

Kelley, Charles Interview 8-22-90

[Speaker 1]

5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, testing, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, over. Uh, this is Stan McKenzie speaking. Uh, today, uh, this is the 22nd day of August 1990, and I'm interviewing Mr. Charles Kelly of 232 South, what is this, Purdue Avenue, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Uh, Kelly, when did you join the service? It was, uh, July the 18th of 41. Uh, did you volunteer?

Uh, no, I was still, I had no excuses. I was drafted at that time. How did you, uh, end up in the branch of service that you did?

Well, I went to Fort Eustis, Virginia for training, and we trained on 155 Coast Artillery guns, cannons, you could call them, I guess. It was basic training, why, uh, and there was four of us that were sent to Fort DuPont, Delaware. Uh, and of all things, after training on it and learning there were nut boats and screws on the 155 guns, why, this was a mine-laying outfit.

I, of course, never knew that the Army and the Coast Guard laid mines. So, uh, we learned the nomenclature of various kinds of mines and anchors and all. And then, uh, the December the 7th happened a couple of months later, so we immediately were sent down to Fort Miles, which is right on the point at Delaware Bay.

And at that time, our tankers were being sent along the Atlantic Convoy, uh, coming through Delaware Bay, so our job was to lay mines all across Delaware Bay to Cape May, New Jersey, uh, as a precaution against submarines coming that way. Of course, this was not the final outfit I was in. It so happened that quite a few of them were old Army and the others were drafted six before I was, and, uh, so you had no chance for promotion at all.

And I had learned that they were forming an outfit in Florida to, uh, reproduce maps, and that had been part of my line of work in civilian life. And, um, I happened to know a person in Washington that was organizing these, uh, outfits, which was great. And I wrote him a letter and said that I was available, and two weeks later, this outfit, since we were, uh, actually doing work, not training, laying those mines, people considered it impossible to get out, so I was big shots strutting around there, being, uh, incidentally, those North Italians blew in on that point, picking up that sand as a hippie-like, uh, buckshot.

So here I was going to Florida with, uh, an outfit that, uh, was, uh, impossible, they considered, to get a transfer from there. And it certainly made a difference in promotions, because down there, uh, Now, in this map-making, uh, outfit were new recruits, so they did partially basic training, which I'd already gone through a couple of times, even. So I knew, uh, the operation of, uh, presses, especially, and map-making.

I got corporal, and two weeks later, sergeant, and finally, staff sergeant, and I taught the fellas how to run lithographic presses. In the outfit that, uh, went overseas. What did you do in civilian life?

I worked for TVA. TVA? Yes, in, uh, printing maps and forms and things of that sort.

When you went in the service. Was anybody else in your family in the service? Uh, no.

Did it bother you to leave home? Uh, no, actually, I'd already, uh, I'd been transferred from, while working for TVA, from Knoxville, which is my hometown, to Chattanooga, so I'd been there for a couple of years. You were a little bit older, more mature than most of the boys that were going in, weren't you?

You were a little older and more mature than a lot of them. Although, there were several that were in the outfit, and I guess the others were younger. Had you been to different parts of the country before you got into the service?

Uh, no. What did you think of the people that were in charge of your training, occasionally or otherwise? I was chosen by the headquarters or someone to attend a school.

On the old standards, people quite often used, uh, azimuth instruments relative to firing heavy artillery. So, uh, that school lasted for eight weeks, which I'm not. We kept on emphasizing that we'd just be corporals when we got out of here, and, uh, otherwise you'd be larger.

You know, you'd better straighten out and get all this material. We had tests and worked for eight hours going to school there for several weeks. People also used azimuth instruments, so it did come in handy in that respect.

They used triangulation. The boats would go out with a mine, two base end stations, and they'd form a triangle, and you would know exactly where they was placed. Because these were control mines.

They weren't the kind of contact mines. They were controlled from the shore. Huge cables running from the bay floor to the flooding ramp.

What, um, tell me again what units you were a part of. Um, the one that, uh, let's talk about the one where you spent the most time in, once you got away, uh, laying the mines and so forth. What unit was that that you were showing me there, I meant to go, engineering unit?

Yeah, it was 960th Aviation Company. We were attached to various wings of the Air Force to reproduce maps. That pretty much was your duty to reproduce maps, right?

Well, my particular one, we had platoons that, uh, geodetic platoons that, uh, would go out and, uh, right spot on the Earth for use for radar, you know, when they were building airstrips around. We had various, uh, things that did odd jobs for the Air Force as well. I guess the main body of it was made up of the drafting, the, uh, orthographic process.

Um, there were people from other parts of the country in your unit, of course. Uh, what did you think of those people that you had just met? Oh, we got along swell.

The last outfit that I was in, the one I went overseas with, were from Schultz ones, it was rather amusing. They were from Fort Dix, so they're strictly, and so forth. And I would find more little clippings on my bunk, uh, on food, uh, and child rides, you know.

They'd catch a little article in the paper, somebody 10 years old gave it. And I got more little clippings. I'd come back to my bunk and there would be...

But I got along, uh, well with all of them. There's all, all types as there is in any group of 200 people. One thing, we were all in the boat more or less.

You had to save basic drives, whether you were rich or poor, whether you were somewhat... You spent time out of the United States. When did you leave the States and when did you get back?

Camp Stoneman, California. And, uh, on a Mount Vernon troop ship, what, November the 5th of 43. We went out in a southerly direction and then straight across to Australia because the submarine menace was there to some extent in the Pacific.

And this, uh, Fort Washington, we named it Mount Vernon. It was a fast, fast troop ship, so we went out in a convoy. The 5th when we landed was November the 21st.

We stayed in Australia for a week or two. We went to Brisbane, Australia. We went on a freighter to New Guinea.

Where in New Guinea were you? What did you call it? Uh, we were, uh, landed at Fort Strip.

Much of that jungle we had to carve out a place where we were going to stay, but we were fairly close to those strips. When did you get back? I know you did some other things.

After then, when did you get back to the States? What was the date of your return? Approximately in a month is okay.

September the 27th, 1945, and got to Tacoma, Washington October the 9th. 1945, right? Yes.

When did you get, uh, you remember, did you come from, uh, Tacoma on home base? Uh, on leave or something. Uh, I was, while I was in honor, just before I went overseas, Air Force Base.

So I, uh, wanted to be discharged. Do you keep in touch, uh, with any of the men that you were in the service with? Uh, I keep on Christmas cards, uh, or long-distance calls, uh, from Janet LeBleu.

One I contacted all along was, uh, Janet LeBleu. And, uh, I still, as I mentioned, exchange Christmas cards, but I don't have any. Were there reunions that you go to or did any of the others go to Tacoma?

[Speaker 2]

I've never, I've never heard of any.

[Speaker 1]

I certainly would go. Since it's an outfit of so few people, uh, no one has ever taken the initiative. I would imagine it'd be hard to get in touch with people now anyway.

What memories do you have of the men who served with you? I was, uh, in the boat and, uh, all of them. We went through quite a few different things, uh, together when the Japanese were infiltrating, especially.

Uh, squirming around, dodging the tracers. Uh, that's another thing that, uh, I didn't know before. Uh, the Japanese, well, they chased some Signal Corps out.

This was in, uh, I don't know if you've seen that. And they, uh, took us down the road where we were. We were in an adjoining outfit.

And those tracer bullets, I think they were ... or something, tracer. And how they arc when you're out of the other end, I, I, when firing, you don't realize it, I don't believe.

But when you're out of the other end, it's dark. Those things loop. They don't go in a straight line.

I, I don't know if that's, that's off the subject.

[Speaker 2]

No, that's, that's interesting.

[Speaker 1]

The question you, I ... Um, well, tell me about the Jews now. Were you all under attack or fire any time you were in New Guinea?

Did you have any, uh, Japanese opposition? Uh, no, just, just a few reconnaissance planes. And, uh, we would move them back on up towards the, uh, northern or western end by then.

So we didn't have a great deal of, uh, of trouble with the Japanese. Just, uh, joining our outfit, I just happened to think of it. They had, uh, a mock that if anyone was going to bomb it, why, you know, it would just get trimmed and all.

And we would turn on a few lights from the various generators that they had set up. Which, which was rather ... Well, when we first moved there, it wasn't very comforting to have it right next door.

But I don't recall that they ever did bomb it. We had it rather quiet in New, uh, New Guinea. Just carting out the place where we were going to stay from the ...

And, uh, there were big old vines hanging down. It was big around like Tarzan would, would, uh, sway God. Okay, after New Guinea, um, were you all using any native labor in New Guinea?

Yes, I think there were, uh, I'm sure that we did. And I think they had a few other details, but, uh, later on in the Philippines while we, uh, K.P., because we had some dating labor. Okay, after New Guinea, then where was the next stop?

Uh, I think we were in the Philippines. And we started to another island, and, uh, And then they had the naval battle that I mentioned before. They decided that we could, uh, progress, so they decided, uh, that we were going to leave.

But before we got there, our navy was winning and throwing back, so we ended up going directly to Leyte. We were in a convoy. We were, uh, Liberty.

We ended up in Leyte Gulf. I think it was about D-5 or something real early because that, uh, the Gulf of the, uh, was strictly a blackout because we were over all along trying to get out of Leyte. Mainly.

And we had strictly a blackout deal, even though there were hundreds. One thing that I can remember, we caught loose fire on the Zeros one time, and it's strictly no one else did it out of all the hundreds of boats, and we never did understand why, except that the crew, which was, uh, what are they? They weren't military, but, uh, Yeah, that's who it was.

They got extra pay if they fired us in the aircraft, so that was the final conclusion, even though nobody told us. But out of all those hundreds of ships, I ain't let a little ship fire at them. I don't know.

Okay, uh, let's see now. Tell me about the rest of the time in the Philippines. You've just landed, haven't you?

You're still under enemy attack. After a while, we were able to dock and get unloaded. The Burj Duran facility, but that's when the trouble, I spoke of before, they infiltrated quite a bit.

That's the island Tokyo Rose kept saying that we'd be running. We were practically infantry there for quite a while. We had little gags about non-combatants, put upsides, things like that.

But we had ditched the night patrols, and one time in particular, after they, uh, so they parachuted a few people to go down with stretchers and pick up the wounded, and they were down in a flat hollow, and the aid station was up a huge bank. Anyway, there was four of us. It took that man to manage to take it up that hollow, which was just slick and muddy.

You could go down to your knee and just feel like you couldn't get it back out. So we were taking one up. Of course, the fellow above had to lean way over so he'd have the stretcher on level, and the ones beneath would be holding it up above their head practically in order for the stretcher to stay there.

On one trip up, while in basic training, you always froze when the flare went off. You weren't supposed to be afraid of that. And, uh, the flare died.

So we turned around. I'm just trying to help you out so you can see. So that was God's trick.

But we were right around the bend. And there's a lot of firing going on whistling past, but there was a bend in the cliff, and they were slightly around it. So even though the things were uncomfortably close, they couldn't go around the bend, so we were safe.

I was sad that the next morning it's raining as usual, and one of the fellows we brought out, see, they just had a little aid tent, and there wasn't any other. Well, after you spent your time in the Philippines, did you come straight home from the Philippines? Oh, no.

Well, from Leyte we went on up to Luzon, but we didn't stay there long. Up Clark Field, of course, there weren't any dormitories left, but we did set up our tents and stay there, but never did go up. Oh, the past several weeks, we went on to Okinawa.

And ice was there. We got nuclear ice. So we had a convoy going, so we're the first ones that skirted that way.

And of all things, it was the LST we were on. Well, I was fouled out when we were in this convoy, pulling us along because we didn't have any power. Well, I'm glad they did.

I didn't want to be left there. We didn't have any trouble. Well, there's several destroyers that accompanied us, and they dropped a few marines there or not.

Anyway, as it left, it gave you a little bit uneasy, and I took care of us being towed. Well, that was taking you from Luzon? From Luzon to Okinawa.

Oh, from Luzon to Okinawa, okay. All right, and then from what happened on Okinawa? We set up again, and there were various Japanese targets that were taking place.

That was along about the time they dropped the atomic bomb, so I nullified that part. But we were out at the AEC, and I think I mentioned that. We planes came in, and then they got American.

Earlier, Bernie Powell got, you know. Did you have any relationships with the civilians, or natives, I guess, would be a better word than civilians, overseas? Did you call them or work them or anything, or get to know them at all?

Not too much. They did their laundry, and we'd communicate as well as we could with them, and had charge of this geographic town. Anyway, they sure did have a celebration for their youngsters, and my son would take pictures of them, and every day I'd ask him, and I'd trust that he'd do it.

Did you have any contact with any Allied troops? See any of the British or Australians? Yeah, Australians.

Funnily enough, New Guineans, too, basically. What did you think of the Australians? Oh, we got along well.

Yeah, I liked them. How was the mail service? Did you get the letters and get them on time?

No, certainly not moving that number of times. Sometimes it's six weeks, and then we'd get 10 or 15, you know, every time. It settled down to a place where there's a fair degree of regularity.

In some regions there were scenes where the plane must have gone down and caught on fire or something. Did you ever wonder what you were in the service and why you were there? I pretty much knew.

It was hard to understand a lot of that. What did you plan to do after the war was over? TBA.

Did you do that? Did you end up doing that? Yes, I stayed about a year.

It wasn't too great. I'd been gone altogether four years and three months. Some of the old-timers welcomed you back, too, but a lot of them were a little bit snippy because they were losing their jobs when you're coming back.

And that wasn't the sole reason. Another fellow and I decided to go in business for ourselves. We were as comfortable as it was.

I've heard that before of other organizations as well as TBA. No one was nice to TBA. You know, there's a little undercurrent about, well, I guess I'll lose that job.

Yeah. Did you have any feelings about people of grades that weren't in the service? Not as strong feelings, no, because you never knew.

Did the war change you? I can't say it changed me drastically. I'm pretty calm and not the nervous type that would affect me to too great an extent.

Do you think it changed the country? It brought patriotism to the forefront. I don't know whether that has been retained at the present time or not, but at that time, wow.

Could we have done better during the war? Having that many people coming into the service was a gigantic problem, but placing a person the most out of their intellect and experience. To do that, you have to have a huge core of interviewers that are smart.

So I realized that the problem can push you. It's a thing that has been talked about so many times. What did you end up doing in civilian life after you left TBA and went into the service?

I just didn't agree all the time. I was 40 hours, so I got on with the Atomic Energy Commission. They needed people in, so I stayed there for a long time.

89, 40 years. Is that right? 40 to 89.

49. You of course could work there, but the scale of the people in that line of work. I lived in Oak Ridge most of the time.

[Speaker 2]

The whole time.