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PROJECT 88-3

Mr. Joseph P. Cribbins

Interviewed by

Lieutenant Colonel Hawthorne L. Proctor, USA

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USAWC/USAMHI SENIOR OFFICER ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Joseph P. Cribbins

[Begin Tape C-208, Side 11

INTERVIEWER: Good morning. This is the first in a series of interview sessions for the oral history of Mr. Joseph P. Cribbins, who is currently serving as the Chief of the Aviation Logistics Office and as the Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Department of the Army. I am Lieutenant Colonel Hawthorne L. Proctor, a student at the US Army War College. I will be conducting these interviews from Mr. Cribbins' office at the Pentagon. Today's date is 25 November 1987. Sir, you were born in

Millbrook, New York, in 1914. One of the many things that I've learned about you is that as a youngster you were very interested in horses. Could you tell me more about your formative years, especially growing up in and around New York.

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, Colonel Proctor, my father was a horse trainer, and in this capacity, he moved fairly frequently. As a matter of fact, we moved from Millbrook, New York to Morristown, Short Hills and Far Hills in New Jersey and eventually Old Westbury on Long Island. It was almost the same as a military career in that there were frequent moves and many schools. I am a first generation Irish-American. My father had become a horse trainer as a result of his experience as a youngster in Ireland. He was bound and determined that I would never follow in his footsteps because he did not believe training horses in those days was a very promising career. Accordingly, I did not ride as a very small child despite the fact that there were always lots of horses around. When I was about twelve or thirteen, I used to walk some four miles after school to the stable that was owned by a friend of Dad. When we were living in Far Hills, New Jersey I would always manage to get a ride on one of the horses. In

return, I groomed horses and cleaned tack; that is the saddles and bridles. Dad inevitably found out about this and I really expected to be chastised pretty severely. Instead, he called me in one Saturday morning and took me to a small stable in back of our house. He opened the door and there was a fourteen-hand pony. He said, "I guess it's in the blood and now it's up to you. You take care of him and make sure you do. He is all yours." I said, "OK." That was the only chastising he gave me. However, I will always remember a couple of things. This pony, we called Ebony, was really an interesting one. By the time I got him he was eight or nine years old. Another horse trainer and friend of Dads had been driving home from Newark, New Jersey. While driving up a hill, he saw this small pony pulling a furniture wagon. It was a very hot day and this pony would go for a fairly short distance then turn and lock the wheels on the wagon, stop for a bit, then turn and proceed on. He did this about three times while going up the hill. Of course this really interested Dad's friend because the driver of this wagon was fast asleep. The pony was doing this on his own. So Dad's friend followed the wagon and driver home, and he bought the pony. He thought that this pony would make an absolutely super

pet for the children of a wealthy family. As it turned out the children were not quite up to Ebony who was a character in his own right. So he gave the pony to Dad with the stipulation that he never sell him.

INTERVIEWER: With all of the moves that you had while growing up, did you get a chance to develop any interests other than horses?

MR. CRIBBINS: No, I'm afraid not. I played a little ice hockey. I seemed to spend most of my time in and out of splints from riding horses. One Christmas I broke a wrist playing ice hockey and I figured one hazardous sport was enough.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, you said that you went to a number of schools. Did you have a favorite subject?

MR. CRIBBINS: I guess that I was so entranced with horses that I really didn't think much about school. I found it very easy and didn't have to do an awful lot of homework. I would get up very early in the morning and take care of my pony. By the time we moved to Long Island, I had outgrown Ebony. We gave him to another horse trainer who had a youngster coming along. His

kid eventually became an outstanding jockey and Ebony had a good home. I began riding all the horses Dad was training as well as riding race horses, working them in the morning at the Whitney Estates in Long Island. So my career really was one of horses, horses and horses.

INTERVIEWER: When you completed high school what type of work did you do?

MR. CRIBBINS: I finished high school in Westbury, Long Island, New York in June 1931. The year before I finished high school, I spent the summer at Cooperstown, New York, with F. Ambrose Clark racing stable where I worked horses and trained to become an amateur steeplechase jockey. I was growing too large to become a flat jockey, which is really what I wanted to do. So, when I graduated from high school, we were in the midst of the worst depression. I became a professional steeplechase jockey riding for F. Ambrose Clark. At that time, of course, I was purely an apprentice, but I went full time with the racing stable where I worked horses and began to ride some races.

INTERVIEWER: Being a steeplechase jockey and working with horses has certainly made you a noted horseman.

I understand that you joined the 101st Cavalry Regiment, New York National Guard, which seemed right in line with your background. What prompted you to enlist? I believe you were about twenty-six years old at the time you joined that outfit.

MR. CRIBBINS: That's correct. Let's back up a little bit. I rode steeplechasing for about five years. I considered myself a very good horseman, but not a good steeplechase jockey. It is quite possible to be very good at equitation and horsemanship, but a poor jockey. I did have a stable on Long Island and we fox hunted three to four times a week. I rode in horse shows and trained horses. In the course of all of this, I had gotten to know members of the 101st Cavalry Regiment. Many of them rode horses as a sport rather than a living the way that I did. Since I was knowledgeable with horses, I was asked if I would be interested in joining the 101st Cavalry Regiment. It was known as Squadron A and was located in the old Squadron A building at 94th and Park Avenue in New York. So in October or November 1940, it became pretty evident that we were going to be involved in the war going on in Europe. Eventually I did join Squadron A. It is interesting that in order to join the regiment I had to

pass a board of five members because it was an affluent and a tough outfit to get into. As a result of having passed the board of five members, I became a private in the US Army National Guard at $21.00 a month. I was assigned to Troop A of Squadron A, a horse cavalry squadron. The other two troops in the squadron were Troop B of Genesee Valley and Troop C of Brooklyn. They comprised the squadron that I belonged to in the 101st Cavalry Regiment. The other squadron was mechanized and equipped with halftracks.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall whether it was a single person or several people who were part of the riding club that asked you to join the regiment?

MR. CRIBBINS: There were three or four members of the regiment who asked that I join because of my knowledge of horses.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the words "affluent outfit." Would you explain what you meant by those words?

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes, I think that I was one of a very few in the squadron who was working pretty hard for a

living. Most of the young men in the squadron were working on Wall Street or were from families who were extremely wealthy. Many of them were going to college. They belonged to Squadron A, because in those days it was a very attractive thing. It afforded them the opportunity to ride and meet a lot of people who were great fun to be with. Most of all, the squadron had the facilities which were not easily obtained in those days.

INTERVIEWER: What type of training did you receive upon joining the regiment?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, the first bit of training I had was rather interesting. If I remember correctly, my first night of duty was 12 December 1940, just a year before Pearl Harbor. I recall being in this small platoon and being trained by a corporal who had us around the riding ring. He started telling me how to hold my hands, how to put my heels down, how to grip the horse and how to do all the things that corporals in the cavalry were told to teach new students. This went on for about three quarters of an hour when Lieutenant Fred Devereaux, one of the people who had asked me to join the squadron, came up and asked if he

could take me off for a few minutes. The corporal said, "Of course, sir." And Fred, whom I very carefully called "lieutenant," took me off and asked me if I would look at his mare. I looked at his mare as she was standing hunched up. He said, "What do you think is wrong with her Joe?" I said, "I think I know what is wrong with her. She has what we call azturia. It comes from being stable bound and eating too much feed resulting in a paralysis across the back. Fred said, "What should I do?" I told him to get her into the stall and keep her absolutely quiet, cover her up and give her some salt peter. I also told him that he'd better get a veterinarian the next morning. This took about half or three quarters of an hour. By the time I got back the corporal looked at me and said, "You're a wise S.O.B., aren't you? Who the heck are you?" I said, "Corporal, I am Private Cribbins, 101st Cavalry Regiment," and let it go at that.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds exciting. One of the things I would like for you to relate is how the training that you received in those days equates to the training that our citizen soldiers receive today.

MR. CRIBBINS: In those days, as I remember, we did some guard duty in the squadron on the basis of a guard list. We served two weeks at summer camp and drilled in the squadron on horses every weekend. It was not mandatory every weekend, but those who did not participate often enough during weekend drills were dropped from the rolls. The training was by the book. It was difficult to exercise cavalry in New York City and Squadron A was right in the middle of the city. We did have a riding ring, but that was the extent of the training, except for the summer training. I would say that the squadron was much more of a social and a riding club than a fighting unit at the time I joined.

INTERVIEWER: Well it seems that recruiting was not a problem in those days?

MR. CRIBBINS: No, recruiting was not difficult for the squadron. You could get in if you wanted to. As I mentioned earlier, there was a board of five members who screened prospective members. In fact, Mr. Henry Stinson, who became Secretary of War, was at one time a member of the board.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you serve with Squadron A?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, I had a rather unusual career. I was a private from 12 December 1940, until 1 January 1941. We were inducted into federal service on 27 January 1941. I made Private First Class on 1 February 1941 and went on to become Stable Sergeant which was a "Rocker" sergeant. There were only two "Rocker" sergeants; a first sergeant and a stable sergeant. Today, a stable sergeant would be equivalent to a sergeant E-5. I remained a stable sergeant from March 1941 until February or March 1942. At that time, we packed the horses into porte' vans, which had been used on the Red Maneuvers in the fall of 1940. We took them down to the remount station at Fort Monroe, Virginia and turned them back into the Quartermaster Corps thus becoming a fully mechanized cavalry regiment.

INTERVIEWER: You know our policy today is that the "first to fight is the first to be equipped." You mentioned that one of the squadrons was mechanized and had halftracks. Did they really have equipment at that time and if so, was it very much or just enough for them to train?

MR. CRIBBINS: They had halftracks and motorcycles and some jeeps. I would say that none of us had the

equipment that we were going to fight with. For example, during the Carolina maneuvers, a jeep would come up and that would be an enemy tank coming over the ridge. We had a thirty-seven millimeter gun which was used as an anti-tank gun. Believe it or not, we were still equipped with Enfield Rifles. They were on the books before the Springfield Rifles. Those Enfields had a kick like a big Missouri mule. We did not have any of the modern equipment. Obviously, we were unable to do much of anything and we found that out pretty quickly.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, you mentioned that the regiment was federalized in January 1941. Would you elaborate a bit on that process? What did you go through as a unit in terms of mobilizing and getting everyone ready for war?

MR. CRIBBINS: We were alerted early in January 1941. I was immediately called up and placed on guard duty in the squadron building. We were really getting ready for war since it was still about a year before Pearl Harbor. We were told that we were going to be moved to Camp Devens, now Fort Devens, Massachusetts where we would be stationed and trained as a horse-mech cavalry

regiment belonging to, I believe, the VI Corps which was in New England. We would be the reconnaissance regiment for the corps. We got our horses together and assembled all of our equipment and on 27 January 1941 we loaded into rail cars. It was one of the coldest nights I can remember. Because it was so cold the eggs that we had in our box lunches froze and broke on the way up. Only the horses survived really well that night. The next morning we arrived in Devens and unloaded the horses into straight stall stables that had been erected, practically overnight. The stable crew was placed in a shack and the rest of the regiment was put in brand new barracks. Shortly thereafter we began to train as a full regiment.

INTERVIEWER: When did you leave the regiment?

MR. CRIBBINS: I guess for the first time in my life I was given an IQ exam. I found that I could qualify for military service as an officer, so I was given the opportunity of going immediately to the Infantry or waiting for the Cavalry OCS. I decided since horses were my thing, I had better wait for the Cavalry. However, I didn't think that horses were going to be around for very long since we had already lost ours. I

was selected for the Cavalry school, went to OCS at Fort Riley, Kansas and became one of what were called "90-day wonders." I left the squadron in July 1942, and was commissioned in November 1942.

INTERVIEWER: What type of training did you receive at OCS?

MR. CRIBBINS: They were still teaching a horse course and a mechanized course. Since I had spent my early life with horses, I chose to attend the mechanized course. Interestingly, despite the fact that I had attended the mechanized course, my first assignment turned out to be the 1st Cavalry Division, where horses were still being used..

INTERVIEWER: I believe the 1st Cavalry Division was stationed at Fort Bliss when you reported for duty.

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes, the 1st Cav was at Bliss. Its units had just been drawn in from places like Ringold, Brownsville, and Clark, where they had been patrolling the border between Mexico and the United States. For the first time in a number of years, the 1st Cavalry Division had been finally assembled at Fort Bliss.

INTERVIEWER: So you were a new second lieutenant with 90 days of OCS training when you reported to the division. What was your first assignment there?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, I reported in and I was assigned to the 2d Squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment. I think in large part because the squadron S-3 and the regimental adjutant were from the 101st Cavalry and I knew them personally. So I think that my name turned up on one of their lists and I was assigned to that regiment.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall who your first boss was when you arrived in the regiment?

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes. My first "immediate boss" was the sergeant major of Company G to which I was assigned. Having been a rocker sergeant for well over a year, I thought it was probably the greatest single demotion that one could get in the Army. I reported in and the sergeant major said, "Lieutenant, a couple of things -- I understand you have a horse background so you're going to be the stable lieutenant." He went on to say that Captain Dykeman (Company Commander), will see you tomorrow morning. He also told me that he and the CO

expected me for drill and gave me the hour of the morning to report. After telling me all of that, he said he really didn't expect to see me around the company in the afternoon and that payday was a day of leave. He said, "Do you have any questions?" Of course, I was then dismissed after having no questions.

INTERVIEWER: When you reported in to the 1st Cavalry Division, it was ironic that a sergeant major told you what you were going to be doing. I know that you were not happy about that, but tell me a bit about the regiment that you had just joined.

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, as I said before, I thought it was the worst demotion that I had ever had in my life. I grant you that we were dressed pretty. We had britches, boots and Sam Brown belts and as officers in the cavalry we were part of an elite corps in those days. However, when I looked around and saw the caliber of the average regular Army soldier compared to the young men that I just left under the 101st Cavalry Regiment, it was like night and day. The old regular Army was not a very attractive place to be in those days and I'm afraid that it showed up in the rank and

file of the soldiers. As it turned out, the 1st Cavalry pulled people together and made absolutely super soldiers of them as it had done throughout history. As a matter of fact, they had a pretty rigorous screening process and got rid of the deadwood, but kept the good people. There were some super non-commissioned officers who had 15 to 20 years of service as non-commissioned officers in the Regular Army. I must say, it was an enlightening experience for a second lieutenant out of a relatively rout-order outfit like the 101st Cavalry Regiment of the New York National Guard. Although the 101st did very well on maneuvers there was an entirely different kind of discipline in the Regular Army.

INTERVIEWER: You said earlier that the 101st Regiment was somewhat of a different breed, i.e., rather elite. How would you characterize the rank and file of the 1st Cavalry Division when you reported in?

MR. CRIBBINS: Quite different. When I first reported in, we were just beginning to get draftees as a result of the Burke-Wadsworth Act which established conscription. Further, we still basically had the old Regular Army 1st Cavalry Division. It was, I was led

to believe, what you expected to find in a Regular Army Division. There were super officers who were West Pointers, ROTC cadets and young officers coming in with various skills learned in the civilian community. The noncommissioned officers were well versed and knew their jobs, but by and large had very little imagination. We had great difficulty getting them to pass their IQ Test of 110, which was a requirement to become an officer. We wanted to make officers of many of those men who were the stalwarts among their peers. The rank and file of the enlisted man was, if you were to categorize them today, considered to be mental Category IV.

INTERVIEWER: You said that the Division had the peacetime mission of border patrol. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, did the Division retain its mission of border patrol or did it start to train for war?

MR. CRIBBINS: When I reported to the Division it was really preparing for war. I think that between the Louisiana maneuvers in which the 1st Cavalry Division participated and the Carolina maneuvers in which the 101st Regiment trained, it was established that horses

would have little usefulness in World War II. So the 1st Cavalry Division was in the process of really winding down its era of being a horse cavalry division and was about to become an infantry division. Interestingly, we were also beginning to get draftees and my first job was teaching equitation to the draftees. I joined the division in late November 1942 and we didn't lose the horses till about February 1943. I taught urban or big city draftees how to ride horses during the day and I spent the night teaching Texans who had never seen water how to swim. Now that was quite a chore. I guess I taught more people how to ride horses than were in my squadron.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, earlier you talked about the Carolina and the Louisiana Maneuvers. You said that during both maneuvers it was determined that horses had no place on the battlefield of the future. Would you comment on your experiences during the Carolina maneuvers?

MR. CRIBBINS: I think the Carolina maneuvers were my first real experience with logistics. We had maneuvered and ridden all over New England prior to going down to North Carolina in August 1941. One of

the first things we had to do was load our horses and equipment aboard our porte' vans. A porte' van carried eight horses and a squad of eight men, and was pulled by a tractor. Each cavalry squadron was equipped with enough porte' vans to carry and mobilize the horses on the highway. The mechanized squadron drove halftracks over the highways or moved by rail. Because we were routed over the Skyline Drive, in Virginia, it was quite an experience. The tractors were underpowered and it made for a long trip. If you could imagine the tight quarters with eight horses who would stand all day side by side. There was no partition between them, only a partition between the four forward and the four aft. The eight troopers sat on a bench up on top of the trailer. When we finally got down to the maneuvers, we were given the job of reconnoitering or protecting a flank of the maneuvering Army. When other soldiers would rest for the night, we had to take care of our horses before we took care of ourselves. On the weekend, we would wind up on one flank of the Army, and before Monday morning exercise began, we would be on the other flank some 150 miles away. So by the time we finished the maneuvers, I think it had been proven that if you were going to use cavalry in that fashion, the horse had outlived his usefulness.

INTERVIEWER: Would you talk briefly about some of the training that occurred in the 1st Cavalry Division while it prepared for war?

MR. CRIBBINS: OK. The 1st Cavalry Division, as a Regular Army division, was far better trained than anything I had seen in the National Guard. Although the caliber of people may have been different, the caliber of training was also very, very different. The 1st Cavalry knew how to operate as a cavalry division. "Lee's Lieutenants" which I had studiously worked with in OCS at Fort Riley, Kansas, was still vital for the horse cavalry. When I arrived at the 1st Cavalry Division, I had a pretty good tactical background as a non-com in the 101st Cavalry Regiment and result of an excellent OCS at Fort Riley. However, I still had a great deal to learn. The way the 1st Cavalry Division rode, maneuvered, drilled and bivouaced in the desert at night or fought during the day was all new and most interesting to me. It was much more difficult to convince the cavalrymen in the 1st Cavalry Division than those in the 101st Cavalry Regiment that losing their horses was the right thing to do. I think that one of the telling things that really convinced the cavalrymen to become infantrymen was extended training

in the desert. During training exercises lasting several days, every trooper had to dig his horse in before he dug himself in. That tended to make infantrymen out of cavalrymen quicker than anything else. [End Tape C-208, Side 1]

[Begin Tape C-208, Side 2]

INTERVIEWER: Sir, you were discussing earlier the transition of the various Cavalry units. I'd like you to focus on the transition of the 1st Cavalry Division from the horse cavalry to infantry.

MR. CRIBBINS: Are you talking about the 1st Cavalry Division now?

INTERVIEWER: Yes Sir.

MR. CRIBBINS: The 1st Cavalry Division's transition from horse cavalry to infantry meant that we would take all cavalry tactics and convert them to infantry tactics by fighting on foot as infantrymen. Actually, other than the training on horses, much of the training that we learned in the cavalry really applied to the infantry. In other words, what we were doing was maneuvering very fast on horse instead of on foot. In

fact, we were fighting as true infantrymen. But it was a difficult thing to prepare for the tropics in the Pacific while training on the desert of El Paso, Texas. However, that was the only place we had because the transition went very fast. We actually transitioned in training by the simple expedient of removing the horses. We did not transition organizationally or otherwise. Let me explain very briefly. We lost the horses in March 1943. By May 1943, I set out with the forward echelon of the 1st Cavalry Division to Australia. We were put on railcars and sent to Camp Roberts, California. We then moved on, to the debarkation point outside of San Francisco where we boarded the Maui and sailed across the Pacific to Brisbane, Australia. We arrived in June 1943 and established a working camp consisting of tents, facilities and training areas outside of Brisbane at a place called Strathpine. Between June and December 1943, the 1st Cavalry Division really trained in infantry tactics, particularly in jungle fighting and in amphibious warfare. The training was done in the semi-tropical forest around Brisbane and near Newcastle, where we did amphibious training. Members of the Australian forces who had been engaged in jungle warfare provided the cadre for our training. I would

say that the real transition of the 1st Cavalry from horses to infantry was accomplished in Australia between the early summer of 1943 and December of 1943. Shortly thereafter, we deployed to Oro Bay, New Guinea and spent another two months training in New Guinea before we deployed to the Admiralty Islands for our first taste of combat.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, let me go back to the time that the Division got orders (in February 1943) alerting it of its ultimate assignment in the Pacific. What were people's attitudes like once the news of the deployment arrived?

MR. CRIBBINS: Unusual to put it mildly. Here we had a division that had been literally assigned to that part of Texas and the southwest throughout its lifetime, going back to the Civil War. There was the tradition of the Gary Owen or 7th Regiment and the job of patrolling the border and being a horse cavalry unit. Now an infantry division, it was about to be deployed to the Pacific in an entirely different environment and type of warfare. The division was made up, as I have indicated before of largely Regular Army soldiers, but greatly supplemented by draftees. Also, the division's

hierarchy, senior leaders and staff officers were changed. For instance, Brigadier General William C. Chase became the first brigade commander. We had a change in regimental commanders with Colonel (later General) Sadler taking over the 12th Cavalry Regiment. Major General Hoffman, then Colonel Hoffman, took command of the 5th Cavalry Regiment. General Innis P. Swift, who was the Division Commander, held a review on horseback. I guess it was one of the final ones and it was really impressive. It was held at Armstrong Field. Can you just picture a division, I'm guessing it was about 10,000 people, on horseback, on Armstrong Field? There was a battalion of artillery with mules and pack artillery. I'll always remember this particular formation because I was then a Platoon Leader and Stable Lieutenant. Sitting on a horse at the head of my platoon, I watched General Swift as he made a review of the division on horseback. The mounted review was the most impressive single thing that I've ever seen in my life. It was the end of an era for us, but I didn't recognize it then because I hadn't been part of the beginning of that era. It was a sight to see that whole field full of horses and mules with a division completely mounted with their guidons -- it felt, really like a different way of life. I wouldn't have

missed that review for anything. Let me pick up from there. We were alerted in February 1943. The division was dismounted, except for the division staff, the regimental commanders, and the division commander. We then had a dismounted review of the division and by this time General Swift had received his new staff members from Washington. Many of whom had probably not ridden a horse, or if they had, it had been many years since they'd ridden one. General Swift sat on his big thoroughbred while we were standing at attention. Then he conducted his inspection at a full gallop with the staff trailing. When he came around the second time, it was a sight to behold. General Swift was way out in front of the staff in a full gallop. The sergeant major of the division, who was carrying the guidon, was hanging on to the guidon for dear life with the colors trailing behind him. The G-3 had hit the dust about the time they came around the first lap. I remember one of the staff officers came around upside down with his two legs and his arms wrapped around the neck of the horse while facing upward. The rest of the staff never did appear. They'd all fallen off their horses. I think that General Swift enjoyed that more than any review he had ever held because he was quite a horseman. I'm sure that he enjoyed every bit of it.

He was showing what a cavalryman should be despite the fact that we were no longer cavalry.

INTERVIEWER: What do you recall most about General Swift? Obviously he was quite a horseman and I'm sure a dynamic leader.

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes. I saw a lot of General Swift mainly because I became an escort for the youngest Swift daughter. I rode in the coyote or fox hunts that we had on Sunday morning. Being a horseman with a lot of background, I fitted well into the hunt or what was really a drag hunt, one where animal scent is dragged along the ground. So I got to know the Swift family as well as a second lieutenant could have in those days. Occasionally, I escorted young Pamela Swift to some of the formal affairs that occurred in the Division. General Swift, as a Division Commander, was probably last of a breed of cavalry soldiers who had really been dedicated to the cavalry all of his life. He was a fine horseman, a great gentleman, a good soldier, a top-notch soldier. He certainly proved that in the war in the Pacific and eventually became corps commander.

INTERVIEWER: Since we are talking about the senior leaders in the 1st Cavalry Division, what would you say about the quality of the officer corps in the division?

MR. CRIBBINS: I'd say absolutely super. It was tough to become an officer assigned to the 1st Cavalry in the first place. One became an officer after completing OCS, West Point or ROTC at such places as VMI (Virginia Military Institute), The Citadel, or Texas A&M. Texas A&M provided a large number of cavalry officers to the 1st Cavalry Division. I believe it probably had the largest ROTC of any college or university in the United States. I would say that the officers in the 1st Cavalry Division were just the reverse of those in the 101st Regiment. For the most part, the National Guard officers did not have the training or the dedication to the Army that the officers in the 1st Cavalry Division had. The kind of officers who were in the 1st Cavalry Division, before and during my time, people such as General Creighton Abrams, or General Mike Davidson, or for that matter any number of officers that had been in the Army were absolutely top-notch and it was especially true of the officers in the 1st Cavalry Division. They had in large measure, made the

difference in the 1st Cavalry Division being the super outfit that it was.

INTERVIEWER: You stated before that there were people who came from Washington to staff the Division headquarters. Could you elaborate on who those people were and what they brought to the division in terms of capabilities and skills?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, it was pretty evident that they all had an infantry background and were, I believe to a man, infantry officers. I'd say that the staff of the 1st Cavalry Division that resulted in the change over from cavalry to infantry was greatly enhanced by the caliber of the officers that were sent out there. To the best of my knowledge there was not one of those officers who fell by the wayside in combat other than being wounded. Certainly, none that I know of were ever relieved.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, were you still a platoon leader when you deployed as part of the advanced party that landed at Brisbane, Australia?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well, at the time that we went to Australia, I became S2/3 of the 2d squadron, 12th Cavalry Regiment. In fact I deployed to Australia in that capacity rather than as platoon leader. The squadron commander at that time was Lieutenant Colonel Tuckerman, whom we called "Tubby." He came out of the 101st Cavalry Regiment and I'd known him when I was a member of that outfit. He was put in charge of the entire advance party and when we got to Australia, he became the G-3 of the division.

INTERVIEWER: You were there approximately two months prior to the arrival of the remainder of the division. What kind of challenges did the division's closing present to the advance party?

MR. CRIBBINS: The biggest single challenge was one of construction. We spent two months really working around the clock constructing a camp for the entire division to occupy. The whole objective of the advance party was to construct a camp where the 1st Cavalry Division could fall in on since it would be there for some period of time while training before being committed to combat. Australia was in very rough straits because it was not the least bit certain that

the Japanese were not going to invade Northern Australia. They were already in New Guinea and had occupied the surrounding islands. There was every indication that their next thrust was going to be right into Australia. So our objectives, and I was not really privy to all of this at the time, I guess we had really two objectives. The first was to train ourselves just as quickly as we possibly could to accomplish whatever fighting was needed on an offensive operation, and second to be prepared to assist in defending Australia if that became necessary.

INTERVIEWER: So you saw the division having a two-fold mission -- act as a deterrent against an invasion while preparing for war?

MR. CRIBBINS: I believe that is correct because it was pretty evident from the newspapers that the Australians were very, very concerned that the Japanese were about to move in on them. The Australian armed forces had been in the desert fighting Rommel, but they were brought back home once the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

INTERVIEWER: You bring in a new chapter in training. You mentioned that the division trained in amphibious operations. Would you comment on who conducted the training and how well that training was received by members of the 1st Cavalry?

MR. CRIBBINS: The training was tough, but well received by members of the division. The Australians really conducted the training in amphibious operations down in a place called Newcastle in Australia. They all had had wartime experience as did those who conducted jungle warfare training. And of course members of the Australian divisions that had fought in Northern Africa during the early days of the war contributed to our infantry training.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, do you recall when the Division deployed to Oro Bay in New Guinea? Could you tell me about some of the highlights of that deployment?

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes. I recall exactly, it was December 1943. My element was placed on a liberty ship which was small by today's standards for a cargo ship. We were each given a six by two pallet of plywood which consisted of our bunk and our bedroll or whatever for

our 12-day journey. One of the things that I remember well was the fact that our 1st Cavalry Division was still largely Hispanic and Catholic. As it turned out, I was one of the officers who was Roman Catholic. Since we did not have a priest with us, I was asked by Colonel Stadler the regimental commander, if I would hold some sort of a service. I believe that most of our soldiers certainly felt the need for some sort of Sunday service. Recognizing my very limited capabilities in the religious arena, I did say Rosary with the soldiers. The first job that we had in Oro Bay was to construct another camp. We trained in New Guinea from late December or very early in January 1944, until we went into the Admiralty Islands which must have been in the February 1944 time frame.

INTERVIEWER: The troops must have sensed that they were getting closer to war as a result of the training in Australia and New Guinea. Can you describe what the morale, attitudes and feelings were like among members of the 1st Cavalry Division since they had been training intensively for over eight months and had not seen combat?

MR. CRIBBINS: Well the morale was super. For the first time, I think the troops across the board in the 1st Cavalry Division began to realize that they were in Australia with a purpose. When we arrived in New Guinea they knew that our engagement in combat was imminent since that was what we had been training to do. The training in Australia was tough. The Aussies were tough. Looking back at the Aussies, I have to believe that Australians in 1943, while we were there, really epitomized the type of Americans that I believe existed before the turn of the century. They were, as they put it, cobbers. They were tough cobbers, well disciplined soldiers and were probably the cream of the fighting men anywhere in the world in my estimation. Some of the training that we had in Australia was rougher than some of the actual combat that we had later on. We did lose a few soldiers during amphibious operations and jungle training. We did amphibious operations on a ship called the Westralia off the coast of Newcastle. We deployed in rubber boats and LCMs and learned how to prepare and make an amphibious landing under fire. I recall when General Chase had the brigade down in Newcastle where we were doing amphibious training. He made some comment during one of our night sessions when we had the officers together

running a pre-brief on the next exercise or a back-brief on the previous exercise. He told the Australians that he thought the amphibious training and operations could be greatly improved if some equipment available elsewhere were made available to the troops training at Newcastle. He wasn't being really critical, but was making an observation. Without hesitation, one of the Australian lieutenants stood up and said, "From my position General, if I had your stars and bars I'd make it happen." (laughter) With that, the General said that maybe he did have the requirement to make it happen. However, we got along great with the Aussies. I must say that the 1st Cavalry did fit in well with the Australian climate and people.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, I'm going to bring you up to February 1944 or about the time the 2d Squadron of the 5th Cavalry Regiment was about to launch the initial attack on the Admiralty Islands. What do you recall about the preparation for and the actual attack of those islands?

MR. CRIBBINS: The 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry went in as the assault element. I recall that the Admiralty

Islands were considered strategic in General MacArthur's campaign to regain control of the theatre. These islands commanded the sea lanes down toward New Guinea and other Japanese-held places such as New Britain and New Ireland. It was important for us to possess the Admiralty Islands to control the sea and air lanes. Moreover, control enabled us to establish an airstrip from which B-17s, our primary bombers and the B-24s could operate. I guess the B-24s were more prevalent than the B-17s at that time and the B-29s hadn't arrived yet. So the 2d Squadron, 5th Cavalry Regiment was chosen as the assault echelon to attack Los Negros Island backed up by the rest of the 5th Cavalry Regiment and the 12th Cavalry Regiment. As I remember, the 1st Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division was given the mission of taking Los Negros which was the Eastern most island of the Admiralty chain. Manus Island being the largest and most critical to General MacArthur's strategy, was to be taken by the 2d Brigade under General Verne D. Mudge. General Chase, went in with the 2d Squadron of the 5th Cavalry Regiment. It had been reputed, from the viewpoint where we were in the ranks, and later I learned from GHQ that it was going to be a relatively easy landing. It was an unusual amphibious operation since the 5th Cavalry was

deployed with a combination of destroyers and other craft and were actually landed in almost a non-combat role. It seems that intelligence had said that there would not be a great deal of opposition. But not too long before, the Air Force, either ours or the Australians had knocked out a ship that was taking some 5,000 Japanese and Korean soldiers off the Admiralty Islands to deploy them elsewhere. The ship was knocked out, but those 5,000 tough soldiers were still there. So it became a very tough operation on the 5th Cavalry Regiment. I remember they had a pretty rough time there for a few days while they tried to gain a toe hold on Los Negros. They had about a hundred yards of beach and that was about it. The Japanese were attacking 24-hours a day with ground Kamikaze (suicide) attacks and really trying very hard to run them off. The artillery consisted of Navy three and five inch guns. Knowing the trajectory and the flat beach you kept your head down or you got it taken off because the Japanese were right on top of us all the time. I know one of my friends in the 5th Cavalry said that he was sitting in a revetment one night and he really did not know if they were going to last through the night because they only controlled a small stretch of beach. While on the small stretch of beach, they were getting

pounded around the clock by the Japanese who had suicide squads coming in that either died or took the position they were aiming for. Fighting had been intense when some GIs who were dug in a revetment, had heard over a short wave radio that San Francisco had just got news that General MacArthur had landed on the Admiralty Islands and the situation was well in hand. One GI with a New York accent said, "Golly that makes me feel better. You know I was getting worried." The reconnaissance in force turned out to be quite a fight. Another thing worth mentioning concerned General MacArthur. The word had gone out that he was known by some of the other services as Dugout Doug. Let me assure you of one thing. I believe that the man was without fear. I don't think he knew what the word fear meant. He came ashore with his scrambled egg hat and his khakis while the Japanese were all over the place. We were all dressed without benefit of any insignia. Wearing insignia was sudden death. Carrying a Browning Automatic Rifle, or a .45 caliber pistol was sudden death. The Japanese were obviously instructed to take out people carrying those weapons. However, General MacArthur came ashore and walked up and down that place as if there wasn't a Japanese anywhere within miles. The people who were escorting him were trying, without

making a big issue of it, to stay far away from him while he walked up and down that beach and surveyed all he saw. Quite a man. Unbelievable!

INTERVIEWER: One report that I read said he was on Los Negros Island within six or seven hours of the initial attack.

MR. CRIBBINS: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER; I'm curious about the quality of intelligence. You said the Admiralty Island chain were of strategic importance; yet intelligence said that the enemy was moving on. What turned out to be a reconnaissance in force mission was really quite a fight.

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes. I think the intelligence was faulty. I'm saying this from all the word that we got as troops. Don't forget that I was still S2/3 of the Squadron Combat Team. I was not privy to the higher echelons of intelligence. The word that we got was that while the Admiralty Islands were important, Los Negros was going to be a relatively easy capture because there were administrative forces there. As it

turned out, the Japanese were there in force. They were tough and they were joined by some large Koreans who were also tough soldiers.

INTERVIEWER: One thing that you mentioned was the fact that you did receive tough training. Based on what you've told me thus far, I believe your training paid off extremely well. There was a lot of hard fighting on what became the first of many successful campaigns.

MR. CRIBBINS: Yes. Well first on the training. The training was tough. It was hazardous and didn't pull any punches. Training in some ways, as I said earlier was tougher than actual combat. During the early 30's when I was a steeplechase jockey I would run five miles a day, and really thought that I was fit as I could be. Looking back at that training I was in better shape when I went into the Admiralty Islands than I had been as a steeplechase jockey. We were trained physically and mentally in such a fashion that we were really prepared to fight when we went in. The training made the difference. That's what it was all about. I think it is important to note that the 1st Cavalry Division, a four-square division with two brigades, consisting of four regiments, hardly had two people in the same squad

with the same type of weapon. Everyone took the weapon of his choice whether it was a carbine, an M-1 rifle, a Browning Automatic Rifle, a bazooka, you name it. We had them all. It must have looked like a haphazard outfit. However, the people were well trained in jungle warfare and it seemed to work very well. Of course the American soldier, I do believe, has got a certain amount of individuality. If you give him good leaders, train him well and discipline him, he'll show a lot of initiative. It was very interesting as to how you fought a war in the jungle. I've often thought about it and remember one thing that in the jungle there was so little visibility. The Japanese were ever present and you could not spot them because they were super artists in camouflage. The toughest thing ever was to be on point in a patrol. We found out very quickly that if you wanted to survive as part of a patrol you better be prepared to react very quickly. One of the ways we found to react very quickly was to make the point man a left hander then make the number two man a right hander or vice versa. The reason being that no matter which side of the jungle the fire or the threat came from you had an immediate response without having to turn around. We found out very quickly it worked a heck of a lot better than putting two right

handed or two left-handed guys up front in a patrol since one of them may have to spin around in order to counter something that required an immediate response. Another thing we did which became standard was to take the clips from any of our weapons that had clips, tape two down and one up so all you had to do was flip around the clip and slap it in. These things were not in the field manuals, but the GIs devised them very quickly and they worked very well. Another initiative on our part that we really plagiarized from the Japanese was to use 60mm mortars as knee mortars. It was a matter of holding them in hand and pointing and using Kentucky windage and aiming them in the direction of the enemy. We also had 81mm mortars which was part of our artillery. They were not too satisfactory when we would try to lay them close to the troops because we were as likely to hit them as we were to hit the enemy troops. I can remember one time in the jungle fighting in Los Negros when we got cut off for several days and we weren't sure where the dickens we were. We had to call in artillery at night or the Japanese would overwhelm us at night. In order to call in the artillery, there really was only one way to do it and that was to call the first round in exactly where you believed you were and hoped you weren't too accurate.

I called in the first round as I say and hoped to goodness I wasn't all that accurate. But the reason for calling it in that close was that if it landed more than 25-50 yards away in the jungle you did not know where it landed. When we dug in at night, we'd call the artillery in and have light flak coming in over the foxholes to help keep the Japanese out of our lines.

INTERVIEWER: At the tactical level, you have shown that not only did the tough training pay off, but initiative that the soldiers showed paid off as well. With so many different weapons, was logistical support for the operation a problem?

MR. CRIBBINS: Not too long after our initial combat, I wound up being the only original member of the squadron staff who had not been wounded or killed. So I became the S-4 as well as the S-2/S-3. The requirements were not very many. Actually, the logistics support for the 1st Cavalry Division which was in substance a very light division was adequate. We didn't need any vehicles, at least I am talking about the squadron in which I served. Really what our logistics requirements consisted of was Class V (ammunition). Ammunition consisted of small arms, grenades, 60mm and 81mm mortar

and artillery rounds. There was hardly a need for POL (petroleum, oils and lubricants), except what we might have used to heat food. If we heated it, we didn't do that very often because it was in the tropics. Food, which consisted of the K-rations and the C-ration which we subsisted on mostly. Logistic support was really not critical. The replacement of weapons was always necessary and they seemed to be readily available. Food consisted of C-rations. [End Tape C-208, Side 2]

[Begin Tape C-209, Side 1]

INTERVIEWER: Sir, you mean, that even though you had different types of weapons, you didn't have problems getting the ammunition for those weapons?

MR. CRIBBINS: No, as I remember we didn't have the problem. There was enough ammunition for all the weapons that had been issued to the division. The fact was, we just didn't have any standard TOEs [Tables of Organization and Equipment]. When we went on shore, we still had farriers who were horseshoers. The farriers were still part of the division. Remember now, we had a square division with two brigades and four regiments.

We did not reorganize once we got rid of the horses. As I remember, since we really didn't know what to do with horse shoers, we gave them bazookas. I guess it was expected that we would sooner or later run into Japanese vehicles. Well, on the Admiralty Island Campaign, or at least part of it, we never did see a Japanese vehicle because it was all jungle fighting. However, the farriers with bazookas became targets for the Japanese. In fact, any person who had anything distinguishing such as a Browning automatic rifle or a bazooka, officer insignia, field glasses or a .45 caliber pistol, that person became an immediate target for snipers who were everywhere. As a result thereof, we very quickly depleted the farrier population because carrying a bazooka turned out to be very hazardous business. We didn't know that this was going to happen. It happened very quickly. The other thing was, since we had nothing except "C" or K-rations and didn't have any class A rations for a long period of time, our cooks fought along with everyone else. When we eventually did get class A rations to the cook, we found we didn't have any cooks left. Also, and this was very interesting, one of our best soldiers turned out to be Captain Williams who was a medical doctor. In this "dog eat dog" war no one recognized the medics,

certainly the Japanese didn't recognize them as being different from the rest of the soldiers. I remember lying along side of Captain Williams at one particular spell of combat and he was about as good a combat arms soldier that you could wish for and he was an honest to goodness medical doctor.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, can you draw some parallel between what happened during the Admiralty Campaign and the way we plan to fight the air land battle?

MR. CRIBBINS: I think one of the most interesting things about the Admiralty Campaign was General MacArthur's strategy, which I had the opportunity to observe first hand when I was assigned to his headquarters. The strategy was to by-pass strong points and critical islands where he could establish forward operating bases for the air corps and protect sea lanes. The way General MacArthur fought the war in the Pacific turned out to be a war of logistic deprivation of the Japanese forces by picking off places such as the Admiralty Islands, Biak and Leyte enroute towards the Philippines which was his goal at the time. A couple of things happened here though that I think were very important. First, casualties, using

General MacArthur's strategy, were really minimal when you compare them with the casualties that were suffered in the Central Pacific, particularly in places like Saipan and Iwo Jima. I am not qualified to be critical of how the battles were fought or why the same strategy was not used in those particular places. Second, as we moved up through the island groups under General MacArthur's command, the Japanese became very hard pressed to get petroleum and rubber from the East Indies which was their major supply source. I understand that the Japanese were dropping 55 gallon drums of petroleum into the current in Java hoping that the drums would get to Japan because they couldn't get a tanker through. Now to answer your question, if I look at the air land battle as I have seen it portrayed, I would suggest that we may very well be faced with having to fight in isolated pockets. In many instances what we may be doing is fighting out of those pockets and cutting off or getting cut off from our logistic support. I cannot envision any future war that is going to be pursued with any degree of success without recognizing the absolute necessity of getting logistic things in or around enemy-held territory. Every time I get another briefing on land warfare or warfare under the air land battle doctrine, it strikes

me more and more that it seems to be a repeat of General MacArthur's strategy in the Pacific.

INTERVIEWER: How did we maintain control of the air and sea lanes so that we could ensure that our forces were logistically supported, particularly the 1st Cav?

MR. CRIBBINS: I think that initially General MacArthur was not very enthused about the air corps as an operational element. It had become quite evident that the war in the Pacific was a sea war. After Pearl Harbor, almost all of the major battles occurred at sea. We controlled the air with a terrific air corps under General George Kinney. He really became very close to General MacArthur and convinced him of the great value of air power. Now General MacArthur may have been, and I am just guessing on this, turned off during the loss of the Philippine Islands when all the B-17 bombers or most of the Air Force in the Philippines was knocked out before it ever got off the ground. But General Kinney certainly brought him around down in Australia. By the time we were moving up through the islands, the first goal on any island was to seize or build an air strip to accommodate fighters and subsequently accommodate bombers. In the

interim, fighters from the navy carriers provided close air support. I remember well during fighting on Leyte for example, Marine Corps fighters made the difference between success and failure for the Army.

INTERVIEWER: Sir, you left the division after the Admiralty Island Campaign. Where were you assigned?

MR. CRIBBINS: I was assigned to General MacArthur's headquarters. It was 30-60 days or maybe a little longer than that, after the Admiralty Island Campaign. At the time, I had amoebic dysentery and dropped down to somewhere around 100 pounds. In addition, I guess this old steeplechase injury, which occurred back in 1933, caught up with me and my days as an infantryman were numbered. I was evacuated to Oro Bay in New Guinea when my orders caught up with me and I joined General MacArthur's headquarters in late September or early October 1944, just before we went into Leyte. My regimental commander recommended me to one of his friends who was in the Transportation Regulating Office for the theater. That gentleman was Colonel Charles Unger.

INTERVIEWER: What were your duties?

MR. CRIBBINS: I was a First Lieutenant. My civilian background had been completely horse oriented. I had a high school education and had not been to college. I'd been a steeplechase jockey, operated a stable, had been in the horse cavalry and an infantryman. I was transferred into the transportation element at General MacArthur's headquarters and I literally became a transporter overnight. My duties were those of an air movements understudy. I believe it had been the desire for me to get an orientation in the Transportation Regulating Office, then move into one of the stations. The people who were already in the Regulating Office had been recruited from civilian airlines and had a great deal of background in air transport. At that time, the theater had a scheduled air transport system operating from Melbourne, Australia through New Guinea. As we moved forward, we would immediately establish another station and eventually we were running the longest scheduled airline in the world with some 125 C-47s.

INTERVIEWER: Would you explain the intra-theater air transport system which was something new to us. Also, talk a little bit about some of the challenges that were faced from your perspective.