of there.

MRS. CULLEN: Didn't some fellow come up and speak to him in German, one of the sailors?

MR. CULLEN: Oh, yeah, that's right.

A fellow, he was in back of me in the sand dunes. He came up dragging a sea bag, and I said -- he spoke in German.

INTERVIEWER: So was that a third person, or was that the second person?

MR. CULLEN: That's the third.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MR. CULLEN: So he says to the other fellow that I was with, talking -- he told him, "Shut up, and get down with the others."

He was sorry that came out. So then I knew, well, these guys are German. What are they doing out here? Coming or going?

It was a strong odor of diesel fuel there, which was unusual. So, when I got back to the station, the chief that's in charge, Barnes, he was home. He lived nearby.

INTERVIEWER: What was his full name?

MR. CULLEN: Barnes.

INTERVIEWER: It was Chief Barnes?

MR. CULLEN: Chief Barnes. Yep.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: So the fellow that was in charge at the time was a surfman by the name of Jenette, who was a good guy, really, and he -- when I told him what happened, he says, "Oh, boy, this is big." He says, "I've got to notify Map Hague, the next station," and he says, "We'll get or break out some rifles, and you don't have to come back, but if you want to go" -- I said, "I'll go."

So the four of us went down to the beach. We spread out, and we walked down. We thought whoever was there might still be there, but we got to where he says, "You show us which spot you were, where you were."

This is daybreak now coming, but you still can't see nothing. So I says, "I think this is it here." So, sure enough, I found a package of German cigarettes. I was lucky, and then I showed them to him, and he says, "Oh, boy."

MRS. CULLEN: When did the rumble from the submarine come?

MR. CULLEN: That came shortly after that.

INTERVIEWER: So it rumbled after you went back with the patrol?

MR. CULLEN: Yes, with the four of us, three other men and myself.

INTERVIEWER: So you didn't even know there was a submarine until you heard the rumble. You just smelled the diesel, I guess.

MR. CULLEN: There was a blinker light from the sub. We knew it was a surface vessel because of the blinker light, and we figured it was a submarine because the beach vibrated. Remember there was a tide --

MRS. CULLEN: And it was stuck on a sand dune.

MR. CULLEN: It was on a sand dune.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: So I said, "Okay. I'll go up in the tower and notify Map Hague that there's a -- we think there's a sub here." So I did. I went up and told them up there, and they said, "Okay. We'll handle it. We'll send an 83-footer." I don't know where that was coming from, but we were out near the Atlantic Ocean here now.

But I went back again and just stayed there a little bit, and then Jenette came along, and he says, "We're wasting our time here. There's nothing moving. Come back to the station."

So the four of us started back, and the car was coming down the road. So we figured this is the car that's going to pick these guys up. Well, this fellow was some fellow in the Navy. See, this was a Navy operation there -- base. Not too many with radio. So they -- we wasted time doing that.

Then we went into the office, the Coast Guard station there. We cleaned up and had a cup of coffee, and then, all of a sudden, things started to happen. The Army came, trucks, guns, artillery.

MRS. CULLEN: FBI?

MR. CULLEN: Oh, they came later --

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, okay.

MR. CULLEN: -- in the morning, and they took over.

INTERVIEWER: That was still in the evening, just a few hours after the exchange you had with the Germans.

MR. CULLEN: Yes. Yes. This was still in the morning.

And then the Army men came, and they disrupted everything. Well, when you got cannons and whatnot coming in, plus men, say what the hell is this.

But, anyway, the FBI did come, and they wanted me, and they took me in a car. They took me to East Hampton.

MRS. CULLEN: No. You didn't go down to dunes yet and dig up the --

MR. CULLEN: Oh, no. That comes later.

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, really?

MR. CULLEN: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, gee, I'm sorry.

MR. CULLEN: The FBI --

INTERVIEWER: Well, before you go on, when did you first make contact with the outside world as far as the -- you probably had some kind of a radio or some device in the station?

MR. CULLEN: Jenette, who was in charge --

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: -- he notified Map Hague station.

INTERVIEWER: As soon as you got back --

MR. CULLEN: That's the officer in charge of the stations out there.

INTERVIEWER: And then you went back out to -- with those four others?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: After that radio message?

MR. CULLEN: He did that on his own. We weren't involved.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: We were standing by, waiting to see what's going to happen.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Everybody was anxious to see what's going to happen.

INTERVIEWER: Did you give the money to Jenette when you explained it to him?

MR. CULLEN: No. The money was turned over -- yeah, that's right. Jenette -- somehow it's later.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: They were starting to ask questions, and then the FBI came. And the FBI took me in the car to a home of an FBI agent in East Hampton. There, they interviewed me, asked me questions after question. They figured I must be part of this, that I lived -- if they are who they are, you're not going to survive, but I was lucky. And then I told them, one after the other, this is what happened, and they were shocked.

INTERVIEWER: So they had different people --

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: -- asking questions, interrogate you, whatever?

MR. CULLEN: These agents, maybe -- I don't know how many, 15, 20. They came out, and they dug a hole. See, what they actually did, the Germans --

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: When I was talking to --

INTERVIEWER: Dasch?

MR. CULLEN: He -- the fellows in the back, they were digging and burying the explosives. And then they waited. They went to the railroad station and sat there and waited for a train. We never went near it, but we just didn't know whether they were coming or going.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: So the FBI then took over the whole thing. In the boat room, the FBI came in, and they got a hold of the truck we had, and they put these explosives that they found down the beach a little further where they had dug to bury it.

INTERVIEWER: So the FBI found the explosives?

MR. CULLEN: No.

MRS. CULLEN: You were with them.

MR. CULLEN: It was a Naval intelligence officer that was there, too, and the Coast Guard was there. And they are the ones that found it.

MRS. CULLEN: When you turned the beach sand over --

MR. CULLEN: Oh, that was --

MRS. CULLEN: -- you could see it was all wet, and that's what gave them -- to help them find it.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Up in the dunes.

INTERVIEWER: Was it marked by anything? That location?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. A bathing suit

MRS. CULLEN: German bathing trunks.

MR. CULLEN: But the thing was, when you turned the wet sand over --

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: -- it stood out, and that's how they found it.

So the four cases of incendiary bombs and whatnot, they brought into the boathouse, and we -- fortunately, the Coast Guard had an officer there who came out, and he said, "Well, open it up and see what's in here, but be careful."

So he did. He opened it up and there was a five-gallon can and -- full of excelsior, and there were different types of bombs, 45 shell --

MRS. CULLEN: Coal.

MR. CULLEN: Piece of coal, pieces.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: Fountain pens.

MR. CULLEN: And fountain pens.

INTERVIEWER: Fountain pens? Wow.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah. You open it, and it would explode.

INTERVIEWER: Blow up? Oh, it was all booby-trapped.

MR. CULLEN: See, fortunately, they knew what these were.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: If we had of done this, we'd have been in real trouble.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: But that all worked out. He packed it back in the excelsior, the way it was, and he took that into New York, into New York and give it to the Coast Guard, and the Coast Guard got in trouble for taking that, and it should have went to the FBI, but the FBI went there and got it.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Wow.

MR. CULLEN: But, unfortunately, the Coast Guard didn't get the recognition that they should have.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: It was mostly FBI.

MRS. CULLEN: But that was J. Edgar Hoover. He wanted the credit for it.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Sure.

MR. CULLEN: I was lucky I was able to say hello to him.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Yep.

MR. CULLEN: At the trial, I spent two weeks with an FBI agent, and we traveled around looking to see if we could find these guys, because one thing led to another, and then, finally, I got into New York and the -- I was living at home for a few days, and then I was in the Coast Guard on Ellis Island a few days, and then they sent me to Washington. And that was when they were going to have the trial.



Military Tribunal, July, 1942. U.S. Army Signal Corps Photograph.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: So they had -- the story broke in the paper, but they didn't mention me. But there was a guy by the name of -- what was his name? The reporter from the -- the old timer.

MRS. CULLEN: Walter Winchell?

MR. CULLEN: Walter Winchell.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. Sure.

MR. CULLEN: His contacts are pretty good. He got information that there's a Coast Guard who's been involved in this story, and I was told that this wouldn't soon come out until after the war. So he knew.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet him? Did you meet Winchell?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. I was in a -- on a -- what do you call it? An elevator?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. We went to lunch at the Waldorf. I was living good then.

[Laughter.]

MR. CULLEN: And he was in there, in that elevator, but I didn't tell him who I was.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. So you didn't -- he didn't necessarily --

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: -- interview you or anything of that nature?

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MR. CULLEN: I kept that a secret, but it was fortunate, the way it worked out.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: At the trial, I was, of course, the first witness called, and there was three generals. They were the judges, and they -- J. Edgar Hoover -- and Biddle, he was the Attorney General [U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle]. He was doing his thing, and he called me and asked me if I -- what I did and where did I meet these fellows and so on. So I told him, and he says, "Would you recognize this man again?" And I said, "Oh, I'm quite sure." I said, "I'll never forget him." So, sure enough, he was there.

MRS. CULLEN: You didn't tell about the night before, that you took you down to where they were holding all of these men.

MR. CULLEN: Well, that was before the trial, the day before the trial.

INTERVIEWER: They took you down to the cells to see the men?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, the prison.

MRS. CULLEN: The tombs. They were like a tomb.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, the tombs. And that's where they kept each one.

And I was told to put on an Army uniform and look at each one of these men as long as I wanted to and see if I could identify one of them; actually, the two.

INTERVIEWER: So you recognized two of them?

MR. CULLEN: Just my guy. Haupt.

MRS. CULLEN: Dasch.

INTERVIEWER: Dasch.

MR. CULLEN: He was the only one if recognized.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: Well, then he had that --

MR. CULLEN: Gray streak.

MRS. CULLEN: He had that streak, which helped you could recognize him.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

MR. CULLEN: And the only reason he survived that whole thing was he turned State's evidence, and he never planned on --

MRS. CULLEN: He also came up to you at the trial.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. He stood up, wanted to be recognized by me, and it -- there was no doubt about it, who he was. I was just happy that I'd met somebody that I had seen.

MRS. CULLEN: Didn't he tell you he was supposed to kill you at the trial?

MR. CULLEN: No.

MRS. CULLEN: He didn't tell you that?

MR. CULLEN: He didn't tell me that, but it was a known fact he was supposed to get rid of me, and he didn't do it.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Of course, I was the only one out there on the beach.

INTERVIEWER: Why did he stand up and want to be recognized? Was that just --

MR. CULLEN: They were -- each prisoner -- there was eight.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: There was four that landed in Florida.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: Okay. Each prisoner stood up, they had an Army guard. Each had two guards to the next of them, and they sat along the wall.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: And they were in the hearing, the trial. They had a trial. So when I -- Biddle asked -- I was invited up to sit on the stand as a witness, and my job was to tell them who I met, when I met them, and is he here?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: And that's what I did.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MR. CULLEN: Next day, they shipped my bottom back to New York.

MRS. CULLEN: But I think he came over to you because -- I mean, I don't know this, but I'm just telling Bill because he had -- he didn't kill John. He sort of saved John.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MRS. CULLEN: And I think maybe they wanted -- he wanted them to know that.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: You know?

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay, to recognize the fact that he [Dasch] hadn't killed you after all.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah. He should have, but he didn't, you know.

INTERVIEWER: So that to grant him some sort of --

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- dispensation for that.

MR. CULLEN: Sure, which they did.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Because he was the only one that -- actually, there was two of them that lived, but they died years later.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. So, now, did -- after the hearings -- now, the hearings took place over the course of several days, I suspect.

MR. CULLEN: Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, in Washington, D.C.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. That's where the trial was.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. And after that, were you involved in anything extraordinary? I mean, in terms of your service -- you were in the service for how many years total? Was it four years?

MR. CULLEN: Five years.

INTERVIEWER: Five years.

MRS. CULLEN: It was five.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: I was all -- in for five.

INTERVIEWER: And after the hearings were over, they sent you back to Long Island, or were you in another part of the coastline there?

MR. CULLEN: Well, what they did was -- I was sent back to Long Island, Ellis Island, and then in turn somebody said, "We've got to get him up here in Public Relations." That's where I wound up, and I did a lot of bond rallies and launchings.

MRS. CULLEN: You also drove for Fred Vinson.

MR. CULLEN: That was a special deal.

INTERVIEWER: Fred Vinson?

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah, Secretary of the --

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MRS. CULLEN: -- of Treasury. Secretary of the Treasury.

MR. CULLEN: That was -- he established the World Bank in Atlanta, and the Coast Guard had the base there, and that's where they held, but whatever they had to do, they gave that base.

So I had the honor of driving a Cadillac from New York to Savannah and driving Vinson.

There was another big wheel there, Secretary of the Navy, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Forrestal? That would have been Secretary Forrestal maybe?

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember myself. Between the two us --

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: Too many years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So you did war bond drives, things of that nature. They kind of showed you off as a hero?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Were you mainly on the East Coast, or did you travel all over the country?

MR. CULLEN: No. Mainly on the East Coast.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: I got as far as St. Louis.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: I went out there.

INTERVIEWER: And you were there -- were you with some other military figures in these war bond drives at all?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. Yeah. There was a German -- a Russian woman.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MR. CULLEN: She was a well-known character who killed so many Germans over there.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: So they had her travel around with us. She couldn't speak English.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?

MRS. CULLEN: I just found this because I wanted to send one to our grandson.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. Wow, that's great. I have to find out where you got that and get a copy of that. There's some nice graphics on there too.

Did you receive any decorations, too, at all?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. I think I was still in New York, stationed there.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And I was in a car pool, transportation, and used to take different personnel to different places, and that's mainly what I did.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: This is a Legion of Merit.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Legion of Merit.

MRS. CULLEN: Navy Medal of Honor.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: Those are the two, and he's -- I think these are just from New York State.

INTERVIEWER: So he received some medals from the State of New York?

MRS. CULLEN: I don't know what those are, John.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Can I make you some tea or coffee?

MR. CULLEN: This is the Legion of Merit.

MRS. CULLEN: No?

INTERVIEWER: I'm fine. Thanks.

MRS. CULLEN: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks. So Legion of Merit and the --

MR. CULLEN: That's --

INTERVIEWER: -- Army, Navy --

MR. CULLEN: -- for doing the job.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: That's from the government.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: This one. This is good conduct, three years enlistment.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is that a Coast Guard medal?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Any other Coast Guard medals in there?

MR. CULLEN: No. That's it. That's all. Yep.

These are civilian decorations. This is the Army and Navy Union.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And this was one from a Coast Guard outfit in Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. So it was a local Coast Guard medal of some sort?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. They awarded this every year to outstanding Coast Guardsmen.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. Great. Super. So, as a result of -- actually, I'd like to kind of go back to some of these questions, too, if you don't mind.

MR. CULLEN: No, not at all.

INTERVIEWER: But just kind of going along chronologically here before we do that, were you treated differently by any of the Coast Guard personnel as a result of your history in the service as far as officers or enlisted are concerned?

MR. CULLEN: The enlisted people that you were with never made any issue out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But some of the Coast Guard officers did.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. They wanted to know what happened and so forth, but where I was in Washington, it was different.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: It was recruiting there. There was a chief who became a commander, thanks to my story, I think. He was the public relation man.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MR. CULLEN: So he took pictures, publicity and so forth. He worked on that. He was a good guy.

INTERVIEWER: So some of the officers may have treated you differently, but enlisted pretty much treated you the same as usual?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. Just never made a big deal out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: Well, John never did either. You would have to pry to get the story out of him when he was younger. People who would want to hear it, he'd say, "Well, I'll tell you sometime. Sometime. I haven't got time now," or, you know, he never flaunted it.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Yep.

MR. CULLEN: But after I got out of the service, like I said, I had stayed 20 years.

INTERVIEWER: So, if you had stayed, you would have continued on as an enlisted going up the ranks and --

MR. CULLEN: I think I would have at least make chief.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. CULLEN: Well, I did make chief, too, thanks to down here.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: This admiral, one of the last things he did was he made me a chief, which was nice. It was. It was the last luncheon we went to.

MRS. CULLEN: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: Plus, moreover, John, since we came down here, then they did more when it happened, I think, don't you?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. I got more publicity here than I ever got in New York.

MRS. CULLEN: How did they find out again how -- who you were when we came down here? Was that Sweeney's brother who said to you something like do they know down here who you are? Remember that?

MR. CULLEN: Who?

MRS. CULLEN: Sweeney's brother-in-law.

MR. CULLEN: Oh, yeah, that's right.

MRS. CULLEN: He called the *Pilot* [*The Virginian-Pilot*].

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: I mean, John didn't know he was going to do this, and there was a big spread in the *Pilot* on the front page.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: Well, then it being a Navy town, Bill --

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MRS. CULLEN: -- and then they picked up on it, and, oh, golly, we had phone calls and people and interviewing. A couple of books have been written since we're down here.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: You know --

INTERVIEWER: Now, who was Sweeney?

MRS. CULLEN: Well, Sweeney is just a friend of John's.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: He's a guy I bowl with.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: His brother-in-law is --

MR. CULLEN: His brother-in-law --

MRS. CULLEN: He's a captain in the police department in New York.

MR. CULLEN: He's a lieutenant, Staten Island Police Department.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: And he knew the story, and he met John at the bowling alley with this Sweeney, and he started the thing to roll. Otherwise, no one would to this day ever know who he was.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Huh, that's amazing.

MR. CULLEN: It's amazing.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So you served after the hearings were over.

MR. CULLEN: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Were you based out of -- you said you were based out of New York City?

MR. CULLEN: Manhattan.

INTERVIEWER: Manhattan.

MR. CULLEN: New York.

INTERVIEWER: And were you in the Public Affairs Office there?

MR. CULLEN: Public Relations.

INTERVIEWER: Public Relations, probably. Yeah, okay.

And you served virtually the rest of the war or your service out of that office, even though you were going around to different venues?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. I was assigned to Brooklyn, across the street from Ebbets Field, a garage. It was Coast Guard.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And I was assigned there as a -- two of us were in charge of guard detail.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: Sergeant of arms.

MR. CULLEN: What?

MRS. CULLEN: Sergeant at arms, is that what they call it?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. Something.

MRS. CULLEN: It didn't mean anything, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: Title.

MRS. CULLEN: It just sounds good, you know?

MR. CULLEN: That was a whole block of Coast Guard trucks, equipment, and that's -- they took over that garage. That belonged to civilians, and they, in turn -- Freddy Fitzsimmons, who was a -- Freddy Fitzsimmons, was it?

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah. He owned the place where the Dodgers played.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. He was the manager of the Dodgers.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MR. CULLEN: So he says, "Hey" -- when I was a master of arms there, he says, "What are we going to do for a place to park?"

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: So I said, "Well, as long as you don't play night games, we'll be all right."

[Laughter.]

MR. CULLEN: Because the trucks and all go do their assignments and whatever they had to do.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And then I'd say to him, "Park here, here, and here, and get out of here by 6 o'clock."

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. That's great. Well, the people that served in the station with you when you first were -- encountered the Germans, did they continue to serve there in the station after the whole event, or did they kind of -- or did you ever find out what happened to some of the people that were in that station after the --

MR. CULLEN: Believe it or not, I never spoke to any of them again.

INTERVIEWER: Really? Even -- were they there for the trial, for the hearings?

MR. CULLEN: No. No. I was the only one that went to the trial in Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Because they weren't involved, actually.

Barnes, who was the chief, he wasn't there but was there later. He was there at Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: But other than that, nothing was ever said.

MRS. CULLEN: I just read this a little while ago. I got this out today because I want to send one of these to our grandson.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: But I came to the end of this sort of article, and I thought it was interesting to note. It tells the story, and it says here this was the only face-to-face confrontation in the United States during World War II with the enemy as it landed. That was the only --

INTERVIEWER: It was an amphibious --

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- sort of thing. Interesting.

MRS. CULLEN: Open it up, and John -- there's John's picture at 21.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: So you can see what he would look like at 21.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. Yeah. Handsome devil there.

Do you know where this article came from?

MRS. CULLEN: I don't. I don't remember that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: We've got so many --

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I'm sure.

MRS. CULLEN: So many people made books and sent them to us.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: Gee, John even had people -- ladies writing to him proposing marriage. Would you believe that?

INTERVIEWER: Really? That was back in the -- during World War II?

MR. CULLEN: '42.

MRS. CULLEN: '42. And his sisters, his sisters saved them all and then showed them to me one day. She said, "We didn't want to show you these until you and John were married," but --

[Laughter.]

MR. CULLEN: We've been married 61 years, 62 coming up.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's a good record there.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah. They didn't say it would last. They said it wouldn't last.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's funny.

So you left the service in 1945, '46?

MR. CULLEN: '42 and five is '47. '46, '47.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember was it -- it was in '46 or --

MRS. CULLEN: When did we have your --

MR. CULLEN: Discharge.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah. We have that actually.

INTERVIEWER: So you never saw any sea service?

MR. CULLEN: Sea?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to sea at all?

MR. CULLEN: I got assigned to a small boat in the harbor in New York.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MR. CULLEN: And that lasted two days, and the ship, somewhere in Jersey, courier this here and that.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: It was always something.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: It didn't help me.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Unfortunately. I wanted to go on a troop ship. There was a big one coming out, but they wouldn't let me on it.

INTERVIEWER: They wanted to keep you in New York City?

MR. CULLEN: Kept me in New York.

INTERVIEWER: '42?

MR. CULLEN: '46.

INTERVIEWER: So it was June 20th, 1946.

MR. CULLEN: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: June 20th. Okay. Boatswain's Mate First Class?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: There's something there about the medal.

INTERVIEWER: Award of Legion of Merit for Outstanding Performance of Duty, November 9th, 1943. Great.

So is there anything else that comes to mind that's of significance that we passed over at all?

MR. CULLEN: Well, I'm just looking at this here.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, take a look at those. There were some questions.

MRS. CULLEN: You also thought that the FBI followed you for quite a while. A couple of -- after. Remember? There were cars.

MR. CULLEN: Oh, the FBI was --

MRS. CULLEN: Stay around if we were out and at night. He would take me home, and John would say, "See that car over there?"

MR. CULLEN: They let me come home and live there for a period of time.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Which made it convenient for the Coast Guard, as well as myself, everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: So I would be out and being followed, I'm pretty sure.

INTERVIEWER: How long do you think that continued on for? Through the hearings or beyond?

MR. CULLEN: After that trial.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Then the trial was June?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: Was it?

INTERVIEWER: Was it June of '42 or June --

MR. CULLEN: '42. Six months, I was in when this happened.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: It happened in June.

MR. CULLEN: June 13th.

MRS. CULLEN: June 13th.

INTERVIEWER: So, if it was six more months, maybe it was --

MRS. CULLEN: About six months later.

INTERVIEWER: -- early '43 or --

MRS. CULLEN: Was that later, the trial? I don't remember the trial. I think it was August. I think it was in August.

INTERVIEWER: So it was later in the summer?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. It was July, August.

INTERVIEWER: Later that summer.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So I'll go back and take a look at some of these other questions here earlier on.

MR. CULLEN: See, I never saw the sub.

INTERVIEWER: You never did see the submarine?

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: You smelled it, it sounds like, but you didn't see it.

MR. CULLEN: I smelled it.

INTERVIEWER: And you heard it, too, I guess.

MR. CULLEN: I heard it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: And the fact that it was -- we figured it was stuck on the sandbar.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: But it got off.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: We couldn't do anything about it anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. And when you first encountered, did you see them first, or did they see you first on the beach?

MR. CULLEN: No. They were both standing by the water.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: I was quite a distance away.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. So you were quiet. You heard them talking, I suppose, and that's how you --

MR. CULLEN: No. The fact that two of them were standing together made it an object like you see. Otherwise, if it was one person, you'd be lucky you saw them.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But they stood -- the fog is what creates this.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: And, fortunately for me, they were where they were.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. So --

MR. CULLEN: Down by the water.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. When this -- when the third man came up behind you and said some words in German, you picked that up immediately?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You understood that it was German and --

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And right after you heard that, you kind of had a pretty good feeling about what was going on or idea, I should say?

MR. CULLEN: Well, I knew they was up to no good.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: But I played dumb, like I didn't know anything.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But I knew what was going on.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Did you know if they were armed or not?

MR. CULLEN: I never saw any weapon.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: No.

MRS. CULLEN: They were -- they were executed August 8th, 1942.

MR. CULLEN: When?

MRS. CULLEN: Executed August 8th, 1942.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. That's when -- that military trial didn't last long.

MRS. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: President Roosevelt, he said get rid of them.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: All eight were tried by a military commission, the first such trial since Abraham Lincoln's assassination.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting.

MRS. CULLEN: That's another thing. When they caught some of these fellows from the 9/11 thing, there were some people wanted to speak to John because they didn't know what kind of trial to have. You know, they wanted -- he's the only one that was left. Everyone else is gone. You know, we were the youngest, and they wanted to do a movie of him, of it, and --

MR. CULLEN: I was 21.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: I'm 85 now.

MRS. CULLEN: So it was --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: It goes by fast.

MRS. CULLEN: They wanted us to come here and --

[Telephone ringing.]

MRS. CULLEN: Excuse me.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

Well, I also want to ask you some questions, just some mundane questions about your background there too. So you weren't sent to boot camp really. You just had training there in Long Island?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: See, things got very hectic in New York, and Manhattan Beach, they opened up as a Coast Guard receiving station.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: And that was in Brooklyn.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But I never got down there.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Yeah. It sounds like they just gave you a little bit of training there on Long Island, and they just sent you to the station --

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: -- and that was it.

MR. CULLEN: See, I didn't stay on Long Island long enough. It was nothing really there. The Coast Guard stations and the lifeboat training and patrols, beach patrols, there really wasn't there much to do.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: We wanted to go to sea. You had to know the right rabbi.

INTERVIEWER: Say what?

MR. CULLEN: The right rabbi.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: To get out.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MR. CULLEN: And, unfortunately, people that were in charge of New York, of where I was, transportation, they had enough to do to keep them busy, but, as far as doing anything for you, they couldn't do anything for you.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: So that's when we got married and traveled a little bit, not much.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: I was -- unfortunate that -- it was a fortunate thing, it all worked out the way it did.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: But I still liked -- would have liked to have seen some of the activity elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER: The action.

MR. CULLEN: Like coming down here.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: I'd have loved to have been down here.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Yeah, I'm sure there was a lot going on here.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Just a couple of things.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: This is the stadium. This is the location of where John was at the end of Long Island at Amagansett.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay. Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: And I don't know. What is this, hon? This is a Coast Guard -- is this the watch where you watched the watchtower?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. That's the tower.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MRS. CULLEN: This is a Coast Guard magazine.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: That's me.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, that's me there.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: This was the book that was just -- how long ago did he write this book?

INTERVIEWER: This is a recent publication, I think, isn't it?

MRS. CULLEN: It is. Did you see this one, Bill?

INTERVIEWER: I haven't seen a copy yet, but I've seen it on the Internet.

MRS. CULLEN: It's very good.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: If you want to --

MR. CULLEN: He did the best job.

MRS. CULLEN: He did. He really did. He came and spent the entire day, and, boy -- and he sent us a book, which was very nice. So many others would do things for John or get things from John. We were -- he was on television, and then they would skip. We'd never hear from them again. They'd never let us know when it was going to be on or sent us anything, but he did.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: This is also a great book, this one.

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Okay.

MRS. CULLEN: I can't think of anything else that might help you.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Great.

MR. CULLEN: Time went too fast.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: It does. So what was -- before this happened, you were stationed there in Amagansett, and what was your daily routine like? Was it a pretty boring existence or just kind of --

MR. CULLEN: Patrols. That's mainly our object.

INTERVIEWER: Eat, sleep, patrol, and that's about it?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any time off at all, go see a movie or --

MR. CULLEN: Oh, yeah. You got 48-hour liberty, which I could hitchhike in from out there in Amagansett into Bayside, where I lived.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. So you'd go home for a couple days?

MR. CULLEN: Forty-eight hours.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: I had a date with him the night he met those guys, and he stood me up.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MRS. CULLEN: Yep. Because he was out with the FBI. I never heard from him.

INTERVIEWER: And you had no idea. Huh?

MRS. CULLEN: What could have happened? Well, the next day, in *The New York Times*, a story came out about a lone Coast Guardsman who met these men on the beach, and my mom, she said, "I think that was John. That's why you didn't hear from him last night. John would never stand you up. That was John," and it was.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing.

[Laughter.]

MRS. CULLEN: Isn't that something?

INTERVIEWER: So he got back in touch with you shortly thereafter?

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, sure. And another thing that I thought was so funny -- and you'd have to know his mother to realize this -- when the Coast Guard -- when the FBI took him home to get his civilian clothes, he couldn't tell her the story. They told him not to tell, and he came in with these two FBI fellows. He go gets his regular clothes. She said, "What did you do, John?" He said, "Nothing, Mom." They said, "He didn't do anything, Mrs. Cullen. It's all right."

"He must have done something if they came home here, and they got his civilian clothes, and he has to wear a uniform, and there's a war."

[Laughter.]

MRS. CULLEN: But she was very relieved and proud when she heard the story.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MRS. CULLEN: When he could finally tell her.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing. So how many men did you say were stationed with you? Were there three or four others altogether at that station, or were there more than that?

MR. CULLEN: Oh, there's more than that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really? Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. There was -- this station at in Amagansett was a small unit.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Okay.

MR. CULLEN: And they just were starting to put men out there because there wasn't enough and give them places to go. The enlistments doubled, tripled. So they had all these guys. They had to do something with them --

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: -- and there wasn't enough ships for them all. So it was very confusing.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: Unfortunately for me, I was stationed out there, but a lot of fellows were sent everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. So, at first, you kind of didn't really have a choice of your assignment. They decided for you, where you were going to go, the Coast Guard did?

MR. CULLEN: Well --

INTERVIEWER: Or it was --

MR. CULLEN: It was a lieutenant in charge of Public Relations.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And he would get the information as to parades and radio and TV -- not much TV -- and assignments for personnel in the Coast Guard to go to, to get publicity.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: They were really short on publicity, and the enlistments, there weren't that many, really.

MRS. CULLEN: But they went up after this happened.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, they did.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MRS. CULLEN: Oh, yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So it was a real --

MR. CULLEN: Then it was an awakening for the Coast Guard --

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: -- because we didn't know what -- who knew? I didn't know when I enlisted. I just know the fellow I enlisted with, John, he -- it was his idea. He says, "Well, we'll stay in New York." He was looking out for -- I was looking to get around. Go, get some sea breeze.

MRS. CULLEN: He would like sea duty. They wouldn't give it to him.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: They just wanted to keep you there and --

MR. CULLEN: At hand, so I could be filling wherever they might be.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And it was not bad, but the fact I wound up driving a captain in the Port of New York for something to do.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: Because in Brooklyn at the garage, I was master at arms with one other fellow, but we had eight guards there, and there wasn't enough to do there.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Just out of curiosity, what happened to your friend? Was it John Edwards?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to him?

MR. CULLEN: He -- he wound up on a -- on a small -- what the hell do they call them? He got some sea duty.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: And he wound up -- when we split up, we were at Short Beach lifeboat station, and they told -- they wouldn't let us be together. So he went one way, and I went another. So I went out on an island, and he went too. Bay Shore -- not Bay Shore -- yeah, Bay Shore. Fire Island, they had us stationed there, and he wound up there. And then he -- he was a conniver, but he was a good guy.

MRS. CULLEN: He said it; I didn't.

[Laughter.]

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. He wound up over in Long Beach. Long Beach.

And that small boat he was on, I don't know. It went to Florida or somewhere, but I didn't see too much of him.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. What was the -- just kind of getting back to your station life, what was the food like? Was it pretty bad, or was it fair?

MR. CULLEN: It was -- when I was stationed in the Jones Beach, we went there. They split us up and put us there for lifeboat training.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: This was in January.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: You have a 10-man lifeboat, big job, and the cold and the weather and the food wasn't too much.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Now, these guys that were stationed there, six, eight of them, they ate good, but they got the food first. When you're sitting at the end of the table, you didn't get anything. They didn't care. It was like a joke. You'd say, "Wait a minute. When do we get to eat?"

But we finally got to know them, and things worked out much better.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But there was a time, supplies were short.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. It was the beginning, until they -- then when I got out on the island, Georgica, there was a fellow -- cooks, you couldn't get any cooks. "Do you want to volunteer to be a cook?" No problem. He had to know something, and it was an Italian kid. He came from up in Utica. He volunteered. He used to love to eat. Jesus, he was eating good, and we were -- we were lucky we got something to eat.

[Laughter.]

MR. CULLEN: Pretty funny.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Well, just out of curiosity, they didn't have a blackout at that point, did they, on the coast?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: They did?

MRS. CULLEN: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: A blackout?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. The lights on the cars blacked out just the street.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: You forget. Forget a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah, I'm sure.

MR. CULLEN: I wish I could be more help to you.

INTERVIEWER: No, this is great. This is good stuff. Let's see.

So you're at a debriefing by the FBI. Did you have a debriefing by the Coast Guard as well? Did they ever have a chance to talk to you about it, or was it all Army and FBI after you met the Germans?

MR. CULLEN: All Army and --

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Mostly FBI.

MRS. CULLEN: That was because of Hoover.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: He grabbed everything and wouldn't even tell them what was going on.

MR. CULLEN: He took -- took over.

MRS. CULLEN: He wasn't -- he wasn't a nice guy.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: You probably heard that.

INTERVIEWER: Heard about that, yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever meet Hoover?

MR. CULLEN: Yes. Yeah, I went to his office. He wanted to be nice and say hello.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But, other than that, his two men that I was living with in Washington, I stayed with them in a YMCA.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: We got big classy places to stay. You were lucky you had a bed.

[Laughter.]

MRS. CULLEN: They weren't -- this was all new.

MR. CULLEN: This was all new. Met a lot of nice people.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: I did. Senators and whatnot.

INTERVIEWER: Really? Which Senators? Did you meet the President at all? Roosevelt?

MR. CULLEN: Almost.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

MR. CULLEN: Almost. The day I was supposed to meet him, it was at an occasion in Washington at the White House, and something -- you know, he wasn't well. He was --

MRS. CULLEN: He gave John a Presidential Citation.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MRS. CULLEN: It's packed in a box upstairs.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: The other one that was laminated when it arrived?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: When did you receive the citation, Presidential Citation? Was that '42 or --

MR. CULLEN: Yeah, '42.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So when -- just getting back to Herbert Hoover, what did he say to you when you were in the office with him, do you remember?

MR. CULLEN: He was pretty cold. He wasn't very friendly.

INTERVIEWER: It was just small talk for a few minutes?

MR. CULLEN: That's all. That's all. It was -- unfortunately for him that I had take up for [inaudible]. That's the way I felt.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: He wasn't -- wasn't nice. You know, usually, I met a lot of people.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Gees, some of them, they couldn't do enough for me, not that I was looking for anything. I just --

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: But that's -- he was pretty aggressive.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Hoover.

INTERVIEWER: What about -- you said you met some Senators? Did you meet anybody you recall? Truman or any of those?

MR. CULLEN: No. Outside of -- what's his name when I went to the World Bank down in Savannah?

MRS. CULLEN: Vinson?

MR. CULLEN: Vinson.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: I was sent down from New York to Washington, picked up a car, go to Savannah.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And then I met Vinson, and I made some trips with him, functions that he had to attend.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm.

MR. CULLEN: That was it.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MR. CULLEN: But I did meet others at dinners. The food was great.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. I'll bet.

MRS. CULLEN: It made up for all the food you didn't have when you were at the station.

MR. CULLEN: I went from 152 to 202.

[Laughter.]

MRS. CULLEN: It wasn't doing too bad.

MR. CULLEN: But then I got smart and started to cut back.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: I was getting too heavy. That ice cream. Half-a-gallon at a time.

MRS. CULLEN: Your grandkids were here one night, and he still has his uniform.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: So we said come on up here and try one up, and we got one on, and we couldn't get it off. He was stuck.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: And another interesting thing is our granddaughter was in the Navy for 10 years.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MRS. CULLEN: She was a photographer and flying over that nut's caves over there in helicopters.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: But she was stationed on the *Fred Vinson*, and we told her that grandpa had driven for him during the Second World War. She was thrilled, told her commanding officer. She was a big deal.

INTERVIEWER: And that's the carrier, right?

MRS. CULLEN: Yes. That's the carrier.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MRS. CULLEN: It's stationed out on the West Coast.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. San Diego.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. That's where she -- she got out. She had a pretty rough time.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. She was all [inaudible].

MRS. CULLEN: They had [inaudible] over there, and when she hit 10 years, she was supposed to go back, and she said, "I think I'll get out," even though 10 years more would have been nice, but it's okay for you to say it's only 10 years, but when you're doing it, it's a lot different.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: And we figured that it's better to be safe than sorry, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Life's short too. I mean --

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Now she's -- she works for --

MRS. CULLEN: Kodak.

MR. CULLEN: Kodak. Out in the West Coast.

MRS. CULLEN: Yes. Seattle.

MR. CULLEN: Seattle. She's doing very nice.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's good. That's great.

Well, just a couple more questions for you, I guess, just getting back to the hearings with the Germans. Does anything else stand out in your experience there? Do you remember how they behaved at all?

MR. CULLEN: Well, that night that I was taken out to the prison where they were.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: And put on a uniform and made believe I was a guard.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: Of course, they watched them all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: There was a window. We'd just stand there and look and look. He said, "Stay here as long as you want, and see if you can identify another one," which I couldn't. Just the one.

INTERVIEWER: Could they see you as well as you see them, the Germans, that night?

MR. CULLEN: They can look out that window that's in the door, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Okay.

MR. CULLEN: Plexiglass or whatever it was.

INTERVIEWER: Sure, sure.

MR. CULLEN: Wire in it.

But they were -- I didn't think they'd execute them that fast. What I heard, Roosevelt was the one who wanted to get this over with.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Sure.

MR. CULLEN: No fooling around.

INTERVIEWER: And they dressed you up in an Army uniform?

MR. CULLEN: Just so I --

INTERVIEWER: Just so --

MR. CULLEN: Look in that window in each cell.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Of course, I didn't know the four from Florida.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Sure.

MR. CULLEN: I felt sorry for the younger fellow. When I heard they executed them, I felt sorry for him, but that's the way life is.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. And you were on the stand testifying for just one day?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Part of a day?

MR. CULLEN: I was in a room with FBI men and evidence that these fellows all accumulated while they were here, and they had Dasch, the guy I met. He had maybe 80- to \$100,000 on him, and I settled for a few hundred bucks. Didn't make any difference. I never got any of it anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: They confiscated that, and that's the procedure in the service.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MR. CULLEN: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: The -- was the cross-examination pretty aggressive or --

MR. CULLEN: No. He just --

INTERVIEWER: When they asked you some questions and --

MR. CULLEN: That's all, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

MR. CULLEN: They just wanted to make sure that I was the one that met Dasch on the beach --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: -- that night.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. And he's the only one you said that you recognized?

MR. CULLEN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't recognize the others?

MR. CULLEN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MR. CULLEN: That's all I needed was just the one.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Fortunately.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. And then with the -- just switching over to the war bond drives and the other things that you did there --

MR. CULLEN: After.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That was 1943, '44?

MR. CULLEN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Kind of in that period?

MR. CULLEN: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And the only other personnel you were with was this Russian woman? Were there any other Coast Guard people that you were

with that were considered heroes at that time with the war bond drives or any of those?

MR. CULLEN: Yeah. I met a few.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. CULLEN: But don't ask me their names. I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. CULLEN: Yep.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, I guess that's kind of the questions I had lined up for you today.

MRS. CULLEN: These are the -- look at the cars, how old they look now --

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: -- transferring the prisoners.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MRS. CULLEN: This one here is John going into the trial.

INTERVIEWER: Where? Here?

MRS. CULLEN: This one.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

MRS. CULLEN: Going into the trial. A lot of these are from the Archives.

INTERVIEWER: National Archives?

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah, the National Archives. You can go in there now, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MRS. CULLEN: And we attempted it one day, but --

MR. CULLEN: It was too crowded.

MRS. CULLEN: -- we were on our way to a wedding. We had another couple with us, and they wouldn't allow them in, but they would allow John in. We had to present our licenses in and, you know --

INTERVIEWER: Identification.

MRS. CULLEN: -- quite a bit of identification. So we could have gone up there, but we couldn't. We didn't have the time.

INTERVIEWER: That's a great book. I'll have to get a copy of that.

MRS. CULLEN: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think that's -- unless anything else stands out that you can think of, that's --

MR. CULLEN: Nope.

END OF INTERVIEW

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