

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH KRAMER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Joseph Kramer in Manchester, New Jersey, on October 27, 2012, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Joseph Rivetti: ... Joseph Rivetti ...

Greg Saul: ... and Greg Saul.

SI: Mr. Kramer, thank you very much for having us here in your home.

Joseph Kramer: Welcome.

SI: Thank you to your family, particularly Frank Darish, for setting this up. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

JK: Where and when? That would be Possumtown, which is part of Piscataway, back in February 19, 1922.

SI: What were your parents' names?

JK: Parents' names were Joseph and Julia.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, do you know anything about where the family came from or how they came to settle in that area?

JK: Well, I never pursued Pop's history, but he came from New York City, the Bronx section. Mom, I know more of. She came from Yugoslavia, came over here, according to the history, about 1912. I don't know when they were married and I believe they did settle in New York City, and then, moved out to Possumtown.

SI: Did your mother ever talk about what her life was like in Yugoslavia before she came here?

JK: Yes, she did. It was all work. Women done most of the farm work and the men just, I don't know, operated if there was such a thing as machinery, but the women worked hard out in the fields. I remember that very vividly. Whatever she told me, I did go back to visit her hometown in Yugoslavia and, boy, isn't that the truth. I've seen everything, yes. It was hard and their chickens and geese and everything was right in the backyard. It was fenced in, yes, but no paved streets. It was rough living. It must've been rougher yet when she was a child and they had a canal going through there. I've seen them fishing. She remembered fishing there, but whatever she said was what I've seen and witnessed, yes.

SI: Was she of German descent living in Yugoslavia or was she Serb or Croat?

JK: Yes, and picked up the German language, because I think she migrated from there, Yugoslavia, to Munich and that's where they would've picked up the language, yes.

SI: Did she come over to this country by herself or did she come with family?

JK: No, she came over by herself. Her brother had been here before her and took her in. That's about as much as I know.

SI: Okay. Was your uncle in New York then?

JK: Yes, in New York, yes. He was a mason by trade. Yes, I recall that.

SI: When your father was living in New York, was he working? Do you know what he was doing there?

JK: No, no. The only thing I know is, naturally, when I was a child and I witnessed it and seen it, yes, he was a welder by trade. At that time, they used acetylene welding and it was a lot of gas and the fumes got in his throat and he had throat cancer. He had an operation on that and, in the meantime, he couldn't weld anymore. So, he worked for Mack Trucks in New Brunswick as--what would you call it?--all the steel, incoming steel, coming into the factory, he had to separate it all and distribute it to the different departments when they needed it.

SI: Okay, like inventory control?

JK: Right, right, you got that, yes.

SI: Did he get sick after World War II or was this early on in his life?

JK: Before World War II, before, yes.

SI: They moved out to Possumtown. Had they had your older brothers or sisters yet or did they start their family after they moved?

JK: Started it there. They had one sister in New York City and the rest were here in Possumtown, which is two more sisters and another brother.

SI: Can you tell us what their names were and when they were born for the record?

JK: No. No, my oldest sister was Agnes, the one that was born in New York City, then came Ruth, which was born in Possumtown there. Then, I came into the picture, then, my sister Julia--she's passed away also--and my younger brother. I know more about him. He's born in 1929--that was the year of Depression. [laughter] Pop, when they got in an argument, Pop said, "You were born at the wrong time. You're born at [the] Depression," and made a joke out of that, yes. I remember that. My brother and I are the only two living right now and he lives in Forked River. So, we see each other quite often.

SI: Your earliest memories are of growing up in Possumtown. Tell us a little bit about what your neighborhood was like, where you grew up.

JK: Well, number one, we were the last house on the road, leading out to nowhere. [laughter] It wasn't paved, wasn't even stoned. You produced your own stone and we'd put logs out there or anything, so [that] the cars wouldn't get stuck.

SI: Which street was that that you grew up on?

JK: That was Second Street. This is in Possumtown we're talking about. What did we do?

SI: Yes, what was that street like? Did you have any neighbors?

JK: Oh, no, not many neighbors. Going down that street, maybe about three, but, evidently, it was a settlement there, at that section of Possumtown, they were all German and just bordering that German boundary line were Italians. Growing up there, we got along well. We made a little sandlot baseball team and make a baseball field out of nothing, put up our own so-called backstop and all that stuff, make it look like Big League. That was our fun, and then, we had a brook running through there, called Ambrose Brook, done our fishing there. I didn't do too much of that. I always had something to do home.

SI: Like chores?

JK: Chores, yes, or something, the garden. When it was garden time, it was you dug the garden. [laughter] Nobody'd come plow it for you. For winter, we bordered a forest. There were a lot of oak trees and we were given the okay to cut down any dead tree that was there and use it. So, that's what we do. We cut down trees, cut them in six-foot lengths, lug them in on your shoulder, bring them in. A few years later, Pop got wise. He made himself a cart out of Model T wheels and they would carry more logs. Now, we load that up and one guy steered it while he was pulling it and the other guy pushing--that was the horsepower--and then, we'd bring them in. Then, you had to cut them in one-foot lengths, and then, after that, you split them up for kindling. After that, you brought them down the cellar. So, there was always something to do, always something to do.

Another thing that was history, it was my chore. One day, splitting the logs and not thinking--it was around by the clothesline where Mom hung the clothes--I was swinging the axe. The axe got caught in this clothesline coming down, on the down stroke, and it snapped back, hit me right in the head. I fell to the ground and I wonder, "Why? What am I doing on the ground?" [laughter] I found the axe came back and hit me, but it was the flat part of the axe, naturally. It wasn't--if it was the blade, I wouldn't be here [laughter]--but I'll never forget that, either.

SI: How old were you when that happened?

JK: Oh, jeez, I don't know, old enough to know better. [laughter]

SI: It sounds like you had a lot of work and important responsibilities to do at a very young age.

JK: Oh, yes, oh, yes, clean the windows outside, and you didn't clean them with paper towels. You used newspaper, naturally, and vinegar and water. The ceiling in the--well, you lived in the

kitchen then. The kitchen had the stove. That stove supplied the heat for the whole house, which was nothing. You used to have to wash the ceiling down. I remember doing that, washing the ceiling down, not with a pole, a stick, up there. Crazy, you've done a lot of crazy things and worked, worked like a jackass. [laughter] You're always working and scrubbing the floors, naturally, and any maintenance outside. Oh, we had chickens, geese, and, even when I was an infant--I don't remember what all of that--but they had a cow. We had a cow. I had nothing to do with that, but that was it.

SI: Would you say most of the food that your family ate, they raised themselves?

JK: Yes, yes, and a little distance from us was a blackberry patch. You were detailed to get out there and do your picking and it was very thick, thick going. I always remember Pop's phrase, he said, "Whenever you smell an odor of a cucumber, there's a snake in there," and he said, "Back off when you pick up that odor." So, I always remember that, yes. [laughter]

SI: Your father was working at Mack Truck then.

JK: Mack Trucks, at that time, yes.

SI: How often would he work? What were his hours like at that time?

JK: Well, of course, me, at that age, younger age, I didn't care, but, as I got older, yes, he put in his five days a week, yes, sure.

SI: Was his employment ever affected by the Great Depression?

JK: Not by much, I don't think, not by much. I never seen him, like, hanging around the house. So, he must've been somewhere, must've been working. That's about all I remember, yes.

SI: You said that the neighborhood was German or had German ancestry.

JK: Yes, yes.

SI: In your household or in your neighborhood, were there German traditions kept up?

JK: Oh, yes. Mom had what they call "coffee clutches." I guess they got together and had coffee and BS-ed. I don't think they played cards, I don't recall that, but they had that pretty faithful, [at] one person's house, and then, the next one. I don't know whether it was weekly; I don't remember that. Yes, they held that. Then, in the summertime, we had--today, you'd call it barbecues--but, then, they had, I don't know what you would call it, a cookout maybe, call it a cookout. These relatives that were still living in New York, they came out to us in Possumtown. That was a great thing--it was country to them. One of the guys was a cook for the Hungarian Army, World War I, and he'd whip up the goulash, a big pot of goulash and corn. Next-door to our property was a property with the field corn and we were allowed to go in there and pick the corn. So, we'd go there, get the field corn, stick that in the fire, too, and cook that. You didn't know field corn from regular eating corn. You're just lucky you had it.

Should I tell him the rest? [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Kramer's family responds, indicating that they used every part of the corn.] Well, then, before this cookout broke up, the men got together. These guys won't believe this; you won't believe it. [laughter] They used to have a farting contest and to see who would be the loudest and the most and they'd promote it. The cars that they came out with, they used to pick up the cars, to put more pressure on them and they would fart away. I wasn't included in that. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Kramer's family responds, kidding that they do not believe him.] No, no, I wasn't included. It was just the men, the men. I wasn't no man then. This one guy, he's always the winner, year after year after year. Nobody dethroned him. He was tall and skinny; you would never think it that he would produce that much. You laugh, but that's the God's honest truth--okay, go ahead.

SI: Okay. In your house, was only English spoken or were there any other languages spoken?

JK: That's my fault, yes, only English, except when they came out, the gang came out from New York, or the coffee clutch women, they would speak, yes.

SI: Your parents?

JK: In the house, no, they just didn't do it. I don't know.

SI: Did religion play a big part in your life growing up?

JK: Well, we were Protestants then. Mom was pretty strict and, of course, Pop followed along. Yes, we went to Sunday school, yes. In fact, there was a bus that came out, I forget what the bus line [was], I forget what it was, used to come pick us up for Sunday school. That's about all there. Oh, yes, one time, Mom and Pop went to church, I think it was evening--I don't know why it was evening. You normally go to church on Sunday, but it was an evening thing and I wasn't involved in it. He went there and they had, like, a little parking garage, shanty, you put your car in. When they came out at night to go home, it was dark out, no such thing as lights.

Pop gets in the car, he wants to back up and the car wouldn't go, wouldn't back up. So, he said, "What the hell's the matter?" So, he gets out of the car and he finds out that some robbers came in, jacked up the car and stole the rear wheels, wheels and tires and everything. That's another thing I'll never forget. [laughter] That was crazy. I think, back in those days, you always--you saved a lot, because you didn't have no money to go buy anything. So, I guess Pop had some spare wheels around. So, he got home and come back with another set of wheels. Of course, you always had a spare. I don't know whether he had two then or one. Back in those days, you needed four of them, four spares, because the damn tires, they wouldn't last for nothing, made out of cardboard.

SI: Do you guys have any questions?

GS: How did your parents feel about FDR's New Deal legislation in the 1930s?

JK: Yes, well, you're talking about FDR, then, you're talking about, well, let's see, yes, I was home in some of that, yes. They were strict Republicans, but Roosevelt satisfied them, satisfied us. That's about all I can tell you about that.

SI: Did you see any of the New Deal programs in action in your area? Were they building roads or buildings?

JK: I was born and went through the Depression, going through Depression almost all my life. So, I wouldn't know the difference. Mom and Pop always supplied us with food and clothing, not too many goodies, if any. Luckily, I had a cousin from New York, yes, and my size, perfect size of me. He was well-off and I was getting all his clothes, hand-downs, shirts, suits, jackets, anything, just send them out and I'll put them on and I'll wear it. I was--you believe this or not--sometimes, I was the best-dressed in high school, because of his clothes. Now, what would I have without his clothes? I don't know.

SI: Would you say most of the families on your street and in your neighborhood were in the same situation economically?

JK: I would say so. What trades they were in, I don't know, but none of them rode around with some bigger or better car or a bigger or better house--all about the same.

SI: Did you have to go out and work at a young age, outside of the chores we talked about?

JK: Oh, yes, aside from that? Well, I was--I am and still today--interested in money. [laughter] So, I did a newspaper route or a magazine route. I was for that and for junk picking--copper, brass, steel, all that kind of stuff, any way to make a dollar. I had no trade, no nothing. That's about it. When I got out of high school, naturally, [I was] looking for work, but I was pretty sure of getting into Mack Truck because of my father, but not at that time. So, I took a job. I worked for Rutgers.

SI: Really?

JK: In the Agricultural Division, and I went with this one guy. I have no idea what his name was. I went with him, from Brunswick, down here. Somewhere in South Jersey, they had some experimental corn. They were growing corn and he brought me down and there were certain fields had different species of corn. I would have to pick them and bag them, mark them and everything and bring them back. After a couple of weeks working there, they gave me the car and told me what to do. That was weird. I only worked a couple of weeks and they gave me the Rutgers car to come down here to do some work. I couldn't believe it, but I left them--maybe I should've stayed with them, I don't know--and I went to work for Mack.

SI: How old were you then, about seventeen?

JK: Twenty, yes.

SI: Okay. Before we talk about going to Mack, can you tell us about your early education, where you went to school in Piscataway?

JK: I first went to--getting out of the grammar schools--we were detailed, where we were at in Possumtown, to go to Metuchen, Metuchen High School. "Goddamn," I says, "you get up, it was dark out. You come home, it was dark out." I said, "What the hell kind of life is this? There's got to be something better than this." So, I complained, and then, Mom picked it up. I don't know how she inquired about it, but I got a transfer to Bound Brook High School. On this Metuchen route, a car, a station wagon, that would come and pick me up at the house. I forget, they would drop me off some other place, I would pick up a bus, and then, the bus to school and, naturally, the reverse bringing me home. Well, that took up a long time, man.

SI: Sure.

JK: So, I went to Bound Brook, but that, it was a little bit better, but I had to do a hell of a lot more walking. [laughter] I had to walk from where I'm at in Possumtown out to Lincoln Boulevard--I don't know if you heard about that--and vice versa coming back.

SI: Were your grammar schools in Possumtown or Piscataway?

JK: Not in Possumtown, in--I don't know, Randolphville, is it? You know of such a town?

SI: Yes, Randolphville and New Market, I think it said on your survey. [Editor's Note: Randolphville and New Market are unincorporated communities within Piscataway.]

JK: Yes, I went to Randolphville up until, I think, the fourth or fifth grade, something like that, and then, over to New Market. When I was in Randolphville, I was the athlete there. I was fast and I thought I was going somewhere. [laughter] So, they had track meets with New Market, maybe Holmes Marshall and Arbor, and that's where the big guys come in. I didn't rate nothing. I went down. [laughter] I couldn't compete with them.

SI: What were these schools like, the grammar schools?

JK: Well, the Randolphville one was--you've read about them in the history books--one big room with a divider with the blackboards. I don't know, somehow, they were on a track, I guess, and they separated the rooms there. Your outhouses were outside. I don't know how many years ago, with my brother, we rode out there and that Randolphville School is now an apartment complex, I guess two-family complex, but it's still there. It was built like the Rock of Gibraltar, square. Everything's square back in those days, yes.

SI: Did you have one teacher teaching multiple grades?

JK: That's right, there you go, yes, yes, two teachers, one in that room, one in this room, and they carried a stick, man. [laughter] They carried a stick. You got hit with that stick--they weren't just carrying it, yes.

Frank Darish: Can I interject here?

SI: Sure.

FD: You said you had outhouses in school; what about your boyhood home? Did you have an outhouse there or indoor?

JK: Home, yes, sure.

FD: Yes, sure what?

JK: In the early stages. When did we go inside? I can't really tell you.

FD: Well, we don't need to know exactly.

SI: To go from an outhouse to then having indoor plumbing in your youth.

JK: Inside, yes, that's right. That's when the plumbing was started in the house. That's when we got heaters and a furnace down the cellar. Yes, that's when that happened.

SI: At any point, did you not have electricity?

JK: No, we always had that, always had that, a bulb here and there. [laughter]

SI: Was the school at New Market different or was it also like the one in Randolphville?

JK: Oh, yes, that's like going from Possumtown to New York City. [laughter] Sure, that was big, a lot of people there, a lot of kids.

SI: Did you have a favorite subject in school?

JK: Yes, you believe it or not, at one time, I could draw the whole United States--not by copying, I could draw--and put the capital down on each state. I thought that was pretty good. I couldn't do it today, but, I mean, I thought that was good. No, that was my best, and then, going to high school, I don't know why this happened either, why I went into this commercial course, where you typewrite and all this nonsense. That wasn't made for me, but I went through that, too.

So, I wasn't much of a reader and they used to have book reports in high school. Then, the teacher would say, "Well, Joe, get up, make a report," on a book I read. I'll get up there--I don't know what the minimum was, two minutes you're supposed to speak--I think I was finished in twelve seconds, I was done. [laughter] So, the teacher says, "Joe, I want to see you after school." I go after school, he said, "This book that you made a report on," he said, "what does the book look like?" said, "Was it this thick? Was it this big?" I said, "Yes, the average book." He said, "You're lying, Joe." So, I copied it from the *Newark Star-Ledger*. There was a summary of a book and this was a two-book volume. This teacher said, "Joe, I know damn well you didn't read

two books. You're lucky you read one." So, he said, "Just don't let it happen again. That's all." [laughter] That's crazy.

SI: In this commercial course, were you taking woodshop or metal working?

JK: No, no. That's what I missed. That's what I should've been taking. That was more my line of work.

SI: It was just typing and business courses.

JK: Yes, that's right, shorthand, all this nonsense, Christ sakes, crazy.

JR: Did you play any sports in high school? You mentioned playing baseball and track as a kid.

JK: Did I do anything in high school?

JR: Yes.

JK: I was thinking, did I go out for football? once, maybe--too much. It took up too much time. I got home just about when it got dark and I've got to do this? I said, "Oh, no." So, no, I didn't do it. I didn't do any sports, no; used to go watch their basketball team. They were state champs there for two years, Bound Brook, yes, and, naturally, the Thanksgiving game. Their rival was Somerville, but, now, that's all mixed up now. I think Somerville is part of Bound Brook, vice versa, I don't know, yes.

SI: Did you travel around to the towns around Possumtown very much or did you mostly stay in your local area?

JK: Did I? In other words, to travel around, you had to have a car, right? I had to be seventeen, naturally, first and Pop bought me a Model A, 1928. That was the first year they made a Model A. He bought a can of black paint and red paint and he said, "You've got to paint this car, to make it look better before you drive it," and you done it by hand. You sandpapered it and you done it by hand. You took the wheels off the car. Of course, they were spokes, wire spokes, back in those days. I painted, sanded them and painted them red. It was a good-looking car, but that's my first car, yes. Did I get around? I don't know, went to Bound Brook maybe, was a big deal.

SI: What did you do for fun, particularly after you got your car?

JK: What did I do?

SI: Yes, for entertainment or recreation.

JK: Nothing. [laughter] Oh, well, yes, Friday nights, two of my mates from the high school, three of them, one played the music box, the accordion, and the other guy played the sax and this other guy, he passed the hat around. We went to the bars in New Brunswick. On Friday nights,

these guys would play a couple of songs and he'd go around passing the hat. I supplied the wheels, because I think I was the oldest in the bunch. I supplied the transportation and, after it was all over, one guy was detailed to buy a bag full of stale buns. Then, we'd go into the restaurant and order a cup of coffee and we'd break out this bag of buns and eat them. You'd finish them off. So, that was our fun. That's it.

SI: Would you go into New Brunswick often?

JK: No, just for those.

SI: Just for that.

JK: Not even to the main street, just some of the side streets there. Yes, we got one guy left out of that crew and I heard he's going away pretty soon. Yes, they're all gone.

SI: In the 1930s, when you were in your teens, did you know what was happening in the world? Were you aware of events overseas, things that were going on in Europe or Asia? Did you follow them in the newspapers or on radio?

JK: Yes, sort of followed that in the newspapers, especially when the Germans invaded Poland. That was in 1939. What was that, September the 2nd, September the 1st?

SI: Yes, September the 1st.

JK: Yes, something like that. I sort of remember that and I said, "Hey, there's something cooking now." Then, naturally, they had the conscription of our men to go into the service. It wasn't a war yet, and then, they came around. Then, I got the notice to go down to the Army, sign up. Pop said, "No, you don't want the Army." He said, "Go to the Navy." So, I went and signed up with them. That's about it. [Editor's Note: The Selective Service Act of 1940 required all twenty-one to thirty-five-year-old males to register for the draft. These age parameters were expanded to eighteen to forty-five years of age after the United States entered the war.]

SI: Before you went into the service, in that period before Pearl Harbor, could you see changes in the local area? Had they built Camp Kilmer yet? Had that opened yet?

JK: Well, yes, I sort of remember that, yes, all those buildings, those barracks there, yes. At that time, after I left the Rutgers job, that's when I went to work in Mack's, yes.

SI: How long did you work for Mack Trucks before you went in the service?

JK: About two years, that's about all, about two years, yes. Then, you could see, in the shop, they were going, converting over to military work. You knew that. In New Brunswick, they were doing the gears, transmissions and rear-ends for the tanks and big trucks and whatever, yes.

SI: For those two years, what did you do at Mack?

JK: When I first went in, got all the dirty work, naturally, filing with a hand file--no such thing today, it's crazy. Then, I went over to the automatic screw machines, where you put in the bar stock that I was talking about, my father was in charge. You put that bar stock in and you would make a bolt with threads on it, or flanges or whatever it called for. That was my job there, yes, very interesting work.

SI: How was it interesting to you?

JK: Well, it's automatic machinery and you had to know what you were doing. You had to really watch and there ain't too many people wanted to teach you out there, either. You're on your own, pick [it] up on your own. That's about it.

SI: Could it be dangerous, working with the machines?

JK: It was dangerous in respect that some of those pieces you put into that machine were about six to eight inches in diameter and they were long, oh, maybe ten, twelve feet long. You had the block-and-tackle to put it into the machine. You can't pick the damn thing up, it's heavy. If this block-and-tackle happen to slip, on steel, it'd come down on you. That's it, break your leg--you're finished. You had to be careful, had to be careful, and nobody told you much about that, either. You just learned on your own, man. You learned, yes.

SI: Was it good working conditions? How would you describe it?

JK: Well, they had--what made it interesting, again, was money--they had a bonus system. You produce so many pieces--if you produced more than that per hour, you got a piece of the pie. That's what made it interesting, yes. In fact, Ginny, my wife, she worked in that department over in Mack in Plainfield. Plainfield also had a Mack and she worked in that department.

SI: Did they have a union?

JK: Yes, you're right there and, of course, Pop wasn't union. He was a company man and you've got to do what your old man does. So, I followed suit, but the union won out. They won out. They [Mack Truck] would bring in the scabs from outside and cause trouble out there, out in the street, until the majority signed up for union. Then, after that, it settled down, settled down.

SI: Did the union come in before World War II or before you left for the service?

JK: Oh, yes, before, yes. I'm not sure what year. I couldn't tell you what year, maybe '41, maybe '42.

SI: When they would have the scabs and the guys out in the street, was there ever any violence?

JK: No breaking heads, no, no. There was none of that, but a little violence. They just wanted to show their power. "Let's do it our way or else you're going to get more." That's about it.

SI: Do you remember ever being personally harassed because you were not union?

JK: No, no. I stayed away from that. [laughter]

SI: Could you see a difference in how the plant operated between when you first got there, and then, after the union came in? In your personal situation, did it get better or stay the same or was there any change at all?

JK: No, about the same. I wouldn't see any difference. They're still doing it the old-fashion way, man, like I say, filing with a file, and you talk about each part, if it was large enough, had a stamp number, had a part number. Each number had to be hammered with a hammer. You do that today?

SI: No.

JK: You don't do that today, you're crazy, [laughter] but that's what had to be done back in those days, yes. So, I imagine they made corrections in that. As you know, eventually, Mack's closed up and they went to Hagerstown, right, yes.

SI: In Maryland?

JK: Yes, yes. They operated it crazy. They had [the] Plainfield end, which was building motors and engines, they had New Brunswick for the rear-ends, transmissions, and they had Allentown, Pennsylvania, for assemble--get those two together, bring it down to Allentown, put it together. That's stupid. So, I guess they all got together and, now, it's one in Hagerstown, old-fashion ways, yes.

SI: You were there when Pearl Harbor was attacked. You were working.

JK: Yes, right.

SI: What do you remember about that day?

JK: What I remember, well, at that time, I worked second shift. When I come into work, all the guys coming [up said], "What's the news? What's the news? What's the news in Pearl Harbor?" things like that, until everything settled down. Then, it was routine after that, yes.

SI: How did you hear about it? Was it on the radio or some other way?

JK: Exactly how I picked it up, I don't know. I guess I was home, probably came in on the radio, yes.

SI: What were your feelings at that time after you learned about the attack?

JK: Well, I sort of knew they were going to call me. Just waiting, that's all, waiting. I got deferred, I think maybe once or twice, because I worked for Mack, but, then, time went on and it

was my age. "That's it. You've got to go now, buddy. There's nobody going to save you now." So, then, that's when I went in.

SI: Before you left, could you see a lot of workers at Mack being called in or going to work at other plants?

JK: Not too many from Mack. They were all older than I. Maybe they went in after I left, some of them, but, no, they were old-timers, a lot of old-timers there.

SI: Do you remember if they brought in new groups of workers, like women?

JK: No.

SI: Were there many women working there, or any women at all, when you were working there before the war?

JK: No, no. They had their building, the office, yes, and a lot of women there, but that was across the street.

SI: No women working in the actual factory.

JK: Oh, no, no, no way.

GS: You and your father worked at Mack. Was your mother working at the time?

JK: My mother? No, no, she never worked. She had enough to do running the house. Did she have any special things? Well, she was good at canning, get the fruits and vegetables in that. In fact, a few times, we used to even make soda, soda in the bottles. I was in charge of putting the caps on with the machine. [laughter] Well, Mom was a professional--this is before I was born--a cook and chef. She worked for the Delano Family, in New York somewhere, right, I guess?

SI: In Hyde Park?

JK: There you go, yes. She worked for them and I think she worked for Edison, Tom, here. I think that was short-lived, because I remember she's talking about his lab. She talked about that, but she was good in cooking, yes. She could've pursued that, I guess, but I guess when you make a family, you can't do that. I don't know, but today's world, I guess you can. You forget the kids and go to work, right, [laughter] different world, different world.

GS: Your father wanted you to enlist in the Navy. Do you know why that was?

JK: Why? Yes, his close buddy was a career Navy man and, naturally, you sided with him. Whatever he does, you said, "I've got to do the same." Then, I signed up for the Navy. You go through boot camp, everybody's the same. You're taught whatever you're supposed to be taught. Then, you go home on leave for a week. Then, I reported back to California. I said, "Man, this is inland." I said, "What the hell are they going to teach me now?" It was all about hand-to-hand

fighting, like a Marine, taking guns apart, machine-guns apart, going through gas chambers and all this. So, I wrote to Pop, I said, "What the hell you call this?" I said, "This ain't Navy. This is hand-to-hand fighting." I said, "What the hell did I get into?" I really didn't know. Then, they shipped me out. I went to, shipped me out to, American Samoa. That was just a transfer base, no teaching, no nothing. You just hung out there.

SI: I have one question before we get further into the service. You were on the home front for about a year before you went into the service after Pearl Harbor. You enlisted on December 12, 1942, almost a year after Pearl Harbor. Did you see any changes on the home front? Were there any shortages, any Civil Defense activity?

JK: Well, I guess they had that--I remember the gas coupon. I guess I remember that.

SI: The ration coupon?

JK: Yes, yes. They had different colored ones or something. I don't know what that was all about. Like I say, I never ran around anyway, so, it didn't bother me any.

SI: Tell us about the process of enlisting, where you went, what the physical was like.

JK: Well, I went to--personally, I really don't know where I signed up for the Navy. I don't really know that, but we were to congregate at the Dunellen Railroad Station to [be] brought to--was it Wall Street in New York? I think that was the recruiting office there.

SI: Was it Whitehall?

JK: No.

SI: Maybe it was Wall Street.

JK: Something like that. At that station, I'd seen some of my buddies that I went through school with, naturally, all got together. We went out to, shipped us out to, Great Lakes, where the training station is and, from the time there, those buddies I just told you about, I met at the railroad station, they were in my same company, I never seen them again. We were in one barracks, two-floor barracks. I never seen them again. I mean, in the service, I never seen them again, but, after the service, I ran across both of them, actually, but that's weird. You're in the same barracks and you don't see them. You're just busy. You're kept so busy, you didn't have time to go pal around.

SI: What was the trip out to Great Lakes like?

JK: Well, it had to be an overnigher, in the coach, naturally. You didn't get no Pullman [a comfortable sleeper car]. Your food was the rations, the K rations. They had that. They didn't serve you nothing. So, we got to the Great Lakes [facility]. That was on New Year's Eve. So, we say, "We're going to celebrate." They said, "Where do we want to celebrate?" said, "We want something to eat." So, they gave us some rolls, leftover--this is at midnight, going on

midnight--with baloney. In those days, they called it "horse cock," and black coffee, no milk, no sugar, no nothing, said, "Well, there's your celebration." They put you in a big drill hall, huge, huge. It's got to be the size of a football field at least and there were all cots all lined up. The guy brings you in, he says, "There's your cot," but you stayed there. I don't care if you had to go to the pot or what, because if you got out of there, off your cot, you'd never find it again. It's impossible. There's people all around. You just stayed there, that's it, until the next day. Then, they transferred you to the barracks. [laughter]

SI: Was it a shock to go from your civilian life to the regimentation of the military?

JK: Oh, yes. Well, I could take hardship. I mean, hardship was all right with me, but the needles that they gave you, oh, damn. They give you so damn many needles, your arm would swell up. [laughter] They didn't care. They'd just shoot that mother in there, let her go, "Just keep going, keep going," yes. It was in the dead of winter for the training there and Great Lakes is cold. So, I didn't mind that. Jersey was pretty cold, too. I could stand it, but the CO [commanding officer] there, he was brought up and raised in Texas. We're supposed to go outside and do drilling and all that stuff. He said, "No, man, this is bullshit." He said, "I ain't going. I'm not going outside." So, he said, "Come on inside. Get your book," *Blue Jacket's Manual*, "read the book." [laughter] We didn't go outside. Well, that picture's on the wall. Yes, he's there. [Editor's Note: Mr. Kramer notes a photograph of his boot company on the wall.]

One of those Dunellen-ites, naturally, I run into him after the war. He became--what would you call him?--(editor at KO Hammer?). You remember (KO Hammer?)? Well, we met him, and then, this other guy. In the meantime, all these years went by, I'm down here and this other guy died, right around here. He was laid out right around here and I went to pay my respects. I met his sister and she said, "Joe, you want to see some of his Navy material?" I said, "Sure, we'll look at it." I looked at it and he had that picture. I said to myself, "What is he doing with my picture?" So, he was in the same company as me, but I'd never seen him. Here he is, he's in this picture. I go home and look at my picture and find him. I didn't ever know he was there. It's crazy, crazy world.

SI: From the picture, it looks to be about a hundred or so men, quite a lot.

JK: I really don't know, yes, but maybe you can understand why I never seen him again, yes.

SI: Does anything stand out about the drill instructors and how they treated you?

JK: Well, naturally, at boot camp, this guy was chicken. He didn't want the cold weather. So, we had it easy. I assumed, going through the Navy, I assumed that they were supposed to teach you how to swim. I don't know how to swim and that's part of my story there, too, when we get to that. So, what do you want to know next?

SI: Maybe just a few more things that they taught you at Great Lakes, parts of the training that stand out in your memory.

JK: No, nothing.

SI: Did they have firefighting classes, anything like that?

JK: Nothing that sticks out with me. Naturally, we were taught something, but it didn't interest me. [laughter]

SI: Were you ever allowed off the base?

JK: Well, after your twelve weeks, I think it was, or eight--no, I don't think it was twelve weeks. You were allowed to go home, yes, and, naturally, from there, we went to California.

SI: It may have been twelve weeks, because, according to this sheet [a summary of Mr. Kramer's naval career], you got to the Great Lakes at the very end of 1942, and then, you went to Moffett Field in mid-April.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: What was crossing the country like in that time, going from New Jersey to California?

JK: Again, I couldn't tell you. It was nothing to eat again. It was the boxes, the K rations. It was brutal, nothing to do, nothing to read, nothing.

SI: Was it all troop trains that you were on or were you with civilians?

JK: No, no, as far as I know, no. I never left the car, so, I don't know what I was hooked up to. So, I guess it was all troops. That's what I would assume. Another thing I remember, we got to Salt Lake City, a train depot, pretty big. I look out the window, I see a civilian train across. The porters were cleaning out the Pullman cars and they were throwing mattresses out there. So, I says, "One of those mattresses are mine." So, I went out and got that mattress and pulled it into that train. So, I slept, horizontally, all the way until Moffett Field and all the other guys were suffering on these hard chairs, cushions, but I had my mattress, man. [laughter] They took it back, I guess.

SI: You said it was more like Marine training at Moffett Field. Was there a lot of going out on maneuvers or bivouacs?

JK: No. Yes, well, they took us to some more gunnery school, to take apart machine-guns and different things. It was a part there, you were so familiar with what you were doing, they would blindfold you and see if you could do it blindfolded, but I said, "I can't understand this, being in the Navy, to be doing this." I think we had some shooting, too, with the targets going by.

SI: They would be towed on a sleeve.

JK: Yes. That's about it there. On Moffett Field, I had a pretty good time. That's when I went out. I had found a good friend and I don't know the details, but we got a hold of a car, bought a car or something, I don't know, ten dollars or something, I don't know what. We used that to go

to San Jose, which is I don't know how many miles down the road. We had some girls there. I think I was called out first or we were both called out together--I don't quite recall. We just leave the car there. Who the hell cares? I didn't pay that much for it, didn't do no maintenance on it. That's it. Somebody got a car, I guess. [laughter] Yes, that's it there.

SI: You must have met people from all over the United States when you were going through training, or did you stick with people mostly from the Northeast?

JK: I don't know. Yes, you just sort of found somebody who was close to you, that's all. I don't care where he was from. This buddy of mine here then was from Chicago, yes.

SI: Did anything strike you when meeting these different people? Do any differences stand out?

JK: No, I don't think we got into that.

SI: At Moffett Field, did they tell you what you were being trained for or what to expect in the future?

JK: No, no, I didn't know nothing. You just follow orders, that's all, follow orders. No, I had no idea.

SI: It just sounds like gunnery training that you did there.

JK: Yes, nothing to do with boats, nothing to do with boats and water.

SI: You did not receive any engineering training at any point.

JK: No, nothing special, no, but we ate good there, man. Oh, yes, we made it up there, yes. [laughter]

SI: Was that a Navy base?

JK: Yes, it was a Navy base. It was aside from a field like Lakehurst, Moffett Field. There was blimps. I guess they took care of the West Coast like Lakehurst took care of the East Coast with the blimps [lighter-than-air antisubmarine operations]. I remember blimps flying around, but I had nothing to do with that, no.

JR: Besides the mattress incident, what were the sleeping conditions like in Moffett Field?

JK: Well, it was all right, I mean, nothing bad about it, no. It was comfortable. It was all right. I don't know whether we slept in doubles. I don't recall, maybe, but it was all right. I'm only a complainer, so, if everything's all right, I don't say anything. [laughter]

SI: Where did you leave the US from?

JK: Where? 'Frisco. Was it Pier 90 or Pier 92 or something? I sort of remember that. It was on a Merchant Marine ship.

SI: Do you remember the name of the ship?

JK: SS *Ewing Young*, the SS *Ewing Young* [Hull Number 631]. That was a merchant ship, which was the same size as the one you guys seen, the *Jupiter*, same size, same thing.

SI: You were going over as a replacement.

JK: Well, I was going to another transfer base out in Samoa, out to Samoa.

SI: How long did the voyage take?

JK: Seemed like forever, man, [laughter] and we went all by ourselves. We left 'Frisco all by ourselves, crossed that ocean. I knew--anyone knew--there were Jap subs out there somewhere and I said, "Oh, my God, I'm a sitting duck. One ship out there, they have to hit it somewhere," but we went all the way through out to Samoa. On the ship, there was a tied down--naturally, it was tied down--[Lockheed] P-38 [Lightning] fighter plane, was something new here. I looked at that thing. It was a twin-fuselage, right. I said, "Oh, my God, where'd they get this thing here?" I said, "This plane here is going to win the war all by itself," [laughter] but that's the first time I'd seen that P-38, yes.

Then, on the ship, there was one *National Geographic Magazine* that floated around. I happened to look at it and I said, "Well, we're going to Samoa." No, I don't think we knew where we were going--well, maybe we did. There's a part about Samoa. It was known for raising bananas, good for bananas. So, I said, "Oh, at least we've got something to eat there." [laughter] I get out there in Samoa, the goddamn banana's about as big as my finger. [laughter] I said, "Where the hell are all those bananas?" I didn't see any. Then, there, at first, I noticed the natives, the Samoans, they would go out in the water with their, I forget what they called them, muumuus? just a sheet, I guess. They'd go out in the water and they'd bathe themselves naturally. They'd wash their clothes out there in the water, wrap themselves up in it. By the time they got to their hut, clothes were dry. They didn't know drying machines, [laughter] it's so hot out there. It was pretty close to the Equator, I think, yes. That's where I ran into the cases of dengue fever, and then, I think they also call it elephantiasis, where the parts of your body ...

SI: Would swell up.

JK: Would swell up. I said, "Well, why do they call it elephantiasis?" You could see this person's leg swell--it looked just like the trunk of an elephant. It's ugly. I said, "Where does this come from?" said, "It comes from mosquitos." "Mosquitos?" There's a lot of mosquitos there. So, they issued those nets and, from that day on, I slept with a net, because if you got a sign of dengue fever, they shipped you back, but I don't know if you would progress or, eventually, I guess it would, in your system, you would eventually die from it. I don't know, but I always slept with a net. I don't want to carry that around. You'd see the arms on them, oh.

SI: Did they give you any extra shots before you went overseas?

JK: Extra chow?

SI: Shots, medicine, going into the tropical area.

JK: No, not that I know of.

SI: How long were you stationed on Samoa?

JK: Not too long, not too long, maybe a couple of weeks. That's about all, yes. I guess, then, they form another shipment of guys and get them out of there.

SI: You were just waiting around for the others to get there.

JK: That's right, yes, assigned somewhere in the Pacific. I'm sure there's a lot of places to put you and that's where I got involved. They shipped me out to this island. I spent eight or nine months there. There's a lot of history there, brother, good and bad, good and bad. [laughter]

SI: How were you shipped out?

JK: Oh, from Samoa to there? I went there by--naturally, it was ocean-going--a tug. When you got to the island, you couldn't anchor. I've got a lot of history on that, too. It was so deep, all the anchors, they couldn't reach the bottom. So, they had found that out before I got there. The Seabees [US Navy construction battalions] were in on the island and they dynamited the coral. They had coral, surround the whole island. That's like concrete itself, sharp as a razor. You couldn't walk on it in your bare feet. They dynamited a fifty-foot channel through this coral into the inlet, and then, you could get inland. They had the LCMs there to bring us ashore. You know what the LCM is, right? [Editor's Note: Landing craft, mechanized, or LCMs, were used to carry troops, weapons and supplies directly into invasion beaches in World War II.]

SI: It is a bigger one.

JK: It's a bigger one, made out of all metal, all metal, and it had two motors, two screws.

FD: Pop, that island was Nanumea?

JK: Yes.

SI: Yes, that was my next question. Is it in the Ellice group?

JK: Correct, yes. That was the nearest held American island to the Japanese, because a couple of hundred miles was Tarawa. Every full moon, before and after a couple of days, it lit up. The moon lights up that coral just like a fluorescent light and they would, Japs, come over and bomb, maybe only two planes, maybe three. It wasn't massive, but they would lay bombs on you.

SI: Could you remember a couple times that happened, tell us what it was like?

JK: Well, when we first got on to the island, we were told--it must've been a pretty hot topic then--they said, "Dig a foxhole." So, me and my buddy here, this Polish guy here from Chicago, we dug a hole. We weren't satisfied with the hole, so, we had to fortify it. So, we got some coconut logs, put it over the top, so [that] the bombs won't come in. So, we had a pretty good shelter there, right nearby--oh, and they'd put us into the natives' huts. They didn't have no tents there then for us. They put [us] into the natives' huts and the roofs were made out of the palm leaves. That was the roof. Naturally, you had corner posts, no sides, no sides to that, and it was on this coral--they made it out of coral--platform. That was your base. They gave us that for, I don't know for how long, couldn't have been too long, maybe a month or two, before some shipment of tents came in. Then, they moved us to a different place.

While we were in the dugout, while we're there, we weren't fed too well. So, my buddy and I said, "Well, we've got to do something about this." [laughter] So, right close by, walking distance to the head--the head was built over the water, with a catwalk, went out to the head--right around there, they made that the commissary. They stored all the food for the island there. I guess the natives used it for their, I don't know, whatever, to have a party or something. They would hold it there. It was pretty big. So, my buddy and I seen this food stacked up there. So, well, that's going to waste there. That's no good there. [laughter] So, we decided we're going to raid that. So, we walk by, we eyeball it, where the stuff is that we could handle. It was canned fruit. So, we said, "This looks pretty good. I think we can handle this." So, we wait until it got dark. In the meantime, the Marines had a sentry walking this commissary. So, my buddy and I, we had this all timed, how long it took for him to go around. That's when we go in, grab our case, hit the beach and run down the beach, and then, back into our hut.

So, we done that for a while. We were eating all canned food all the time. Then, another guy come in the picture in our group. He noticed how good we were eating. He said, "Can I get in on it?" So, we hemmed and hawed. We said, "Yes." So, we took him on, told him what he has to do, and so forth. We go there--this is at night, this is all figured out at night--and this guy, he goes there, he couldn't see and he puts a lighter on. He had a lighter. I said, "You stupid son of a bitch." He puts a light on, so, the Marine could see the light. [laughter] So, the Marine was on the other side--he didn't see the picture--but they did come out with a warning the next day, "Anyone caught on those grounds, you're going to be shot at before you're told to halt." So, that put the end to that.

SI: Were they still giving you C rations then or was there a mess hall?

JK: No, a mess hall, yes. They had built a mess hall. Sure, you were given enough to eat. It wasn't--you didn't have no seconds or nothing. Then, as we were eating, my buddy and I, we noticed the porters were going down, serving the officers, on the end of the mess hall, with ice cream. I said, "Ice cream? That rings a bell here, too. I've got to get some of that." [laughter] No, we didn't get no ice cream. Enlisted men didn't get no ice cream, no desserts. So, somehow, we got buddy-buddy with the cook for this mess hall. So, we said, "We want some of this ice cream." So, he said he couldn't give us any, he said, "But, I'll give you the material, but you have to mix it yourself." We had the mixer.

SI: Like a hand-crank?

JK: Yes, a hand-crank, that thing, and he said, "You've got to do it and bring it back before the next time I use it. Otherwise, they're going to notice it." So, we done that at--they had movies at night on the island. So, that was the time that we had to do this, while they were at the movies. So, we run all the way over and got this container, had this vanilla cream or something, and we whipped up this ice cream. It didn't turn into ice cream, it was just cream, but, anyway, it was good. We just ate the damn thing, put it back in, that was it.

Then, there was another time--like I said, you couldn't anchor on that island. You had to come in with the LCMs. The LCMs went out and picked up the food from these freezer boats that came in. So, there was a load out there waiting for us. So, my buddy and I, we volunteered to go out, [laughter] because we knew we were going to get some of that. We go out there and, out in the ocean, they were handing over these big, big chunks of ham. We said, "Well, we've got to get one of them." So, he said he'll get the ham and he's going to throw it to me and, when he throws it to me, I've got to throw it into the engine room, where you can't see. There's a door and the engine rooms are down below. So, he gets a ham, he throws it to me and, somehow, I fumbled it. [laughter] It dropped out of my hands and went into the ocean. So, he says, "Jesus Christ, what are you doing?" So, I said, "What can you do?" I said, "You've got to try again." So, he tried again, he got the ham this time. This time, I caught it and threw it in the engine compartment. Nobody could see it, so, it was all right. We weren't caught.

So, okay, we bring it back to the tent. So, I said, "What do we do now?" said, "We've got to cook this. So, how are we going to cook this?" So, they had five-gallon containers. They had these Saltines; Saltines came in those containers. "So, we'll get one of them from the mess hall, fill that with water, we'll make a fire, bonfire. We'll put this thing on the fire and cook it up." No matter what group you're in, there's always somebody who knows something about cooking. So, we found this guy and asked him, "How long does this have to cook?" He told us. So, naturally, I had to give him a slice. [laughter] So, we got that detail done. So, we made out pretty good there.

SI: You were stationed on Nanumea for quite a while.

JK: Yes, eight or nine months, yes.

SI: What were your daily duties like?

JK: Nothing.

SI: Nothing? This was just a holding place again.

JK: Well, I guess I was supposed to do something, but nobody knew nothing. You just go to the mess hall and eat, mess hall and eat, come back, mess hall and eat, and figure out how to steal something. [laughter]

SI: Had this island been occupied by the Japanese earlier?

JK: No, no.

SI: There were no holdouts.

JK: No, I guess they would've came down. Given a little more time, they would've. They would've taken that.

FD: Shaun, can we pause for a second?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Are you ready?

JK: Yes, sure.

SI: You told us a story in the break about how you would catch rain water in a fifty-five-gallon drum. Could you tell us about that and how you had to guard it?

JK: Well, I don't know how often it rained, but it couldn't have been that much. So, my buddy and I, again, got a drum and we put it in a corner of the tent, and then, had the trough built where the rain water would run into the drum. I think we were the only guys that had done this, so, we had to guard it, with your rifle. You were issued a rifle. [If] guys wanted to steal that water, you just had to shoot at them, I guess, to get them to change their mind, yes. [laughter]

SI: Were there any shortages while you were at Nanumea?

JK: Shortages, like what?

SI: Food, any supplies?

JK: There wasn't much of anything, but, I mean, they fed you. Yes, you got three meals a day, you got a cot to sleep on, yes. You can't ask for no more than that.

SI: You said the Japanese would come over and bomb at night, particularly when there was a full moon. Do you remember anything about those air raids? Did any of them feel close to you? Were there any casualties?

JK: They weren't close to me, but, naturally, it was my first experience. They would be coming over and it sounded like the breakers in the ocean, "Whoosh." I don't know what that meant, if the bombs were coming, I don't know, but one of their raids, which was one month before I got there, they spilt the church right in two. The British missionaries used to come there to educate the people and I guess they supplied the material and they built this church. They [the Japanese] hit it right smack in the middle, right smack in the middle.

SI: After eight or nine months, you said you were reassigned. Where did you go after Nanumea?

JK: Yes, went to Tulagi. There's a bunch of islands out there and it was another holding place. Talk about rain, it rained every day. You stayed by your cot. You could walk outside--the mud'd go up to your ankles.

SI: That was down in the Solomons.

JK: And that was my so-called only amphibious training I got. So, it wasn't much, just change the filters. You used to have spare filters. You used to have a handle, a valve, when you changed it, and then, in the meantime, you took the dirty ones out. You cleaned them and put them back in, get ready for the next time. They taught me nothing, nothing, about the engines, which what good is a boat without an engine? [laughter] They didn't teach me anything about that. They put me on that.

One time, this is another story I don't really like to tell, but it happened. They brought me out--not [just] me, a bunch of us, maybe five or six of us, the motor mechanics--and they brought us out, I forget the depth of the water, maybe it was five foot, depth of the water. I said, "What are they going to do here now?" So, they said, "Your detail is, now, you're going down, two men at a time, you're going down underneath this VP [LCVP]. You're going to pull the cotter pin out of the drive shaft, take that nut off, back off that nut, get this hammer and wedge off the propeller," had to do that all underwater. This guy, he don't know how to swim and I don't like to be underwater, because you can't breathe under the water. [laughter] So, I said, "How the hell am I going to get out of this?"

So, all the other guys, they kept going, kept going, kept going. Then, it was the last two guys, was me. I says, "I can't go." I went to the instructor, said, "I can't go." He said, "What do you mean you can't go?" I says, "I've got a fungus." I don't know what the hell you called it then. He said, "Where? Where you got a fungus?" "It's down here on my crotch." I said, "I was told by the medics to stay away from the water. I can't go in the water with that." So, he accepted that. I said, "Oh, boy, that's pretty good." So, I thought maybe I'd get away with it, maybe they'll call me the next day, but, no, they dropped it. I was okay; I got away from that. So, I could imagine me going underneath that boat and I don't open my eyes underwater. A lot of people do--is that right?

SI: Yes, some people do.

JK: They work underwater with their eyes. I said, "I can't see how you do that." So, I got away with that detail.

SI: Did they give you a snorkel and a mask?

JK: No, nothing.

SI: You just had to hold your breath.

JK: Yes, that's right, hold your breath and go down. I said, "Oh, no, this ain't for me."
[laughter]

SI: Before you got to Tulagi, were you designated as a motor mac?

JK: Yes. Oh, most of the time, most of the men that went in, you went in as a seaman. Well, I went in as a fireman, because I had mechanic experience--didn't mean anything, except the firemen, they work below and seamen is all topside work. So, you just promote yourself up from third class, second, first, and then, motor mechanic. That's what I ended up, motor mechanic, third class.

SI: Was Tulagi in an area where the Japanese could bomb?

JK: Oh, yes, that was by this [area of the] so-called Battle of Guadalcanal. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Guadalcanal or Operation WATCHTOWER, the first major strategic offensive against the Japanese by the Allies, took place between August 7, 1942, and February 9, 1943.]

SI: Yes.

JK: Yes, right around that area. Of course, it was all peaceful then.

SI: When you were stationed there, were the Japanese still able to bomb the island?

JK: Not that I know of. Well, maybe they were able, I don't know.

SI: You do not remember any air raids.

JK: No. If they made a base out of it, it was safe. You were safe, it was safe.

SI: You were there for about two months before you were attached to the *Jupiter* [(AK-43)].

JK: Maybe, maybe not even that long, I don't know, maybe not that long.

SI: It looks like from the end of July to the beginning of September, maybe a month and a week.

JK: Then, they put me aboard the *Jupiter*. Sure, I'd been on a ship just like it coming over, but I had no experience. I didn't know anyone. I didn't know a soul and you're mixing in with an experienced group of boat crew members that already were on the ship. I guess I was just a fill-in at the time, but, then, later on, a week or two time, they assigned me to a boat and a crew. You had a coxswain, which you're familiar with, and a seaman.

SI: Explain to us the difference between the boat crews and the ship's crew and how the ship worked, what the hierarchy was.

JK: Well, the boat crew, even though we were Navy, you went aboard that ship, they'd put you down in the hold, where they stored the troops and supplies, no accommodations. You're just down in the hold and you had cots, yes, you had cots. There's no bunks.

SI: How many men were in the boat crews?

JK: Oh, on our ship?

SI: Yes, men that you were with in the boat crews.

JK: Well, I'd have to do some multiplying there, man.

SI: Each boat had three.

JK: So, there's three to a VP. How many VPs were there? maybe eight, nine VPs, and I think there were four LCMs with a four-man crew. So, that was it, yes.

SI: Maybe forty, forty-four?

JK: Yes, yes.

SI: How many on the ship's crew?

JK: Oh, I don't know. Then, when we didn't have maneuvers or invasions, they used us--I mean us the boat crew--to do all the ship's dirty work, all the ship's dirty work, like chipping the paint on the side of the ship or going down in the engine room under the floorboards--I think they called that the bilges--to clean the bilges with rags and all that stuff. They gave us all the dirty work and we didn't line up with the Navy for food. We had saltwater showers and the restrooms were, they had that trough running through with the saltwater. That was your bathroom.

SI: How would they give you your food? Would you go to the galley separately?

JK: Yes. They would tell you, with the whistle, when what time is time for you. The ship's company, they ate first. I believe we got the same food they got, but a different time, yes.

SI: You were sleeping down in the hold.

JK: Oh, that's another thing. I didn't believe in sleeping down in the hold, where you had one escape hatch, was a hole, and for all those guys to get out of that, go up on a ninety-degree ladder and get out of that hole? That wasn't for me, either. So, I got all the lifejackets I could find, maybe three or four, I would sleep up on topside, under some kind of a shelter. They always had something there. That's where I done my sleeping at night. In case you got torpedoed, you were one of the first ones off. You didn't get caught down below, where you couldn't get out. That was one of my deals.

SI: Once you were assigned to the *Jupiter*, what was the first operation you were on?

JK: Well, the first operation was Palau, Angaur Island. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Angaur was fought between September 17 and October 22, 1944.] It's something to see, you guys. Before an invasion, they go in early morning, before the sun come up, and all the big ships, the battleships and the cruisers, they would open up with their big guns and shoot that island, just try to make ashes out of it, light up that sky. You think you've seen good fireworks? You ain't seen no fireworks until you've seen those guys. The ocean would shake with all those guns shooting. It was something to see, something to see, and then, you say, "There can't be anybody alive on that island. We're just wasting our time," but they were there. They were in a hole, waiting for you to come in. [laughter] The first time I went in, I said, "This ought to be easy. There ain't nobody left here." I go in, I see our men, the first invaders, laying in the water, dead. I really was scared, man. I got scared. I said, "Oh, this is war. I guess they mean to kill people," yes.

SI: How many men did you have on the LCVF when you went in on that invasion?

JK: Three.

SI: I meant how many men were you carrying into the beach? Were you carrying men or supplies?

JK: Oh, yes. At that invasion, it was the Army instead of the Marines. That's the first time they used the Army out there. Oh, I don't know, it's a capacity of thirty-five. So, I don't know if there was thirty-five there. That's not my business, to count the heads. I was worrying about my own skin, man. [laughter] [Editor's Note: On September 15, 1944, the First Marine Division landed on Peleliu, part of the Palau Islands. On September 17th, the US Army's 81st Infantry Division landed on nearby Angaur, the division's first battle. The US Army defeated the main body of 1,400 Japanese fighters within a few days, but remained to battle several hundred holdouts until October 22nd. Military planners expected the battle on Peleliu to last only three days, but the island's 11,000 entrenched defenders resisted the Marines (later joined by the 81st Infantry Division) until November 27th.]

SI: It sounds like you were not in the first wave. Do you know if you were in the second or third wave? Do you remember?

JK: Probably, in Angaur, I don't know, probably the second, because I seen the bodies laying there already. So, there must've been somebody before me. It's amazing how organized that operation is--and this is something that we'd never done before. We never had a war before like this, but, still, we done it, but just by keep supplying, keep pushing men in. You knock a boat out, put another one in, supplies.

SI: You were on a LCVF. Were you below deck or up top?

JK: No, no, I'm supposed to be one of these. See, there's your coxswain, there's the driver. I was supposed to be one of them. [Editor's Note: Mr. Kramer is referring to a model of a LCVF on the table.]

SI: And the engine is down below here.

JK: Right--no, right here.

SI: In the middle.

JK: Normally, that's where I hid, right down in that hole there, crunched up like this.

SI: Did you know to do that in the first invasion or were you up top looking around?

JK: No, I mean, I crunched down, because, I don't know, I didn't trust anybody. [laughter]

SI: Had the other two crewmen been in invasions before?

JK: No, no. I knew my crew. The other man opposite me, this seaman, his name was (Orlan Lindsey?). He's from Atlanta, Georgia, and the coxswain was--I sort of forgot his name--he was from Louisiana. Yes, I forgot his name.

SI: Can you describe that moment when you hit the beach, what happens and what you are thinking, what you are doing?

JK: Well, once you hit the beach, you have no responsibilities. I mean, these guys that are in here [the holding area], whatever they're doing, or supplies, the beach takes control. They come in and take control of it, what you have. What you were worried about was, "Get that load out in a hurry," so [that] you could back off and get the hell out of there. You didn't want to stick around there. There's trouble there. So, you had to have a pretty good coxswain. You had to have him. He's got to watch the waves that are coming in and, when they come in real nice and high, that's the time you want to [go] full throttle and back out. I mean, if you have no water there, what the hell good is it? You can't do nothing, but you've got to wait for the water to hit you, and then, back out in a hurry. Then, hopefully, nobody's in your way, all that kind of stuff, yes.

SI: How far out is the *Jupiter* when you make this run?

JK: Pretty far, pretty far, miles.

SI: You were miles off shore, you make this run, and then, you go back out to the *Jupiter*.

JK: Well, they have--I don't know what they call it, I guess there's a word for it--a circle of us guys, we go around and they--oh, command post, I guess. In those days, they had the walkie-talkie or something and they would know what you have in that boat and where it has to go. "What beach? Is it the yellow one, the red one, the blue one?" You were all told that and the coxswain had to pick that up.

SI: How long did that whole operation take? How long were you on the beach and how long before you were back where you started from?

JK: Well, that really all depends on what you have in there. I mean, if it's the troops, sure, they run the hell out, you back out. Soon as the last man hits that gate, you back out--oh, and that gate there, I think, well, me, and then, the seaman, we had to crank that mother, all by hand, [laughter] while the LCM, [what] they had, it was power. Well, it was a heavier gate. That was all metal, all-metal boat.

SI: Did you take any fire from the enemy on the first landing? Did you take any fire from the shore?

JK: No, no.

FD: Did you have to go back to the *Jupiter* and bring more troops or supplies to the shore?

JK: Well, this, like I tell him, the command post, you go around in circles and they tell you where to go, tell you where to go.

FD: So, you might go to another ship to pick up supplies.

JK: Yes. They tell you where and the coxswain's supposed to know. I guess he's told where it's at, because they're not like in a parking lot. They're all over the place and miles apart. Another thing, when this ship lowered you, the ship lowered you into the water, you may not see that ship again for a couple days, your own ship. You say, "Well, what do you do at night?" "Well, you're on your own, buddy. [laughter] You'd better find a safe place, know what you're doing." In fact, I don't think I slept. One eye was always open. [laughter]

SI: Did you have to keep all your supplies on the ship or would other ships supply you during that time?

JK: In-between? Of course, we had K rations. I don't think we had it all the time. We'd do a lot of stealing. If we went close by to another ship and it was around chowtime, or even if it wasn't, the coxswain would holler up, "Have you got anything for us?" Either they would or, "No, sorry, you're out. Go try another one."

SI: You were there at Angaur about one week.

JK: A couple days, I guess, yes.

SI: Does anything stand out about that period? Were there any close calls or any problems you ran into after the initial landing?

JK: No, no. Some of my buddies went ashore there. Like I told you, you're not supposed to leave that boat. They went ashore because they wanted to get some souvenirs, whatever you call it. No, I didn't take that chance.

SI: In that initial landing, when you had troops on board, did you talk with them at all? Were you able to see what they were going through?

JK: No, no.

SI: In this operation, were you under an officer from your ship or did they assign you to an officer, somebody who was in charge of the operation?

JK: Well, naturally, there's officers down at this command boat and you had to keep in contact with him. That's all the coxswain's job, yes. Well, there was always something to do. You're always detailed for something. You didn't just lay out there in the water and go to sleep. No, you always had something, somewhere to go, something to do.

SI: Did you ever have to take men off the beach, wounded men?

JK: Yes, yes. If you went in and, naturally, you were empty after you unloaded, you'd take them out and you knew where to go, the hospital ship. They're painted white, right, with a red cross. They stood out, so [that] you had no trouble finding them, yes.

SI: During the invasion, was the Japanese Air Force a threat? Did they bomb the ships that were making the landings?

JK: Well, we started to pick up the *kamikazes* in the Philippines.

SI: Okay.

JK: That's another scary one, too.

SI: Do you remember any, not *kamikazes*, but strafing runs during the Palau operation?

JK: No, no. Most of the fighting in that group was in the next island, which was Peleliu, about seven miles up from us. That was a bigger island, even though Angaur did have a fighter strip. That's what they wanted and they got that, but Peleliu had a couple of them, I guess, a couple of fighter strips, and it was bigger. I think it was a couple of mountains in there.

SI: After Angaur, you went on a few supply missions in the Admiralty Islands and Hollandia.

JK: No. Well, naturally, you were detailed to go somewhere to load up for the next one. That's about what it was and, as they fell in line, I don't know. I don't know how well I can see without my glasses.

SI: The next one listed was the Admiralties. Do you remember going there?

JK: Well, if we went to the Admiralties, that was just to load or unload. Well, then, we're getting back down to almost the Philippines now. Yes, yes, Hollandia was supply, supply.

SI: Hollandia is on the northern coast of New Guinea, correct?

JK: You sort of got me there, or was it just another island out there? You'd be surprised how many islands there are out there you'd never heard of--yes, looks like Leyte and Luzon invasions. They were silent ones. They didn't shoot too much at us as we approached. I guess they done most of their fighting inland, after our troops got in there. So, it was pretty safe.

SI: Tell us about the preparations for Leyte, what it was like going in on that invasion, what you saw and what you did.

JK: Well, the only thing I can remember about the Philippines [is] that the Filipinos, it was so quiet at the beach, the Filipinos were out there aiding us, if they could. They would swim things into the beach, put it in the water and they would swim with it and bring it to the beach, just like the boat would, [laughter] because they were good swimmers, all of them. So, actually, it was quiet there. It was quiet. Like I say, that's when the *kamikazes* came into the picture.

SI: Do you remember seeing *kamikaze* attacks there?

JK: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

SI: Can you describe that for us?

JK: [laughter] Your eyeballs were all over, man. You looked, trying to find one coming at you. If it was coming at you, you'd better find a good place to duck behind, but, if he did hit your ship, you were almost a goner anyway, but, yes, a lot of them just fly overhead. A lot of them missed their targets and they landed in the water. Yes, they were dangerous. They came from all angles, all angles.

SI: Did you know about the *kamikazes* before you saw one for the first time?

JK: I don't think so, I don't think so.

SI: Was it shocking to you that somebody would try to do that?

JK: [laughter] Yes, you said, "Why would a person give up their life to ram you?" yes, but there was enough of them, yes.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where they hit a ship that was close to you, or was it something you saw a little ways off?

JK: A little ways off, maybe, you'd see them hit, yes.

SI: Would you have to go ...

JK: I personally think they missed more than they hit, [if] you add them all up, yes, sure.

SI: When you were next to a ship that got into trouble, maybe it got hit or had some other form of trouble, would you have to go over and provide some assistance?

JK: If you were assigned, yes.

SI: Okay.

JK: If you were assigned, yes. I guess I don't know what they went by, the closeness, maybe. If you were closer to the ship, you had to stand by for orders, yes.

SI: Do you remember being in a situation where you had to help out a ship that was in trouble, maybe pull men out of the water from a ship that was hit?

JK: No, not really.

SI: Okay.

JK: Not really, no.

SI: Does anything else stand out about the landings at Leyte?

JK: Nothing. As I say, it was an easy operation. I don't know why we spent so much time there, and then, we'd turn around, we'd get supplies and we went back to Luzon. That's another invasion. No, I don't know why.

SI: It looks like you were going to these further back areas, loading up, and then, going into these invasions.

JK: Yes, right, right.

SI: In the Philippines, did you, like before, stay on the boat or did you go inland?

JK: No, stay on the boat, no, stay on the boat.

SI: In general, how did the equipment serve you? Was the equipment reliable? Did you ever have any engine problems?

JK: There you go, no, no, very good, never an engine problem. I don't mean that only in mine--almost the whole crew on the ship, never heard of a problem. I guess they must've proved themselves, yes. Then, after the war was over--well, we're jumping the gun--they sent me to the diesel school, where they carried these engines. After the war, they sent me to the diesel school, yes. [laughter]

SI: You had to do all of your training on-the-job when you were out there.

JK: That's right, that's right. [laughter]

SI: Did somebody teach you or did you just read the manuals?

JK: No, no, no one taught me, a little bit in Tulagi, for that two-week course or something like that. That's all.

SI: Did you have to perform any regular maintenance, like changing out the engines?

JK: No.

SI: Oil changes, that sort of thing?

JK: No, no.

GS: Did you ever think about the war in Europe at all?

JK: No, no, nothing in Europe, no. That European conflict, that was pretty long in itself. That took a long time, although some guys went through some of that, and then, went back over to the Pacific, too, yes. Well, that's because the war lasted longer on the Japanese side.

GS: On the islands, what was your interaction with the natives like? Did you find them welcoming or hostile?

JK: Well, on Nanumea, they took the natives off the island, put them on the next one and, I don't know, maybe about every two months, we would go over to their island, pick them up, whoever wanted to come, and bring them back to their original home. [Editor's Note: The island natives were relocated to Lakena.] They would roam around. I think the women would put up a dance for you, the hula-hula stuff, whatever it is, but I noticed right away, when there's a woman involved, there's a chief that's watching. [laughter] He's watching every guy, especially the Americans, watching that you don't make a wrong move. They kept that under control--oh, and the natives there, in Nanumea, after we ate your chow, you'd dump the remains in the garbage can on the way out and the natives were there, with those Saltine containers, five gallons. They just dug in with their hands, put it in their container, filled that container up. Then, they had these outriggers, like a canoe, and paddled home. They weren't fussy with what was in that garbage can, just get in with their hands, pull it out. I guess maybe they sorted it out when they got home, I don't know. [laughter] Yes, they were there. Otherwise, what did they have to eat? I guess they had fish, naturally, and I think there was a tree that produced bread--they called it breadfruit or something? That's about it. Nothing came into that island, okay.

SI: Would you have any opportunities for R&R? Would they give you beach parties, where they would put you on the beach for a little while?

JK: Yes, they had them, in-between. Yes, they're called beach parties. You went to some; I think Ulithi might be on there.

SI: Yes.

JK: Yes, put you on the hot beach--I didn't need that--and they give you two cans of beer that're just as hot as the sun. That's it. [laughter] "Have fun, boys. Enjoy yourself." Well, one guy, well, from our ship, not a boat crew, from the ship, he never made it. I guess he got stewed up there and he drowned himself, yes. They found him, brought him aboard and they buried him at sea.

SI: In any of these operations, were there any casualties on your ship?

JK: Where?

SI: In any of the actions you were a part of before Iwo Jima. We did not discuss that yet.

JK: Oh, you didn't get there. Well, that's where my good Navy buddy got hurt. In fact, hopefully, I'm going down to see him, through the courtesy of those two there, bring me down to Virginia. He got hurt in that.

Virginia Kramer: Joe, how about the fellow that was killed?

JK: Oh, we didn't come home yet.

FD: That was coming home.

VK: Oh.

JK: That's coming home. That's some more killing, uncalled for. All right, where were we? [laughter]

SI: You said, at Luzon, there was no opposition. You were in that photograph that has been widely published.

JK: Yes, yes. That's why I was standing up, because it was quiet.

SI: Does anything else stand out about that landing?

JK: No, just that the natives were helpful, things like that, yes. I wasn't around for that MacArthur return. I wasn't there for that. I think I was in the area, but I didn't see it.

SI: Did you ever interact with the men you were taking in, either the Army or Marines?

JK: No, no. You didn't see many Army men out there in the Pacific. They were all over [in] Europe--seen some, but not that many. They were bringing them in as the war went on. Otherwise, it was all Marines, everything.

FD: I think the Philippines was Army.

SI: Yes.

FD: Because of MacArthur.

JK: Oh, yes? okay.

FD: So, Leyte and Luzon, they were Army, because of MacArthur. He was Army.

SI: When you were not in an invasion, what would a typical day be like for you? What were your duties? You said you would get assigned to do different things. What were some typical assignments and what would you do there?

JK: Nothing, nothing, just stay alert, look out in the water, see if you just see any periscopes coming around. [laughter] That's about all, no, nothing. Well, the ship kept you busy, four on and eight off, on different calls of duty. There was a case once--this is also on the ship--and they all put the boat crew members doing something all day long and at night. They put me on this detail of going down into the engine room of the ship. You talk about noise, the vibration of the engines, and they said, "Come over here." He said, "I'll put you on the phones." "Put me on the phones?" I said, "What do I do now?" He said, "Well, upstairs, the guy's going to call down how many RPMs he wants you to turn," and I've got to receive that and write it, in big letters, on the blackboard, so that the engineers can see it and know what to do. So, they put me on there once and I didn't like that. I don't like nothing in the background making noise, so that it was a little difficulty [for me] in calling the numbers down. He'd say a number and I would write down a different number. [laughter] That was a no-no in the convoy. Convoy, you've got to keep everything close and they got word. They hollered down, they said, "Who the hell is on the phone down there?" It's me. [laughter] "Well, get him the hell off." So, the hell with that--that was the greatest thing that happened. They get me off there, and then, they put me on a detail--it was the chief motor machinist. He was the chief of all the enlisted men down below in the engine room and, somehow, I hit it off with him good. We'd talk and talk. He wouldn't let me do nothing. He said, "Come over here," and he said, "Sit down over here." We'd sit down underneath that blower, blower was coming down. He sat underneath there, he'd say, "You stay here." That's all I done. [laughter] I should have wrote that guy down. He made things easy, yes, yes.

SI: You were in the Pacific for a very long time. Did you always have a sense that things were going in America's direction? Were there ever any times when you had doubts?

JK: Oh, no, no. It must have been going in our favor, because we kept invading and we kept going north, getting closer to Japan--so, something must have been working. That's the only thing, and you'd say, "Yes, well, who's next?" You didn't know who was next.

SI: There were no points when you had low morale.

JK: No.

SI: Did you have any chance to communicate with your family at home or any friends?

JK: Well, you wrote. I don't know how often. Especially on an invasion, you had no chance in hell there. You had to watch out for yourself.

SI: Was it important to you to get mail from home?

JK: Oh, yes, yes, very important, know that they're doing okay.

SI: Your brother was much younger; he would not have been in the service, correct?

JK: No, no. When I went in the service, we had the family nickname for him, "Shrimp," because he was small, a shrimp. I come out of the service, he was bigger than I was. He was bigger than I was. [laughter] So, no more fights with him, no more--he was bigger. [laughter]

SI: You were the only person in your family serving in World War II.

JK: Yes, yes, sure.

SI: Tell us about Iwo Jima and the preparations for that invasion.

JK: Well, very seldom, if any, you were told where you were going. You just chugged along with that ship, chug along, chug along. Evidently, I knew it was getting close to my birthday. I said, "I wonder where I'm going to be on my birthday." That's where I was, Iwo Jima. [laughter] You talk about a bombardment--I talked about it before--you should've seen that one. Oh, my God, they threw everything at them, everything, everything that could explode, and, yet, they were there, waiting for you, waiting for you to come ashore. Out of all the time I spent there in the Pacific, it was cold and chilly and a light drizzle, really shook you up. Yes, you did have long sleeve shirts, which I definitely wore, but, other than that, you had no jacket, no nothing. Yes, that's from there. [Editor's Note: Mr. Kramer's family produces a vial of black sand.] Frank's nephew brought that sand and the shell from the beach and you often heard about the sand on Iwo Jima. It was different. It was black in color, plus, it was granule. You see that it's not like a piece of sand. If you stepped on it, like it said in the book, one foot forward, you would go back two feet, especially if you're going up a hill. It was almost impossible to get up a hill. I never went ashore there. Oh, no, no, that's too scary, man. At night, we're all alone at night. You didn't go aboard the ship. In fact, when it come night, the ships were told to separate. One went this way, one went that way, but they were all--what you call it?--encircled by destroyers to watch over them.

FD: How long were you at Iwo Jima? How long were you there? How long was your ship there?

JK: Thirty-one days. You say, "What'd you do?" Well, I don't know--I'd done something all day long. Once in a while, in that thirty-day deal, you went to your ship and they would raise you up. I guess they'd give you a good night's sleep and some food. The next day, down, out, but you could never find a ship at night. They're gone. You were on your own. You had to find

your way, man, find your way and, out in the water, that's tough. You're not on the Jersey Shore, yes. [laughter]

SI: During the initial landing, were you taking Marines into the beach?

JK: No, I was mostly supplies, mostly supplies on Iwo Jima, yes. The shores were a mess, with the boats and amtracs [amphibious tractors]. Hey, they had a party there, boy, yes.

SI: When you would go in to deliver the supplies, could the Japanese still reach that area with artillery? Would you get shelled when you went in near the island?

JK: Maybe on the early part of it, but, as the days went by, it was less and less, because you kept pushing and pushing them back, but we weren't too far from this Mount Suribachi. That's where they had all their bigger guns at. We were in reach of them all the time, yes.

SI: Were you able to see the flag go up when it was raised?

JK: I didn't see it, no, I didn't see it, but you hear about it just broadcast around. No, I didn't see it. Then, you thought, when they done that, "Oh, it's all over. Two more days, we'll be out of here." Two more days--it was a whole month, a whole month. Like I say, there was always something to do during the day. They always had you going somewhere.

SI: By that, do you mean you would go out to another ship and do something?

JK: Yes, bring it from here to there, whatever they called for. Then, if you had to pick up some casualties, yes, you went ashore for that, yes.

SI: When you would pick up casualties, would you have to do anything special, like help them at all? Did they have medics or corpsmen to do that?

JK: No, no, didn't do nothing. They done it all, they done it all. They brought them on and they took care of them while they were on the boat, too.

SI: You said you had trouble sleeping when you were stationed near Iwo Jima, that it was a very nerve-wracking time.

JK: There was one time--at night, like I said, you had to fare for yourself--and, naturally, you want to tie up with something that's stationary. So, somehow, I don't know why it happened, I was all alone on my boat. You're supposed to have a full crew. Somehow, I ended up all alone on my boat and the boat was adrift. I think there was trouble with it and, as this boat was drifting, it was getting closer and closer. It was being sucked into the big propeller on the ship and I could just picture that thing going into that prop and that prop is always turning. Even though it's anchored, it's always turning. I was all ready to jump overboard and swim, if I could, with the life jackets on, but, somehow, I bounced off the hull of the ship. Daylight came and they rescued the boat, but, as of today, I don't know why we drifted apart. I guess my seaman fell asleep somewhere, I don't know. You're supposed to tie up, so [that] you don't float around.

That's when I heard that the closer you were to the shore, that's where the Japs used to come out at night, [Mr. Kramer makes a throat-cutting sound] cut a couple of them up. So, I didn't want no part of that. [laughter]

SI: You were all alone on the boat that night. Were you able to drive the boat? Did you know how to maneuver the boat in a basic sense?

JK: Basic, yes. Basic, I knew how, because if that guy, the coxswain, got clipped, I was supposed to take over, but, thank God, that didn't have to happen, man. [laughter]

SI: That day, did you just maneuver the boat back to where it was supposed to be or did somebody have to come aboard and pilot it?

JK: No, they came and tied up and pulled me out of there, pulled it out. Like I say, by that time, it was daytime.

SI: Was your boat outfitted with machine-guns, like this model? [Mr. Illingworth indicates a machine-gun to Mr. Kramer on the model.]

JK: That's another thing I don't know, but I can say no. I don't recall walking around them. No, I don't think they were, although you were trained how to handle them if they were on.

SI: I was going to ask if there was any situation where you had to fire a weapon like that.

JK: No.

SI: After Iwo Jima, you came back to Hawaii.

JK: Oh, at Iwo Jima, my buddy there in Virginia there, during the day, he was horsing around close to the shore--he had to be close to the shore. When? maybe about two weeks after we got there. He jumped up on top of the pilothouse of that LCM, sitting up on top of it. See how it [goes], this here--this is where the coxswain went in. He was protected by metal all around, but my buddy decided he's going to sit up there and get a better view or something, I don't know. All of a sudden, he went aboard the ship. Half of his ear was hanging. The lobe of his ear was hanging. He had to get it sewed up. [laughter] So, he got a Purple Heart for that. So, they were saying it was so close, a half-inch more inland, it would have killed him, would have went through his body. Another half-inch, it would've missed him. So, it was a matter of a half-inch that he got clipped and he gets a Purple Heart for it. He goes aboard the ship and Doc sewed him up, got a couple days off. Then, he came back and joined us. [laughter]

FD: Did he ever go ashore on any island?

JK: Yes, he went ashore with another one of his buddies, but I didn't get involved in that.

VK: He was one of the young seventeen-year-olds.

JK: Yes, yes, and ...

VK: ... He liked to have fun.

JK: He went ashore to those islands that we captured and, I hate to say it, but it's the truth, he went for the gold in the teeth of the Japanese, or maybe Americans, too. I have no idea, but I know it was the Japanese and he got the gold.

FD: What was his career after the war?

JK: A dentist. So, he was still looking for gold. [laughter]

VK: He was still drilling for gold.

SI: Did you pick up any souvenirs while you were overseas?

JK: Just that wrench, that's about it.

FD: The wrench was from where?

SI: Angaur?

FD: Where did you get the wrench?

JK: Angaur.

FD: Oh, okay.

JK: Well, I got--I don't know if Sarah has them or not--I had some money, Japanese money from the Philippines. Yes, I had that--oh, and another thing, in Nanumea, like I said, the natives would come over. In fact, maybe the men would come over maybe every day, a couple of them. Somehow, we got in touch with him and he would make a ring for you out of our toothbrushes. Give him a toothbrush, [laughter] and then, he'd get the silver from quarters or half dollars and he would melt them and put your name on it. To this day, I don't know how they done it, because it's so crude out there. There's no gas, they had no electric--they had nothing. How did they get the heat? Well, naturally, they got the heat from burning wood, I guess, but how did they carve that toothbrush? molded that toothbrush into a ring and embodied that silver into that ring with your name on it or whatever. I had one or two made up with the word Nanumea on it. It's amazing what they'd done. That's another great thing I overlooked.

SI: Before we go to Hawaii, do you guys have questions about the Western Pacific?

JR: Have you kept in touch, after the war, with any of your war buddies?

JK: Well, we had the first reunion of our crew members in 1988. We usually had one every year, different parts of the country; not all over, mostly favored where this guy [a crew member]

lived. It was at, maybe, California was one, Texas might've been about two of them, a couple of them in Little Rock, maybe two or three in Virginia, but there is no more, no more of them. One of them just faded away, I think a little last month. So, there's not many, there's not many left; anything else?

SI: When you came back to Hawaii in April of 1945, were you detached from the USS *Jupiter* or was that as part of the USS *Jupiter*?

JK: We came into Hawaii and our captain of the ship, I guess he wanted to make some points, or why he did it, I have no idea. He wanted a boat crew. He's going to lower a boat crew and I understand, at one of our reunions, that it was our crew was picked, but the coxswain of our crew, he was taking a shower. That's the words from his mouth. So, they said, "Forget it, we'll pick another crew." So, they picked another crew. As we're coming into Hawaii, going a slow speed, coming in, the Captain said, "Lower the boat." They lowered the boat with the crew and some officers, a couple officers, Army. He lowered them and I heard screaming. I was on topside on the other side of the ship. I said, "What the hell's going on? Why screaming?" Everybody's hollering, running over to the other side. Here it was, as we were lowering the boat, one of the cables snapped and the boat tilted, naturally, because it wasn't on an even keel. That cable came down on the coxswain and pinned him right where he's standing there, on that wheel, pins him against the boat. That cable was cutting into his body. He was just screaming and hollering, blood gushing all out, cut him in half. This is after the war. You come home to freedom and this goddamn captain--the Captain was not supposed to lower that boat while the ship was in motion. You can do it while you're standing still, but not while you're in motion. I guess, while it was in motion, somehow, something happened with the cables. To this day, we don't know, but something happened to the cables and snapped and pinned this guy.

VK: It's not mentioned in that Navy log, right?

JK: Yes, yes.

VK: But, they don't ...

JK: Oh, it's not mentioned, the reason, the reason for it, no. They had a mast for him, captain's mast, and it wasn't classified. They wouldn't post it, of why this happened.

FD: Only one man was killed?

JK: Frankie, I think there was somebody [else], I think it was another Army [officer]. I think it was another Army guy involved.

FD: I thought you said more than one was killed.

VK: If it turned over, they had to be in the water.

JK: We tried to round up as many members as we could for the reunions and we contacted the motor mechanic for that boat that got hung up in Hawaii. They asked his explanation of what

happened. He said he was thrown out of the boat. He said all he kept remembering [was] that he was going down, down, down, and he said, "This can't happen." He says, "I've got to go up." He says, "I can't breathe down here." So, he said, all of a sudden, it came to him that he'd better start moving his arms and brought himself up. That's what saved him, but we could never get that guy to come to our reunions. He said, "You can stick that Navy right up. I don't want nothing to do with them anymore." I wrote to him a few times, trying to get him to come and he wouldn't. He wouldn't give in. If he's living today, I don't know, and, like I said, that was supposed to be me, goddamn.

SI: Were you told by the ship's crew not to discuss what happened? Did they tell you anything?

JK: No, everybody knew what happened, everybody knew what happened. Well, they say, "Why? Why did this have to happen?" That's the reason. Frankie, he got the log, the ship's log, for me. Every day, it was posted what went on.

FD: But, you said that day was missing from the Archives' copy that they sent you. That's the way I remember it. You said they didn't have that day

JK: Gee, I don't know, Frankie. I think ...

VK: That day is not in there.

JK: Right, it's not in there.

VK: That's why I said I think it was classified and it was not in the Navy log, because you were looking for that. You wanted to see that, whether they were going to give you an explanation, but it was not in the Navy log.

FD: Yes, that's the way I remember it, when you got it, said it was missing.

JK: I'm going to look that up.

SI: Sometimes, they write it in a certain way. They obviously have to report that somebody died, but they do not put in it was an accident that did not have to happen or something like that.

JK: No, no, wouldn't do that, no. That's not mentioned at all.

SI: They did not say to the crew, "Look, we are going to explain it this way. Everyone stick to this story."

JK: No, but, like I say, I'm going to look that up. No, I think that accident is in the log.

VK: I don't think so.

JK: It's what happened after. They didn't want nobody to hear about that. I'm going to look that up.

FD: I thought he said it was missing. There's a gap.

VK: That date might be there, but there was nothing, I think, about an accident. That was definitely not in there.

FD: That was classified.

VK: Right.

FD: National security.

VK: Classified, right.

JK: If you say so, but you got me. I'll look it up.

SI: Then, you were stationed in Hawaii for a little bit before you came back to the mainland.

JK: Yes, back to that base of that big picture there.

SI: That was Maui.

FD: Maui, Kamaole Amphibious Base.

JK: Yes, that was good duty, that was good duty. They had fresh food, man, fresh milk on the table, man, iced tea on the table, "Help yourself, man," and they had freshwater showers. I took two showers a day, trying to catch up. [laughter] That was living. What did I do there? nothing.

SI: Did you get to go on leave there? Could you go around Hawaii?

JK: Yes, but it's stupid, stupid. They had eight-hour leave. What the hell are you going to do in eight hours? There's no transportation. You get on the road there in Hawaii, it was all dirt roads. Where's the cars? Where's the transportation? By the time you got a ride into a town, it's time for you to come back, no sense. In the meantime, you've got your whites on, clean clothes. You get them dirty, for what? Then, you've got to go home and wash them again. Then, after you wash them, you hang them on the line and you've got to watch them with a gun, because somebody wants your clothes, because they don't want to wash clothes. They find out what size they are and they take yours down after you wash them, see. [laughter] You've got to stand there and watch them dry. That's crazy, right.

SI: Tell us the story about this woman at the snack shop that was just off the base. Did you know her during the war or did you just find her?

JK: Yes. Well, she was the only female around the whole area and she was maybe seventeen years old then, working at this snack shack owned by her father. Everybody wanted to go there to get acquainted there with her and I think everybody remembers her name, because she was the

only female around. That's another question mark; I've got to get that straightened out. We ran across her years, years later, twenty, thirty, forty years later. We found her in Hawaii, this dentist buddy of mine. We were out in Hawaii at the same time and we found her and she remembers it all very distinctly, yes.

VK: She did a wicked hula. [laughter]

JK: Yes.

FD: What was her name?

JK: Millie, no such thing as a last name, but, yes, she ended up marrying one of those Navy guys, yes, but he wasn't around when we visited. He was dead already, right?

VK: Yes.

SI: Tell us about coming back home, back to the mainland, then, back to visit your family on leave.

JK: All right, from when we got home to California, wasn't much waiting around there. Naturally, you go on leave. They give you leave time, maybe two weeks, I don't know or whatever it was. Then, I think I reported back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which that's close by. I didn't stay there long, either. Then, they shipped me back to Richmond, Virginia, teach me about the engines on these boats. That's all right, I'll take that education. That's what I wanted to do anyway, stayed there a while. Another thing that happened, stuck in my mind there, too, while I was there, at the tail-end of it, maybe the last week or two, they got word that they're going to close the school down, because the war was practically over at that time. There's a lot of guys had ideas, say, "Well, I've got to bring some of these tools home. I can't leave these tools here. I've got to bring them home." [laughter] So, there's one time, I was on a liberty, we went--you had to go underneath a tunnel. It was a railroad overhead, it was a pretty long tunnel you had to walk through. At that time, somebody, one of the sailors, had loaded up their suitcase with all these wrenches and all this stuff. It was heavy. You put tools in a box, it's heavy, and he got underneath that tunnel and the handle broke. It hit the pavement and it fell open and it made a loud noise, all his tools falling all over the street. [laughter] I don't know, I didn't stick around, I didn't find out what happened, whether the security caught him or not, but all these tools are rattling. [laughter] It made a hell of a noise, it echoed. It was crazy, yes. Then, from there, I still had more points to gain, I guess because I was a single guy. [Editor's Note: The Adjusted Service Rating used after V-E Day determined which servicemen would return to the United States first, taking into account length of service or commendations for fairness. A score of eighty-five points was needed to return home and men with extensive combat experience or young children were allotted the most points.] So, they shipped me out, back out to California again, and that's where I met this German guy. Did these fellows know about the carvings that this ...

SI: Oh, yes, we saw them.

JK: Oh, you did see them, yes. This guy made this all out of knife and wood, box wood.

FD: Where was that?

JK: California.

SI: You were at Shoemaker.

JK: Yes, yes.

SI: They were German POWs.

JK: Yes.

SI: Were you in charge of them?

JK: No, no, I wouldn't be in charge. I just happened to be in the same department. What I'd done, I don't know; I done nothing. They just put me there, that's all.

SI: He was just another worker there.

JK: That's right, that's all.

SI: You said you never communicated with the guy, because he only spoke German.

JK: No.

SI: He only spoke German.

JK: Yes, yes. Like I say, I'm sorry I never wrote his name down, real sorry.

SI: For the record, what we are talking about is, he made kind of like a plate with an Indian from a buffalo nickel carved into it.

JK: Right.

SI: Then, also, a scene from North Africa that he burned into wood using his eyeglasses.

JK: Correct, yes. You see how he spelt, "Amerika?" back, the Germans, they eliminated the "C," they put the "K" in there, and "Oktober" is spelt different, yes.

SI: How often would you see this guy?

JK: I think every day, I guess, yes.

SI: What was he doing?

JK: I don't know, somewhere in Africa. That's all I know.

SI: In California, what was he doing, at Shoemaker?

JK: Maintenance on these jeeps, trucks, I don't know, maybe greasing, oiling, simple maintenance, I guess. Yes, that's about all.

SI: Having been overseas for almost two years, what impressed you the most when you came back to the US? What were you most eager to do or see or get back to?

JK: I guess I wanted to see what the women were like. [laughter] I didn't see any, hadn't seen them in a little bit, but didn't do anything about it.

FD: He hasn't changed.

JK: Yes. I don't even know what car I got next; oh, I think I had a Pontiac then, '37 Pontiac, yes. I kept writing back home to Pop, I said, "Are you maintaining it?"

FD: How did you get out of the service?

JK: How?

FD: Yes, like, where were you discharged?

JK: Well, I was discharged there. I forgot how that went. Naturally, they would pay for you--or would they? I forget how that went. Oh, well, I got discharged there, telling them that I had a job promised me in California, but I must've done that for a reason, must've been for money, must've been money involved, whether they gave you money to go home. I think they gave you money for clothes and I bought my first suit in my life with that money. [laughter] You believe it or not, then, I wore white shirts and a bow tie. That's hard to believe now. I don't do those things anymore.

SI: You came home that way. You came home from California.

JK: Yes, I came home from California into, naturally by train, and come into New Brunswick station, called up Pop. He was at work in Brunswick Mack and, no, wait a minute, I think I walked. Yes, I walked down to the factory, yes, down Jersey Avenue. Yes, I walked down to Mack, got back into the plant or Pop came out, I don't know which. Yes, that's how it went.

FD: Was he glad to see you?

JK: [laughter] I don't know; from then on.

SI: Did you go right back to work at Mack?

JK: Oh, maybe a week, two weeks off, maybe, like that, yes, had to get back to making money again.

SI: How long did you work in Mack Truck after the war?

JK: Well, working at Mack, then, I could see things slipping a little bit, no more government orders. They were going back to the trucks again, and then, there was--oh, yes, talk about the unions in Mack, they went out on strike for quite a while. So, naturally, I went home and I got a job in the Belle Mead General Depot. I remember the pay scale there was ninety-nine cents an hour, just a laborer there, just filling in time. Then, there was job openings there and I ended up being a mechanic, overhauling engines, and then, naturally, notice comes, that camp is closing. So, every damn thing I was doing in my life, they were closing. The plants were closing. So, let's see, what did I do then? [Editor's Note: Belle Mead Army Depot in Hillsborough, New Jersey, operated from 1942 to 1958.]

VK: Went into business, sweetie.

JK: Yes, right, yes, that's another I went into. Yes, that's right, yes. Right from there, I went into the gas station business for quite a while, I guess.

SI: What year was that that you went into the gas station business?

JK: Yes, when was that, (Presh?)?

VK: That year? I don't know. Well, it was after we were married, so, it had to be early '50s.

JK: Oh, I'll take a crack at 1955. I sort of remember that a little bit.

SI: You also worked at Allied Chemical for a while.

JK: No, Allied Chemical, that's you, (Presh?).

VK: I worked there.

JK: There you go.

VK: I worked at Allied.

SI: Okay. You worked at the depot until the early or mid-1950s. When did they close down?

JK: A little while after that, after I left. They offered you jobs, but down somewhere in Maryland or Pennsylvania or something. I'd just got married, I'd just built a house--I've got no time for that. So, I stay around, got into the gas station business, a lot of hours, brother, a lot of hours, hours and no pay, not much.

VK: He did that for thirty years.

SI: Where was the gas station?

JK: You familiar with Plainfield?

SI: A little bit.

JK: Rock Avenue, Front Street, okay, right near the Plainfield Mack building, yes, right near it.

SI: Were you at the same location for the whole time you worked in the gas station business?

JK: Yes, until I retired.

VK: No, you went over to Middlesex, sweetie.

JK: Oh, yes, then, I went into another gas station in Middlesex, for a couple of years anyway, right, (Presh?)?

VK: Yes, like I said, maybe fifteen, fifteen in each. So, it's thirty years he was in the business.

SI: Did you use any GI Bill benefits to get into that business?

JK: No, no, I didn't use them, that's right. That's my fault, could've went to school, but I never did.

SI: I know they also had loans for business.

JK: No, no.

SI: How did you meet your wife?

JK: How did I meet my wife? Let's see, [laughter] my wife worked for a doctor and my sister also worked for the same doctor. So, naturally, my sister tells me there's a new chick in the office. So, I said, "Well, maybe I want to get involved." [laughter] So, this doctor was pretty well-off, like most of them. He had a swimming pool up in the mountains there in Bound Brook. So, we were invited and Ginny comes out with a one-piece white swimsuit. I said, "Oh, goddamn," I said, "look at this. I can't pass this up." [laughter] So, we had some blind dates with my sister and her boyfriend, yes, boyfriend then, and I proposed, I guess, and then, Ginny didn't accept. So, I hit the road again for a while, and then, I got back to her again. That time, it was the clincher. That was back in 1950 and, from then on, it's history, four kids, two boys, two girls. That's balanced pretty good, right.

SI: Can you name your children, for the record?

JK: Sure. I think I can. [laughter] Barbara's the oldest; that's Frank's wife. Karen, she's the youngest, then, Billy, William, then, Joseph is back there, all good, all good.

SI: You spent a long time in the gas station business. Does anything stand out in your memory about the challenges of that business?

JK: Long hours, long hours, and you put the mathematics together, I guess you made about fifty cents an hour, stupid, but they still do it today, but it's different, gas station business. It's different. Of course, we sold things. We sold tires and batteries and windshield wipers and you were allowed to do mechanical work, but you had to keep the shops clean. That's about it.

SI: Did you ever get involved in any veterans' associations?

JK: Member of the VFW back in Dunellen, didn't do anything, no, just a member, so [that] the kids could have a great Christmas party. [laughter] They gave out good stuff, boy. The kids'd line up for that, better than the parents could give them. Yes, that was good. They still send me notices, the meetings going on, yes.

SI: For your time in the service, you received commendations for Leyte and Luzon.

JK: Yes, that's in the log, the Navy log.

SI: Did you receive any other awards?

JK: No, no.

SI: You received the campaign ribbons.

JK: Yes, yes, that's all.

SI: And four Battle Stars.

JK: Yes.

SI: Is there anything else that we have not covered that you would like to talk about on the record, any community activity, for example?

JK: No, not that I know of. I'll think about it later, but not now. [laughter]

SI: Was it difficult to readjust to civilian life after you had been in the service for so long?

JK: I don't think so. Just take one day at a time, that's all. Of course, you had to keep your head above the water, right. You always had to make sure we had money to pay for what you bought. You didn't buy something and didn't have no money. There's no such thing--wasn't even a checkbook, didn't believe in it, cash. You didn't have the cash, you didn't buy anything, that's it, but I do have a checkbook now and I do have a credit card, too, yes. [laughter]

SI: When you had the gas station, was it under your name or was it a franchise?

JK: I had a partner and the first station was under a consignment deal with City Service, which became Citgo, okay, and they had certain by-laws. You had to sell so much of this, you had to sell so much of that, you had to keep your place clean, your hours had to be so much, yes. It's long. It's seven days a week.

SI: Was the second one a Citgo?

JK: Second one was Chevron, yes. So, all I can tell you guys, educate, get something up there, keep using that brain, man, be one step ahead of the other guy, make it easy for yourself.

SI: Thank you very much; we appreciate all your time and thank you for your service.

JK: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Sarah Holovinsky 10/23/2017

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/3/2017

Reviewed by Joseph Kramer 1/4/2018