

KEN ROMMEL
FIRST INTERVIEW
June 14, 2001

NOTE – DG

Prior to doing this interview I had no experience with the process - tape recorders, mikes, placement etc. I simply thought it was a good idea to do this interview. So, with respect to quality, it was done poorly and as a result the transcription and editing was difficult. So, please forgive any errors on my part.

I discovered that face-to-face, verbal communications are considerably different from written communication. This discovery came from my attempt to transcribe these interview tapes. Part of verbal in person communications consists of facial expressions, body language such as leaning forward in ones chair for emphasis. Eye movements, head shaking and the like all help the person communicate and none of them are transmitted into the written word. Tone, laughter, mock accents, anger and a host of other gestures all add to the message and none are transferable to print.

In addition the interviewer helps by his own body language back to the storyteller, so much so that the teller sometimes sees no need to finish a sentence because the listener – obvious to the storyteller, “gets it”, so the storyteller simply stops and moves on to the next point. Naturally the laughter and emotion is absent in the written form as well. When Ken tells me of the incident following the fierce battle where he returns to the rear and a 12 man tent set up with cots and individual duffel bags to accommodate his group and he is the only one there! It brought tears to my eyes...still does.

So, taping an interview and then transcribing it, I learned, has a whole set of problems. I now have a better appreciation for historians who seem to do many interviews and then *write about them*. They lift many quotes naturally, but in the final analysis, they write about their interviews. In this one I wanted Ken to come through.

DAN GILLCRIST (DG): I’m interviewing my friend, Ken Rommel and today is June 14th, 2001. We’re doing it here where we both live in Santa Fe. This happens to be my office, and we’re going to attempt to do sequentially as many questions as we can get through, and we may be jumping around, but we’ll get back to each one. Okay. My first question is you had resisted doing this interview when we talked about it a few months ago. What changed your mind? Do you remember?

KEN ROMMEL (KR): My brother was killed in World War II. He was an Army Captain on an intelligence mission. He’d been put onto Leyte by a submarine, and he was killed before he left. And I was trying to piece together his life from the time he left the submarine until when he got killed. And I realized that there were tremendous gaps at that time and trying to put all

this stuff together it took me -- you know, back in 1972 they had a tremendous fire at the records center in St. Louis. And my records had been destroyed, and then I found out that his were destroyed too. Senator Demenici used his influence to try to get them to conduct a search. They never responded to my requests, and I find out from them that his records also had been destroyed and I guess my name and many, many others were in the alpha section that took the worst of the fire. My daughter has been on my case for a long time to put something down, and since you offered I thought it was a real opportunity to get some of this stuff down.

DG: A friend of mine - a Green Beret - said, "Well, maybe he doesn't want to talk about it."

KR: Well, I have no problems talking about it, and I know that just from what has happened, I know that my mind has blotted out a lot of things that happened to me when I was in combat. And I don't think some of those things will ever come back, and maybe as we go on through this thing I can point out certain instances where it just has been blocked out. But what is left, to the best of my recollection, I have no problem talking about. I might withhold a few things.

DG: I thought I'd start sequentially. You went in the Army. This was during World War II-- did you get drafted or did you volunteer and then, what city was that in?

KR: Okay, it was in Philadelphia, and I -- they had a category called voluntary induction. I had just turned 17 when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, and I wanted to get into the service right away, and the only service that took 17-year-olds was the Navy. However, anyone under 21 had to have parental consent to go into the service. So I immediately started to put pressure on my mother to give me permission to quit high school and go into the Navy. And she wouldn't do it, but she did make a deal with me that if I stayed until I was 18, and then she would give me her permission, which you needed. And so on November the 7th I turned 18, and that was in 1942, and I went to her right away with the papers, and she said, Well, could you wait until Christmas? And then, you know, I said, Yeah, that's okay. So I waited until Christmas and then on Dec 28th, you know, after Christmas my best friend, Bob Hunter and I went down and signed up to go into the service, and we were called January 19th.

DG: You obviously intended to go into the Army. What made you choose that?

KR: I was going to go into the Navy only because it was the only one with the exception at 17. But then at 18 I wanted to go into the Army because my father had been in the Army, and then I had certain ties that -- one was my neighbor, a guy named Mr. Alcorn, who I had a tremendous respect for and he was an old World War I guy who I knew and he had a cache in his basement of all kinds of stuff -- machineguns and all kinds of stuff like that. Yeah, he was civic minded and he even organized the Civil Defense Corps, and they put Alcorn, my neighbor in charge, and they gave him the rank of colonel, and so I immediately joined that and I was, as I say, 17 or 16, right in there, because I think that that was organized, actually, just before the Pearl Harbor attack. But it was interesting because he taught me close order drill. We had white helmets and armbands. I remember once there was an air raid and we had to make sure everybody was in the shelter and things like that. Then he taught us, of course, how to drill and

also taught us close order drill. Commands and, you know when you do column left and column right and right flank, left flank. They all have to begin on the particular foot. Otherwise, you screw the whole thing up, and this was something good to know because there would be spaces and intervals between the commands. But, anyway, we were called January the 19th 1943 and went to the induction center at Indian Town Gap in Pennsylvania, and it took two or three days of processing. We got put on a train and then we went down in Camp Gordon, Georgia, and my first outfit was the 798th Military Police Battalion ZI, and the ZI meant Zone Interior. And what we were supposed to be trained for was when the Army in Europe - and it pertained mostly to Europe -- when the Army would move through areas and captured them, and then we were to follow through and set up order for the civilian government -- the military government that was going to take over.

DG: Oh, you didn't choose it. They just picked you?

KR: That's right. Yeah, no choice. That was Basic Infantry training. It was a regular infantry training. But we were designated as an MPCIB battalion. And so after I went through two months of training down at Camp Gordon, Georgia, which is now Fort Benning, Georgia, and which is now the headquarters for the military police for the whole shebang. But while we were there, right towards the end, John L. Lewis, who was the president of the CIO, which was at that time a huge union.

Regrettably there is a gap of lost tape here. Ken was referring to the strike called by the unions which was widely perceived as quite unpatriotic and which made FDR furious. It was at this time that the US government as I recall stepped in and somehow nationalized things to prevent the strike.

The beginning of the next topic - very disappointing - was also missed. Ken told me that their first assignment was to go to the Port of Norfolk to meet a shipload of German prisoners captured in North Africa. They were the German General Edwin Rommel's troops - The Africa Corps. Ken and the MPs loaded them all on a train and headed west. He described the arrangements on the train. The MPs slept in Pullman sleeper cars and the German prisoners sat up in regular day train seats. There was an MP with a billy club at each car door, another one with a Thompson between each car. The prisoners would raise their hand if they needed to go to the head (restroom). Whenever the train stopped, the MPs would stand along the sides of the cars with weapons and would mount a machinegun on several car roofs.

Ken's officer approached him once with a strange and funny request. It seems the prisoners had heard that there was a guard on the train with the same last name as their revered Africa Corps general - Edwin Rommel, and they wanted to see this guy! So Ken was told to get off the train at the next stop, walk to the first car and then walk the length of the train through all the prisoner cars. The prisoners were expecting him he was told.

He was surprised when as he entered each car the prisoners cheered and clapped their hands. He shook lots of hands and some even wanted to give him their watches! Ken still laughs about this.

During the lost tape he mentioned getting the sense from the Germans of wonder at the size of America and how really far they were away from Germany.

The reintroduction to the interview here involved a train wide epidemic of diarrhea - no doubt from the kitchen car.

KR: The prisoners went to the guard and then point to where they wanted to go, and then the guard had to give them permission. Well, you can imagine all these guys there with diarrhea. Somehow the Army radioed ahead and -- for us, and the medical thing met the train in the middle of the night and had enough paregoric to give to the guard force, but not enough for the prisoners of war. And so at least we had some relief, and then a day or so later we got far enough to where they had some paregoric and then we passed it through the whole train and that ended that. Well, the thing is because the Germans couldn't believe -- I mean, we were on that train for six or seven days, and they couldn't believe that you could ride that far on a train and still be in the same country. And also, as we went through the various areas, they saw all these military planes -- brand new planes all lined up, and I think they got their first feeling of why they were not going to win this war, because I think this was a total shock to them. When we pulled into Florence, Arizona, late in the day -- I think it was 8:00 or 9:00 o'clock at night -- and they were putting the finishing nails onto the prisoner of war camp. And it was the only thing in Florence at the time. I mean, that was it. It was a prisoner of war camp out in the middle of the desert about twenty-five to thirty or forty miles from Tucson.

DG: Well, was it next to the -- did they have a siding there? Or did you have to move these guys by truck or something?

KR: No. The train pulled right up --

DG: Okay, so they just put the camp right on the route.

KR: Yeah. But, now, of course, Florence is, I'm sure, quite a big town. In fact, I think it's a big prison town with several prisons and state prisons. But at that time, the only thing there was the German prisoner of war camp, and I think that they realized that they didn't have too much of a chance if they tried to escape because -- you know, they were right out there, twenty-five miles at least, from the nearest place in the middle of the desert.

DG: In the middle of the country.

KR: That's right. So after that we got transferred, we moved up to Charlotte and we took over the MP duties there.

DG: So did you just turn around and go back.

KR: Yeah. We got off again. And that was it. Just the one load. Then we got sent to Charlotte for a town patrol, so we had MPs town patrol, and that was where I first made contact with the parachute troops. But the parachute troops were stationed in Camp McCall, which was about a two-hour bus ride from Charlotte, and they were also stationed in Fort Bragg. And so once a month on payday weekends the paratroopers would come into town, and, of course, they'd cause a lot of problems for us because they were all young, healthy, robust guys. In tremendous shape, and they were real soldierly -- I mean, compared to the rest of the troops that you saw, these guys really stood out. First of all, they had the jump boots on, which was their unique uniform. They were shined to the T. They were all in great shape, and you just couldn't help but respect them as soldiers. Now, I respected them because of the way they hung together. I mean, if you took on one, you took on a whole bunch of them. They hung together like this. And I had a tremendous amount of respect for them. Well, while I was there -- and we did regular routine town patrol, also went out into the mountains looking for draft dodgers -- deserters more than anything. I wanted to get into the war because, you know, I was screwing around here and the war was going on, and I wanted to get into the war. So the easiest thing for me to do was to apply for transfer to the infantry and was transferred immediately. And I was sent down to Camp Rucker, Alabama. And since I was already a corporal and already through infantry basic, I was immediately put on the staff as a cadre, which is an instructor. Now, this was a very interesting thing because the Battle of the Bulge had just happened. Up until the Persian Gulf, probably the greatest secret mass movement of troops that had ever been done in the world, when the Germans moved their army very quietly and attacked and created the Battle of the Bulge. Well, the losses were substantial.

Now, at that time they had two programs going for college kids, and I'm sure it was in a way to take care of the richer people who had more influence and things like that, but they had the ASTP, which I think was Army Student Training Program, and the Air Force had the Air Cadets. Now, these programs were for college students that were of draft age, and they could volunteer for these programs and stay right in college. They got their uniform, they got paid, but they stayed right in college. They were just college boys. And they were all up there fat, dumb, and happy, wearing uniforms, being paid for it, and staying out of harm's way. Well, the Battle of the Bulge changed that because of the tremendous casualties that they had in Europe. They wiped out those programs almost overnight, and so these guys sitting in college one day, fat, dumb, and happy, and the next day they were on troop trains heading for basic training for the infantry -- a real short basic training, six weeks. Normal is fourteen or fifteen, sixteen weeks. So being cadre down there, having not even completed high school, with a five-word vocabulary, three of which were swear words, all of a sudden we were -- and I was typical of the rest of the cadre -- who were not the best educated people in the world, but we were good soldiers. We were confronted with these guys that were hostile. Their morale was absolutely hostile because they had been thrown out of college, right? And all of a sudden they're in the infantry. And I know I used to teach them map reading and compass work and things like that, and I used to start out -- because I tell them that, "You know, I don't give a hoot whether you pay any attention to me or not. You can do anything you want, play with yourself, whatever you want to do; but let me tell you something, in six weeks you know where I'm going to be? I'm going to be right here with another group like you are. And you know where you're going to be? You're going to be

on a troop ship heading for Europe. And if you pay attention, you just might learn something that might keep you alive and at least keep you from getting lost.”

And so for the most part I didn't have too much static from them, but some of the guys really took a lot. Some guys from the South. They ridiculed their accent and stuff like that. The best thing that could happen for the war effort would be if they'd get torpedoed, you know, because somebody over in Europe's not going to have to worry about them because they were just lousy soldiers. It was just terrible. We had had a hike, for example, we were going on a sixteen-mile hike. We'd call the company to attention, right face, forward march. Three or four of them would drop out before we'd even get out of the company area because they had sore feet or sore toes or sore hands or whatever. I thought, it was such a change from what I had observed with the paratroopers in Charlotte, with just this esprit de corps and there was nothing that would make those guys drop out.

Well, I put up with this battalion for a couple of months, and then I put in for a transfer to the parachute troops. And they took it immediately and I got sent down to Fort Benning, Georgia. Now, that's where the big jump school was. Matter of fact that was the only jump school at the time. And it was a four-week course. And the first week was all physical training. You got up, you ran an hour every morning, and then you started the heavy stuff, working with logs and everything plus calisthenics. They did everything they could to make you drop out. I'm sure the first week was designed to make quitters flip. And I remember the third day of that training, that you were so sore when you woke up that you couldn't even get out of bed. And we used to have to help each other to get out of bed, to get everything moving. You just felt like you'd been beaten to a pulp. And then things started to relax, and by the end of the week you were starting to feel like you were starting to get in shape. The second week was the week they lost most of the people, and that was because of the 34-foot tower. What it was, was you'd get up to the top of this 34-foot tower, and they put a harness on you, a regular parachute harness, and it had a hook and a cable, and you would hook it on a cable and then you would jump out. And you would drop maybe sixteen or eighteen feet before your connection caught onto a long cable. And then you'd shoot down that thing and it was worth a million bucks. I mean, at any carnival, you know, you'd make a fortune with this thing because it was a lot fun. However, there were a certain number of people who could not take that step off that 34-foot tower.

The third week was the 250-foot tower and they had four arms on them, and they had a ring the size of a parachute, and they would drop the ring down, and it was to be connected to a cable. And then whoever was going to jump would run out and be under that ring, and the ring would come down and then a bunch of guys would hook you up right away to the ring. So there you were standing there with a parachute and this ring and a parachute over you. Then they would hoist you up 250 feet and you just would be hanging there. And, now, the interesting part there was that hanging on the wind there was always one arm of the tower that you could not use because it would be too dangerous. No matter what they did, there was no way that they could release you without you going into the tower and that meant certain injury. One of the arms, depending on the wind was called the dirty arm, and then two of the arms were safe because the wind was blowing the right way. So, whoever was going to be on the dirty arm, they gave a little piece of paper to. It was like a half a sheet of toilet paper. And he would say, for example, number three. And so he had one, two, three, and four. Four we're not going to use because the wind was blowing. So they'd get this thing going and they placed all three of you up to the top.

And when you got up to the top they would say, Number three, now, that's the dirty arm. They'd say, Number three, drop your paper. Then he'd let the paper drop. And then they'd say, Okay, number one, slip to your left, pull the release, number one. Number two, slip to your right, and pull the release, number two. And then they'd be watching where that paper would blow. Then they'd say, Okay, number three, you're on the dirty arm. You're going to have to slip to the right. You're going to have to slip hard to the right, pull the release, and number three. And then he would climb up because he knew that if he didn't there was a chance he'd go slamming into the tower. So that was very interesting. And, again, at a carnival, if you didn't get a lawsuit, it would be a wonderful.

DG: But the slipping was where you would pull on your risers? And you would go in that direction.

KR: That's right. You've got the two left risers, and you pull them. Now, what that does is it collapses your chute in that part, so the rest of the chute is catching more air than what you collapsed, and you'd move that direction. Now, when I jumped I used to collapse both side of the chute, opposite sides, and that was to just make me drop faster, to get away from the people because I knew that most of the injuries occurred were air collisions with people. So I always tried to come out and pop them. And the fourth week was the actual jumping out of the airplane. Packing your own chute and jumping. Every day you'd pack our own chute, and then you would jump that day. There were four-day jumps. And every morning they would critique the jump the day before. And they did this for a purpose because it would make you feel good because they'd say, yesterday we jumped 800 paratroopers. We had four casualties, two sprained ankles, a sprained wrist and a broken finger. So you'd be amazed. It's really not as bad as you'd think it would be. Now, sometimes there would be a broken bone.

DG: But it sounded like the odds were pretty good.

KR: Yeah, yeah. And then the last day you made a night jump, they had to do a night jump. Then you were finished, and you got your wings, and then I went on two weeks furlough. Then when we came back we had a couple weeks then a combat jump, where we actually would run a problem with jumping with the parachutes. And this was what gave you confidence because when you jump in the parachute, the first thing you have to do is secure the drop zone, so that the first guys on the ground, that's their job is to if there's enemy left there is to drive them out and secure the drop zone so the next guys coming in are going to make it. So when you jump, your first mission, on the practice, was to clear the drop zone and move on to where you're supposed to. Then your mission reversed itself to where you are now defending the jump field -- the drop zone -- and so you were to try to shoot the next wave coming in.

DG: What do you mean? Why would you want to shoot the next men?

KR: Because the next guys coming in are the enemy. See, they reversed the roles. We got blank cartridges, naturally. But this was also a confidence-building thing because as soon as you tried to get bead on these guys, you realized how hard it was. It was really hard. Because first you're dropping a lot faster than you think you're dropping and they're swinging. And it's just very hard. You know the next thing you know they're on the ground. This gives you a lot of confidence that you're not a big sitting duck up there like you would normally think that you

would be with a parachute. You're coming down fast and you're swinging like crazy, and so you are not a good target. Now, if the enemy would be lucky enough to get onto a door of the plane with an automatic weapon and to track the airplane, then they could -- the casualties could be high. But once you're out that door, it was not easy. So this was a confidence-building thing.

DG: Oh. So you think that was part of the purpose?

KR: Absolutely, yeah. It was confidence-building thing to show that -- because this was always in the back of everybody's mind that I'm going to be a real sitting target. Because when you're up there you don't feel any movement at all. I mean, you're dropping like crazy, but you don't feel it. It's not like being in an elevator or -- because you have nothing to relate to. And this is a danger, to boot, because you're up there -- remember if things don't go the way they're supposed to go, you have to pull the reserved chute. You couldn't ponder it and say, Well, you know, because by that time you're on the ground. Because you're falling fast but you don't realize it, and so you feel that you're a sitting duck up there, and you're not.

The other interesting thing is when you jump with a parachute; the parachute opens in front of you and not above you, because the parachute is actually opened by the blast of the propeller. So when you go out the door and you take a quarter-turn towards the rear of the airplane, and before you get very far, as soon as that static line breaks off, then the blast of the propellers pops that chute open and the chute actually opens up like that.

DG: So you're horizontal for a second.

KR: That's right. That's what they call the opening shot. And then you swing down under the chute. And then the training also teaches you how to get together when you hit the ground, because that's the most important thing is how to get together. Well, right after that training, things are pushed to get into war. They move very rapidly. We were put on troop trains and we were sent to Fort Ord, in California.

DG: And this is from Georgia or some place.

KR: From Fort Benning, Georgia, we went to Fort Worth. And there you get all new equipment. They took everything away from us, gave us all new equipment, weapons and everything. And then we boarded the troop ships in San Francisco, we boarded a brand-new APA, and I think it was Army Personnel Attack Ship. It was a small troop transport, and the name of my ship was the Ocanto, and I often wondered what happened to that. But, anyway, there was a sister ship. This was back in the days when they were turning out a ship a day, if you could imagine. But, anyway, we left with two ships, 800 paratroopers.

DG: Was that a unit or was that just a bunch of paratroopers?

KR: Just a bunch of paratroopers. We were all replacements. We were not in a unit or anything like that.

KR: We were destined for the same places. It did not work out that way. But we were destined, initially.

DG: How long had you been in the Army by this time?

KR: Okay, I'd been in the Army about a year and a half. This would have been in about September of '44

DG: Did they give you any time off?

KR: Just one night. One night we were allowed to go into San Francisco.

DG: What did you call that?

KR: A furlough is an extended leave. A pass was one, two or three days, or whatever they gave you. But we had one overnight pass. And that was interesting because at that time the Woman's Christian Temperance Union were really big and really powerful. And they were stationed in every bar in San Francisco that would have any servicemen at all. Now, I don't know whether they were in every bar, and they could very well have been in every bar in San Francisco.

DG: They were at every bar you went to.

KR: Every bar I went to.

DG: And would they just harass you?

KR: No. You'd order a beer and they'd be behind you like this and they'd go to the bartender . . . and you didn't get served. You didn't get served. They approved and disapproved of you and they'd go like that. And that was the end of that.

DG: On what basis do you think that they were making that judgment? You were nice and too clean-cut or something?

KR: No, it was who was under 21.

KR: See, you had to be 21 to drink, and the WCTU, which was against drinking, yeah. I mean, there wasn't anything they could do over 21.

DG: So if some old sergeant walks in and they'd just --

KR: Oh, yeah, then that'd be fine. Yeah, but if you looked under 21, they would just go like that and their influence was strong enough that even in wartime the bars were afraid to go against them.

DG: And you were 20, probably.

KR: I was about 20, maybe 19. Anyway, so we boarded the troop ships and we left under the Golden Gate, but after about an hour the ships separated, and we didn't see the other ship again until we were pulling into New Guinea. And the ships ran unescorted.

DG: All the way to New Guinea, and you didn't stop in Pearl or anything?

KR: No, straight to New Guinea.

DG: Wow. That's how long?

KR: I believe it was for 18, 20 days, something like that. The Navy went on alert every morning at dawn. I guess 5:00 is when they sounded the alert, and they manned all the guns, and at night they did the same thing. And they would man all the guns and the ship would be on alert for a certain period of time. I guess it was the most likely time for an attack.

DG: It wasn't just a practice.

KR: Oh, no. No. Now, they did have practice, because even basically I'm sure they were new troops, new Navy guys, too. Some of the officers, maybe, hadn't one or two trips and maybe not. I don't know. Because the way they expanded everything and the way they were putting out these ships, I guess, you know, one day you're the lowest guy and the next day you're the captain or something. But we never saw anything until we got close to New Guinea and we saw the first PBY. And all of a sudden they went on alert, and then the PBY came in and started to flash, and then they flashed back. And that's where we got the first clue that we were close to where we were going, but we didn't know where we were going. And we pulled into Ora Bay in New Guinea. I don't think you'll be able to find it on the map – it's very close to Buna, there was a big battle at Buna. And there was a big battle there between the Americans and the Australians against the Japanese. And it was kind of the turning point of who was going to control New Guinea. They were afraid that if the Japanese dropped a freaking bomb on New Guinea, the next thing was going to be Australia. And from what I've read, the strategic plans were that we were willing to give half of Australia because we weren't sure that we were prepared to defend the entire half. That's how far we were prepared to give if things did not work the way they did.

DG: Was that half the northern half of Australia? Because that's the closest half to Indonesia and all the other.

KR: I would guess it would be, but I'm not sure. But I do know that they had an imaginary line that was drawn, I guess, whichever way they thought that they could defend Australia that was going to be their last ditch. Now, however, because of several Navy victories in the meantime, that became academic and not. But, anyway, while we were in New Guinea - we were jungle training and then reported to the troop ship again and we were heading for the Philippines. Now, this is where the thing changed.

They were fighting in the Philippines at the time. In fact, it was a big battle going on, and they invaded Leyte about the same time that we arrived in New Guinea, and that was -- maybe was the initial invasion of the Philippines.

On the way up, we were -- 800 of us put on shore -- we were destined to go to the 11th Airborne Division. The 11th Airborne Division at the time was fighting on Leyte and they had one Parachute Infantry Regiment, and that was the 511th. The two other regiments of the division were airborne regiments, which means they used gliders. But they had one jumping regiment, and we were all jumpers. However, when we approached the coast of Leyte, the 503rd, which was my outfit later -- the 503rd parachute infantry regimental combat team had just finished fighting on Menduro and had been alerted for a coming jump, and they didn't know where the jump was going to be, but they had been placed on alert. The commanding officer, Carl Jones, immediately started to negotiate to get part of this 800 group that he heard about because he needed men. Because they had just been fighting on Menduro and had taken some casualties, and he knew whatever was coming on that it was going to be a big deal. And so apparently he prevailed because we were additionally all assigned to go to General Swain, who was the Commanding General of the 11th Airborne Division. But Colonel Jones apparently prevailed and about ten of us were then peeled off and we went to Menduro and were assigned to the 503rd. Now, we were a combat team. They called it the 503rd Regimental Combat Team because we had a regiment of infantry, a battalion of artillery, and a company of engineers, and we were designed to move fast and hit hard. In other words, get in and get out. We had a lot of assault weapons, but we were not equipped to sustain ourselves over a lengthy period of time. We didn't have vehicles, we didn't have field kitchens, we didn't have any of that stuff. We were an assault group and that was our whole purpose.

DG: Everybody was a fighter, in other words --

KR: Yes.

DG: Instead of setting up tents and stuff.

KR: That's right. Everybody was combat. Well, right after I joined the 503rd, we got alerted to jump on to Corregidor?

KR: Didn't know really what Corregidor was until they started to brief us, but, yeah, we were alerted for a jump, and all of a sudden we knew it was Corregidor. Now, this is where I've said that some of the things have been blotted out, and I think back on the reason that some of this stuff was blotted out because I was never with any particular group during this period for any length of time, because as soon as I joined the 503rd, they put me in at a regimental headquarters and headquarters company demolition section. Now, I was not demolition trained. However, when you need a body, you need a body. And so I was sent to fill a vacancy. We only had a week or so training before we were actually alerted for the jump and we were going to go out the next day because the planes started to arrive that night. And we had an airfield there, which we had secured and the Jolly Rogers was the group that flew us, and they started to arrive late in the afternoon. They didn't want them before that because they didn't want to tip the Japanese off to a jump because a parachute regiment sitting anyplace is a constant threat to the enemy. Because no matter what they plan on, that parachute regiment sitting somewhere is a bubble because they know that they have to always plan that this thing may be dropped in on top of them. So it's disconcerting to have an airport out there sitting anyplace anywhere near you,

and even more so when the planes arrive. Because then they know that something's going to happen.

DG: You were on Menduro at this point? And where is that relative to Luzon?

KR: Luzon is the main island of the Philippines, and it's in the northern end of the Philippines.

DG: That's where Manila is.

KR: That's right. And then Manila is one of the few deepwater ports in the Philippines, and a deepwater port meaning not only does it have deep water, but it had facilities to unload ships. It had docks and stuff like that.

DG: And your island – Menduro - was south of that?

KR: South of that. And we were about a 50-minute flight from Menduro to Corregidor.

DG: That's pretty close.

KR: Fairly close. That's right.

DG: Because at some point we want to talk about the C-47, is that the plane?

KR: That's right. A C-47 was what we rode. We were alerted for the jump and I was part of this demolition section. Well, they gave me, since I was a corporal; I had two teams -- two two-man teams. We had a flame-thrower and a bazooka and me, and we were trained to take pillboxes. That's what our training was that we were doing every day for a couple weeks. And the theory being that the pillbox is a thorn in somebody's butt, and therefore has to be taken. So then they would call us and then we would try to get as close as we could to the pillbox and where our bazooka could get a decent shot at the slot.

DG: Would shoot at the slots? Could the bazooka go through the concrete?

KR: Well the concrete pillbox, you would shoot at the slot. But, you know, you're not that good. It's not like a sniper rifle. But we were trained to take machine guns out or anything like that, anything where an explosive round would do damage, because bullets are only going to do damage if you can shoot at somebody. And where an explosive round, if you can get it close enough in, like a grenade. It's indiscriminate; it'll take anything out that's around it. So the theory was that the bazooka would fire two or three high explosive rounds, and these were shape charged, by the way, which a bazooka round is designed for which would mean that all of the explosives went forward. You could be standing right next to a wall that was hit with a bazooka round, and the tail of the bazooka round would drop down. You wouldn't be harmed, but all the force would go into whatever it hit. That's the theory. Then after the bazooka would fire -- now, while they're firing their one or two, three, whatever you decide, then the flame-thrower team

and I were to then be creeping up onto the pill box with the theory that the bazooka is making these people keep their heads down...you know distracted.

Then when we would signal the bazooka, he would fire a smoke round at the pillbox, and as soon as the smoke round hit, then the flame-thrower team would go up and [whoosh sound] into the opening, and then I would theoretically run around and shoot anybody that came out. It's like it's supposed to work, you know. It's like the football plays, you know. But, unfortunately, everybody doesn't do what they're supposed to do, but that was the theory.

Now, when we got alerted for the jump, they broke our outfit down because we were demolitions and we were an assault team, and they split us up with three battalions, with the three jumping battalions, infantry battalions. First Battalion, Second Battalion, and the Fifth Battalion. But the strategy on Corregidor was that there were going to be three jumps. On D-day the first jump was going to be at approximately 8:30 in the morning. The 3rd battalion was designated for that jump. The second jump was going to be at 1:30 in the afternoon. The second battalion was designated for that jump. And then the third jump was going to be the following morning, which would have been the 17th of February, and that was going to be the 1st battalion. So 3rd, 2nd, 1st were going to jump, and in that order.

DG: How many is a battalion?

KR: About 900.

DG: So there were 900 jumpers that were going?

KR: Yeah. In reality after the first day we put about 2,000 jumpers on the Rock. But that was the theory. Then we had broken up and we were assigned to whatever battalion we were going to work with, and it turned out that I was assigned to the 2nd battalion. Now, as soon as we got assigned to the 2nd battalion, then all we did was find room in whatever airplane had room, and you were shoved in. So I never had any unit cohesiveness.

DG: You didn't know any of these people.

KR: Didn't know any of the guys or anything like that. I was new to the regiment, I was new to demolitions, and I was new to the 2nd battalion. So I got shoved in an airplane the same as everybody. But I was the only one of mine in the aircraft. Now, we were jumping seven- and eight-man sticks, and I was number six in the second stick that was a seven-man stick. The planes normally were jumped 18 to 25, 30 men, at the most.

DG: So the maximum number of jumpers on a C-47 is about 30.

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KR: And that would be the maximum and that would be a long jump zone. Well, at Corregidor we didn't have any long jump zones, so we only had two jump zones. One was a small golf course, and the other one was the old infantry parade ground.

DG: And that was because it was a narrow island.

KR: That's right. The island was two and a half miles long. It was a mile wide at its widest point, and it was shaped like a tadpole, with a big head at one end that had about 600 feet of elevation and then came down to a beach part. Then there was a small hill called Melinda Hill, which got a lot of publicity because of the war and that's where Douglas MacArthur's headquarters were. And then it went down into a tail and down on that end there was a small landing strip for very small planes, but that was basically how the island was set up.

Now, the island itself was a fortress. It had been a fortress for years. They called it the Gibraltar of the Pacific. As Gibraltar protected the entrance to the Mediterranean, Corregidor protected the entrance to the Manila harbor. Whoever controlled Corregidor controlled Manila harbor, and if you could not use the harbor then Manila was of no value. So you had to get Corregidor, in order to bring in big ships so that they could prepare for the invasion of Japan. So strategically, it was built with big coastal artillery on it. It had all kinds of concrete bunkers.

DG: So the Third Battalion jumped first?

KR: They jumped first.

DG: And then you jumped at 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

KR: That's right, 12:30 in the afternoon. Now, the short string of guys worked in our favor and also worked against us because we obviously would take three times as long to put our people on the ground.

DG: Because you did that racetrack?

KR: That's right because the circle could only put out seven or eight at the most.

DG: Only because you were flying across the island and it was really narrow.

KR: That's right. And also a very short -- small jump field. Our jump field was very small. The rock, itself, as a result of pre-invasion artillery, the bombing, the strafing, the battle that went before us had been formed when we lost Corregidor. There was no really good jump field. And I read recently, when we anticipated a casualty for the jump of 20 to 50 percent, and they deemed that to be acceptable.

DG: You mean as a result of the jump, not shot?

KR: No. This was just a jump. This is what they predicted.

DG: That sounds like a huge number. What would be typical, or is there such a thing?

KR: Well, I don't know. Now, this didn't happen, but this is what they were prepared for. The initial estimate was that we would lose about 20 percent of the jumpers, and that was because of the conditions of the island itself. If you can imagine all the concrete and the jagged trees, everything that was left over from bombing. And then 50 percent was the high figure now

the only thing about those estimates were that they made the estimates based on Army intelligence information that there were only 300 Japs up on the island.

DG: Three hundred.

KR: Three hundred. They had several -- there were old prisoners of war who had escaped Corregidor, before we jumped, on work details, and they had said that there were only 300 Japs on the field. Now, what the Army intelligence did was then multiply that by three, just as a safety factor, and figured the max on Corregidor was 900. So we were going to drop 3,000 paratroopers, and we had a battalion of infantry in the 34th infantry that was going to invade the beach part by boat that I was talking about.

KR: And the principle theory behind this was we were going to divide the island. All the Japs that were on the tail end of the island were going to be cut off and couldn't get up to the top, and likewise the ones at the top were going to be cut off too - that was the principle behind the thing. When we flew over, there was about a 30-mile an hour ground wind, which was normally way beyond the limits of any jump. Any practice jump would have been canceled. I was number six in the second string, and right before we jumped, the guy next to me, who was number seven and also was part of this group asked me, he said, Would you mind changing places with me? And I said no.

DG: Can I ask you a question? If you're a stick, is it fair to say that the first guy out and the last guy out are going to be sort of marginal with respect to how they land on this particular zone? Because the last guy out is going to be more apt to swing into the jungle or rocks or something that's not in the zone, or land out of the zone. Is that fair to say?

KR: Well, that would be true for first or last.

DG: Right. So this guy says, Would you trade for me or for last place?

KR: Yeah.

DG: Did he tell you why or did you ask him?

KR: No, but I don't remember anymore. That's one of the things, but I remember saying, Well, I was born on the 7th, seven's always been my lucky number, and that's a seven slot, and I thought, yeah, that's okay. So we just changed. So now I was the last guy on that particular stick. Now, when a stick goes out, by the way, the last guy out is the first guy on the ground.

DG: Well, how is that?

KR: Because the plane, when it comes in for jumping, the plane lifts its tail so that when you jump out you don't hit the tail. So the plane is actually on a slight downward path. So the last guy out is actually jumping lower than the first guy --

DG: Actually hits the ground first?

KR: Hitting the drop zone is difficult. Because what happens is that the first plane over has a dummy, and they look at the whole thing and they get evaluation and they pick a goal point down on that ground. And then they throw the dummy out. It has a parachute on it. And then they count and they watch and see where that thing lands, and then they make an estimate, so then they put their thing out to the airplanes right away, Okay, there's goal points plus ten.

DG: Meaning yards or something?

KR: No, count. One-two-three --

DG: Oh, count, time.

KR: Yeah. So this is not a precise thing, but, you know . . . so we were jumping in a high wind, and I was in number seven, and to my knowledge I was the only guy out of that airplane that landed on the topside. The rest of them landed on the sides, which was the worst place to land.

DG: You mean on cliffs?

KR: Yeah, cliffs and down in the valleys and ravines, and I landed right on the edge of the topside. And I had to slip like crazy because as soon as I got out I looked and I thought, Man, and I pulled a slip like that. Now, we jumped at between four and five hundred feet. We had one of the lowest combat jumps on record. And I still slipped like crazy to get over and land right on the top. So I think the first two sticks not only did not land on top, but they had a good chance of being seriously hurt or killed because the sides are what the Japanese controlled. We controlled the top because of the pre-invasion shelling, the Army, and also the strafing. When we went out they were still strafing. You could look right out and see the airplanes, and they were strafing and diving, keeping the Japs off the top of the island.

DG: So they had a chance of killing themselves, hurting themselves, and then landing right in the middle of a bunch of Japanese. Jesus!

KR: That's right. That's right. Or their alternative would be to slip and go into the ocean, and that would probably be the second alternative because at least we had PT boats out there and destroyers and things like that, that would make an effort to pick anybody up that went into the water. But if you landed on the sides, you were in serious trouble, really serious trouble. Now, when I landed -- again, see, I'm all by myself because I'm not part of this group. So all I do is I have an assembling point where I had to go to, and my assembling point happened to be the left end of the old Mile Long barracks. That's where we were supposed to meet. Now, there was another thing that screwed us up. Well, that plane that had the demolition guys in it, developed engine trouble. And they bailed out over Bataan and lost all their equipment. They lost their flamethrowers, bazookas, etc., and they threw it all out the door because the plane was struggling, and finally the lieutenant said, Get us over some land here and we'll jump out. And so they got out over Bataan. So they didn't even make it to Corregidor until late in the afternoon of the next day.

DG: And didn't have any equipment, either.

KR: Yeah, no equipment. But we had no leadership either because most of those guys were with them on that plane. So . . . right after I landed, well, the person that I saw was a trooper that was impaled on a steel girder, and it was just terrible, and a lieutenant ran over and shot him in the head to stop his -- because he was just swerving and things like that. So that was my initial -- the first thing that I recall after I landed. And I was being shot at and I had a carbine, a brand new carbine, and it wouldn't reload. The carbine was supposed to reload after being shot automatically. I could shoot it but it couldn't be loaded, so I had to reload it each time. So I don't know whether it was bent or something happened on the jump or not because we jumped all our equipment, and we were the only -- to my knowledge, we were the only parachute outfit in World War II that jumped all of its own equipment. If you were a machine gunner, you went out the door with the machine gun strapped on you. If you were a 60 MM mortar man, you had the mortar. Now, you may have the mortar, your buddy has the base plate.

DG: Yeah, another guy has the shells?

KR: The rest have the shells strapped to their legs, things like that, but we jumped everything. And it worked because a lot of the guys killed Japs while we were still hanging in the trees. The sooner they'd get to their weapons, where in Europe a lot of the guys that were killed hanging off steeples because they couldn't get their weapons. Their weapons were in bags. But our weapons were pretty much accessible. We didn't have the bags. If you had a Thompson machine gun, it was strapped right on you. But my carbine wouldn't fire. It would fire a single round only. But shortly thereafter I saw a dead trooper with a Thompson submachine gun and with the case that carries six clips. I got all the training with the Thompson, and so I took my carbine and just tossed it over the side and took the Thompson, so I carried the Thompson for the rest of the time I was on Corregidor. Now, this turned out to be the weapon of choice on Corregidor because all of the fighting was very close. Very close. And there was just a minimum amount of hiking. If there's one bad thing about the Thompson sub machinegun, it's hard to carry. It's not a comfortable weapon to carry. It's a heavy weapon. It's not balanced right for carrying. The ammunition's a pain in the neck and your bag of ammunition has six 30-round clips in it. No matter what you do, there's no comfortable way that you can carry it, so when you have short distances to travel, not a lot of hiking, the Thompson submachine gun was the weapon of choice in close combat.

Contrary-wise, when we fought on Negros, the M-1 rifle, was because there were long patrols up in the mountains and the jungles, and the M-1 is a lot easier to carry than a Thompson machine gun. It's balanced well and you can forget that it's there after awhile, you know, and the fighting wasn't as close as it was on Corregidor. Anyway, after I landed, I made my way to the control point.

DG: This point where you were supposed to meet the other people?

KR: Yes.

DG: But weren't those other people these thirteen guys that didn't even land?

KR: No. The ones I was supposed to meet were wounded. They were the ones that were spread out throughout all the planes.

DG: Oh, yeah. That was just a space in the plane that they happened to have for you.

KR: Yeah, yeah.

DG: So even if those other guys had hit the topside, you'd have split for the barrack's corner anyway.

KR: Oh, yeah, yeah. As soon as I landed, instead of assembling, I had my own mission. They said regardless of where you land, if you can see anything above you, you're in the wrong place. I climbed to the highest point, and when you get to the highest point you will see the barracks, because the barracks was about a quarter of a mile long. It's a long barracks. They call it the mile-long barracks, but, you know, it wasn't. But it was about a quarter of a mile long, and it was the geographical feature, you know, because getting up to where you can see it. And I did. I had to scramble up because I had landed right on top, but I hadn't landed on the sides either. And so when I scrambled up and I saw, I knew which way I was supposed to be heading, I had to be careful because there was still Japs around and because the Japs started to come out of the holes and stuff like that. Well, after I met up with some people and this is where I can't remember who was with me. And let me give you an example. Shortly thereafter we were sent out because somebody was pinned down and needed a bazooka, and we headed to where we were supposed to go and there was a row of buildings, which turned out later to be the old NCO housing on Corregidor. And next to the row of buildings was an alley and then a high wall. We stopped at the first of those buildings, and there were some troopers inside the building, and we asked them, Where is the CP, because that's where we were supposed to go. And they said, Oh, it's at the other end of the buildings. And they pointed that way. Well, we thought the fastest way was up this alley. You know, there was all kinds of rubble in these buildings, so we started up the alley. About halfway up the alley there was a parachute -- a spent parachute hanging down, covering the view from there on. And like dummies -- there were three of us. I remember that but I don't remember who was with me, so I've been trying to find out who was with me and I -- well, I assume it was a bazooka team because we didn't have any flamethrowers with us. Like dummies, we went around the parachute and kept right on going. Well, a Jap machine gun opened up on us. It was right at the other end of that alley. And we dove toward the building. I thought I'd been hit because I felt it hit my rear-end, and having never been shot before, I didn't know really how it felt to be shot. I felt things hitting my rear-end, and I dove into this building and there's some troopers in there, too. And I said to the guy, How bad am I hit? And he said, Where are you hit? And I said my fanny. And he said, oh, no, you're okay. He says, you got hit with chips of the wall that were chipped off. Because he could see the powder marks. But I thought I'd been hit in the rear.

We got up to wherever we were supposed to go. But we ended at a shell hole with seven or eight guys, and we were pinned down by a sniper. And we'd had two or three guys hit, and we didn't know where the sniper was shooting from. And this is why I say I have a gap. One of

the guys in that shell hole who got killed, and who I remembered vividly, was Lieutenant Benniger. Lieutenant Benniger, it turned out, was my section leader, and I have no recollection of him at all until he got killed. I was right next to him when he got killed, but now, again, because of my short stay with the 503rd when we first arrived, they probably had the officers off training them differently than us. Well, I didn't find out till recently that he was my section leader, but there were he and another lieutenant by the name of Camel, also got killed, and what we did when some of these guys got hit, we tried the old movie trick of putting that helmet up with a stick, you know, because none of us knew which way -- Benniger got it right through his head, killed instantly. But none of us knew which way he was facing when he got hit. So we tried the old stick on a helmet, and that didn't work, so we put the helmet back on one of the dead guys and pushed him up, and the sniper did not take the bait, so we knew the sniper had to be very, very close. So we had a guy by the name of Sergeant Philips, and Sergeant Philips saved the day, and I never knew what happened to him after that. And that was, again, see, it wasn't my company. This was F Company. C Company was that company, Benniger was my lieutenant, but Philips was yelling back and forth and he tells the bazooka guy, he says, I think that sniper is right down there below us. He said, There is a staircase there, and I think he's right at the top of that staircase. So he says, I'm going to just shoot like hell, and when I start to shoot, he says, you get up and fire a bazooka round. The sergeant grabbed a BAR, and I tell you, the guy had cojones this big. He said to the bazooka guy, Are you ready? And he said, Yeah, and he stood right up and just started blasting with this thing, and the bazooka fired and, sure enough, we wiped the sniper out.

DG: And what was the evidence of that? He didn't shoot anymore?

KR: Yeah, yeah. Stopped firing. And then we got out then because we'd been trapped in that shell hole for a period of time. Now, I'm not sure how long.

DG: Did you ever get to where you were supposed to?

KR: That was where we were supposed to be. Now, the first night we were split up and I was made part of the perimeter for "F" company, the perimeter. I know we were right by the officer quarters. And all during the night, the Japanese were moving around below us, and they would start into areas and they would take sticks and they would beat on sticks, and then they would answer each other with sticks. And it was very nerve-wracking until we got used to it because it sounded like they were all over the place. While they were on Corregidor, every day, for about ten days, was a day of severe action. And I read the other day that while one day we killed over 900 Japanese just on one day. It turned out -- and I don't think anybody knows the exact figure -- but it turned out that the Japanese had over 5,000 troops on there.

DG: Not 300.

KR: They had nearly five thousand, and they were Jap Marines, which was the cream of the crop of the Japanese defenses. We killed over 5,000. I don't know how many that we killed that nobody will ever know because we blew up a lot of tunnels and caves and things like that. Every day was a gun battle. Usually going out we had a gun battle, and we usually had to fight our way back because every night we would withdraw to make a safety perimeter, and we

had a rule on the island that with the exception of the scouts, nobody moved at night. Anybody who moved at night was the enemy. Now, the only exception to that were the trained scouts that would go out to scout an area out, specific area, and get back. But they had a specific time they had to go out, and a specific place - and a specific time that they had to come back at a specific place. They couldn't come back early. If they completed their thing they could not come back early. They had to come back at a specific time and of course, then, we had passwords and things like that. But they were the only ones that moved at night. And we did the same when we were on Negros. The policy was that any move at night was the enemy, and we had to do it that way. So at night we would come back and form a perimeter for security to protect our area. Now, this was good and it was bad. It was good because we have an easier area to protect. It was bad because we had to sometimes take the same place over and over again two or three times, which was kind of frustrating because you'd lose guys trying to take, and then these are, say, gun batteries - Wheeler Battery. And then to go back and have to do the same thing again and replay the same thing. Now, each time it was a little bit easier - you knew more about it, but, still, you ended up getting guys killed.

Also, when we went out, because of the tunnel system, the Japs could come back up behind us and then ambush you when you were coming back in. So you had to fight your way out and then fight your way back. And several incidents, one of which we got out on the end of a thing and we got trapped out there, and a couple guys got killed. And the only way back was to run across the area, and it was about 35 or 40 yards. And it was under Japanese fire, so the only way to do this was one at a time. And so the guys who were at both ends would the fire and then give a single, and one guy would run and the next guy would run, and you'd run your butt off, because you didn't want to get hit and you could see them, the bullets; they'd bounce around. So the guy in front of me, he takes off and he gets halfway in, he goes down, and so we thought he got hit and we yelled to him, Did you get hit? And he said, No, no. And I said, What's the matter, and he says, I've got a trick knee. My knee went out on me. So I said, Well, can you run? He said, No, I can't run. So I took the guy with me and I said, Are you ready? And he said, Yes, and we yelled ahead and we said, and we're going to need help. So the two of us started. And you never saw a white boy run so fast, you know. And we swooped him off fast. We went, between the two of us and him hobbling, and the three of us just charged and we made it across. And I said, What -- and he said, Oh, it's an old football injury. And I said, What the hell?!, how'd you pass your physical? He said, Well, I didn't tell them about it. I thought to myself, Jesus, I damn near get killed because this guy's got a trick knee, you know and didn't tell me. He was in the parachute troops!

DG: Well, you wonder how he made it through training.

KR: So another place that we were on and a very interesting story, the Japs had bonzaied a position; it was held by D company one night, and the next morning we were sent out to help them. And there were dead Japs all over the place, and so we didn't want to sit there with a bunch of dead Japs because, one, it didn't take them very long to start to smell because of the tropics. So we picked them up and threw them over the side, which was about a 500-foot drop down off this cliff. After the first two or three we started to add little sound effects, you know. Aahhhhh! Because we knew the Japs were down there.

DG: So that was a little demoralizing to the Japs, right?

KR: Yeah. We found recently that they're giving tours on Corregidor and where we were doing this they're calling it Suicide Point and said that all these Japs committed suicide. I think I told you I'm going to take a trip back to Corregidor in February, and I can't wait till I hear that, I'm going to just look to the tour guy and say, no suicide. We threw them over!

DG: Well, who's saying? You mean there's a park service guy with a hat there?

KR: Yeah, yeah, apparently tour leaders or, you know. You don't know the story so make up a good one.

KR: All these Japs I'm sure looked like that because they were all down in somewhat of a pile. But we threw them over the side. Water was a critical thing, so we were attacking down to a place called Cheney Ravine, and on the way down there was a spring where the water was coming out of the rocks, and the Japanese had set up cans and other things to hold water and so we kicked them over. And then on the way back they had been set up again, so that showed you how close they were, that you had to be careful, and so we kicked them over again. Now, when we kicked them over the second time, then -- I don't know whether it was a sergeant or whoever was with us -- but he charted them. And then when we got up to the top he handed the chart over to the mortar teams, and so the mortars, during the night, fired harassing fire down in there, hoping that they'd catch them trying to get water. Well, the areas where we got trapped the next day had become the same area and the water cans were up, and we kicked them over again and we got down on the beach and then we got trapped on the beach down there.

DG: Someone was shooting at you from above somewhere?

KR: Well, there were these caves that were above us that we couldn't get any fire into at all. We tried to get some bazooka fire in there. We couldn't get any fire into them. They really had us in a trap. We couldn't retreat back up the beach from where we had come. We couldn't go any further because there were physical obstacles that we couldn't get around, and the only thing going for us was we had some big boulders there that we could at least be behind. Got several guys killed there and fortunately our radios worked, and so we radioed for the Navy, and they sent around two LCVPs. And the one stood off with the twin fifties and it just raked that cave. And every other place that looked like it was firing. And the second one came in and dropped that door and we took the dead and the wounded and everything and then they put the gate back up, and we got out of there. Fortunately, neither one of the Navy guys got killed. That didn't turn out the same way in other situations where we had used the Navy, and some of them got killed by coming in too close to try to help out, and they got hit by snipers and some from artillery. But it was unique being on Corregidor because the officers had destroyers that could fire point blank support for them. You know, how often does an Army have Navy destroyers standing right there that all you have to do is point out a cave and they put one right into the cave for you? So it was good that way because the Navy gave fantastic support, and the pilots of the Army Air force and the Navy and Marines rotated.

DG: And where were they taking off from?

KR: I'm sure the Navy planes were probably carrier planes. I'm guessing. But by this time, see, we had enough airfields around because we had the airfield on Menduro; we had the one on Leyte. They were flying missions every day from Leyte, even big bomber runs.

DG: Wasn't there a big invasion force coming from the north on Luzon? There was an area up there where they landed, and then they came toward Manila?

DG: Oh, yeah, right, right. But there were no airfields up there, I mean operational.

KR: Well, see that had preceded Corregidor; the invasion of Luzon was right before Corregidor, so they were fighting like crazy up at -- they're fighting and it probably just about ended by the time that we took Corregidor. But they had a real bad battle there in Manila, particularly. Yeah, and it was Clark Air Force Base -- Clark Airfield, and I think that was back in action.

DG: Okay. So the Army could have been coming from not too far off.

KR: Yeah, because they could go from Leyte, from Manila. Can we take another break while I go to the can?

DG: Oh, yeah, sure. One question that most battles you think about -- you alluded to it awhile ago - where you would take real estate and then move and take real estate and you had a sense of progress. Whereas this you would go out every day, come back, fight your way out, fight your way back, as you said, so that I would think that it would be hard to relate what day you got trapped on the beach and what day you went down to the ravine and kicked over the cans. Did it all kind of run together?

KR: That's right.

DG: Hikes everyday, basically.

KR: You just remember certain things of certain days, but, yeah, for them to get as to what day it was or anything like that -- I do know that the day we got trapped on the beach and got out, was one of the blackest days that we had had, section-wise. We were down to next to nothing. We had lost all our flamethrowers by this time. We had lost a lot of people because our sections were spread out to the three different battalions, and they had all had a very, very bad day. And I remember we were all kind of sitting around at twilight, and we had the little fire going, and we were eating and we had a lieutenant by the name Blake who was a newspaper writer. And I remember all of us about as low as you could be, and Lieutenant Blake started to talk and nobody paying too much attention to him, but he was talking about how things go and how things are not fair, and stuff like that, and he said he remembered back in Virginia he said he had a friend that said how unfair things were, that he had painted pictures all his life and he said that nobody ever called him an artist. And he said that just because I sucked one little old cock, he said, everybody calls me a cocksucker. And everybody just broke up and it killed the

tension, and then from then on it was like business as usual. Yeah. And I don't know how he ever came up with the story or any of that.

DG: You know he'd just made it up, right?

KR: You know he may have, but it just broke the thing, because we couldn't have been any lower. And all of a sudden we just started to laugh. And then another very funny thing was that - I don't know who the lieutenant was, and I thought, this is great, you know? We were out on a patrol and, you know, you had to go to the bathroom, you had to go to the bathroom and things like that, and we were stuck in the area for a short period of time, and he decides to drop his pants and take a crap. And we were all sitting there and --

DG: He's right there?

KR: Oh, he's right there, right in front of us because there's no place you can go, you know, you're confined, and usually when you're in a situation like this it's because somebody is pinned down up in front of you, and you don't know what's going on and you're waiting for somebody to come back and say, Hey, we need this, do this, do this. But in the meantime, you're not moving around because you don't want to get shot. Anyway, he's out there just walking and taking a dump, and the biggest blackest snake I've ever seen in my life crawled out from this rock and crawled right under him while he's squatting there, see? And we were watching this because, you know, we don't know what's going to happen. And after the snake gets far enough away, one of the guys just casually reaches up, picks up his Thompson submachine gun, and then [sound] and kills the snake. Well, the officer, he had had diarrhea on top of everything, and then we told him that it crawled right under him while he was -- while he was squatting there, you know. Well, nobody wanted to say anything at the time because we weren't sure how that snake or the officer would react - what was going to happen. Whether he leaped up and the snake, you know, goes -- what we thought was anything there (In the Philippines) had the potential of being lethal. That's one of the funny things that happened.

One of the things about Corregidor is since it was a fort -- a former coastal artillery fort, and had all these gun emplacements; it had tons and tons of gunpowder stored on it. And usually on those concrete gun emplacements they had -- they were probably six stories, and one floor would be the shells, the next floor would be the powder, and the next floor would be the shells. They separated them like that for some reason. I've never been able to talk to a coastal artillery guy to know why they did that.

KR: A terrifying thing was explosions. Major explosions. Sometimes it would rock half of the island. And sometimes it would be nothing more than a shock. A Japanese would run into a tunnel. We'd fire two or three rounds into the tunnel, and it would explode because God knows what you hit inside there. Or it would start to smoke, and as soon as it started to smoke then you figured, oh, boy, here it goes, and then [sound] it actually would burn. Sometimes it would burn for two or three days.

DG: And every time that happened it killed a bunch of Japanese, probably, right?

KR: Oh, hopefully. We don't know what was in there because we could never see into any of them. But there was always a major explosion. And to the point where I thought -- if this whole place is going to blow up and just sink, and if I ever get off this steaming island, I'll be ahead of the game. And almost the last day the Japanese deliberately blew off the whole top of the hill that they were under.

DG: Wasn't that way down on the tail?

KR: That was down at the other end. That was the first battalion. And one of the companies was on top of that knoll when they blew it, and the casualties were just horrendous. And some of the boulders actually went out and landed on the destroyers that were a half a mile off the island, so that's, you know, you can imagine a destroyer being hit by a boulder? So that's how serious that was. Also, there were a lot of mines. It was just a -- I just felt this whole thing is just going to blow up and sink. And I wanted to get off it before it did.

DG: And I'm sure you were not alone.

KR: Oh, I'm sure, because it was happening all over and, as I say, the slightest thing could kick it off. And you didn't know, like living next door to some guy that saves dynamite. But if you don't know about it, and that's the way these things were, because we didn't know which one of these gun emplacements were still loaded or what.

DG: Well, what happened -- when you guys got on those LCVPs, and it took you around somewhere else and dropped you off like within ten minutes or so?

KR: Well, probably not ten minutes, but took us over and dropped us off on the beach where they had made the initial landing, where the 34th Infantry had come in. By that time it was secure.

DG: Oh, so it was safe.

KR: That was a secure area. Yeah. Yeah, we controlled everything at that time from the top down to beyond Belinda Hill. We controlled all that. We still didn't control the end of the island and the tail. But we controlled everything in between, and so that was safe area to come into.

DG: But then you went right back, hiked up to the top again?

KR: Went right back up to the top because that's where we were, yeah. And that was, they say, the black day that we had because not only had we been trapped, but we got a couple guys killed, we got my sergeant killed, he got hit right in the throat with an explosive bullet, and it was a shame because he went down to deliberately blow all these tunnels up. Now, he was a trained demolition man, you see, I wasn't. His name was Sergeant Harley. And one of the things when you're a demolition person and one of the rules is you never run away from your explosive. And the reason you don't is because you might trip and fall and, you know, so a good demolition guy knows exactly how long he has to get away, and he sets his fuse. He knows he's

got ten seconds left, 15 seconds -- whatever he set. So I took Harley and the other guy while we were covering, went down into one of these gun emplacements and set these charges to blow this up because this one was a particular pain for us because we had taken the darn thing two or three times.

DG: And you wanted to collapse it.

KR: Blow it closed, that's right. And so he set the charge and he came walking down, and I thought to myself, Man, you know, you'd have to have cojones that big to get out there by yourself to begin with and then to just walk out like it's a Sunday walk in the park. Yeah, after he got a good distance away, when he just went into a kind of jog and came back up to us and turned around and got hit -- a sniper hit him right in the throat with an explosive bullet. He died within minutes.

DG: They had explosive bullets?

KR: Yeah. Well, we did, too. We had bullets that --

DG: It wasn't just a hollow-point - it was a bullet that actually exploded?

KR: I forget how -- whatever it did, but it was an explosive bullet, I guess similar to an incendiary. We had different color tips, we had . . . I can't remember anymore, one was red tips. I think they were the tracers. I think we had yellow tips, which could have been the explosive, but they were used for different things.

DG: You said water was a problem. When you guys worked your way back every night, were they dropping food in or did they land it.

KR: Oh, yeah. The first couple days they re-supplied us by air and they dropped water, and this was very frustrating because sometimes what they would drop would drift down to the Japanese. And this was frustrating. Now, there was a water tower on Corregidor, and we were using water from that tower for the first couple days and it was terrible tasting. So we had the halizon tablets and then we used to throw the stuff in the k-rations, you know, anything to -- because we were thirsty and so the first couple of days we weren't getting water. Well, after we took the beach and secured the beach, then they started to re-supply with water then, and they drained -- the engineers then drained the tank and sometimes you're better off if you don't know the end of the story because in the tank the Japanese had built an anti-aircraft platform. Well, a good direct hit apparently had landed and so it blew the platform and all the Japs down into the water.

DG: Yeah. And that was days and days before.

KR: Yes. So we were drinking water that was, you know . . . and this is probably why I got sick right after I came off Corregidor, which is very interesting. When I came off Corregidor it was the initial impact to me about what had happened because when you go off to fight, you secure your area, strike all the tents, you pack all your belongings in a duffel bag all

labeled, and then it's all secured. Well, before you come back, and they know you're coming, then the rear base guys set up your camp again, and they set up the thing just like it was a full regiment. So you have the same people who left coming back to a new place.

KR: That's right. And they set up all the tents, so you have A Company's tent --B Company, C Company and all that. When I went to my tent, I was the only guy in my tent.

DG: And it was an eighteen-man thing, right, or something.

KR: There were twelve, I think -- I think there were twelve men tents. And I was the only guy that was in that tent. And that was when I got the real impact about what had happened to our section because we had taken a severe beating. Now, I don't know whether they were -- I'm sure they weren't all dead. I'm sure some were in the hospital or things like that. That's another thing. They didn't count a casualty unless you were dead or bones broken so bad that you could not fight. Otherwise, you were Band-aided and aspirined and returned to duty right away, because there was no way that they could lose you. So if you were a casualty, that's the way they scored it.

DG: So there were a lot of guys fighting with one arm in a sling?

KR: Oh, yeah, hurt in the jumps and things like that. We had an awful lot of casualties. I started on that before, but we actually had about 15 percent casualties from the jump itself, out of the 2,000, about 15 percent. The whole operation, 25 percent was our casualty rate which is high.

DG: But, actually, the fact is that a lot of those guys were still there fighting because they had wounds that would allow them to fight

KR: That's right, but they weren't even scored as casualties. So the 15 percent were either dead or bad shape. So we had 15 percent casualties on the jump and 25 percent casualties on the mission. So we lost a fourth of our people, casualties. I don't know exactly how many were dead, but anyway, when we got back to Menduro, I sat there in my tent and I thought, this is crap. So I walked over to B Company where I had some friends, one of which I had gone through jump school with, and I said, Hey, you know, we had the crap kicked out of us -- and they did, too. So I said, What's the chance of me transferring over here, and he says, Let me talk to the sergeant. So he had a sergeant who is still a friend and who I'm going to see in a couple of months - Sloughfoot Akin from Shadyville, Louisiana. Fraudulent enlisted when he was 15 years old. A hell of a guy. I'm alive probably because of Sloughfoot Akin. The guy had instincts that were just absolutely fantastic. So I went over to him and I said, Hey, Sloughfoot, what's the chance of transferring to B Company? He says, It's all right with me if it's all right with them. So I hustle back to my company and went in to see this Lieutenant Blake, the same one, and he said -- and I'm sure he was devastated by all the guys that they'd lost, and I said, Lieutenant, I said, I'm down there by myself. I said, I'm not demolition trained. I said, I've got some good friends over there at B Company and they need some guys. Do you have any objections to me transferring? He said, No. He said, If they want you that's okay. And he signed off and so I picked up my crap and went over and the rest of the war I was with B Company. And right after

that is why I went to the hospital, and that was an interesting thing because I was going over to the battalion hospital. I just felt terrible. I was turning yellow and losing weight, weaker than a dog, and I went in to see this doctor and the corpsman would say, He's got a temperature of 103, sir. Okay, give him some sulphur pills and come back tomorrow. And the corpsman would say, He's got a temperature of 103, sir. Okay, some sulphur pills. So I did this for three or four days, and then one morning I went down for breakfast and they had sauerkraut for breakfast. Well, that did it for breakfast. That did it. And I went over to regiment, first aid. Well, I don't know what had preceded me, but it was not pleasant because when I walked in the regiment doctor was sitting there. I went along with the First Battalion doctor that I had been going to for three or four days, and they had obviously had some unpleasant words, because I walked in to the tent and the doctor from regiment looks up and he says, Put him on the plane to the hospital. Hepatitis. And the other doctor spoke up and said, Aren't you the boy that's been coming in from here? And I turned to him and he says, You stupid son of a bitch, you can't even recognize a case of hepatitis when you see it? So they'd obviously had words before. Because the doctor never said anything. He just looked at me and said, Hey, put him on the plane. So they sent me down, put me on the plane.

Let's see, okay, so they put me on a plane and they sent me down to Leyte to a field hospital. And I was in there for 57 days. Because it turned out that I had amoebic dysentery, hepatitis, and malaria. So no matter what they gave me for one, it had a bad effect on the other. So they kept screwing around and trying to adjust the medicine, because I was down around 148 pounds.

DG: And you're tall. You're six-two?

KR: Yeah, and I probably weight 175 before, and that was interesting because I've always had a hard time when they tried to take blood, you know. And they had this one guy...you know you go into the hospital now, and they stick it in there once and they leave it there, and then they change the thing. Well, in those days they didn't.

DG: It was a new needle every time.

KR: Yeah, new needle every time, see. So this guy, he couldn't have hit the right hole if he was giving an enema. I mean, he was just terrible. I don't know whether he couldn't see right. But, anyway, he'd give me eight attempts on one arm and then the other arm, see. So after three times a day for about three days, and when he came in I said, Get away from me, you sonofabitch, and I jumped up on my bed and started to jump up and down. I told him I'd kill him, and he ran out of the ward. And they were scared of anybody that had been in combat, anyway. Most of the hospital was filled up with rear base people, and anybody that had been in combat, they were automatically afraid of you. And the ward was just quiet as hell. And a little while later I see a nurse, and she peeks in and then a doctor peeks in, and then pretty soon about five of them come down together and they come to my ward. And he says, I understand you don't like needles. And I said, You're goddamn right I don't like them. And I said, Look at my arms, and I said, That sonofabitch. And he says, Holy shit, because he thought that I was, you know exaggerating.

DG: Making it up, just whining.

KR: Yeah. And I said, Look at that. I said, That sonofabitch. So they told him don't come near me again, and they sent somebody else that knew what they were doing. But that was an unhappy incident.

KEN ROMMEL
SECOND INTERVIEW

DG: How long were you on Corregador?

KR: February the 16th we jumped, and we left March the 2nd, so whatever number of days that was.

DG: Was it secured then?

KR: For all practical purposes it was secured, which is interesting, too, but for about the first ten or eleven days, we had a major firefight. I think I mentioned we would normally get in a firefight on the way out, and then we would have to fight our way back every night. And also every day up until even the last day, there was a major explosion on Corregidor. After we left Corregidor, we went back to Mindoro.

DG: How'd you get off?

KR: LCI's, (Landing Craft Infantry) and we ran into a huge storm-- we would call it a hurricane on the East Coast. And I do remember that I was coming down with dysentery and so I spent most of my trip on the can, either going to the can, being on the can, or off the can. And the one that the soldiers were using was so filthy -- because of the terrible storm and there was crap all over the place, I found one up in the Navy part of the ship which we were not supposed to go but I found one that was relatively clean, and I remember sitting in there just fat, dumb, and happy; I'd finally found a nice place where I could sit and go to the bathroom as I needed. And there was a young sailor came running in and it was obvious that he was seasick, and then when he saw me he didn't want to throw up. I guess he didn't want to let the Army know that the sailors got sick, but he couldn't hold it and he threw up all over the sink and everything. It was a hell of a storm and I heard later where the Navy lost several ships in that storm.

So we were back in Minduro and when we got back -- let me tell you the thing I found out the other day or I heard the other day about Mindoro. I was talking to my old sergeant, who we called Sloughfoot Akin. He's the one I think I mentioned before. But I talked to him the other day on the telephone, and when they were on their way to invade Mindoro -- I was not with them this time, but they were on their way to invade Mindoro, the Japanese apparently thought they were going to invade [Palauan?]. And Palauan is an island somewhere close to there, but I haven't been able to find it on the map, but it's involved right now in this hostage situation --

Okay, now, Palauan, apparently had a lot of Marine prisoners of war, and they slept in caves at night, and in the daytime they brought them out on work details. So when the Japanese detected the invasion going to Mindoro, they thought they were heading for Palauan and they took all the Marine prisoners and put them down in the caves and poured gasoline down there

and set them on fire and killed most of them. And this was all just a mistake in Jap intelligence. But, anyway, after we got back to Mindoro, I transferred over to B Company, then I really got sick. I turned yellow and I lost twenty or thirty pounds, and so they evacuated me to the hospital on Leyte and I was there for fifty-seven days.

While I was there some interesting things happened, but one of the patients in the hospital with me was a first sergeant of an outfit which was assigned to Leyte. And after we became good friends and he found out that my brother had been killed and was buried on Laity, he said, Would I like to go visit him at the cemetery on Leyte. I said, Sure, and he called up his outfit and had them bring a Jeep and a driver over and took me out to the cemetery so I could see my brother's grave.

DG: So did you find out about your brother from home?

KR: Yes. In a letter from my father. And it was a beautiful letter, and the letter disappeared the same day that I got it. To this day, I do not know what happened to that letter.

DG: Oh, that's too bad.

KR: Yeah. But I think it was probably, again, you know, the officer sent you all your incoming and outgoing mail, and I think that they didn't want it around -- for morale purposes, so I think somebody just was told to throw it away. It was a beautiful letter telling me that my brother had been killed on Leyte, and it's very important to the intelligence of the Sixth Army. This was not a major problem because there was only one cemetery on Laity, which is now closed. They closed it years ago and moved it just outside Manila. Yeah, a big national cemetery-- just outside Manila. After fifty-seven days I got discharged from the hospital. I was supposed to get out and report to a replacement depot and that in Army terms where it just was a tracking point and then they would ship you out either to your outfit or wherever. And as I was walking into the replacement depot, I saw a couple guys that I knew from my regiment and they're giving me all kinds of signals. So I get off the road and go over behind these bushes, and they said, Don't sign in. And I said, Why not? They said, As soon as you sign in you're dead here. They're putting you on work details. They're not making any effort to get you back to the outfit or anything like that, and it's a crummy place, and don't sign in. So I said, What the hell am I going to do? I mean, I just stepped out of the hospital. And, well, you've got to go somewhere. He said, Oh, there's an airbase down here. Now, why don't you go down there and see if you can hop a ride back to Negros. And so, well, that's a pretty good idea, so I thumbed my way down the road --

DG: Did you have luggage or any kind of like sea bag or something like that?

KR: No, no. Whatever I would have had would have been very frayed.

DG: So you just had fatigues on?

KR: Fatigues, yeah, yeah. And no weapon. That was all taken away before you got to the hospital. So I thumbed a ride on a military truck and he got me off the base, so I walked in and told them who I was and what I was trying to do, and they said, No problem. You might

have to be around here for a couple days. And I said, Well, that's no problem. And it was that point that I realized the air corps lived a lot better than the infantry did because the food was much better, all the conditions were much better. Now, after about two days they woke me up early in the morning and said, We've got an observation plane, a small reconnaissance plane that's going to go up to Negros. And so I got whatever stuff I did have and got together and [drew?] up and joined my regiment that was on Negros, and they're fighting in the mountains right outside of Bacalog.

DG: How had they gotten there, another jump?

KR: That was an invasion by ship, they did not jump on Negros. As soon as I got there, then I turned into a medical section with part of my regiment, and the doctor says, Oh, okay, you're going to have to rest for awhile until I get some weight back and stuff like that. And it's pouring and we were living in foxholes with just ponchos over us. And so I just got my stuff together, and drew a weapon, when all of a sudden they came running over and they said, Okay, everybody saddle up. That was a term they used for getting ready; we're going to move. He said a position had been overrun up in the mountains, and they need some help up there right now. And it was the longest march that I'd ever known -- well, I'd ever had to do. It was a mountain trail, raining, and muddy. I was weaker than a dog. I was using my rifle as a cane. And I thought, Man, you know . . . but, anyway, we were up into the mountains, going on a mountain trail, after this mortar position, and, fortunately, stayed there for a couple weeks so I could get some strength back. We were fighting in the mountains. It was very interesting fighting in the mountains because whoever was the lead unit was actually doing the fighting, and then all along the mountain trail we had kind of outposts, and the outpost would be 500 to a thousand yards apart, and this was to keep the trail open so that we could re-supply whoever was up on top doing the fighting and also take the dead out.

There were natives that we had hired to pack a lot of our stuff for us, and so every day a boom train would start out at the bottom with supplies and things and like that, and they would work their way up to the top and then drop the supplies off and then carry the dead and the wounded back down. But you needed these outposts strategically placed, just like the old outposts across the West, here, to keep the trail open so that the guys that were doing the fighting were not cut off from the rear. And, now, as the boom trains left one spot to go to the next, we would radio back and forth and say, Okay, they're on their way, so that the one above wouldn't shoot these guys coming up the trail, because anybody on the trail was suspect. And so I was in this position for about two weeks.

Fighting in the mountains was an interesting thing because you talk about basics because many of our firefights were over who was going to get water, and we would send out a water detail every day to get water up in the mountains from a spring and things like that. Invariably, we would have a firefight and get people killed just getting water, so a lot of things later in my life -the proper perspective about priorities and what's important and things like that. Another interesting thing was that while we were fighting up in the mountains, the Navy was flying a lot of dive bombing support for us, and we selected targets for them and they would come in and dive-bomb them, and we would sit there and watch them and we got to be pretty good experts at where they would put the bombs. And so one day three or four came in to dive-bomb, and when the one got to where he was supposed to drop the bombs he didn't drop it. We were watching, you know, we were saying to ourselves, Hey, drop that, you know, drop it. And he pulled up and

when he pulled the thing came off and we knew it was coming right down to us and so we let out the “old fire in the hold” yell with this thing coming down and the bomb dropped right in the middle of us and nobody got hurt. And the interesting thing is that later, after I got out of the service, I was dating a girl by the name of Marion Walters, and she was in high school with me, and her brother was a former Navy pilot and while I was over there one night to pick up Marion, her brother came in and was talking to me and we started talking about the war and when he found out I was with the parachute troops, and he said, Were you on Negros by any chance? And I said, Yeah. And he said, Were you fighting up in the mountains? And I said, Yeah. And he said, by any chance, did you know or were you anywhere around where they dropped a bomb on you? And I said, Yeah. And he said, Was anybody killed? And I said, No. I said, Nobody was hurt. He said, I dropped the bomb. I said, You did? He said, Yeah. He said, The thing stuck and didn’t release, and he said as soon as it released, he said, I knew it was heading right into you guys. He said, I could never find out whether anybody was killed or hurt. He said, I knew that they were the 503rd that was fighting in the mountains. I thought that was a strange coincidence.

DG: Oh, my God, yeah.

KR: But after we got fighting in the mountains, we came down and then my company was selected to make the first reconnaissance patrol to the other side of the mountain, and so we had trucks with machine guns mounted on them and all that, and there was one road, and we took this road across the mountains. Now, as we got anywhere near bridges and things like that, we had to get off the truck because we didn’t know whether the bridges would be mined or set with explosives, and then we would go across the bridge -- or the troops would go across, and then we would secure a perimeter on the other side, and then the truck would come across. Then we would get back on. But in the meantime, we’d search under the bridges, to make sure that the Japs haven’t rigged them with explosives. And as a result of that patrol, we got over into a little town called San Carlos, and we were there in San Carlos then until the end of the war. Now, while we were in San Carlos, we were making patrols out of San Carlos and usually two or three day patrols. We would go out and spend one or two nights out in the jungle and up in the area wherever we would go we would usually go as a result of Japs attacking small villages or something like that, or somebody would get loose and get down and tell us about it, and then we would go up there and try to find the Japs and get them out of there.

DG: Were they basically trying to escape? Were you just kind of chasing them to ground or something?

KR: Yeah, yeah.

DG: Because they knew they were toast right?

KR: Yeah. We found out later that they knew the war was going to end before we did, and their commanding officer had more or less given them the instructions that if you couldn’t get caught, then fight. But, if you can, just evade this thing. Now, another interesting thing here was written up in my regiment as the Bee Patrol. We were out on a platoon size patrol, and as we came out of a clearing out of the woods and started down a clearing, a Japanese patrol came

out just the opposite, and we had the immediate firefight and the Japanese ran back into the jungles. And so after we got organized, we ordered the scouts in to see what was happening there and the scouts went on in and I remember it to this day. They just came flying out of there as fast as they could, yelling Bees! And with that thousands of bees came out, and so we all ran and dropped half of our equipment for about a mile down into this stream, and we all jumped into the stream. And some of the guys were stung fairly seriously and actually were given the Purple Heart for this.

DG: Really?

KR: Yes.

DG: What were -- the Japanese that were there in the middle of it?...You're going to tell me.

KR: The next day, we had to go back up and get our equipment, and so this time we took flam throwers with us. And we went in to the woods, and by that time the bees were all calmed down, but there were tremendous beehives which we did hit with the flame throwers. We found the first Jap in there about 35 or 40 yards, and the last one was no more than a hundred yards, and they'd all been stung to death --

DG: No.

KR: -- by bees. Yeah.

DG: Wow.

KR: Yeah.

DG: What a terrible way to go.

KR: Yeah. They'd all been stung to death by the bees. Now, I don't know whether this was the first of the African killer bees or what, but this was on Negros.

Okay, another interesting patrol concerned an airplane. I can't remember whether it was an A-20 but it crashed up in the mountains. I know there were at least two, and possibly were the three. I think there was three -- got out of the airplane and they were okay, and they signaled apparently to the other airplanes that were accompanying them that they were okay, and whoever was running the show up there said, Okay. Get away from the airplane because the Japs will home in on them. Get away from it, but keep it in sight because we'll use that as a rescue point. Then they -- whatever they did, had to call around and find out that here we have a parachute company, actually, sitting right close. So we were alerted and we were going to jump in there to get these guys and bring them out. Well, they evaluated that would probably be too dangerous, and we were close enough that we could get in there with about a half a day's forced march. So they organized again a reinforced platoon.

I think we had about a platoon, and off we went early in the morning. And we got up there around the noon or 1:00, and we found the guys, and our leader at the time, our lieutenant

at the time was a guy by the name of Bill Foster, and he was the only platoon leader -- only section leader that I had that survived the war. Those officers -- they say that the life expectancy of an infantry lieutenant was about 15 minutes, and I think that's probably very close to being accurate because I lost every lieutenant that was ever over me and usually within a matter of minutes, and then your sergeants would end up running everything until you got replacements, and then they'd bring the new officers in and then invariably within a very short period of time they were killed. Bill Foster was the only one that lasted, and I think it's because it was toward the end of the war and we weren't getting into much heavy stuff. But when we got up there, we checked these guys over and I told this when I saw your brother's book (FEET WET by RADM P.T. Gillcrist) and saw many of his pictures and he was wearing boots. And I said at least you Navy guys knew something that the Air Force didn't know because they were wearing loafers and low-cut shoes, so I guess they were going to be back that night eating their good meals you know, and drinking their scotch that they used to fly in from Australia, and all that, but here they were, fat, dumb, and happy. They looked overweight and -- we were lean and hard paratroopers. Bill Foster told them. He said, Are you guys okay? And they said, Yeah, so he said, okay. Now, we want to get out of these mountains before dark. We know what happens after dark and we don't want to be here if we don't have to. So we're going to move out and we expect you to keep up with us. And we moved out. And we wanted to be out of the mountains by night because there was a lot of bad things could happen at night, you know. And so we were -- well, they kept on falling farther and farther back and we'd say, Hey, Bill! And I don't whether it was because we never stopped or not. I would look back and sometimes it was two or three hundred yards back to these guys. It must have been scary and nerve-wracking for them to see us farther and farther out in front of them. When we got back down and I had the opportunity later that day to see one of their feet, and they were bloody messes. I mean, I really felt sorry for them because the shoes that they had were certainly not shoes that you'd be hiking.

DG: So they had probably lace up officers shoes -- you know, dress shoes.

KR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they looked like they could go to the dance that night. But, anyway, towards the end of the war, we found out later, that the Japanese -- and this is very interesting, too, -- the Japanese were in radio contact with us towards the end of the war. And two or three days before the war ended, they told us that their communications with Tokyo had gone out and that they would take our word for it when the war was over, and they would not tell us their strength and they would not tell us the condition of their troops, but they did agree that they would surrender to four different points, and they would divide their group into four equal parts. And one of the places that they were going to surrender was in my company sector that was in San Carlos. Now company strength at that time now was down to about 62, 63 people. The normal strength of a company is almost 200, but we were down that low because of casualties and sicknesses and all that.

The night that the war ended -- we were camped along a stream, and there was a cliff on one side of the stream and a fairly steep cliff on the other side where we were. And then we had a trail that went up to the top of that where we had a machine gun outpost up there and also our communication outpost together. And then we had a machine gun outpost up the stream and a machine outpost down the stream, and that was our night configuration so that we couldn't be attacked. The radio we had was one of these crank-type radios, and we would go onto the air five minutes before the hour and stay on the air until five minutes after the hour in case there was

any traffic from regiment. The night that the war ended I was assigned up there, and the officer told me that if we got the word that the war was over to fire a burst of machine gun fire tracers right over the guys into the bank across the stream and then they would know. Well, about midnight we cranked it up and they told us that the war had ended. However, right before that we heard voices up there that made us feel pretty confident that there was a Japanese patrol. And so I thought, if we fire that machine gun and all these guys go out and start to celebrate, and there's Japanese up here, we could lose a lot of guys, you know. So we just ignored the thing, and the next morning when they came down and I went in and woke the officer, and told him that the war was over.

Now, we still had to go on patrols. Our intelligence had estimated the strength of the Japanese having no more than 500. They thought there'd be no more than 500, and they thought they would be pretty weak because we had cut off their supplies from Japan months before, so they had no way of resupply, thought the weapons would be in bad shape, stuff like that. We just thought that they would be in very bad shape. We sent them word of the surrender and they said, Okay, they were going to send the group down. But we went up. We had one truck. We went up to the base of the trail coming down, which they were supposed to come down, 3,000 of them!

DG: And there were 60 of you?!!

KR: Yeah. Three thousand of them came marching out of that mountain. We thought the whole Japanese army was surrendering to us. And it's a good thing that they have the emperor and all that crap. But, anyway, we got on the radio right away and said, Hey, there's something wrong. We found out there were 3,000 surrendering in four different places, so there was actually 12,000 troops left on that island, and they were in relatively good condition. It was amazing how the Japanese could live off the land. You know, they only lived on a bowl of rice a day and things like that. So when we saw them come down, that many, we'd grab the rifle off of one and throw it and then we would point, and they'd all come by and they'd throw their crap wherever we pointed. And then we took the very weak and put them into the truck, and then we marched the rest of them back to the little town of San Carlos where we were, and we had a field set up which was hardly adequate, didn't have any fence around it for a couple days. The Japanese all did what they were supposed to do. It was amazing because then we then became, I guess, their emperor.

DG: Were you afraid? I mean, you didn't know that for awhile, though. Were you afraid when you saw all these Japanese?

KR: Absolutely. But when we got all the weapons around and when we got them into this field and our officers assured us that they'd be no problem. You know? They had surrendered and things like that. It was very interesting to see the Japanese -- we had tremendous respect for them as fighters and soldiers. But it was interesting to see the difference between the average Japanese soldier and the average American soldier. For example, when we got tents, we had these big squad tents, and we had them on the back of trucks, and the trucks would go along and they would kick off this ball of canvas every so many yards.

DG: Was this for the Japanese?

KR: The Japanese, that's right. And then we would tell them to put the tents up. And it would be so funny that we would be rolling on the ground laughing. Their answer to everything is *sahito*, which meant more men, more men. If they wanted to move anything at all, they wanted more men, more men. This is the way they did things. They tried to put these tents up, and they didn't have any idea. And as we say, the average American would look at this thing for just a few minutes and figure out some way to put that tent up. Not the Japanese. The Japanese -- this was in the hot, tropical sun -- they would have forty or fifty under the canvas and all you would see were these heads bobbing around and all the yelling back and forth. As I say, we'd be laughing so hard we . . . and they were trying to put up the tent from the inside, and it was just -- and come out and they'd be a puddle of sweat. So funny after watching this exercise for awhile we finally laid down a tent, put the two poles in it, got a couple guys, pulled the thing up, and they acted like we were miracle people. And this was the same for everyone.

Another thing, we had burial details everyday because some that were sick were dying, and we had other details everyday. Now, by Geneva Convention, which we followed -- the Japanese did not follow because they never were signatories to it -- but Geneva Convention the officers are immediately separated from enlisted men, and officers are not allowed to work - for an officer to work, to do manual labor. That's the Geneva Convention -- but the enlisted men you can work. So we would have all the enlisted men, and the officers would be a separate thing. So all the work details were enlisted men. You'd have a burial detail, or whatever you had, and there'd be fifteen Japs assigned to the thing, and so you'd line them up and then you'd count and point to each so they knew we were counting them and then you'd call one of them out, and you'd tell him do it. And you'd say, How many? And he'd go pointing and counting in Japanese. Then we'd say, Okay you're in charge. He would be just a regular buck private or something. As soon as you put him in charge, he was an arm of the emperor. And he would be slapping the other guys around. I mean, the corporal punishment was just a common thing in the Japanese army. And we would go out and bury whoever we were going to bury, and then when we're getting ready to come back, he'd come up and say, Two missing. We'd yell, Go find them. And he'd dash out and they'd find them sleeping under a tree somewhere, bring them back in, stand them at attention, beat the living hell out of them, and knowing that the next day he was not going to be in charge. And they all took this. It was absolutely amazing.

DG: So there were no reprisals by the other Japs?

KR: No reprisals to my knowledge. It was -- it was the way of life --

DG: That's amazing.

KR: In the Japanese army. They are very brutal people, and it was just a way of life. So after we got them squared away, we got moved to Dumighetti, and this was a coastal town, and then we were alerted to go into Japan. And we boarded ships pretty soon.

DG: So the Japanese prisoners were still at that camp?

KR: Yeah, but by that time new people would take care of that. You also asked me when we got to Corregidor, there was one battalion of infantry -- I think it was the 32nd infantry -

- and they were left there to do any of the last mopping up of Corregidor which was very much, you know -- but there were several other of the islands right around Corregidor that were also part of the fort complex, and they had to clean them up. So, now, yeah, and the prisoners were still there when we left. We were ordered up to Dumighetti, and we stayed up at Dumighetti for a short period of time and then we boarded ships for Japan. And that was interesting because on the Navy ships, they gave us Jello five times a day. We had a regular Jell-O call, and you had to line up and they gave you a big bowl of Jell-O, and this was supposed to thicken our blood because we were going from the Tropics, north. We were going up to a place which was a ski resort or a ski town, yeah. And we landed in Japan in a place called Sendi.

DG: If you were going north, maybe it was a northern port, do you think?

KR: We landed at a place called Sendi, north of Tokyo and Yokohama. And then we - I think we went by train to Moriota, and we took over an army post that was still intact. And that was interesting because again we saw the way they treated their own people. Since we had Japanese workers working for us right from day one, we had Japanese police on the gates, and they were supposed to handle the Japanese. Well, after a couple days -- and we had all kinds of specialty items by this time, cans of peanuts and things because the PX had started. So if a Japanese did a real good job for you, cleaned up your place, why, we'd give them a can of peanuts or something. And you would leave at 4:00 o'clock, or whatever the time was. At 4:30 there'd be a boom, boom, boom, boom, boom on your door, and you'd open the door and there would be two Japanese policemen with the guy that you'd given the peanuts to. He was a bloody mess, and they were bowing and they were handing you back the peanuts. The cop thought that he had stolen them.

DG: Sure. Assuming that he had stolen them.

KR: I mean, that's the type of people they were. So from then on we learned if we were going to give them anything, we walked down to the gate with them and then gave them in front of the police. You know, in any other place we would be considered the enemy. But I guess the titles changed immediately that we were, you know, servants of the emperor.

I had a gymnasium that I was in charge of and every day I had a work detail. You got up in the morning, and they'd have all the Japanese lined up, and they'd be holding a sign that would say, Gym 1 or Gym 2, who are this and that, and then you'd motion them, and they would come and work all day for you in the gym. And they actually replaced my floor, the gym floor. And, they used no levels. A carpenter carried a little bag that had a mallet in it, a saw that had a rough cut on one side and on the other side, and I think one or two other tools, and they built the most beautiful floor in there you've ever seen - leveled everything by their eye. They built houses, they only used one nail, that was for the last piece. Everything else was notched and fitted. They were amazing carpenters for the little bag of stuff that they had. But I think did the notching because they probably didn't have any nails left in Japan. But just like a set or kit that you would buy, they put things together.

Now, one thing I forgot to mention. When the war ended and we were on Negros, they dissolved the 503rd, and we were all assigned to the 511th, which is part of the 11th Airborne Division. And the 11th Airborne Division and the 1st Calvary Division were the first two

occupation troops into Japan. And MacArthur wanted the Airborne because for some reason we were taller, than the regular Army average was. And he wanted to impress the Japanese with our size. MacArthur's Honor Guard were all over six feet tall. He wanted the Japanese to figure that they had been defeated by a land of giants because it would ease their . . . you know, save face, or something like that.

After the war I was up there for a few months and then came back on a troop ship back to California and a troop train back to Indian Town Gap and was discharged on March the 15th.

KR: I was discharged back in Pennsylvania, Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania, which was sixty miles north of Philadelphia where my family was.

DG: I read that book -- I have it over there -- *Corregador, The Rock Force*, I know you read it. There was one sort of final explosion on the tail end of that island.

KR: That's right.

DG: With a whole bunch of people on top with tanks and halftracks and everything. What do you know about that?

KR: Well, I know I wasn't there, which I was very happy about!

DG: Did that happen while you were still on the island though?

KR: Oh, absolutely.

DG: So you were just further up the top of the island?

KR: We were up at the top. Up until that point, my -- the battalion that I was assigned to, the 2nd battalion, had by far the most casualties, and we did most of the heavy fighting on the island. When they started to clean out the tail of the island, because the second battalion had taken such a beating, they left us up on top to do the cleaning up, mopping up. During the mopping up is when we got trapped there and had to be taken off by the boats. But they took 1st battalion and the 3rd battalion down to the tail to assist the 32nd infantry battalion that was there who had come in by land and to clean up that port. There were two major explosions down there. One was Melitta tunnel, an explosion somehow got set off, and the second was right down in an area called Monkey Point, and that one, part of the 1st battalion was sitting right up on top of this Monkey Point when the Japanese either purposely or by a mass suicide or whatever, set this major, massive explosion, and buried a good portion of the 1st battalion, and so at that time their casualties then became equal with the 2nd battalion - us, who had been doing most of the fighting. This explosion was so great that it took boulders almost the size of Volkswagens and put them out on destroyers that were sitting half a mile out. And they came crashing down. We had a lot of casualties. That's why I say I don't know how many Japanese died. They need figures that you will never know exactly how many Japanese were killed on Corregidor, because I don't think anybody knows, really to this day, how many people were actually there. But, that was probably the last major explosive. I know the day we left I was hoping and praying that I

would just get off this thing before it blew up because I was convinced that that whole island was just going up like that and we'd all sink. It was just amazing.

DG: I had another question about an earlier thing, just going back. The C-47, you jumped and practiced from the C-47, and then one combat jump. What was that plane like?

KR: There was only one door. The door was on the right side looking from the front to the back. And it was in the rear part of the aircraft. And so when you lined up, you had all the guys who were going to jump, you had them lined up from the door forward. And you had a cable that was running down the length of the airplane, and you had a static line with a hook on it, and you would stand up and hook onto that cable. And then as you were getting ready to jump, and when you did jump, you were turning and you would go out at such a speed that the last guy out was almost at a dead run when he hit that door. That's how fast it would go, yeah. You'd all be lined up right next to each other, and then once they tapped that first guy out, whew, it just went like that. And you went up to the door, shoved that thing forward, and went out of the door. Theoretically you took a quarter turn to the left, and you got into a position like that.

And then the propeller blast would theoretically turn you the second quarter to where you were now facing the rear of the airplane, and then you would drop just long enough for that static line to pull your chute out and break off, and then the power would pop the chute open. Now, later when they started to jump out of the C-46, then they had two doors, they were on each side of the airplane, and then later than that they started to jump out the back of the airplane where they could lower the whole thing and run out. The C-47 would hold about 30 guys.

DG: I was curious about in Europe -- and maybe I asked you this. If I did, tell me, but in Europe the guys would get a break and they'd be able to go to a city because there were cities and towns and inns and bars and everything. Through the Pacific there wasn't anything.

KR: No. We had nothing until we got to the Philippines. Or even the Philippines. When we were fighting, Bacalog was a relatively small city. San Carlos was very small. There weren't any bars or anything like that. Dumighetti again was very small.

DG: So you guys experienced a completely different celebration part of getting furloughs or whatever, than they did in Europe.

KR: Yes. No celebration, no girls. No girls at all, from the time we went to New Guinea until the time we got to Japan. Now, I'm sure that some of the guys, rear base guys that were not paratroopers had it different. But we were always isolated out into an area.

DG: And you were fighting, you were always in combat.

KR: Yeah, we were always in combat, always in an area where we could be thrown into combat very quickly. Yeah.

DG: What did you do when you got back to your hometown? Did they actually formally muster you out there or was it just kind of a date that they set?

KR: Well, at Indiantown Gap. You went through all the procedures, signed all the papers, and they gave you your medals -- ribbons. They didn't have medals for us at that time, but you got all your ribbons and then later you got the medals. And, yeah, you suited and left.

DG: And then you left with your sea bag or whatever, we used to call it. It's a duffel bag, I guess.

KR: Yeah.

DG: Full of your uniforms and boots and all that kind of stuff.

KR: That's right.

DG: Had you brought home any souvenirs or did you -- some people brought home Lugar's from Europe and whatnot. That was probably not allowed, was it?

KR: I had a .38 snub-nose, which I carried in a shoulder holster that I bought from another paratrooper who was leaving, and I don't know why he was leaving because the war wasn't over. But, anyway, I brought that. But I didn't bring any Japanese things like that home with me at all. I wasn't in the souvenir business. I remember some guys were like vultures after they killed Japanese. I wasn't one that was like that. If I could have gotten my hand on one of their big swords, I would have gotten it because, one, I knew the value of some of those swords, particularly officers' swords. If I could have got a hold of one of those and figured out how to get it home, I probably would have latched onto it. But I didn't take any of the weapons or anything like that.

DG: Can you think of anything else that we haven't covered?

KR: You know, you go through all the training and stuff like that, and up until the time when you're actually alerted to go into combat, you right away try to seek out somebody that has been in combat and ask them, you know, How do you stay alive? All the training, you very seldom meet anybody who's ever been in combat. And one thing I did find out that -- and it's an interesting thing -- that the same people always seem to come out of combat. The new guys always seem to be the ones that get killed. And I think there was something to the thing when MacArthur was against rotating because he said that you'd be rotating all the people that know how to fight without getting killed. But, anyway, you would ask somebody that had been in combat, and you'd say, You know, what shall I do? And the only thing they ever said was, Keep your head down. Which was good advice, but it doesn't help you very much. But you find out later when you're in combat that it makes a lot of sense to keep your head down, but combat is nothing like the movies. Combat is organized chaos, at the best. Most of the time you don't have any idea what the hell is happening, what's going on. You're stuck somewhere, you're being shot at. You don't know with any certainty where they're even shooting from. You know that your guys are getting hit. There's none of this crap in the movie where the heroes are out and somebody's going to shoot the hero, and his buddy turns around and shoots him and he goes like that, you know. Doesn't happen. Because it's a confusing thing and it's amazing that it works as well as it does because I think now when I went to the 82nd Airborne last year, they

were all individually hooked with communications and stuff like that, and I guess that's fine, as long as the communications doesn't go out. But our radios didn't even work half the time. Our radio could be old style. We worked a lot with hand signals but, still, it's chaos. But I did learn several things, which I then told people when they asked me. And I'd say, Well, for one thing, keep your eye on the BAR team. Now, the BAR is a Browning Automatic Rifle, and there are several things interesting about the BAR. First of all, for a weapon it had a very distinctive sound. There was nothing in the Japanese army that sounded like a BAR. And this was important because many times patrols would cross into each other's sectors by mistake, and you'd get into a firefight with your own guys. And so the first thing we tried to get into action was the BAR, and as soon as we heard their BAR, you'd start to yell back and forth, Hey, who are you and all that, you know. So the BAR was a good thing. But the second thing is the BAR team, which was always a two-man team, were probably the most experienced guys in the squad, and they were experts at picking out a good place to lay down a field of fire with a reasonable amount of cover. But they also knew that they were a deadly weapon and that as soon as they started to lay down any fire, this would go for a machine gun, too, that the Japs would immediately try to get somebody in position to knock that weapon out. So the BAR guys, they would fire three or four magazines and then they'd get the hell out of there. They'd change position. And, invariably, you would see some neophyte say, Oh, that's a good spot, and run in there and then get shot in the head by the sniper that they had worked there way into. So I said, Make sure you know where your BAR team is and where your machine guns are, and then don't go jumping in there right after they pull out, because that's going to be the hornet's nest. And another thing, if you're on a jungle trail or any place where a guy gets hit by a sniper, don't just run out to where the guy got hit because the Japanese were very great for picking out one spot that they could aim and shoot at and maintain their cover. And they may sit there all day long watching guys go back and forth, waiting for someone to hit that one spot. But once they hit it they were dead. And if you ran right out to the same spot to give help, then you were going to get hit, too. So the thing is that any time a guy got hit by a sniper, you'd start the search right away to try to find out where is the sniper shooting from, and concentrate on that. Let the medics handle the guy, but you find the sniper first. Outside of that you just say, Try to pay attention to what's going on around you because it's hard to know what's going on many times.

DG: They call it the fog of war, don't they? I think that's a pretty good description.

KR: I'd never heard that term, but --

DG: Oh, you haven't?

KR: Yeah.

DG: I've heard it over and over. It illustrates just how you just don't know what's going on, just a bunch of noise and it's scary as hell --

KR: Yeah. Guys are getting hit around you, and you wait until you usually see somebody's bogged down. That's what starts the whole thing off. You're on a patrol or something and all of a sudden somebody draws fire, and then you've got to try to figure out where they are and what you're going to do then to get them. And, as I say, it's none of this movie stuff because it's not like that.

DG: What made the BAR a distinctive sound? Wasn't that a .30 caliber?

KR: It was a .30 caliber and it was a magazine-fed. It had a 20-round magazine.

DG: But wasn't the M-1 .30 caliber also?

KR: Yes.

DG: Was it the same round?

KR: The same round, but the BAR was a heavier weapon and it was gas-operated to where the bullet going out was similar to the M-1 and it would create the gas that would recoil the weapon. But the weapon was heavier, so when it recoiled it had a thump to it. It had this very distinctive thump, and the action was the thing driving the bullet forward, and it stood out because as soon as they opened up with a BAR you knew it. It just had a very distinctive sound.

The subject changed to what happened when Ken went to college immediately following discharge at Gettysburg College on the GI Bill. I included this part because Ken had decided to stay on in the Army after graduation.

KR: There was the C program because I was already a veteran, they took me in the last two years rather than the first two years, so I was actually commissioned at the end of my sophomore year. Then at between my junior and my senior year, the head of the -- the colonel. I can't remember his name, but he was in charge of the Military Science Department -- he worked out some kind of a deal down to Fort Benning to the Infantry School and was part of the Officers Basic Force, and that was for commissioned officers. It was an advanced course for commissioned officers, and if I recall they were training you to get up to a battalion or regiment size operation. While I was there, at the end of the three months, the various departments, if they wanted to could offer you a bid to stay and be part of their staff, which was the elite of the infantry, and I was fortunate enough to get two bids, one from the Defense section and one from the Attack section, and I turned them both down because I still had one year to go to college and I wanted to -- since I'd gone through this far, to finish up. Exactly, because the Korean War had just started while I think that I was probably there for the summer.

DG: So that's like '50 or '49 or something?

KR: About 1950, yeah. Now, this worked in my favor because when I got back to Gettysburg the senior year, I was kind of fish and fowl. I was still a student, as far as the college was concerned, but the ROTC department considered me part of the staff and actually assigned teaching assignments to me. But mainly it was good because Gettysburg being so close to Washington, and having the famous battlefield there, they were always stuck with visiting dignitaries that would be in Washington for one reason or another, and then they would make a trip for them to Gettysburg. And as a result of this, I became somewhat of an expert on the Battle of Gettysburg because they would assign me to go out and be the escort officer. Well, the guy that would bring them up, his name was Tilburg, you know, I'll never forget that, and he was

with the National Park Service and he was the expert on the Battle of Gettysburg. And so I would meet the bus when it came in, and then I would get on the bus and introduce myself and welcome them to Gettysburg College, and then we would tour the battlefield. So I would hear Tilburg's spiel three, four, five times a year. He knew every bullet that was fired. The guy was really something. And then I would take them all to lunch, and the Military Science department, obviously, would reimburse me. But I would do all that and then send them on their way again, so that was a pretty good deal because that would get me out of the classes.

I was actually going to make the military my career. I had gotten the highest military award in college, the distinguished whatever it was which gave you, an extra privilege. Apparently when Marshall was the Chief of Staff, he was, to my knowledge, the first Chief of Staff that had not gone to West Point. I think he went to Virginia Military Institute. But he had seen -- at least he had perceived through his career that the West Pointers were always promoted over other officers, and so he called it the West Point Protective Agency. And when he became Chief of Staff he made a determination to break that up, and so when you got a commission, a regular Army commission, which mine was, by the way, because of that distinguished award thing I got. -- if I had gone on to active duty I would then be assigned a West Point running mate who had the same date of commission that I had, and the purpose being that they could promote the West Pointer, but they had to put something in your file why they did not promote you, that you had to be considered. And so I -- having this privilege, I was going to make the Army a career. I was going to go back. I like the Army and I enjoyed it and I was going to go back. That changed towards about Christmas of my final year. Several things happened, but one is one of the guys that I was living in the same house with wrote a term paper on the FBI, and I read the paper and I was pretty impressed. And during that Christmas I went down and visited the FBI office to see whether they were recruiting. And they were, and so I started the paperwork, and as soon as I graduated I received my orders to go to the FBI.

DG: Was the FBI training thing at Quantico at that point?

KR: Yes. Yes.

DG: So their relationship with Quantico goes way back, huh?

KR: Yes. Now, at that time the only training that the FBI did at Quantico was the firearms training. All the other training you had up at Washington, and so we were going back and forth all the time, depending on what your training was. And then eventually they built the FBI Academy at Quantico, and then they didn't spend any time in Washington anymore.

DG: Well, let me ask you. Is there anything else? I know your kids want this to have some stuff on the FBI, but we probably ought to have some firewall in between. So is there anything else about the World War II Army part that we failed to cover that you can remember?

KR: Mm-hm. I think that we've covered pretty much everything.

DG: Do you have anything to editorialize or just have it speak for itself?

KR: Have it speak for itself.

DG: Good. I think it speaks well for itself, by the way.

KR: Yeah, I'd just like to say that I couldn't have been in combat with a better bunch of guys than I was with.

DG: Oh, that's nice.

KR: I parachuted with the Regimental Combat Team. They were pros. It was, to my knowledge, the first parachute regiment ever formed, and it gave a tremendous account for itself in World War II. They were tougher than nails and then about as good a bunch of guys that you could ever be around with, and I realize it was the same way when I went back last year for my first reunion with them. They're still a bunch of -- and I was surprised at the number of successes that were there. They've done very, very well for a bunch of tough, rough paratroopers.

DG: Now, you're going to go visit Corregidor later this year, right?

***KR: In February. It'll be at the same time we made the jump, yeah. And I'm going to a reunion back at Biloxi in September, of the group. But then we're planning a trip to the Philippines. We've already been invited to the President's mansion, and it should be a real great trip.

DG: Oh, yeah. Well, I'm glad we had the opportunity to do this and good luck on that. And maybe we can add a little epilogue to this tape when you get back from your thing.

KR: Yeah.

DG: Thanks for doing this.

KR: Oh. Thank you for doing this.

*** Ken Rommel's trip to Biloxi for the reunion of the 503rd was cancelled due to the attacks on 9-11-01. Also the trip back to the Philippians was cancelled.

Author's Note: Several months following this interview Ked suffered a stroke which, among other things, had a dire effect upon his ability to speak, read and write. He is, understandably, quite happy we had the chance to get this all down.