

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Just so I have it on tape, the first thing I want to do is just to get your first and last name so I have proper spelling of that.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: So if you'll go ahead and give me first and last name and the spelling.

Answer: Carl, C-A-R-L, middle initial M, last name is Kramp, K-R-A-M-P.

Question: And you served in which branch?

Answer: Army, US Army.

Question: US Army.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: So when did you -- did you enlist, drafted, how did --

Answer: I was enlisted in National Guard, May 11th of 1940. I went into the National Guard. And then in September, it was, why we was changed to -- we was the 34th Division, 34th Tank Company, 34th Division in 1940. And in 1941 -- '40, why, they changed it, in September they changed it to Company A of the 194th Tank Battalion. And that took in a battalion, a company out of St. Joseph, Missouri and a company in Salinas, California

Answer: And then in February 10th, we were inducted in the federal service and sent to Fort Lewis, and we trained at Fort Lewis. And in September of '41 we was sent to the Philippine Islands. Company B was sent to Alaska, so they split us up. And from there, why it was rough. (laughs)

Question: Now you were just a kid at this time -- how old were you?

Answer: I was 20.

Question: Twenty. So that's pretty much just a kid.

Answer: I had my 21st birthday out in the middle of the Pacific. (laughs)

Question: Heck of a birthday party they threw for you -- one that went on for awhile.

Answer: It went on for awhile, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: So when did you first see active duty? I mean when did you first see battlefield?

Answer: On December the 26th of '41. We was on the -- moved in the front lines on the 25th of December. And then the 26th, why the Japanese attacked and they surrounded us and we had to go through them to get out. And I was lost. I was missing in action, because I was supposed to follow the tank ahead of me, but I got hit with a shell, hit right in front of me and I looked through a little peep slot about that wide -- (gesturing) -- about that long and about that wide. And explosion inside and out, 'cause we got hit on the back, too, at the same time, a box of ammunition blew up. Why, it blinded me and I couldn't see where the other tank had went. So when the other tank, I couldn't see it anymore, I took the first road that I

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

could see out of there. I figured that would be best thing to do (laughs) and we got back all right.

Question: So it might have been an advantage that you couldn't see --

Answer: We did, because the rest of the tanks were all lost because the Filipinos blew their bridges and we had no engineers. And so they couldn't get the tanks across and they had to blow up all the tanks. And they lost our whole battalion lost their tanks there. So.

Question: What's -- I mean, you were pretty young, and I hear a lot of the vets say we were too young and too stupid to know any different. We were just doing our job. But do you remember, were you afraid? Did you have any real concept of what you were in?

Answer: Not really. Not at first. Not until the first fellow was killed. Then we realized that they were shooting at us and somebody was going to get killed. When the first guy got killed I -- then we realized that something -- it wasn't any fun anymore. Because we was walking around with no steel helmets on or anything. And the mortars were flying over ahead of us and machine gun bullets were going over the top of us, and one thing and another and didn't even bother us until the first guy was killed. Then we realized what was going on. Then we woke up to the fact that they wanted -- they were trying to kill us. Cause otherwise, why, like firecrackers (laughs).

Question: Kind of fun until you realize what --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So did you then just live in constant fear forever, or was it fear and then you could push that aside --

Answer: No, you don't fear nothing. I mean, you're not afraid. We, well, I played pinochle on Bataan and the shells were going over the top of us, we'd listen, say, well, that's not going to come anywhere near us, and we'd listen to another one come over, well, that's going someplace else. You could tell where they were going to go, you could hear them, and so it didn't -- didn't bother us any. But, 'cause then, I don't know what it is about it, but a person gets used to it. And the fear is practically gone. But, so, I don't know, I can't explain it any other way.

Question: Is it probably because in your mind it wasn't going to happen to you?

Answer: I guess that was it.

Question: What about when you look back on it. Do you have -- in retrospect, do you have a fear of thinking --

Answer: Well, I do, yes, you do. Now, I have -- I do this darn near every night. You always think back, what's -- what happened to you. And I hate it. I hate to do it, but my brain runs back to it. Why, I don't know. And I'd like to be able to forget it (laughs) but it just doesn't seem to do it.

Question: Now you were captured.

Answer: Yes, hm-hmm.

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Question: How did that happen?

Answer: I was in the hospital. I wasn't wounded but I had boils. So I was in the hospital and the Japanese left us in the hospital and then they set the big guns around the hospital and used it for -- So Corregidor couldn't fire back. We were hostages, you might say. So Corregidor couldn't shoot back at us.

Question: So human shield.

Answer: We was a human shield, yes, hm-hmm.

Question: And did they remove you from the hospital eventually and --

Answer: After Corregidor surrendered, they did, yes. They took us to Manila

Answer: We were prisoners in Manila

Answer: To prison in Manila

Answer: And then from there we went to Cabanatuan, the main camp. And then we stayed there until we went to Japan.

Question: Now at that point did fear start to settle in?

Answer: No. You get used to it. You don't know whether you're.. you're going to look at the next -- guy laying down next to you is going to be dead or not. So you don't -- it don't bother you. You get to where you don't mind -- it don't bother you. Cause you didn't know what was happening, one minute to the next.

Question: Now what was your -- what was your treatment like, because, now, the Japanese didn't recognize the Geneva Convention?

Answer: No, they didn't. They treated us just about the same way they treated their soldiers. Rough. That was rough. We were treated like that. Cause they didn't make anything easier for us than they would their own soldiers, you might say, and they treated them terrible. But at least they got food and we didn't. That was the main thing. We didn't - - we just got just enough to get by on and that was it. And that wasn't enough to even get by on, you might say -- just enough to sustain the life in you for awhile cause you get so weak you slept most of the time. But the worst, worst part was on the Hell Ships. You went on those, why you remember probably seeing pictures of the old slave ships coming across. Well, we were now in the same position as that, but we weren't chained, you might say. We had a spot and that was it. And it was messy down in there because they wouldn't let you out to the deck to go the bathroom or anything like that. They just put down buckets. Of course everybody was sick from dysentery, one thing or another and people got crapped on every night. Was laying down in different -- where they were -- some of them had been walked across, you know, so people couldn't make it to the buckets they had down in there, why, they -- guy got messed up. And they put down the rice in a bucket and then they'd take the bucket out and put it full of water and then you drank sour water all the time. Cause -- and that's what made you sick. And I remember coming out, getting off the ship at Mogi, Japan, and -- and we walked down the street and the people on the street was gagging from the smell of us. Cause it was -- and we couldn't smell it but they could. (laughs)

Question: So that was transporting you from where they captured you to --

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: To Japan. From the Philippines to Japan.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: So now what is your -- how do you survive that? What's going on. Do you take your mind to other places or do you just focus on minute to minute?

Answer: Just minute to minute I'd say, yeah, hm-hmm. Yeah. You knew that anything could happen to you at any time but you weren't afraid of it. You got where it was -- you'd been that way for so long that you just didn't care anymore. You didn't care if you lived or died. And that was probably the best thing that could happen to a person to get into a position like that.

Question: What -- now, when they put you in the camp, did they make you work or did they --

Answer: Oh, yeah, we worked about 14 hours a day, six days a week. They let us have Sunday off, that was main thing, one thing, but most of the time we worked. We worked hard too, and it was hard work.

Question: What did they have you do?

Answer: Well, I was working in Uwada Steel Factory in Japan. First we got there, why they had us shoveling slag out of where they pour the steel from. And that stuff there is about 200 degrees. Well, they'd let it get down to about 150 degrees and then they'd put us in there to try to shovel that stuff out with scoop shovels. And in a minute, one minute, you know, you have to put water on it to cool it down but you worked in steam, you were just sopping wet all the time. And even in the wintertime, why you come out of there, you're just sopping wet, you didn't -- you didn't have no coats or anything like, you know, that to put on, so you just -- freezing all the time. Yeah.

Question: You lived in barracks or what did they --

Answer: Yeah, we lived in barracks, yeah, hm-hmm, slept on a grass mat. The blankets -- well, I can describe our blankets -- you might as well put a sheet of plywood over the top of you. They were made out of coconut, and you could roll them up and stand them in the corner. (laughs) There was no warmth in them.

Question: Did you -- within your group within the barracks, did you form associations with other POW's or stay to yourself or -- how --

Answer: No, you didn't -- you tried to stay -- I would say, I'll put it from my point of view. I had friends over there, but we didn't visit because when you got a chance to rest, you rested. You didn't make no associations or anything like that. Some -- when you got a day off, you slept most of the day to get your strength back, because that's all you could do. You didn't have much to eat. They give us rice and barley, mostly, barley and millet, they fed us toward the last, and if you -- the Japanese would get the bottom of the carrots and we'd get the tops. So there wasn't much to that. They'd send you over fish soup sometime, but I think the fish just swam through it. (laughs)

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Question: Not a lot of meat.

Answer: Not a lot of meat, no. (laughs)

Question: If you lost your strength and weren't strong enough to work, I know the atrocities in some of the German camps, how did they deal with that, or did you even see any of that?

Answer: You went to work whether you were sick or not. If you're too sick to get out of bed, they let you stay in, but if you were just mildly sick, you went to work. They didn't have no -- they just kept you going all the time.

Question: Did you have any association with the guards? I mean, were there different guards who were nice, and different guards that were mean, or --

Answer: Some of them, some of them -- most of them were mean. But one -- we had one guy, we called him Shorty. He didn't like the war and he didn't like anything about it. He let us know that he didn't like the war. He'd say, "I like the United States; I don't like the war." And he'd take and hide us, sometimes, when -- from the Japanese soldiers and put one of us out in the guard duty, you know, to watch and see if any soldiers came. If any soldiers came, we supposed to run back and wake him up so we could get back and show that we were working. (laughs) He was -- he was -- he was a nice guy, I'd say that much for him. He didn't like the war and he let us know that, too, right off the bat. If they'd caught him, why they'd killed him.

Question: So there was this definite human relationship with some of the guards where you saw that you were brother to brother, I mean --

Answer: Well, you might say that with that fellow, but that was the only one that I knew of. Most of them were mean to you. They had a little upper hand over an American and they took it.

Question: Was it -- do you think -- was it a hate for Americans, or was it just they were given power and they just were corrupted with --

Answer: They were corrupted with power, yeah. That was with the (inaudible) And we, had -- they were small people and they lorded it over the bigger ones. That was about it.

Question: And I assume they were probably roughly the same age as you were.

Answer: Yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: And they -- they were shoved into this job and --

Answer: Well, these -- the guards were older people. They had been in the Army at one time or another and had been discharged for some reason or other and that's where they came from. But, whether they'd been wounded or what, I don't know, but they -- they were ex-soldiers, and they were the ones that were mean.

Question: Did you ever -- Lauren was talking about this yesterday. He said that it was real hard to get the upper hand or play a little trick on them once in awhile, but every so often you found some way to - to goad the guard a little bit. Did you run into any of that or were you too busy surviving?

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Too busy surviving, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: They talked about their schedule. You had to get up because you had to be counted. Mid-day you had to be counted, and in the afternoon you had to be counted, and so there was this very regimented. But they didn't work in Germany.

Answer: Well, we worked. We were counted in the morning and counted in the evening again, but that was it. They didn't count us at noon 'cause we was out working. And we was slave laborers -- we were slaves, actually. So they didn't bother with us at noon.

Question: How long were you in the camp? I mean, how long were you captured -- I mean, how long were you a POW?

Answer: About 3-1/2 years.

Question: Wow.

Answer: Hm-hmm.

Question: So in that time you had no contact with any family --

Answer: (shakes head no) I got one package -- one from home and one package, one letter, from one of my uncles, but I never heard -- the rest of the time we never got anything. We sent out a card, probably every six months, I think it was, and we were told what to put on it. We were supposed to be in good health and everything, you know. And -- or they wouldn't send it if you put anything else on it. They had the lockout and we could only check this or check that, no writing or anything. You just -- just the name of the people it was supposed to go to.

Question: So you put your name, who it was going to, and then you checked, I'm in good health, having fun in Japan.

Answer: Yeah, having fun. Yeah, yeah.

Question: Do you know if any of those got to your family or anything like that?

Answer: Some did but not all of them. Hm-hmm.

Question: And then return, nothing, basically got returned.

Answer: No, nothing got returned.

Question: So what was the hardest part for you of being a prisoner?

Answer: Well, the sickness. The sickness, at first. And lost so many of them at first, you know, I mean, 200 of them a day was dying. (inaudible) and the sickness I had, diphtheria, yellow jaundice and dengue fever all at the same time. And doctor come -- I remember the doctor's name, Dr. Schultz, he says, "You're a lucky kid." I says "Why, why am I lucky? I says, I know what I got." Well, he says, "This is the last shot of diphtheria serum I got". And he gave it to me and the rest of them came in that day died.

Question: Wow. And that was while you were in the camp?

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: Yes, hm-hmm. That was in the Philippines.

Question: In the Philippines. Okay.

Question: Were you aware of -- of dates? I mean in the fact of -- was it just another day, another day, or were you aware when, like a holiday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, things that, to me --

Answer: Yeah, we kept track of that. I don't remember how we did that but we kept track of it anyway and so we knew when it was Christmas and holidays and things like that.

Question: Did you acknowledge that or did you try to shut that off to survive?

Answer: No, I don't remember any more just what we did about that. We never -- we had to work on those days, nothing -- it was just -- our holidays and not theirs so we had to work on those days. But we try to remember them. One thing and another. Sit down and talk about what you like to eat. (laughs)

Question: You know, that's interesting, because that's what Lauren said got them through -- food.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: They talked a lot about food.

Answer: Talked about food. Yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: Buttered pancakes with syrup was his --

Answer: Hm-hmm, yeah.

Question: And he says to today -- his wife says to today, he is never going to go hungry. That was the hardest thing --

Answer: Yeah, that was me, too. I'm not going to go hungry. People don't know what hunger is. They know hunger -- hungry, but they don't know what hunger is. Hunger is when you got hungry all the time, and I don't know -- people talk about hungry people in this country. Well, they're not really hungry. They're -- they're getting something. But hunger is on the high list -- when you're hungry, you hunger for something.

Question: It sounds like not only were you hungry but you were dealing with this constant sickness.

Answer: Constant sickness, yeah.

Question: So no, food, no --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Now, did you -- when you came out, were you pretty skin and bones?

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Answer: No, we weren't, because we was in there a whole month before the Americans came to get us in Japan there and they dropped food to us, and we were eating day and night (laughs). We put it on -- weight on pretty fast.

Question: Did you get sick from getting all this food all of a sudden? Was that hard?

Answer: No, we didn't. It was nice to get something to eat, anyway. Had plenty to eat.

Question: What other POW's that were with you -- Germans, English, British, I mean who --

Answer: There was English, and East Indians, and I think there were some Dutch, too, I don't know, Dutch, East India, and on like that. But it was mostly Americans. But there was some English.

Question: Do you keep in touch with any of them?

Answer: No.

Question: No --

Answer: I don't remember their names, even. Just the guys in my company. I keep in touch with some of those but there's only about eight of us left now so I don't know, some of them are sick, pretty bad off and one thing or another, but -- I don't keep in touch -- I don't remember the guy -- we had to double up and sleep together to stay warm, and I don't even remember the guy's name that I slept with, cause we didn't -- just somebody to keep warm with, try to keep warm with.

Question: Do you remember how you found out the war was over?

Answer: Well, we was out -- we was out working, and they sent us all back and we heard all the people standing around their radios listening to the Emperor and we didn't -- we knew there was something going on but we didn't know what it was. So, I'm glad the war ended then because we found out later on, oh, about ten years ago now it was, that the Japanese had orders to shoot us all -- shoot all prisoners of war the first week of September, 1945. So we were glad the war ended on the 14th of August. (laughs)

Question: Wow. Boy, that's -- that had to be kind of bone chilling.

Answer: Well, we didn't know it until about ten years ago, so it didn't bother us. We probably found out about it, why, it had been a little different if we had been over there.

Question: Did -- so when the war ended, what happened in the camp? How did you get out? What -- did you wake up one morning and everything was different or --

Answer: Well the Japanese soldiers left. We didn't have no guards. And so we just went into their place, and like the medicines and stuff, why the Navy doctor, the day they dropped the A-bomb on Nagasaki, that was supposed to have been dropped on the Uwada Steel Factory. And that was the first objective. But they brought it over and it was raining, so they took it down to Nagasaki and dropped it. But they bombed us out with incendiary bombs. We were out in the factor working. And this Navy -- one guy had his shoulder, his arm practically blown off, so the Navy doctor had to take it off with a hack saw and a butcher knife and no anesthetic. And after the Japanese surrendered they had all kinds of medicines in there and

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

anesthetics and one thing and another in their supplies that he didn't even know they had, but they wouldn't give him anything.

Question: So you were working in the fields for the steel factory and the US came in and bombed it with incendiary bombs --

Answer: Hm-hmm. Yeah. They hit the -- I was working in the coal field at that time, and the steel factory I was in before had been bombed out. So they brought me on some of the coal. Well, they caught the whole coal field afire that day. But we didn't pay any attention to it. We -- we were sleeping in the little tin shack and trying to -- shrapnel started coming through the shack and we just put our scoop shovels over our head and went back to sleep (laughs) You got where you didn't care anymore.

Question: I assume, I mean your mind had to be, if I sit here or if I run or if I crawl, it's all the same.

Answer: Don't run. Nothing -- you're liable to get hit. Stay down on the ground. Yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: So once the bomb was dropped, did you get the news of that?

Answer: No, we didn't know what was going on. We knew something had happened but we didn't know what.

Question: And then did you get up one morning then and the guards had all just --

Answer: Yeah, they'd all left, hm-hmm, yeah.

Question: I heard one gentleman I talked to was saying that the guards left because they knew that, with the war being over, if they were still around, some retribution --

Answer: Yeah, probably that was true, hm-hmm.

Question: So then you had to -- the war is over, you got some news that the war is over, or just all of a sudden they started dropping food to you?

Answer: No, we knew the war -- when they left the camp we knew something had happened. We figured the war was over when they left like that. But otherwise we didn't know much. They dropped food to us and that was some -- they did send a representative -- I think it was the Navy came in and told us that we had to stay there 'till we were repatriated, I think it was. And then they started dropping food over us. There was no sign on our buildings for POW, so they had to put signs on the building, POW's, so they could know where we were so they could drop food to us.

Question: So like on the roof you put --

Answer: POW, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: So do you remember the food -- what it was that you --

Answer: Oh, every kind, yeah. I can't remember. It was all canned stuff. There was a lot of bacon -- I think there was a lot of bacon -- we sure had bacon for quite awhile (laughs).

Carl Kramp

Tape 1 of 2

Question: You didn't care what it was.

Answer: No.

Question: Just that it was food and it was good.

Question: So then after the war ended, it was, again historically a lot of our view is the war is over and there's these big ticker tape parades and all that. Well, yes, in New York, but here you are in Japan, war is over and now are you wondering, how do we get home, or --

Answer: Well, we knew they'd come and get us, we hoped anyway. (laughs) We hoped they'd come and get us and they did, finally. But it was the 16th of September before they come and took us out.

Question: And how long did it take you to get back stateside?

Answer: Oh, I was back stateside the end of October.

Question: So it was still quite a while.

Answer: Still quite awhile, yes. Went to the Philippines, first and then to -- we went -- went to Nagasaki from there on the train and then we went to Okinawa in an aircraft carrier, British aircraft carrier, and we was hoping they'd -- heard about Bully Beef -- hoped they'd give us Bully Beef, and they gave us rice. (laughs)

Question: Just what you wanted.

Answer: Just what we wanted.

Question: I have to switch tapes here.