

Interview with Jerry Kigin

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Interviewed by David Overy

Overy: Mr. Kigin, when and where were you born?

Kigin: I was born in Lake Crystal right out of Mankato in 1921.

Overy: What were you doing when the war came?

Kigin: I was working at the bank in Mankato and I'd already had my private pilot's license which I got in September of 1941.

Overy: How did you get involved in flying was it a club or?

Kigin: It was a (CPT) civilian pilot training program. I always have been interested in flying. So that's how I got involved. Then in December of 1941 was Pearl Harbor. At that time I was playing semi-pro basketball. So our gang, in fact the day we were going over to New Prague to practice we heard it on my car radio that they bombed Pearl Harbor so we said that this was probably the last time we'd all get together. We played a couple games after that, but then we all went and enlisted. I enlisted in the Navy thinking I was going to be a Navy pilot. My good friend enlisted in the Army and ended up in the Army Air Corp. But then after we went through training, then we had the choice of being a Navy or Marine pilot.

Overy: Where did you do your training?

Kigin: We started out in Iowa City and preflight school. That was our rigorous training. Then we came to Minneapolis and flew Stearmans in basic training. We were sent to Corpus Christi; where we had advanced training and that's where I got my wings in July of 1943. I was sent to Jacksonville, Florida where I flew PBVs in operational training. Between then and when I went to Cherry Point, I went home and got married.

Overy: Tell me about your training at the various places. What was your training like?

Kigin: Minneapolis was the worst. We were flying in the dead of winter in open cockpits. I don't know if you know what the Stearman airplane looks like, they had one out here not too long ago, in fact I think they have one out here at the airport. But it's a tandem, open cockpit bi-wing beautiful airplane, oh it was a nice airplane to fly. But if it was zero degrees or below we couldn't take off. Well, the winter of 1942, we came to Minneapolis and, let's see, got out of Iowa City in about October, November and we came to Minneapolis and we flew December, January, February and all of us froze our cheeks and our ears. We washed out a lot of potential the pilots because of the weather and the gear, you were bundled up in that stuff that you could and luckily I learned had learned how to fly before that. I think we washed about 1/2 of our class that came from Iowa City.

Overy: You said the real rough stuff was in Iowa City that was the basic.

Kigin: No, no, Minneapolis, the rough flying (crosstalk) that was tough, and that's where most of the fellas got washed out.

Overy: What were they washed out for?

Kigin: Just coordination, everything else that and they were tough at that time. If they didn't have the coordination or if they got sick in the airplane they were washed out. They were told to go a different kind of training. I imagine some of them ended up as ground personnel and stuff like that. They probably stayed with the flying end of it. Then we got to Corpus Christi, Texas and it was just the opposite. The weather was about eighty and ninety degrees. We got down there in April and the weather was eighty degrees and ninety degrees and very humid and lots of clouds. We really had fun down there because then we were into the SNJs, which is the AT-6, Army AT-6. That was a fun airplane to fly. The once we got through with that, then they brought us back to the main base and I got into multi-engine. That's when I got into flying PBYs in advanced training down there, and that was a lot of fun. Those were the planes that you took off at 40 knots and you cruised at 40 knots and you landed at 40 knots. Big old lumbering, nice plane because when you weren't flying you could go back and they had a galley and bunks for sleeping.

Overy: Were you still in the Navy at this time or where'd you--

Kigin: No, that was, yeah, because I was flying there in advance before I got my wings. In July of 1943, after I finished all this training then we graduated, and we went from cadets to second lieutenant and that is when I decided to go into the Marines rather than the Navy.

Overy: Why was that?

Kigin: I don't know, I think a bunch of us got together and said, let's go in the Marine Corp. It was a lot smaller and we might get a better chance of getting overseas than we would in the Navy. Because we were all gung ho to get out into the fighting. We were all going to get out into fighting.

Overy: Do you think your training was good training?

Kigin: Oh excellent.

Overy: Do you think it was realistic, as far as what to expect once you got there?

Kigin: Definitely, because we were navigators, we went all through the syllabuses and we did a lot of ground school. We were as good of navigators as we were pilots. We had to be. At that time you had none of the sophisticated equipment that they had later. The training was excellent. After I got my wings we went to Jacksonville, Florida we got into a lot of night work with PBYS off the St. John's River. Before we left there we took a trip down to do a little anti-submarine work off of -- because about that time the German subs were out, we never saw one but we were out patrolling for it. We took an two day flight down to a place called [???]. Ever hear of that?

Overy: No.

Kigin: It's down below Cuba, it's quite a ways down. So we flew down there and then flew back to give us a long over water experience of flying. At that time we had no idea what we going to end up in. Because that was what they call, operational training. So then we few lots of hours down there.

Overy: Did numbers of people wash out excessively at each place that you went? Was it that kind of selective program?

Kigin: Once you got through basic, which was in Minneapolis, they call it ebase at that time. I don't remember of any that washed out at Corpus Christi or at Jacksonville. Once you go that far along, the good cream came to the top so to speak. There was none of them that I knew were killed in training,

Overy: I was going to ask about that.

Kigin: None that I know of in Corpus Christi and then in Jacksonville, not until we got to Cherry Point, where we had some problems.

Overy: Where was Cherry Point?

Kigin: North Carolina, we called it the boondocks. The base is still there. It's right out of Newbern and out of Jacksonville. Then we went there, at that time the Marines had the B-25s and eventually they set up for four hundred squadrons and four six hundred squadrons. Ours ended up to VNB612. That was the squadron. That's the B25 and we call it the PVK and I got pictures of that.

Overy: You said you had troubles at Cherry Point. What kind of things?

Kigin: Weather. We had one plane blew up on the ground. We had bomb bay tanks along with the bombs. They finally figured out that they were springing leaks. This one plane taxied out there and evidently a bunch of fumes accumulated in the bomb bay and it blew. From then on when we got in that airplane, first thing we did was opened the bomb bay doors and the last thing we did was close the bomb bay doors. So that if there were fumes it would dissipate. Then, we had some who got lost in weather and had to bail out or crashed, not very many though. Not at that stage in the game

Overy: What happened to a pilot if he got lost and had to bail out and the air-craft was lost? Was there any kind of reprimands or anything that came as the result of that?

Kigin: I have no knowledge of that.

Overy: When a commander loses his ship--

Kigin: Well, he's supposed to go down with it.

Overy: Exactly.

Kigin: We were all in, what they called a pool at that time, when we went to Cherry Point, until they started forming the squadrons. We were getting flying time and getting used to the P-25s or the PBJ. So, that's what we were doing at Cherry Point. Once we formed the squadron we went from Cherry Point up to a place called Peter Field Point, which wasn't too far away. We had our own air strip out there, we would do all our training there. Then we went to Boca Chica, Florida and that's right out of Key West. We flew torpedo training down there and you want of know why we got into the torpedo training?

Overy: Tell me about your bombing training.

Kigin: We did some skip bombing at first. We did some skip bombing off around the coast.

Overy: Describe skip bombing.

Kigin: It was early in the war. The SPDs, those were the dive bombers, and they carried 500 pounders. They'd go in on a ship and they'd come in at an angle and drop their bomb and skip it along the water into the ship, that's where the term skip bombing came from. Then we went to Boca Chica, we got into using a torpedo instead of skip bombing and the reason we did it was because the commanding officer of our squadron was the one at Guadalcanal and had taken a PBY, the old low and slow, put two torpedoes under it and went in and attacked a ship. Got the hell shot out of him, but he survived and came back. That's where he got the idea that he could do it with PBJs. so that's what we did, we trained and we were doing a lot of night work, because we ended up to be a night squadron. so, we did a lot of night work. With torpedoes, dummy

torpedoes is what we were using. So then after we had come proficient with the airplane, what it could and what it couldn't do. Then we were shipped overseas. We went from Boca Chica to Miramar, California, put our planes on a carrier, a cheap carrier. One of the T-2 tankers, was a Kaiser built ship that they put a deck on it and we had to load our planes it and unload them because we couldn't fly them. Toliddle? Was the only one that flew 25 on up off a carrier and nobody has every landed one on a carrier I'll tell you that. Anyway we shipped them, we went out to Pearl Harbor by carrier. Then we trained out there more. We started getting at Kaneohe Bay airbase, they switched us from torpedoes to rockets. The five inch rockets, we had four of them under each wing and they would fire in salvos, two, two, two, two and we did the same thing with the rockets that had been doing with the skip bombing and the torpedoes. We'd go in at a low level and fire the rockets. The reason that they had them laddered, we called them laddered, was because if you were off on your distance as far as getting close to your target. Two of them would eventually, and they were delayed fuse so they would explode inside the ship. So that was the training at Kaneohe in Hawaii. After we had gotten enough training with the rockets, we were to report to Eniwetok. So we took off from Pearl Harbor and flew our planes to Johnston Island. This is in September of '44. We flew our planes to Johnston Island. At Johnston Island the planes were all ready to, we were going to take off at night so we could get into (unintelligible) at daylight. I'm flying co-pilot, with a fella by the name of Randy Kenyon. We were warming up our plane and all of a sudden, we hear a tremendous racket and the plane behind us-when he started up his engine, he hadn't set his breaks and he chewed up our tail. So Randy and I and our crew were on Johnston Island in the middle of the Pacific for seven days until they flew and new tail out from Pearl Harbor. The fella that chewed up our tail. When I got into the first combat I flew co-pilot for him. I haven't been about to locate him, I've look all over

the United States, can't find him. But anyway that's what happened. So, then Randy and I we all by ourselves seven days late when we got to Kwajalein and they sent us up to Eniwetok, and then we did more training at Eniwetok. Then we were just waiting at Eniwetok, we were going out and shooting rockets and some of the Islands that the Japs still had, they were bypassing all these islands, so we did a lot of training there. Until they got the airstrip on Saipan secured and then they sent out squadron to Saipan. We were flying off of East Field, which was a fighter strip. They always put us on fighter strips so there would be 25s. I tell you it got pretty hairy sometimes. We did our first operation off of Saipan, and our mission was to go after the ships that we coming and bringing provisions into Iwo. Let me tell you first that when we did go to the rockets, we went to radar, search radar with the Honeywell automatic pilot. When we were going in on a firing run we would locate a ship with the radar. We were flying probably at a thousand feet or less. We would locate a ship on radar and then on the firing run, we'd have to come back and around again. Actually, the bombardier navigator controlled the airplane because he had his radar scope. He took over the automatic pilot and we would get down to fifty or a hundred feet before we let our rockets go. When he'd say rockets away, then we manually took over flying of the airplane. We had to get back up again. We had radio altimeters too. So, we were accurate to within five feet. The reason we went in at that low altitude was because the Japs didn't have very good shipboard radar at the time. They couldn't pick us up until we fired the rockets. Then they would fire at us, by that time we were gone. Except one time we got going and there was another destroyer up there that spotted us. It was like fireworks on Fourth of July. But I never got hit, I was lucky. So, that was our firing runs. We were catching all the shipping, trying too that came down to Iwo from Japan. If we crippled the ship at night, this was all night work, the army or

Navy would try and send someone up to finish them off during the day if they were crippled in the water.

Overy: Was it normally considered that night flying was more dangerous?

Kigin: Yes, we lost thirteen out of the original sixteen airplanes and many crews we lost too.

The first three that we lost, they just went out and never came back, we don't know what happened to them. Whether they were shot down, or ran out of gas. Well, we were flying sometimes, my longest mission was just about 12 hours. So, you can imagine sitting in that B-25 for twelve hours. In the bomb bay we filled it full of bomb bay tanks so we were carrying something like fourteen hundred gallons of gas. Our limit was just about twelve hours depending how your engines are running and how you leaned them out.

Overy: What does that come to as far as mileage?

Kigin: We were flying as high as two thousand miles at night. That's a long time. Because when we were flying off Saipan we were going to Iwo. We flew most of our mission off of Saipan, catching them coming to Iwo. When they decided they'd have to take Iwo, we waited until they secured the airstrip and we went to Iwo. Then we were catching the shipping that was coming out of Tokyo Bay and over to Okinawa, places like that. We were looking for ships up there, and off of Iwo we lost a bunch of them. I was back on rest leave in Pearl Harbor when we lost three or four crews off of Iwo and the last crew we lost was off of Iwo just before we went to Okinawa. They went out and we never found out what happened to them.

Overy: Is that what happened to most of them, they just didn't come back?

Kigin: Yeah, most of them. Some of them had to crash land because they ran out of fuel or on Iwo we had one plane that, we were coming in the dark and Iwo was a volcanic island, and was fogged in all the time. So we had to be brought in by GCA, Ground Control Approach.

Overy: Using radar to guide you?

Kigin: Yes. They brought this one over Mt. Suribachi and brought him in 100 yards short so it wiped out the whole crew there. Then they had two other ones. Also while I was gone they pulled a daylight raid. Here we were a night squadron and they pulled a day-light raid on Kyushu and we lost one plane on that- who got shot down by our own F4U pilots. I showed you the configuration of our airplane and they'd never seen one like that before--cause of what he'd done to the B-25. The last crew we lost was off of Iwo and we think he got tangled up with the fifth fleet-cause they were operating up there at that time. Actually before we went to Okinawa it was kind of winding down-we were having a heck of a time finding anything to fire at. Then when they secured Okinawa, they put us on another fighter strip up there. Off of there we were flying into the Sea of Japan, off of Korean and Pusan, and looking for ships toward Tokyo Bay. Off of Iwo we were flying right out at Tokyo Bay. We had different sectors to search. It was rare that we had more than three planes up at one time out of sixteen. Because radar gear was so critical and the auto pilots were so critical so we had a lot of problems malfunctioning. At that time, our radio equipment was all tubes- no transistors at that time, so anytime you landed that airplane pretty hard you were going to shake a few things. We had Honeywell technician's right with us-- civilians-radar technicians' with us, right with our squadron. They didn't fly but were right with us.

Overy: Did you have a lot of faith in your equipment? Did you think it was good equipment?

Kigin: Yeah. We did a lot of dead reckoning were we would, we were navigating by dead reckoning and using smoke bombs for drift and celestial navigation if we could see the stars and the moon. One night I took off from Iwo Jima and I tasted every filling in my mouth when I got off the ground. Both of my props and the nose were on fire--St. Elmo's fire. There was a typhoon in the area when I got back early the next morning it took from Hahachima to Iwo which is about ninety miles took me a full hour in my PBJ and when I landed, I was the last plane in I landed with full power in one engine practically keep the- you fly it right into the ground. There's only one strip there. Lucky I wasn't coming over Suribachi that night--I was flying into Suribachi. That's what you had to do--fly them into the ground. (Crosstalk) If you had a crosswind that's when we had the typhoon you had to fly right into the ground. The only way to get them on the ground. Any landing you walk away from is a good landing. The P-51s were on Iwo with us. They had the tough job. They were escorting the B-29s to Tokyo. The reason they took Iwo was to save the B-29s that were shot up or ran out of gas. Sometimes we were flying all night then we'd have to sleep all day. Until the B-29s started coming back and starting bailing out over Iwo. They had as high as eight crews bailing out at one time over Iwo. Then they'd send the black windows up to shoot down the 29s. Some of them came back and this one time if that 29 would have come down a hundred feet more, he would have wiped out our whole row of airplanes. Iwo isn't that big of an island and he went right into the drink over there.

Overy: So they came back so badly shot up.

Kigin: Yeah, they were coming back, they landed one twenty nine there with two engines out on one side and they said they couldn't do it. They did it. And the 51s they were flying to Iwo and Tokyo and back and they had wing tanks and those guys were- the average age of that squadron was either eighteen or nineteen. It was amazing. You had to be crazy to fly those. The 51 was

built by the same company that built our North American. Beautiful airplane, there's still some around. Then off of Okinawa, we were flying the Sea of Japan. Then in August--the first atomic bomb was about August 6th. I wasn't flying that night, but they had told us that if we were going to fly we had to stay out of a hundred square mile area, we didn't know what was going on. That's when they dropped the first atomic bomb. It came off Actinium, which is next to Saipan. With the briefing the next morning when all of us were down on the line they said they had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. We said what in the hell is an atomic bomb? Nobody knew what an atomic bomb was. So about four or five nights later said to stay out of the southern area around Nagasaki. So, then they dropped another one there. Then I had a mission I think a night or so after that and was flying up from Okinawa into the Sea of Japan looking for something to shoot at, couldn't find anything. I'm flying along the coast at about five hundred feet and the lights were on in Pusan. We tried to call the base because we were a long ways away at 500 feet, we wanted to know if the war was over so we didn't fire at anything, and we just jettisoned our rockets and came back. Then it was over right after that. All the lights on in Pusan Harbor. They knew that things were over and done with. After that we were ferrying, they took us and we piled as many ground troops as we could into our B-25s and PBJs and flew them into Yukosika right out of Tokyo and flew them into the air strip right out of Nagasaki. We had a grass strip there that we were fly in, flying our troops in and out of. But then we weren't carrying that much gas because it wasn't that far from Iwo airfield up to the name of the strip was (unintelligible) it was right out of Nagasaki. So, the first place we got to fly over Tokyo in the day time and see what the 29s had done to it. Then we got to fly over Hiroshima to see what was left there and Nagasaki. That was awesome.

Overy: Tell me about what you thought when you flew over those cities.

Kigin: I couldn't believe it, that one bomb could do what it did because, well, Tokyo we knew what it was doing cause the 29s were going up there by the hundreds and they were dropping their fire bombs and just wiping everything out. When we saw Hiroshima and Nagasaki and we saw what one bomb could do we just couldn't believe it.

Overy: What was your reaction otherwise? Did you think it was a good idea, bad idea?

Kigin: It was a good idea because we would have lost -- oh, God-- they'd go into the homeland and we'd have lost many. I think at one time they said we'd lose over a million men. We were so happy that they did and that time I still think it was right. It shortened the war so much that you just couldn't believe it. The bomb itself where they exploded it and the Nagasaki hid, it was kind of in the hills and you could just see a ring all the way around it as to where the flash went and it just charred everything because it was kind of green up there. Hiroshima was a little flatter so it spread it out more, you couldn't see like you could in Nagasaki and the ring around the area it hit. I never got to spend any time up in Japan, but it looks like a beautiful country, the one where it wasn't wiped out.

Overy: Tell me about your airplane?

Kigin: It was one of the truest airplanes that you could ever fly, it never let you down. It would fly on a single engine which some of our fellas had to do. It had the Wright Cyclone engines in it, which is- see, there were two engines they were using, and we had the Wright Cyclone. The other on the PBVs and a lot of the other ones were using Pratt Whitneys and that Wright Cyclone engine was just a fantastic engine. I flew one night and I had a cylinder out, but it kept going. No problem. In the airplane, we had a pilot and co-pilot and a bombardier navigator and a radio man and a tail gunner and we had sometimes four enlisted men and two pilots. I flew co-pilot in

Saipan until I got to Iwo, then I had enough seniority to be first pilot cause we lost a bunch of pilots.

Overy: Was it easy to fly?

Kigin: It was a real true airplane. The B-26 which was the widow maker, that was, they didn't use any of them in the south pacific except the two targets. They use them over in the European area, but I think they had it added like three feet to each wing. Because if they had a single engine on takeoff they were dead. They were done. We could fly our 25s on a single engine.

Overy: So, the B-25 was user friendly?

Kigin: It sure was. Yes, it was a fantastic airplane.

Overy: On these missions, what kinds of relationships did you have the crew. What did you during all those hours?

Kigin: Well, we had radio silence so we couldn't talk to any other planes. It was boring. The radar man, he was constantly--well, we had a radar scope too. We had the scope between the pilot and co-pilot so we could see what he saw and because there are a lot of small islands, rocks and stuff- they all show up on the scope so you have to distinguish between the ships and the rocks and small islands. It gets pretty boring, because you're flying sometimes eleven or twelve hours at a time and once you find a ship and go in and fire on it, you have to figure out how much gas do I got, what can I get my engines at and what can I cruise at? We did a lot of our navigating by radar. At a certain altitude, the radar was really calibrated. We could pick up objects between 90 and 100 miles. We were the only squadron of its kind. We were experimental because nobody had radar like we did.

Overy: Is that what you meant, you said you had a very special squadron.

Kigin: Yeah, we were the only squadron of its kind. Either Army or Navy. We were the only marine's squadron out of eight squadrons. The other were all daylight squadrons. They were operating south. One of the six hundred squadrons had the PBJ with the seventy five canon in the nose and they came up and were with us about a week, but then they went back down south again.

Overy: You didn't encounter enemy fighter aircraft?

Kigin: Yes, we did, but very seldom because we were down and we found out by trial and error and the Japs did have some radar on their fighters, but they were no good below a thousand feet. So, all we did was stay below thousand feet. Although one time coming back to Saipan one of our planes was above thousand feet and ground radar in Saipan spotted this bogie behind our B-25 and they scrambled the black windows and when they got to a certain spot, they told our crew to peel off and get out of the way and the black widow got the Jap fire. The last big raid we had in Saipan was a daylight raid. The Japs mustered somewhere along the line about fourteen or fifteen airplanes and they pulled a daylight raid on us they strafed right down the middle of our runway. Didn't hit one of our airplanes. He got down to the end of the runway over towards Tinian anti-aircraft. We were all standing around watching this thing. We should have been in fox holes. We were watching this take place and they shot him down right there. I don't think one of the planes got back. They were probably the first of what they called the suicide Kamikaze plane because at Iwo well, they had a lot of Jap planes before we got there because they had the picket lines set up on Iwo and Okinawa. All the destroyers were sitting up between the island and Japan and they would put up a wall of fire like you never saw and so they just dared the Jap planes to

fly through and they did. They came through and they hit a lot of ships. Off of Iwo, I don't think we ran into any Jap fighters. In Okinawa, I know we didn't see any Jap planes. They were pretty well decimated.

Overy: Flying at night using rockets you normally did not get an idea did you of the damage you caused?

Kigin: Nope. What we were experimenting also with was a million candle-power bomb-flash bomb. We had cameras set up in the plane to try and get pictures. After we fired our rockets and started to make evasive action we would drop that million candle power bomb and try to get pictures. We had a few pictures but not enough to show what kind of damage. We could not see any explosions because our rockets were all delayed fused so they would go through the armor and explode inside. The only way they knew we had hit ships was the next day if the army reconnaissance spotted a ship dead in the water or if sometimes they sunk, they were not there anymore.

Overy: What kinds of debriefing did you have when you came back?

Kigin: We had to tell the intelligence officers exactly what we did, what we thought we shot at, whether we thought we hit them. Sometimes we didn't hit them. We would go in on a firing run and if they were doing evasive action or knew we were coming in or our equipment was not calibrated right we would miss-which happened. Once you let the eight rockets go, that was it. You headed back for home.

Overy: Did you find that frustrating not knowing exactly what you had done?

Kigin: Yes, we sure did. But we knew we must have been doing some good. We were getting rid of the shipping! That was the main thing.

Overy: What was life like at base when you were not flying, what kinds of things did you do?

Kigin: Most of the time we were checking out our airplanes. We were flying those airplanes during the day to calibrate the radar and check the engines. We had a lot of briefing on what was going on and what is expected of us, and we had our recreation. John Engle and I were in charge on Saipan of building the officers mess. He was a carpenter and knew about concrete and putting up the frame and everything else. I was his assistant. We had a bunch of enlisted men who were excellent carpenters. We also got the Seabees to help us. The Seabees for some reason or another, were friends of the Marines. If we needed something they would go and steal it from the army! That was some outfit those Seabees. They were all craftsmen and they were older. We were a bunch of kids twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. But they were older and experienced and they knew what they were doing, so we depended upon them a lot for a lot of the things that we needed done. They came through.

Overy: Was there a friendly or unfriendly rivalry between you and the army people?

Kigin: We had hardly anything to do with them. Once the Army found out that our officers club was there they filtered in once and awhile. We had some of the famous ones--Tyrone Power--come over to the club. We didn't have anything to do with them. You know a squadron that was together as long as ours was a close knit squadron and we stuck by ourselves. We played poker, bridge- that's where I learned how to play bridge was over there. We kept busy, we had work to do. My duties were also photographic officer, so I had to overlook all the people that were involved in photography- like putting the camera's in the airplane and stuff like that. I just had to

overlook it, I didn't know anything about it. Most of us had extra duties like that. One of the fellows was kind of a barber, so he kept us trimmed. We had a doctor we have seen him a number times in Washington, D.C., a dentist, and another navy man that was a photography expert that I did a lot of work with. So we had a pretty well rounded squadron. We had a big squadron-we had a lot of personnel. At one time they figured over five hundred enlisted members. We went over with fifty two pilots. We kept losing them or shipping them back. We had replacement pilots. I had one replacement who flew with me only once off of Iwo. One the way back from a mission he had fallen asleep. All of a sudden he wakes up and he says you are flying this airplane sideways! I can't remember his name, he only flew with me once. Evidently he had gotten vertigo. He was one the later ones that came through and how he got through training because you believe your instruments period. No questions asked. You believe your instruments. I told him to go back to sleep. Then when we got down in briefing in the morning, I told the flight operations officer no more. Don't send him up with me again. You can't have something like that! I don't think he flew anymore. They probably found something else for him to do like digging latrines or something.

Overy: You said you had a pretty close knit squadron. Does that mean officers, enlisted men, everyone?

Kigin: Officers and we got to know our crews pretty well, but they kept changing the crews to. During training, a lot of us were married so our wives got to know each other and we are still in contact with a lot of our squadron and their wives. Two years ago we had our first reunion in Washington, D.C., so we got to see the pilots and the wives. There were twenty pilots there. They had another one this last year at Cherry Point, but I couldn't make it. A lot of the pilots couldn't make it. They are going to try and have another one, we think, in California in two

years. They are also keeping track of the pilots and the enlisted men that have passed away since we got back. We have lost a few that way.

Overy: What was the relationship between the various command groups? Was there a close knit comradery between the squadron commanders and the upper echelons?

Kigin: The colonel and the major who were the CO and the exec would have had the contact. We were under the army and we were kind of a bastard outfit. We were kind of a marine outfit under the army and the navy. What the army told our Colonel we don't know. Except on Saipan we got chewed out but good. One of our planes had fired on one of our own subs. Subs at that time had to come up at night to recharge. So then they took eight to ten of us down to the submarine base on Saipan, put us on board a sub and took us out to show what it was like to be on a submarine. Then the directive came down through the army through the navy to us that we had to fly over anything that we were going to shoot at to make sure it wasn't a submarine. I am afraid that's what happened to some of our crews that never came back. We were altering the ship we were going to fire at by flying over it and then coming back around on our firing runs. That could have been what happened to them.

Overy: There was no way on the radar at that time to tell what that was down there, it was just a ship right?

Kigin: That is right. It was a blip on the radar screen. It's what we called a blip on the radar screen. You couldn't tell if it was a merchant ship or a submarine or a battle wagon. We didn't run into any battle wagon. Mainly what we were catching was supply ships that were coming down, troop ships that were being escorted by destroyer escorts and stuff like that, that had a lot of fire power. So you had to fly over them to see what they were.

Overy: How many missions did you have?

Kigin: Twenty five or something like that.

Overy: Was there a policy that after so many you got R&R?

Kigin: Yes. When I first started flying off of Saipan, it seemed like we were flying all the time.

My pilot and I got shipped back to -- I don't know how many missions I had then, we got shipped back to Pearl Harbor. In fact we were there when Roosevelt died.

Overy: When did he die? 1945

Kigin: I think that was when I was back on rest leave. Because that was before, right before they took Iwo. Or right about the same time. I was back on rest leave. Then when I got back to Saipan, I had jungle rot on the bottom of my foot, I had an inverted planters wart and jungle rot. so I was grounded. So I took a contingent up to Iwo on the LST that was about seven day it took to get up there. The captain of the LST made me his official airplane spotter! The Japs luckily didn't come after us. They had pretty good air cover out there all the time. The Marines were flying F6Fs night fighters off of Iwo and then they went into Okinawa. The army had the Black Widows. They were a night fighter but they were strictly air to air and not air to ship. So, that's about it.

Overy: Did you say you were married before you went overseas?

Kigin: Yes. I got my wings in July, went to operational training in September and then I got married in September.

Overy: Was your wife able to go with you to several posts?

Kigin: Yes. She came to Cherry Point and then she came down to Boca Chica when we were there. That's where the wives all got acquainted. Then we came back and started families.

Overy: What kinds of things frustrated you most about military career?

Kigin: We had a Colonel that we thought was a tyrant. He was about five feet tall, mean and ornery we thought. He was older and we were young kids. He was a task master which was good. He surrounded himself with pilots, that I was probably about the fourth shortest. He surrounded himself with pilots that were 6'6, 6'5. I was 6'4. So he could boss us around.

Overy: Did you feel like you were pretty well taken care of as far as food?

Kigin: We were griping about the food all the time which everybody does. We had C rations mainly. K's finally. No fresh meat or anything like that. We did have turkey dinner on Christmas day on Saipan. We had turkey. They were eating shifts, and at that a time they didn't have detergent soap. They were using lye soap and he didn't rinse the trays! We had the sickest bunch of pilots and crew. Mainly pilots because the crew members had eaten first ten we ate second. We had pilots that went out on mission that night that had to return. Luckily I wasn't flying, and I was only a half block from the head. On Okinawa they spotted what they called "sleeping sickness" among the natives. They decided they were going to give us all inoculations. We were all getting inoculated for this so called sleeping sickness. We got shot and then as we were going back to our tents we felt like we were on fire! Absolutely on fire! Whoever could get a hold of a doctor. He said the only thing I can tell you is try and run it off. So we went down and tried to play basketball. We found out later that they put too much formaldehyde in this virus shot they were going to give us. Oh we were sick for a while. Just for one day though. You were just burning up all over, and hurt, I mean hurt. I asked my doctor friend about that and he said they

used to use a little of that but if you get too much of it you got a problem. Otherwise I never got sick.

Overy: Were you're living conditions fairly comfortable?

Kigin: No! We were in tents and on cots.

Overy: Lots of mosquitoes?

Kigin: No! The worst mosquitoes we ever had were in Key West Florida and flying out of Boca Chica! Here we come from Minnesota and go down there and we didn't know what mosquitoes were until we got down there. We used to say that when we had gotten on the ground in May, we got out of the airplane and the mosquitos flew us back to the flight line, that's how bad they were down there. But then what they did was, starting in Saipan, we all slept under mosquito netting, all of us all the time we were on Saipan. They kept spraying the islands with the old DC3s were coming over and spraying them all the time. Iwo, nothing could have lived on that island, absolutely nothing. They had bombarded that one so much before we got there that there wasn't a blade of green grass or anything. It was all volcanic ash is what it was.

On Iwo we lived in tents, well we did all of the time, we were living in tents. On Iwo we didn't even use mosquito netting because there was nothing there. It was a volcanic island. We didn't have too main air raids. We tried to dig fox holes in that volcanic ash. We would dig a fox hole from here to over there before you could get deep enough so you could be out of the way if they would happen to drop a bomb were the shrapnel was flying. That was really something.

Overy: Were all the Japanese gone by the time you got there?

Kigin: No, they were still in the caves. They were still routing them out while we were there. They had them pretty well controlled on our end of the island. We were down by Suribachi on the south. They were up north mainly, back in these concrete. I think they brought up the Iowa right up on the shore to knock out these pill boxes. They were entrenched in there. I don't remember what the figures were but we lost a lot of marines on that invasion and so did the Japs. Talking about Mt. Suribachi, the Japs were never able to build a road up to the top of Mount Suribachi. The Army engineers and the Seabees, I think they said it took them, they said, three or four days to build a road up there. They said give us another week and we'll push this whole damn island right into the Pacific! That was their attitude. When we first got there the landing strip was these landing mats. I don't know if you're familiar with the mats? They were doing the other side of the airstrip starting to get it prepared for coral and one of the B29s the right side of the strip looked better to him than then on the landing strip and put his 29 in there! I don't know if he wipe out the gear or not. It looked better than it did over on the other side. They finally got it with solid coral. It was coral all the time that we were flying off of. We had to be careful of our propeller tips. We had to watch them real close. If you get that nose down to far, you will start picking up rocks and chipping up the propeller. So you had to keep a close watch on them.

Overy: What kind of funny things happened to you? There must have been some kind of amusement.

Kigin: We had not many funny things on Iwo or Saipan. When we got to Okinawa, one of the fellows said he was a hypnotist. I don't know whether he was or not but one night we just had a ball. He was hypnotizing (unintelligible) that was really funny. The worst time we had on Okinawa was the day the war was over. Everybody was shooting everything they could find and we were spending a lot of time in our foxholes because of all the bullets flying around.

Everybody was shooting. I think they killed six or seven people just celebrating. The worst time we had on Okinawa when all of us who had enough points were shipped up to one of the highest points on the island. We were waiting for a ship to come in to take us back to the States. That's when the big typhoon hit. It just wiped out everything. I lost a whole bunch of gear. We were in tents and where the typhoon hit, a whole bunch of us had to get people out, there was a hospital tent up there, we got them out of the hospital tent and got them into the ambulance, and they took them down below. Then the wind started tearing everything up. A whole bunch of us spent thirteen hours in a walk-in cooler that was shut down, but you could couldn't stand up straight in. In a typhoon the wind blows three hundred sixty degrees from all directions. It caved in the mess hall that they had. Blow everything out on side and came around and blew it back the other way. I remember when we were in Okinawa, in fact, when we got everybody out of the hospital tent, the wind was so strong we had to get down and crawl on our hands and knees. We found out later that anemometer at the airstrip went out at about a hundred thirty knots! It just wiped out everything up there. The next day, there were about two hundred ships missing out there in the harbor. The 5th Fleet was there at the time, they were Halsey's 5th Fleet. They sent as many as they could out of the harbor to ride it out. I think they said that there were twenty or so sunk in that typhoon. We went through five typhoons, so I know what a typhoon is like, what that wind can do.

Overy: That was one of the scariest things that happened to you?

Kigin: Yes. Here we were waiting to go home. So then a couple of days later we finally got on board a ship. They called it an A-K whatever that was. It had a bent screw. So it took us from Okinawa to San Francisco, twenty one days! Exactly.

The skipper said he had food on board for twenty one days and we better get there in twenty one days. So that's how I got home. After flying all that time we went home by ship! Four knots we were making about. Oh, that was boring. We thought we were never going to get in. The only thing we could do was play poker, walk the deck do this do that. It was just boring. On a troop ship like that there is nothing else to do. So then I got out, I was finally discharged right after the first of the year. I had accumulated leave. I had about ninety days leave coming or so.

Overy: What did you come out as? Did you receive regular promotions?

Kigin: Yes. I came out as a first lieutenant and a little while later I was promoted to Captain after the war was over.

Overy: Do you have any regrets about military service?

Kigin: No. I wouldn't do it again for all the tea in China but I wouldn't have missed it for all the tea in China.

Overy: Did you have any problems after that, adjusting to civilian life?

Kigin: No, didn't have enough brains.

Overy: What effect do you think the war had on you? As a man as a person?

Kigin: I grew up I'll tell you that! Grew up in a hurry. Then I went back into the banking business and stayed in it. In fact I ended up retired nine years ago at forty one years in the banking business.

Overy: You think it increased your maturity considerably?

Kigin: Oh, yes. When I was made president of the bank here in 1955, I was the youngest President of the whole group. Most of us who were being made president at that time were WWII veterans. We were mature. Not when we went in but when we came out. You grow up in a hurry.

Overy: Being a combat veteran, what was your attitude towards Vietnam? These young men going off to Canada burning their draft cards?

Kigin: We didn't like it at all. In the first place there was no objective. We knew when we were out there, we knew what the heck we were doing, and what our goal was. What was it in Vietnam? See that was the whole problem with that whole damn war was the objective. Turned out we didn't have any, that I know of, oh, we had some draft dodgers in WWII but nothing like Vietnam. Because, well, we were attacked, Pearl Harbor was a horrendous situation. We were attacked and we were going to show those Japs where we were going and how we were going to do it. But Vietnam, as far as I know, I wasn't involved, I don't think they had that objective. I think that these people that did go to Canada, they thought they were doing the right thing. I don't think they were because none of us did that. That was our attitude about that thing about that. It was a terrible war.

Overy: You were pretty well convinced about what you were fighting in WWII?

Kigin: Oh definitely. Even more so then Korea. Korea was it a war or wasn't it?

Overy: A police action?

Kigin: Yeah. I think I read were one of our squadrons was killed in Korea after he survived WWII. He was killed in Korea.

Overy: Did you keep in touch with members of your squadron rather continuously after you got out?

Kigin: Yes a lot of them. We're still in contact. We stop to see them too. I've seen members down in Iowa, Missouri, California, and Florida on our trips. We keep in contact with each other. Some of them have come to see us. The last one to come here we had seen him in Florida. At the time we saw him we knew he had carcinoma. He was here in either September or October two years ago, and he died in February. He and his wife came up and spent a day with us here.

Overy: So you have found comrades you have never forgotten.

Kigin: Yes. I am still going to try and find the pilot I flew most of the mission with--John Engle. I can't find him. I even went to his home town in North Carolina. There was a John Engle there but they didn't know anything about him. My oldest son is a CPA and he works for SCC in Washington, D.C, so some time when I am down there, I am going over to see what I can find.