

Carl Kramp

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Question: For younger generations to really understand a combination of things, of both sides of war. I mean, there's the atrocities, but there's also things that -- that happened that we just conceived the war as being really scared and all that. And here you're faced with a life-threatening situation but yet you found some way to survive.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You found a strength in it and you know, if I were to write a story I'd say the bombs dropped and they ran, hiding and scared. Well, now you describe it to me -- the bombs were dropping and you, you're know, trying to get another couple winks of sleep.

Answer: Yeah, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: So there's that aspect of war that gets -- gets lost also. One question that I've always wondered is, for a couple of reasons, is -- once the war -- well, first of all, when you went over, ok, I'll back up before you became a POW, and you were fighting. Who or what were you fighting? I mean, in your mind, what -- were you just protecting yourself or --

Answer: No, we were fighting the Japanese. Yeah, hm-hmm. We couldn't -- our tanks - - our small tanks, light tanks, we couldn't use them as a tanks should be used because there was just no way through the jungle and one thing and another. For those type of tanks. And so we discovered that -- as the line folded, as the line kept coming back into Bataan, the line folded, we would hold the Japanese back until the line would re-establish in another are

Answer: Then we'd retreat. But we were always the last ones out. We stayed. We was the last ones back. So that's what they used our tanks for -- just to hold the Japanese back, and it caught up to us a couple of times and we had to fight them but --

Question: What was their technology like compared to our technology?

Answer: Well, I'd say that their tanks were about the same as ours at that time, hm-hmm, yeah.

Question: So you were evenly matched. A It was evenly matched, but -- I never even seen a Japanese tank.

Question: Oh, really.

Answer: No, I never seen -- because we -- we didn't -- wasn't no tank battles that I can remember.

Question: Were you close enough that you actually saw soldiers -- Japanese soldiers or were you kind of separated with your tank.

Answer: I never seen any, no.

Question: So that aspect of the war --

Answer: -- didn't come in this, no.

Question: So when you left -- after you got done with the war, did you leave with an animosity towards a country or towards a person or what were your feelings in that way --

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Answer: Animosity towards the country and I still have it. Cause they treated us bad, you know. They could have treated us different. But -- like they did the prisoners in the United States. They were treated decent. Why couldn't they have done that to us. But of course they didn't have the Geneva Convention, they never signed that, so they didn't have to. But they -- well, tell you the truth, how they treated their own soldiers. I seen them out there one day, he was -- this Japanese Master Sergeant was having a walk with this one little guy. He couldn't stay in step. And this Master Sergeant, hollered at him and hollered and hollered at him. Finally the Master Sergeant just got mad, he went over there and lopped his -- and took his sword out and chopped his head off. The next day they had a big funeral for him. And that's the way they treated their soldiers, you know. When the ships -- they treated their soldiers down in those holds just like we were. Of course they probably could get out on deck and one thing and another, but the main thing -- but we couldn't.

Question: That's interesting that they -- that it was a mutual disrespect, I guess, or -- mind set or something.

Answer: Yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: What did you think then when -- cause I remember when it used to be "Made in Japan" was like terrible stuff, where nowadays --

Answer: Yeah. I don't buy anything that's made in Japan if I can help it. Not nothing if I can help it, why I won't buy it. Sometimes I can't help it, you need something, you have to have it, "Made in Japan". But I don't want to buy anything -- have a car even with a Japanese name on it.

Question: Do you hold the same animosity for the Germans?

Answer: No, because I don't know about what happened over in Germany, and of course they were captured by white men, not Orientals. Orientals have an animosity towards whites. I feel if they can get the best of them, they can.

Question: How do you feel nowadays about -- if you're doing business say, around town, and where a Japanese-American citizen you're dealing with --

Answer: I don't mind them. I had a good friend out there, of course he passed away. He was Japanese. I played golf with him. He was a nice guy. And his wife was nice. I know her yet, she's still living. And I've always got along good with them. We had fun playing golf together because he would always say "That's a rucky shot". (laughs) But he was -- he had been put in the concentration camp over in Idaho and he could speak seven languages. So they asked him to be an interpreter and he says well, I won't be an interpreter until you take my wife out of that camp. And they did. And let them live where they were. But he was an interpreter. He was a nice guy.

Question: So it sounds like your animosity is more towards a country --

Answer: Yes, hm-hmm, yes, that's a country.

Question: That seems like sometimes it would be a hard one to disassociate. I know that some people -- their animosity was just extreme and it becomes a hatred with it.

Answer: Yeah.

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Question: But it sounds like you don't really have -- you have an angriness towards the country -- towards this mind set --

Answer: Yeah, hm-hmm. Younger people today, they don't know what went on. And so it's my generation that would have against the Japanese, you might say. They're the ones that we had to fight.

Question: That's why it seems like it would be hard today with a lot of the political correctness and all that to say that's wonderful, but we also lived this, and that's a reality also.

Answer: That's right.

Question: That needs to be respected. Like you said, you began to understand when you saw the first person killed, the first person in your group was killed, that they're trying to kill us.

Answer: Yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: And we're trying to survive.

Answer: That's right.

Question: When you think back, what was your hardest part about being in the service?

Answer: Well, the hardest part -- I liked the service. I did, I liked it. But I can't remember the hardest part there in the States, anything like that -- I can't remember anything like that. So, but I liked it. I liked the guys and everything, you know. It didn't bother me. I liked the service.

Question: That's one thing when I talk to vets that -- the interesting thing has been is that when you look at your full life, that World War II on the time line was this very small part, yet there are these amazing bonds and relationships that were built between all the veterans.

Answer: Oh, yeah, hm-hmm. Well, I can't explain it -- I don't know how to explain it, but I had no service hardship in the service or anything like that except when we was over there fighting.

Question: When you hear the national anthem, the Star Spangled Banner played, what do you feel?

Answer: I always stand for that. I feel -- I'm proud of it. In fact, the first -- we run up an American flag -- the first one we could get over our camp, and brought tears to my eyes when we did that. Cause we knew that -- what that meant -- that flag meant to us.

Question: Do you think that kids of today understand that? The freedom that you fought for?

Answer: I don't think so. I don't think they do. They know what they have here, this country. I don't -- they don't think about it enough, I don't think.

Question: Take it for granted.

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Answer: They take it for granted, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: If you -- do you think that there was a message from World War II for future generations?

Answer: Well, I guess, try to get along with one another -- about the only thing I can say. If you fight, why, you don't know what the heck -- like Israel and Palestine, over there. I can't understand why people can't get along. Just because they're different religions is all. And that's what bugs me is all these religious wars now. So I don't understand it.

Question: It's amazing how simple it is when you really get it down to the bottom line -- just try to get along.

Answer: Try to get along, yep. That's about the only thing you can do.

Question: Do you think war has a purpose or do you think war is --

Answer: Nobody wins from it. Nobody wins. You might save your country but you don't win. Look at the people you lose. Good people, honorable people.

Question: Are you a hero? Do you think you're a hero?

Answer: No. I don't think I'm a hero or anything like that. I didn't do enough, I don't think.

Question: Going and defending the freedom of your country -- you don't think that's enough to --

Answer: Well, it's enough to do it but we -- we were disappointed that we couldn't do more than what we were doing. We couldn't -- couldn't -- didn't have nothing to fight with, but of course, in those days, why they -- I don't think they expected a war so quick.

Question: Did you lose any of your buddies over there?

Answer: I lost my future brother-in-law, one of them -- he passed away from malaria

Answer: And --

Question: He's the one in the picture?

Answer: He's passed away, too, but he come back. But his other brother, he -- he died over there. Like they -- the Japanese put you in ten man shooting squads. Let one guy escape then shoot the other nine. And one fellow from our battalion, from (inaudible) California, he had to watch his brother be -- twin brother be executed by the Japanese -- one guy escaped from his company -- his ten man shooting squad.

Question: I can't even imagine how you would face that -- I mean, that's the hardest thing for me to understand as I interview the various vets is all that had to go on and how mentally you toughened yourself up to deal with that.

Answer: There was four guys that was in the barracks next to me, we had bays, you might call it. Not bays, but we slept. And they decided they'd go outside and see if they could get some food. And -- because the Filipinos still had a little store outside the gates -- some

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place outside the fence. This was right after we got to Cabanatuan. And so they went out and they got caught. So the Japanese -- they tied them up to a post -- on the fence post, and every one of them that went by beat them -- beat up on them a little while -- for awhile -- until they took them out that night and shot them.

Question: I don't understand that type of hatred. I mean, that's the only thing I could guess it would be would be a hatred.

Answer: They had to dig their own graves and then they shot them. Another time they just called a guy through the fence. The guard wanted him to come through the fence. The guy went through the fence, well then the guard turned him in as escaping, and they made him go out and dig his own grave and they shot him, too. And there was two Navy officers. I know they escaped and they caught them. They brought them back to Cabanatuan -- they beheaded them. Things like that went on at Cabanatuan. They'd cut off Filipinos heads and stick them on the gate posts -- on the fence posts of the base -- on the fence posts.

Question: Do you think that was part of a psychological thing -- they wanted to let you know that don't mess with us --

Answer: I guess so. I guess that was it.

Question: So it sounds like you chose to mind your P's and Q's and --

Answer: Oh, I did some rotten things, I guess, towards them.

Question: Was it -- did you know you were a part of history? This is what I've always wondered. I mean, when we look back, you read about things and you go wow, that was history. But when you were there, did you realize that you were changing the world?

Answer: No, no, we didn't. We didn't know. We didn't know what was going on in the outside world. So we just sat alone. None of us got by ourselves or nothing -- we didn't know anything was going on. No news got through or anything.

Question: What did you do after the war was over -- once you left there?

Answer: I -- well, the first year I just took that off. Took my \$20 a week and stayed home. My wife and I were married, and took \$20 a week and stayed home and did odd jobs and one thing and another. Then I went to -- went to work for the Sunshine Biscuit Company and worked for them for a couple years, and then I got a job at Furman's Sanatorium worked there, run the post office. So that's what I did there for seven years, and then I went into the federal service, in the post office department. So, so I'm retired from the federal service.

Question: Did World War II change your life?

Answer: Oh, I think it did, yes, hm-hmm. I don't know what I -- probably been back at Furman yet, if I hadn't changed -- if I hadn't done that.

Question: Did you -- a lot of people and being the way that World War II was, when they got done, they came home, there was a country to run, and that part of their life was done and they just moved forward. Is that kind of how you dealt with World War II?

Answer: Yes. Hm-hmm, hm-hmm.

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Question: Fifty years is just back then.

Answer: It's back then, yeah, hm-hmm.

Question: Do you have -- I always ask this one -- this is one I forgot. Were there any funny times? In the service?

Answer: Oh, yeah I can remember one time, the -- we was working down south of Manila and we was knocking down rice paddies -- the Japanese wanted to build an airfield. And we was working in gumbo mud up to our hips all day long. And the Japanese had put rock in front of their guard house so they wouldn't get the dirt -- their boots dirty from the mud. We'd wait until we got up in front of the guard house and we'd scrape that mud off, you know, onto the rocks. So the company commander, not the company commander but our group commander, Captain Ferrell, I can remember him yet -- he came to us and he told us the Japanese wanted us to do an eyes left and goose step by the guard house in the morning. So it rained that night and rocks were all slippery and everything. And we was barefoot. And as we started by the guard house he says "Eyes left, goose step goose." And we all started to laugh. (laughs) So we slipped and slid all over the place. They never did ask us to do that again. (laughs) We didn't know if we were goose stepping.

Question: Glad they thought it was funny.

Answer: I don't know if they thought it was funny or not but they never did ask us to do it again.

Question: Well, great.