

Ernie Karkula
World War II Veterans History Project
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Jean Reynolds: Let's start with your parents. What were your parent's names and where were they from?

Ernie Karkula: My dad's name is John Jay Karkula. He was from Blain, Ohio. Do you want me to carry on with him for a little bit before I go on to my mother?

JR: Yes.

EK: He joined the Army and was with General Pershing in Weslaco, Texas. They were chasing Pancho Villa, trying to get a hold of him because Pancho Villa had evaded the United States town in New Mexico. I don't know if you know that or not. He was stationed there.

My mother's name was Bessie Trevino. Her parent's had a big laundromat. So my dad used to take his uniforms there. In those days, the Spanish were pretty particular. They were very protective of their girls. They wouldn't let mother go out with him. He'd come in, bring his clothes in and visit with her. He would get the mariachis to come in and serenade her. She would look out the window at him. They finally eloped after about three or four months. They got married.

JR: Where did they get married at?

EK: At Poteet. A little town called Poteet, in Texas. This is in Texas, near Weslaco, Texas.

JR: Do you know what year they got married?

EK: I think it was about 1918. I don't have the record on that.

JR: Tell me your mother's name. Your mother's name was Bessie?

EK: My mother's name was Blasa. I think they call it blossom in Spanish. Trevino. Her mother was Spaniard and her dad was Yaqui Indian from old Mexico.

JR: Where was your mother born?

EK: She was born there in Texas, in Weslaco.

JR: What kind of work did your father do?

EK: He got gassed, as I understand, in World War I. He was a veteran. In fact, he's been buried here at Fort Whipple. He did some short farming after he got his medical discharge. He did short farming and was a canal rider for the irrigation district. Then, the climate was so hard on him that they sent him to Arizona.

JR: So this was in Texas?

EK: Yes, this is Texas. This is there in Weslaco, Texas. It's a farming deal. He raised cabbage. In fact, he made sauerkraut. Of course, he had a pension, so we moved to Phoenix. I remember I was just a little kid. We camped out in the desert out here. The coyotes were howling and it scared me.

JR: Your mother worked before she got married. She worked at the laundry?

EK: Yes. She worked at the laundry with her parents.

JR: Did she work after she got married or did she stop?

EK: No, she didn't work after she was married. Just during the time until she married Dad.

JR: Your father was in the Army. Was he stationed in Texas at the time he met your mother?

EK: He was stationed there at Weslaco with General Pershing.

JR: He was involved with the Army in World War I?

EK: He was there. All I know is he was stationed there. He met mother there. Whether it was before, I don't know.

JR: When were you born?

EK: I was born in 1924 in Weslaco.

JR: Do you have brothers and sisters?

EK: There were ten of us. I had three brothers. Four boys and six girls.

JR: Where are you in the lineup of kids?

EK: I was about the middle one. My oldest sister is 93 now. There's Melba, Helen, Richard, Harold, and then me. I was the middle one in the middle of the family.

JR: What are the names of your siblings after you?

EK: Eva, Martin, Ana, Gracie and Delie.

JR: That's a lot of kids.

EK: Yeah, it's a lot of kids. My mother was no bigger than you. I'll tell you, she was a great lady. I have stressed to my kids that I never, ever saw her asleep. We'd go to bed at night, she'd be up. I'd get up the next morning, she'd be up. I don't know when she rested. She was a really wonderful lady.

JR: I can imagine. You said that your family came to Arizona in 1927?

EK: Yes, in 1927.

JR: What was that made your mom and dad decide to come to Arizona?

EK: They decided to because Dad couldn't stand the humidity. It bothered him with his lungs and his breathing.

JR: Why did he choose to come to Phoenix?

EK: I think he bought a farm in South Phoenix. We came there. We landed at this place called Five Points on this place in South Central. Then the Depression hit and he lost the farm. The river was running at that time. There was water running down there. When he lost the farm, he came to Goodyear, contracting cotton.

JR: Do you know what year it was when he came to Goodyear?

EK: In 1931.

JR: What was his job for Goodyear?

EK: He was a contractor. He contracted cotton. In those days, they chopped cotton. He'd contracted weeding cotton. Also, he contracted fields of cotton. He would contract with the farmer and pick a field, pick cotton.

JR: Where did your family live?

EK: In those days, there were four camps at Goodyear. Cotton camps. We lived at Camp Number Three. It was a little community. It had a school, a little grocery store, a church. They had regular homes for the original people there. When the season would come to pick, there would be maybe a thousand people there.

JR: They had homes for all the workers?

EK: Yes, they had tents. Rows of tents, one right after the other. Anywhere from five hundred to one thousand people.

JR: Where was Camp Three at?

EK: Are you familiar with Sun Lakes? Where the Bank of America is? There was a forty acre place right there. That was Camp Three.

JR: Camp One was the main headquarters, right?

EK: Camp One was Goodyear, which is Ocotillo now, over by Bashas' grocery store. That was Camp One.

JR: Do you remember where Camp Two and Four were?

EK: You know where the post office is on Queen Creek? Right across the street, there's a little tower. Do you ever notice that little water tower? That's Camp Two right there. It wasn't as big as Camp Three. It was a smaller place.

JR: Was that Chandler Heights or Queen Creek [Roads]?

EK: The post office is right across the street? I guess it was Chandler Heights [Road] then.

JR: What about the other camp?

EK: You know where the Last Chance is? Last Chance at Sun Lakes. You know where the bar is, right there on the corner?

JR: Along Arizona Avenue?

EK: It was off of Arizona Avenue, about half of a mile. That was Camp Four. I didn't see any activity there. They had closed it down because the water there was very salty. They couldn't have that water. It might have had a couple of stragglers putting up tents there, but there was no activity there.

JR: Did Camp Two have houses as well?

EK: Yes.

JR: Did it have a church and school also, or just houses?

EK: Just houses.

JR: The same kind of tent houses, or frame buildings?

EK: Frame buildings.

JR: Do you have any memories of being a little kid there at Camp Three?

EK: Oh, yes. I started working pretty young. We were pretty poor during the Depression. My brother that was older than me, and Melba, Ana, Gracie and Martin went to school at Goodyear at the camp. It was a two building school. I chopped cotton. I went to work pretty young. I worked for \$1 a day.

JR: Do you remember what that was like? To chop cotton when you were young? Can you describe it?

EK: It used to get my back sore from chopping. It would get hot. I think we got five cents a row. The cotton would just be thick with raspers(?). Dad would contract for a field. Then we'd go chop cotton. They paid five cents a row. That's what we got.

JR: A lot of kids in the family were working at the time?

EK: Most of the kids were at school, the younger kids. I only went to third grade in school.

JR: Did you go to the school that was in Camp Three?

EK: No, I didn't go to school there. I went to the school at Kyrene. Then, there was a camp out there. Are you familiar with Lone Butte Ranch, over there by the casino? It was desert there. We would go and camp out there. There was a Mrs. Brimhall, who was the teacher in Mesa. She used to drive out. The school furnished her a place to stay: part of it was her house and part of it was the schoolroom. She taught kindergarten up to eighth grade.

JR: All the kids were in one classroom?

EK: In one room, one big class room. There were twenty to twenty-five people. Very good teacher. I learned a lot from her.

- JR: You said your younger siblings went to school in Goodyear?
- EK: Yes. In Kyrene, too.
- JR: How long did your family stay in Goodyear?
- EK: Actually, we'll call it Camp Three, and then we moved to Goodyear. Twice we moved. Wherever the work was. Most of the time, we spent part of the time at Camp Three, and then moved to Goodyear. That's where we lived when I joined the Marine Corps.
- JR: Did your family live in one of the tent houses? What was your house like that you lived in?
- EK: They had these big adobe homes. Just a line of them, maybe twenty. They would be two bedrooms. We lived in one of those.
- JR: Can you describe what you remember about Goodyear?
- EK: It was like that movie with Henry Fonda. Like Grapes of Wrath, showing the poor people. We had permanent structures for the permanent people, which were adobe buildings. They had some houses.
- JR: So they had the school there?
- EK: They had that school that was the two-building school.
- JR: Do you remember a store being there?
- EK: Yes, a Bashas', a little trading post. That's where they got their start. Eddie Basha, I knew his parents well, and his aunts. I was just a kid, too. I can picture it all in my mind.
- JR: You were doing farm work as a young man. Before the war began in 1941, you were out in the fields picking cotton and helping your dad.
- EK: At that time, I started driving tractor. I drove a tractor for Boswell. When I was fifteen years old, I started driving tractor. I drove tractor for Boswell. In 1942, I went to work near the airbase as a lineman. Mostly tractor driving. I was doing some cowboy-ing at the time too.
- JR: Can you tell me what you were doing as a cowboy?
- EK: Herding cattle. I worked cattle. In those days, they didn't have medication for screw worms. The cattle would get worms in them, and

blow flies. We'd rope them. In those days, there were cattle all over the place. There would be three or four cowboys. We'd go through the field. You could smell them, you know, from the worms. We would rope them and dig out the worms. They didn't have any medication then, so we chewed tobacco. We chewed tobacco, spit in it and then put cotton on it. That would kill the worms.

In fact, I worked the SV [Ranch] for Jack Bogle. (correcting himself) For his dad, not Jack. SV Ranch, which was Wikiup and Wickenburg. That's what we did out in the desert because the donkeys used to go out. The cattle would end up by a water hole. The donkeys would go and bite them and they'd bleed. Then the blow flies would get them and they'd get worms. Then we'd have to go doctor them up.

JR: Did you use the tobacco then?

EK: They came out with a black smear at the time, later on, that worked pretty good. The tobacco was the best. I didn't chew tobacco; I didn't smoke at that time. We just take it, cut off a chunk, put it in your mouth, and chew it for a little while. That was the medicine.

JR: That's interesting.

Daughter: Dad, you might tell her the story about your finger. That's interesting to know. Your finger and the spider webs.

EK: This was in Texas. I was just a little kid. Dad chopped wood and left the ax out there. I went out. Mother was working the cabbage at the time, helping with the weeds. I got the ax, picked it up, and I chopped this finger off right here. Mother got spider webs. It's an old Indian remedy. She put the spider web and wrapped it. It grew back together.

JR: Wow. That's pretty amazing.

EK: She had a lot of Indian remedies from my grandpa. He was Yaqui Indian from across the border.

JR: So she knew a lot of the natural remedies.

EK: Yes. I didn't know what a doctor was until I went into the Marine Corps.

JR: So she took care of you guys.

EK: Oh, yes. She had all kinds of regular medicine. His [his father] situation was when we were little, if we stubbed our toe, he'd give us a dose of

castor oil. I'll never forget that. About once a month, he'd line us up and give everybody castor oil. I guess it worked. We're all pretty healthy.

JR: I think that was pretty popular back in those days. But I don't think kids liked it very much. What other memories do you have about your mom?

EK: She was a wonderful, wonderful lady. She worked hard. She was just as calm as she could be. She never got excited. My dad's the one who would get excited. My mother was very good. To raise ten kids, you had to be. She was a hard worker. A lovely, lovely mother.

JR: What do you remember about your father?

EK: My father was pretty GI. I think if I counted the spankings I got, but I guess I was pretty ornery. So they tell me. I had a lot of energy and still do actually. One time, I bummed a cigarette off one of the workers. I was just a kid. He told my dad. My dad used to call it dancing. This particular time, after a while, he said, "In a little while, we're going to go outside and dance." What he'd meant was, he was going to take his belt and hold you. We'd just go around and around with him spanking me. I got wise to that after a while. I was pretty ornery. I'd put on an extra pair of pants and then I didn't feel it. But when he'd start spanking me, I just screamed. It actually didn't bother me because I had all these clothes on. He saw me pulling these extra pants off. He said, "You know, Ernie. I think we'll go dance some more." This was after I pulled the other pants off. That didn't last very long. He was GI. Very strict. Very smart man.

He became an alcoholic in his later years. When we'd come here, he'd go to Whipple. In those days, as I understand, they didn't really have medication for the lungs. In the morning, to cut the flame, they'd give him two shots of whiskey. He got hooked on drinking. In his later years, he became an alcoholic.

JR: That's too bad.

EK: But he had his good times too. I remember when I was small, he'd drink one or two beers and get pretty happy. He had the _____(?). I remember the song: (sings) "Rings on your fingers and rings on your toes--" He'd get me and hold me on his feet and dance with me. I remembered that. When he was in a bad mood, he was pretty GI. I always had it coming.

JR: I want to start talking a little bit about the War years. What do you remember about when Pearl Harbor was attacked? Where were you at?

EK: I was working with Boswell's. I was driving tractors when it came on. That was in Goodyear at Ocotillo.

JR: How did you hear about it?

EK: At the time, it didn't penetrate too much. Then the draft came on and the boys started going. My older brother went to the National Guard. Harold joined the Navy. It was my turn to go. I was too young, so Dad had to go and sign for me. In the Marine Corps, you joined and you had to wait until it was a complete company. Sixty men to a platoon. I waited a couple months. I worked on a dude ranch in Phoenix while I was waiting. Before that, I had gone to junior college to become a pilot. I did become a pilot afterwards. I had my own plane and everything.

JR: What year was it that you went to junior college? Did you get your GED?

EK: Yes, I got that afterwards, after I got out.

JR: You went to the junior college what year?

EK: I think it was 1940, 1941 or 1942. I have my old records from there some place.

JR: What was it that made you decide to go there?

EK: I wanted to be a pilot. The government sponsored a class. They paid for everything. I had a great boss [Mr. Nickell]. He would help me with my lessons, meteorology and all of that. In fact, you know Chuck [Mr. Nickell's son]. His mother was a teacher. She helped me. She taught me every evening. She had polio when she was a younger lady and had a bad leg. But, a lovely, lovely person. So was his dad.

JR: So she would help you with some of your classes with some of the things you were learning?

EK: She helped me with my navigation and meteorology. I didn't understand that. I got into ____(?). My boss worked with an electrical engineer. I was at work with him. He'd say, "Ernie, you got your lessons with you?" I say, "Yeah." He'd say, "Well, let's do some work." We'd sit down and go through problems. He helped me a lot. When I graduated, I did okay. I got a seventy-eight. I had to have at least a sixty-eight. But I made it seventy-eight and that qualified me to get out as a glider pilot, as a warrant officer.

JR: How long was your class? Was it just for a year?

EK: For a year. Burt would let me off early. I would leave Goodyear, go to Chandler and catch a bus to go to junior college. I think it was two hours

or three hours. Then, I'd come back. Then, I'd be on the job at 7:00 the next morning again.

JR: That's a long day.

EK: But I wanted education. I was hungry for education. I just didn't get the chance to go to school because I had to work.

JR: Did you find it was hard when you started taking those classes because you only went to third grade? Did you struggle a little bit?

EK: Mrs. Brimhall taught me quite a bit. I was smart enough to go ahead and take a test and make it to school. With Chuck's mother and my boss, I got a pretty good grade.

JR: Everyone helped you a bit. What was it that made you decide that you wanted to be a glider pilot?

EK: I didn't want to be a glider pilot.

Pause in recording

EK: I don't know. I just wanted to fly. This deal came up with the government to go to school. There was a shortage of pilots. That's why I went to that. I didn't anticipate going into the Army as a glider pilot. I had that opportunity because I made the grade. I was qualified for that. I wanted to go to the Marine Corps Air Force.

JR: When did you enlist in the Marine Corps?

EK: A short time before January of 1943. I had to get a release from the Draft Board. Then my dad had to go in and sign for me.

JR: How old were you?

EK: I was about eighteen and a half because I had to sign for the draft when I was eighteen. I think I started school when I was seventeen. I'm having a hard time trying to remember that. I know that I originally went into San Diego to the Marine Corps. I was sworn in here in Phoenix on January 3, 1943.

JR: You went into the U.S. Marine Corps?

EK: Yes.

JR: Why did you choose the Marines?

- EK: My older brother was in the Army. Next to him was Harold who was in the Navy. I thought I wanted to be in the Marines Corps.
- JR: What was the name of your older brother that went into the Army?
- EK: Richard Karkula. He's on that Board, the Chandler deal. I think Harold is too. I'm not sure.
- JR: You went into the Marines Corps and entered service on January 3, 1943?
- EK: Yes. I went to San Diego.
- JR: That's where you received your basic training?
- EK: That's where I went to school. Communications school for about six weeks. When I graduated from there, I went to Camp Pendleton for my advanced field training.
- JR: What do you remember about communications school?
- EK: All I can remember is that I gained a lot of weight because I wasn't used to just sitting. I weighed 212 pounds when I got out of school. I was hungry for education. I enjoyed it. Besides that for exercise, I had done a little boxing. Maybe this is a little bit off the subject. In these camps for picking, if it rained, they couldn't go out and pick until maybe 11:00 or 12:00. There would be a bunch of us kids. These guys would get together, give us a nickel to put on the boxing gloves. We were little guys. They entertained themselves by watching us kids fight. I got into it. I fought in Madison Square Gardens in Phoenix as a youngster. In the Marine Corps, I represented my platoon. I was 182 pounds. I fought in San Diego. I fought in Camp Pendleton.
- JR: What do you remember about being at Camp Pendleton?
- EK: It was nice. The only thing I hated about it was that when they find the artillery into the desert, they'd have a fire. Then we'd have to go fight the fire that night and put it out. We went out training. Of course at first, they put me in the raiders, which was a little bit tough. You had to live off the canyon. You had to steal from the other camps to eat.
- JR: Tell me about the raiders.
- EK: I was there not that long. Major got me out of there because I was fussing too much. I was supposed to be in the Air Force. I had all the qualifications. So, I didn't get it.

JR: Can you describe what the raiders did?

EK: Yes. We went out and lived off the desert. We'd go practice and raid some other outfit.

JR: How long did you do that?

EK: Not very long because I got out of it as quick as I could. I don't know. Probably about three or four weeks.

JR: Where did you go after that once you were transferred out?

EK: They sent me back to San Diego. Then, I got a three-day pass. I came home and visited. I thought they were going to send me to the Aviation School like I was supposed to. But they put me aboard a ship. I'll never forget that it was the Prisoner Pull(??). It was the name of the ship. I think it was July 1943 that I was aboard that ship. We went past the Equator. In fact, I boxed during the time we were at the Equator. We landed at Guadalcanal. We had been assigned certain papers. We went out and that's where I would meet up with the 155s. First Batallion. The 155s. At that time, it was the First Marines. Then they split that and made it into the 155s. I wish I could find those papers.

JR: So it was the First Marines and the 155th Batallion?

EK: It was the First Marines when I got there. It was heavy artillery. Then they made that into Third Amphibious.

JR: That's who you ended up being with? The Third Amphibious.

EK: Yes.

JR: What was your military specialty?

EK: Supposedly, communication. I went through school. However, I became a BAR Man. A machine gun, a Browning automatic machine gun. They call it BAR.

JR: What did you do in that position?

EK: We stood guard for the outfit when we were in the front lines. Behind the front line, because these were rifles. At night, we had camps, posts, that we stayed in for infiltration of the enemy. We did that. Tried to sneak out and look for souvenirs. Flags.

JR: Let's go back a little bit. I want to talk about your trip across the ocean in July 1943 when you got on that ship. How did you feel when you left the U.S., and you were heading out into the Pacific?

EK: Of course, I've never been in the ocean before. It was fine. I never did get seasick. There was how-many-thousand men above this ship. We had to learn. You get up in the morning, go get in line. You stand in line and get through eating. You go back to your bathroom and come back, and get in line again. You're standing in line 60% of the time to eat. I got smart. That's why I did boxing, I didn't have to stand in line. They just put a tag on my arm and I could walk right on in and eat. I got on work duty once or twice too. You didn't have to stand in line. One time, when I was on work duty, you go downstairs and load on groceries onto a net. They put them up to the top. They dropped a case of tomatoes. They hollered and I looked up and it caught me on the side of my face. Broke my nose. I had a headache for about three weeks.

JR: How did you feel about leaving the US and going into where battle was happening?

EK: I looked forward to it. When I was at Camp Pendleton, I boxed there. There was this professional boxer who was a heavyweight. He was a GI. I was all ready to go box. I boxed with him three or four times at 182 weight. He didn't want me to leave. He told me, "Karkula, I can get you out of going overseas. You can stay here and we'll box." I said, "No, I want to go overseas." I didn't stay. I'm trying to think of the heavyweight's name. You pick out things that you do, or that I did. Work parties to get out of standing in line. I never did get seasick.

I did get upset one time. There's about four thousand men, I'm not sure. It's just crowded. I was down almost at the bottom. It was hotter than ever. They had cooler ducts all the way around. I was sleeping by one. I took my knife and cut a little hole so I could get some fresh air. It just stunk like heck in there. We hit a storm. We went to go eat and the food was just sliding. The ship was just going like that way. I was laying in bed and I decided to get up and go outside. The guy that had the bunk above me was sick and burped and barfed all over my face. I did get a little upset. I couldn't get rid of that smell for weeks. Every day, there's activities like that. Whether it's of interest, I don't know.

JR: There's a lot of people in my generation or younger that don't have any idea of what it would be like to be on a ship with thousands of other people. That's why I ask that question to get more of an idea of what that was like.

EK: It wasn't the best. I didn't do any better. I hope I'm giving you some good information.

(Pause in recording)

EK: Last night we had some discussion. My grandson was kidding me about the Army. I never discussed it. When I first got out, I used to have nightmares really bad.

JR: I would imagine so. I think that's pretty normal.

EK: Richard, my older brother and I, used to sleep in the same room. He always had to stop at the door. When I got home, I didn't want to go any place. I just stayed home. He'd come in and had to knock on the door before he came into the room. If he came in and surprised me, I'd just fall apart.

JR: That's hard. We were talking about your experience on the ship as you were going down. You ended up landing at Guadalcanal?

EK: That's where I landed, yes.

JR: Can you describe when you came to Guadalcanal, what you saw and what you experienced there?

EK: When we got there, they had disembarked. We got off and they had trucks there for us. The truck took us out about fifteen miles. The air base there was called Henderson Field. They took us out about fifteen miles. We got acquainted with where we belong and where we were. That was the first 155s. We had our maneuvers and going out on fire missions. Then we had to go to work parties every now and then. We'd get ready to go on a campaign and have to load up the ships.

JR: You mentioned the fire missions. Can you describe that?

EK: Fire missions are, well, we set up communication. This is where my communication comes in. Double-E Telephones. We'd run a line from one company to the other on the coconut trees. The guns would set up. Our deal was sort of a guard for the enemy. They would practice. One gun would fire at a certain point until they got it pinpointed. They had their figures. After they hit their point with this one single gun, then they'd have all four. There are four guns to a battery. The Howitzer and then there's the long rifles. When the one rifle or Howitzer would come within the point of the enemy camp, then they'd open up with all four. Of course, that way, they wouldn't be wasting a lot of ammunition. That's

where the kids were. They had their own tent like this doing all their calculating and they'd call it a fire mission. They'd say, "Fire Mission."

I can tell you a story about this. This is in New Zealand. I was there. We had a New Zealand R & R after Guam. We went there from Guadacanal and Guam, which is at the equator and hotter than the devil. We went to New Zealand, which was the middle of winter. Cold and snow drifts this high. We went on a Fire Mission. I got so bad. My throat, and I could barely talk. I was on guard. This jeep came up and it was a Two Star General. I stopped him, saluted him and I could barely talk. I apologized. I told him we were having a Fire Mission. I told him he would have to wait. He said, "Son, what's the matter with you?" I said, "My chest, my throat, I can hardly breathe." He said, "Do you have a phone in there in your tent?" I said, "Yes, sir." He went in there and called. He said, "This is General so-and-so, you got a boy up here sicker than a dog. I want someone up here and get him to medication as soon as you can." In about two minutes, an ambulance drove up and they picked me up. They gave me a shot of whiskey and took me to sickbay for two days. That's called a Fire Mission. You block the roads because they would be firing over the roads.

JR: What was happening in Guadacanal when you guys came in? What was going on at that time?

EK: It was secured. The island was secured. They were stragglers of Japanese soldiers coming in and getting in chow line. For our experience, we'd go out on excursions. Maybe there would be ten, twelve, fifteen of us. We'd take our regular gear that you would have in combat. We'd go out and go around the island to see if there was any activity. We'd spend maybe one or two days. Then, we'd come back. That's what we would do. It was training and teaching. There was jungle, a lot of mosquitoes. In fact, I got malaria there. We ran around in shorts there. We went swimming, until we had a work party. Our outfit would volunteer. Our Colonel didn't want us to lay around too long. When there was a work party, he'd send us out to load ammunition. I used to sneak off. There was a movie deal. The Seabees's had a movie deal there. This other kid and I would sneak off and watch movies. We got caught. Things like that.

JR: How long were you in Guadacanal?

EK: My main base, I got there in July 1943. I think we were aboard ship for twenty-three days. That was our main base. From there, we would go on a camping. For instance, to Guam. Then, we'd help them load the ship, go to Guam. When we secured the island, we would come back to Guadacanal. From there, they sent us on an R & R to New Zealand.

(Pause in recording)

JR: Tell me about when you went to Guam. Tell me your experience there.

EK: We loaded ship at the convoy. I figured how many ships were in that. I think it was five or six days getting to Guam. We were out about four or five miles from the island. That day, and then that night, and the next morning, they moved us about a mile, or a mile and half from the island. That's when we boarded these landing craft to go on the island. It was still dark. We could barely see. We circled around out there for about an hour. Then a whole wave of us just went in on the landing craft. We hit the island. Everybody was about half a mile on the beachfront. Which reminds me, I have a picture, supposedly. Do you have that? After we hit the island, when we were in the deal, a fellow came running out from the jungle with some kids. He was the mayor of Guam.

JR: I saw that picture.

EK: Real nice people. That was at one time- that island was- there were pirates. They would come in. They had Japanese people there. The pirates integrated there with the people and there were Spaniards. These people in Guam spoke Spanish. I speak Spanish fluently. They talked about the problems they had. They had with the Japs.

JR: What kind of problems did they have?

EK: They had to hide out. The Japanese are pretty stern. Just like the Mayor, him and his family left for two years there in the jungle.

JR: When you came in on the landing craft with all the other men, did you say you were part of the first wave?

EK: I was the first wave. All the other guys, we hit the beach. They drop the front down and you take off. We had to climb up an embankment. Then you take off. One thing they had stressed to us, they talked about this on the ship. They said that they thought the Japanese were poisoning the water. They said to be real careful about drinking the water too soon. They didn't know if the Japs had or hadn't poisoned the water. They gave us some pills. If you had to drink water from the stream, put a couple of pills in your tin cup and let it dissolve, then drink it. It offsets the poison.

I liked my coffee, even then. I wanted a cup of coffee. And it was hotter than the devil there. I thought that I didn't dare want to drink the water. If I drink coffee, then I'll run out of water. I'll kill two birds with one stone. I'll just put this powdered coffee. I put some in. I had never drank it before. I put some in my cup with my little water, then I'd just put a little.

I put that package of powdered coffee. It was strong, but I drank it because I wanted coffee. I suffered that evening.

Franco, this friend of mine, we went through boot camp together. He and I bivouacked together, that is, we used the same foxhole. He'd stay awake part of the time, then I'd stay awake, because we didn't dare get up at night. You don't walk around. You stay in your hole. I don't know if I need to get into this or not. I was cramping real bad.

JR: Yeah, that coffee gets you real bad.

EK: Franco said, "Karkula, you got to get out." I said, "I can't get out and I got to go." Franco said, "You're not going to go in the hole here with me." I crawled out from under the tent and rolled over a ways. It was hurting so bad. It didn't rain that much in Guam, like Okinawa. Okinawa was real bad. We slept in water. He and I bunked together. We went through boot camp. He was Platoon Twenty-one, I was in Nineteen. We went through all this together and we came back home together. I visit him in Houston. He lives in Houston. I visited him two or three times. We had another guy, Johnson, that lived in Chicago. We'd get together and go down and see him. They came here a couple of times to see me. First thing we do is start laughing about that incident about coffee.

JR: Where was Franco from originally?

EK: Houston, Texas.

JR: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like to get off the landing craft and get onto the island, and what you did after that?

EK: When you get off the landing craft, you're up, but you don't know what you are going to run into. You're very conscious. You can hear shooting. I never ran into that situation. I was lucky. I was a BAR man. Sometimes at night, I'd have to plow into a deal if someone thought they saw something out there. You really didn't have too much time to think. We were busy. I never thought about getting shot. I really didn't. My mother used to light a candle for me every Sunday, so I think that's what did it. We weren't like the Army. We lived on hard tack. There would be a little box like this. You would open it, peel it back. There was two pieces of candy, a chocolate bar about that big, but it's hard as a rock. That was our lunch. Whenever they got a break and the wagon would come out, they would bring us out something to eat. That was a treat. I never saw an egg.

This was in Guam. I was standing guard for the General. He had this tent up on top of the hill. I was standing guard there. I opened his refrigerator and he had two buckets of eggs. I stole two of them. The next morning

when I got there, all my buddies were around there. We had two eggs. We got a helmet. We cooked them and everyone had a spoonful. I thought that they better not tell on me, I'll get put in the brig.

JR: You missed having real food around?

EK: Oh yes. Even at Guadacanal, or after the island was secure, we'd get food. We got this, and pardon the expression, shit on a shingle. Have you ever heard that expression?

JR: Yes.

EK: That was a deal. The drink was lemonade and it was just like battery acid. In fact, hardly any of the guys would drink it. The drink was so strong, when they'd get through, there would be some left. They'd pour it on the floor and it would sizzle and boil. We didn't get the best of food. Not like in boot camp.

JR: How long did it take for Guam to be secured?

EK: Not very long. I'm trying to remember. We were either there twenty-seven days. It took us maybe a week or ten days. We didn't have that much resistance.

JR: Do you remember ever capturing anyone while you were on the island?

EK: No. I don't think the boys believed too much in taking a prisoner. Unless it was for information purposes. A lot of dead Japs.

JR: Do you have any specific memories that stand out in your mind about while being in Guam?

EK: The people were very nice. Very nice people. Beautiful country. The vegetation, I remember that, just like Okinawa. The vegetation. The green was just green and the red was so red. Flowers and all, just beautiful.

JR: Can you describe, if you were there for ten days, what a typical day would have been for you and the guys that you were with?

EK: After the island was secured, we pretty much just laid around waiting for the ships. When I shipped, we loaded up, then boarded the ship. After the island was secured, other than standing guard and being aware. Our Colonel made sure that we didn't lay around too much. Go on hikes, run us down for twenty miles, then come back.

JR: So he kept you busy?

EK: Very nice fellow.

JR: When you left Guam, where did you go?

EK: We left to Guadalcanal to our main base. We were there about two or three weeks. Then we boarded ship to go to New Zealand for our R & R.

JR: What do you remember about New Zealand? I know you talked about snow. What else do you remember?

EK: The people were very nice. The American soldier ruins a good liberty. The Eighth Army was gone when we got there. The people would drive up to our gate. You'd walk out and they'd take you home and feed you, dine and wine you. Just take care, showed you a good time and would take you back. It kind of got out of hand. The Eighth Army had come home. They were a little upset about the situation. We had military in Wellington, the main capitol. A bunch of the Marines were in a movie. The American flag would come on. The New Zealand soldiers start blowing it. It upset the Marines and a big battle broke out. They put it under Marshall Law. You couldn't go into town unless there were four or five of you. The people were very nice.

When we went back for the second time, you could tell the difference. They weren't at the gate to pick you up or anything. The American Marines ruined it. It's a beautiful country. I never ate so much mutton in my life. They have a lot of sheep there. Even their pies. I'll never forget I had a meal and it was mutton. I got through; the waitress asked me if I wanted a piece of pie. I said yes. I figured I'll get a piece of apple pie. She came back and it was a mutton pie. I'll never forget that.

JR: When we were talking before the interview started, you mentioned that you were pretty young at that time. It was a little bit scary for you. Can you describe how you felt?

EK: I thought about it aboard ship. But it never penetrated until I got on the landing barge. I was thinking, "Well, here goes." As we were traveling, water was splashing on me. I looked up and here were three old salts. Just standing there and talking. It really made me feel good. It gave me confidence, those old three salts there. It was good thing. I never had any trouble after that in Okinawa or any place else.

JR: When you guys came back from your R & R in New Zealand, what happened after that?

EK: Pretty much getting ready for the next campaign. Some more training. I kind of got away and got by without it. I was boxing two or three times a week. In fact, I have a picture of a kid that boxed with me. His name was Norman Theiss from Dallas, Texas. He was killed in Tarawa. Pretty sure it was Tarawa.

JR: Since you were boxing, did that give you special privileges in some ways?

EK: Well, I entertained the troops. I was just like Joel Lewis, but I was one of them. I'd volunteer. I had boxed here as a kid and in town. I got some privileges. I didn't have to stand guard at times. I didn't have to get up at 6:00 in the morning. I could stay in bed and into the kitchen to get your breakfast. I had some privileges. I was always looking for the easy way out.

(Pause in recording)

EK: Guam was very nice. In fact to this day, I can go to the counselor and they'll pay my way to Guam as one of the Freedom Fighters. Several of my buddies did that, but I haven't. Been too busy, but I should.

JR: You'd like to go there sometime?

EK: Yes. I'm sure they remember Lopez, who is supposed to be the Governor. I'm sure he probably passed away by now. But his offspring might remember. It is beautiful country.

JR: It seems like it.

EK: And the people were really friendly too. They tell me that the Japanese is taking over that island pretty much. The motels cost an arm and a leg.

JR: You were training then for your next campaign? Where did that next campaign happen at?

EK: After we got back from our R & R in New Zealand and our campaign at Guam, then we got ready for our campaign to go to Okinawa. At the time, we didn't know. We were in a convoy when we hit Tarawa. We were floating by Iwo Jima. A convoy had hit Iwo Jima. We were floating out a couple hundred miles out in case they needed us. They had a lot of pressure, so they decided to send our convoy around to the south side of Okinawa and make a fake landing. That drew the pressure away from the Japs, and drew more troops to Iwo Jima. We did that and floated around. I think it pretty well relieved the pressure on Iwo Jima. Then we came in and hit we hit Okinawa.

JR: You were in the first wave?

EK: We hit as the first wave, hari-kari. Franco and I had to climb up the beach a ways, through rocks and boulders. A Japanese plane came over and missed us by about fifty feet. They'd been shot down and just hit the islands, just about a couple hundred yards in front of us.

JR: What was that like?

EK: I saw the pilot. I saw the pilot as he was going through. We both did. We split that island in eleven hours, split it in two. We secured it back this way. We got into trouble going the other way. It was just stair steps. We would secure that one step, then there was another one and they were always shelling us. They were looking down at us. Rain, cold, slosh, it was miserable. That's where we slept in pup holes in two inches of water.

JR: You were sleeping in a lot of water?

EK: We'd sleep. Even though your blanket was wringing wet with water, it was warm. It was cold and nasty.

JR: What was that date? When was it that you were in Okinawa?

EK: I'll have to find all that information. 1945, I think it was. I'm trying to remember. It was in the wintertime, it was cold. It was muddy and sloshy. In one incident, we had been up towards the front. We fall back to relax. There was a big levy there. A big levy across a lake, with water on both sides. About a quarter of a mile levy. We got there and when we were about halfway, the Japanese started shelling us. We just rolled off into the water. Out into the water with the shells just falling. I'll never forget that. It was cold too. That's where I busted this leg.

JR: So you were injured?

EK: Not that particular time. We were on a fire mission and we started getting shelled. I was up towards the front, protecting if the Japanese tried to infiltrate the guns. They had posts around there. They had been shelled. A shell had come in and just blew up a big hole that filled up with water. That's where we'd go and take a bath. I was out there taking a bath and shells started coming in. The shells started falling. There was a hill with some rocks a while away and I took off running for protection to get behind the rocks. I jumped and landed. I turned my knee and fell into a rock. I busted my knee and ankle.

JR: What happened after that?

EK: The ambulance came by, picked me up and took me to the field hospital. They had to cut my shoes off. My foot had just swollen. They cut my pants. I was there three days. I wanted to go back to my outfit. You become like family. Franco and I were just like brothers. They went ahead and went back about fifteen, twenty miles away from the front. The Marine Corps did have their own hospital. We just had a medic station. They took me to a hospital, which was the Twenty-Seventh Army. That's where my buddy came to see me in Arizona. He was in the Twenty-Seventh Army. In fact, he brought me some groceries. Some bacon, eggs. See, I like eggs, and I was eating hard rock candy.

JR: What was your friend's name?

EK: Yoakam. Doyle Yoakam.

JR: Was he from Chandler?

EK: Yes. He was from Chandler. In fact, I went with his sister, Florence Yoakam.

JR: Tell me about when you came into Okinawa. What do remember about the island? What did you see, or what do you remember?

EK: Okinawa had a lot of crevices. It was kind of rough, but there was beautiful country there too. The vegetation was like Guam, just beautiful colors. I know on one incident, I was on Post #2 with a machine gun there. There was kind of a canyon there. Our camp was up on top. We had five posts all the way around, so the Japanese wouldn't come in and catch us. I think Franco had the second watch. I had the first watch. I think it was about 12:00 or 1:00 at night, I heard voices. We had the Lieutenant who was officer of the day, who was in charge of all our posts. You had a phone and you ring it. He answered, and said, "What's up?" I said, "I hear a lot of voices down in this canyon." He said, "Pull a flare." You don't do any of that unless he gives an order. I pulled a flare and the flare just lights up like day. There was about fifteen or twenty people. Women and kids. The kids were crying. They started crying when I pulled a flare. They started running. The Japanese would take these families and move them. They'd dress up different and slip past the front lines.

JR: They would come in with the families?

EK: They would come in with the people. Not necessarily their family, you know. And then that way they could cross over or infiltrate. Anyway I told the lieutenant what I saw, that I saw a lot of people, women and children. I said I didn't know about any men. He said that they'd probably dressed up

as women, which that's what they'd do. And he said, well, why don't you go ahead, you use a gun. Open fire if you want, whatever you think. I thought for a minute, and well, there may be some Japanese soldiers in there. But about that time a little baby started crying, and I said well, I'm not about to fire after that. So, they went on about their business. But they used to do that. To infiltrate.

JR: Right. That must've been pretty tough.

EK: Well, I guess Iwo Jima, I had indications and a taste of that, but I guess in order to survive, they had to kill a lot of the civilians. The Japanese had no, no- they could care less you know? They were very mean people. But they were taught that way.

JR: Now, was it difficult on Okinawa. You talked about when you came in and you split the island in half, and you secured one part of it. Then you had to move up and get that other part. Was it difficult fighting on the island?

EK: Oh yes. Very, very tough. There were a lot of people, I think forty five, I'm trying to remember, forty-four thousand people killed in the Marines, or forty thousand. I can't remember now. Now see, we couldn't- the island was this way, and we split about a third of it this way and didn't meet much resistance. But the Japanese army generals pulled all their troops from here and brought them up here. Well from this part down, it was stair step. And you would secure, and they were just like honey bees; holes all along the deal. They were looking right down at you all the time, and they had guns that they would pull out and fire- you know the big guns- and then they would pull them back into the mountain. So you had to go bodily in and get them. Like I said, I was with the 155, so I didn't get a taste of that. Not that severe. I was involved in a deal, not like some of these other kids.

JR: Were you still doing communications at that time?

EK: Oh no, I was a BR Man then. I was a machine gunner. I was, supposedly, someone who had it good. What it amounted to was I had to protect the heavy guns. Or the kids that were in the security deals. And we got into my post go into it there- with a bunch of Japanese. It was very nasty. And when you secure, and you get to the top, you have to do it all over again. Be shelled all the time. We were shelled at all the time.

JR: So you were never hit?

EK: No, that's about as close as I come. I felt the heat of it. I felt the heat of the shell when it exploded. I was lucky. I was lucky there. But when I landed, I landed in a bunch of rocks and broke my leg.

JR: How long did it take you to heal up from that?

EK: Well, I was there two or three days I think, and then they sent me to the twenty-seventh Army hospital. And I was there, oh, about six weeks. In fact, the war ended while I was there. Six weeks, maybe longer, I don't know. I know I fell in love with the nurse. She was a beautiful lady. Beautiful, beautiful girl. I say I fell in love with her, she was very nice. I was the only Marine there.

JR: What do you remember about the people you served with?

EK: Oh they were, like I was saying, they became like family. You know, you protect one another. You take Johnson and I, and Franco. We were just like brothers. Well, Norman, who I boxed with-we lost him and Strobbles-we were just a close bunch.

JR: And how did he...what happened to him? To Norman?

EK: I don't know; all I heard down the grapevine was that he'd gotten killed. Then we lost another one. Strobbles, who was in his same platoon. As I heard, he got one pop from a shell in his stomach, blew him up. Everybody- everybody-

JR: Now, you had mentioned you served with Tyrone Power. Do you remember that?

EK: Yes. In boot camp. Played football with him. Played football, and the guy kneed me in the face and I got a black eye. And he kidded me about it. He'd say, oh that's a beautiful shiner. His wife was beautiful. I can't remember her name. But he was a handsome man. And just as common as he could be. When we were there and washing clothes, he was washing. And then this officer come up, a captain come up, with photographers. To take a picture of Tyrone Power, washing clothes. So the captain said, "oh you guys get out the way," well, he moved over too. And they said no, stay there. And he said, "No, if you can't take a picture of my friends, you can't take a picture of me." He was real nice. They had to take a picture of the bunch, but I imagine they tore it up. But he was a real nice fella.

JR: That photo might be around, you never know. It's probably worth something now.

EK: Well, that could be. I'll tell you what, the kids now, you were talking about, how the kids have no knowledge of everything that took place. Especially in Europe with the prisons down there. I was talking to the kids in high school classes. Three of them, I think it was, and they- I don't really think they comprehend what has taken place. So many of them don't understand.

JR: So you were in the hospital when the war ended, right?

EK: Yes, when the bomb went off, and all.

JR: How did you feel about that, when you heard the war had ended?

EK: Well, I thought that was great, because otherwise so many, many people were going to die. That was when my tour was over. I had to reenlist, but what I wanted to do was come home and then go back. And they said, no, you have to reenlist here. And I said "No, I don't want to reenlist here, I want to go home." So I didn't reenlist. So they sent me home. Got my discharge, and I was going back in. But Jack Bogle- you know Jack Bogle- he was a commander with the National Guard here. And of course I was working for Bogle, so he talked me into joining him. In fact, that discharge I have, I saw it this morning. I spent time there, with him, and then I had too much to do, so I told him I had to resign from that.

JR: Now another question I have before we move on to what you did after the war. How did you feel about the people you were fighting at that time?

EK: Well, you know, to me, they were peons. Just like me. In a lot of instances I had an awareness. I knew the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, which I didn't appreciate. And Hitler was taking over, abusing people, what have you, which I didn't appreciate. That's the big shots. The people who were down there fighting, probably half of them were like me. Didn't know much about it. Or even cared, maybe. I was aware, didn't appreciate them bombing Pearl Harbor. So I felt like I needed to do my part. But I know that them Japanese, other than that they were taught to die for the Empire, I don't think they had any knowledge of what the hell it was all about.

In my humble opinion, I'll venture to say that 30% of the people in the United States, maybe because of the economy, don't know too much about the war, and you know, that they're having down there. Of course I'm no politician, but I think that was a bad move. In fact General Powell told President Bush- when they were talking about attacking- and General Powell said, you're buying a war. He was against it. Very smart man. So sometimes, decisions made above isn't the best. Like this one here, I guess. And with Vietnam it was the same way. I guess Vietnam was a bad deal, bad situation.

JR: What do you think is your strongest memory of what you did during the war? What's your most vivid memory you have from the war?

EK: Well, I'll put it this way. I wouldn't miss it for the world but I wouldn't want to do it again. I think I done my duty, I think I done my share, and I felt like it was something that had to be done. I don't know if that was good, but I just feel like it was what I had to do because of the situation and I was smart enough to know a little about what was going on.

JR: Do you have like, one specific memory from the time you were in the war that kinda stands out in your mind?

EK: One particular time...well I have some. I jumped ship in New Zealand. But I didn't jump ship- I was going to the nurse. We were there for the maneuvers and what have you. This other kid and I, Will Frankel, we put on our- we had on our dress uniform- then we put work uniforms over it. So we went out and told the guy at the gate that we were on a work party. So we get out behind the ammos where they're loading, and whatnot, and took our clothes off and met the girls. We come back, and it was- 11:30. We put our work pants on and went aboard the ship. And we had got up there and taken our work clothes off, and what have ya, and they pulled anchor, and went back to Guadalcanal. So I almost jumped ship. That stands out. There's several things like that. Most were bad, but there was a lot of good.

And then, what stands out too is the people I met. Met a lot of nice people, and some that I still get cards from. And there've been two or three of them that passed away. I haven't heard from Johnson in the last three years, and he was a year older than I, so I don't know if he passed or what. But I never did hear from his wife. Just memories, fond memories.

JR: Franco, is he still around? Franco, your friend?

EK: I haven't heard from him in the last two years. Last time I called him. He's eighteen days older than I am, so I need to call him and see if he's still alive. We called him Big because he had a big nose.

JR: Did you have a nickname?

EK: Yeah, they called me Cuckoo Bear. I don't know why.

JR: Cuckoo Bear. That's a good one. So when did you return to the U.S.?

EK: In '46. Nineteen Forty-Six.

JR: Do you remember the month?

EK: No, you know, I'll find that. I'll find my discharge- it has- it shows all that stuff.

(Pause in recording)

Daughter: It's hard to talk about it, but that's the stuff the people want to know. The kids and stuff.

EK: Well, and then some of the gory things too. I was no worse than the other Marines, I wanted a souvenir. In fact, I lost my souvenirs on Okinawa after the island was secured. We were bivouacked along the ocean and had a typhoon come up. The ocean swelled twenty feet. Three ships grounded when the ocean went back down. And we had our camp, along the ocean. And I had a C-Bag with a hari-kari knife, a Japanese flag, and quite a few other things. And the ocean come in and took the tent and everything. The only thing that stayed was my rifle, hanging up on the post. My souvenirs swept out. I got so mad I picked up that rifle and threw it in the ocean. I'll never forget, they said, Karkula, you do that again you're gone. And I said "I don't care, all my souvenirs are gone." He said, "You're kidding." And I said, "Yeah," and he said, "Well, I don't blame you."

We used to take- this is gory too- we used to take- there'd be Japanese soldiers dead, you know. Well they used to put booby traps under them. You'd run up there, pull the body, and it'd explode. Kill a Marine. So we used to take- we had a rope- about fifteen or twenty feet, and we'd go real slow and tie that rope to them and get behind a stump or rock or something, pull the rope, it'd explode. Turned those Japs all to pieces. That's gory. Can you imagine doing that?

JR: No, I can't.

EK: Well, we did.

JR: I know a lot of things happened out there.

EK: I was set up to be a BAR Man, like I said. We moved back to this rest area, there was a hill there. And there was an opening. Just about the size of that right there, an old cave. A couple of the guys decided they wanted to go in and see if there were any souvenirs in there. Well they got in there part of the ways and they got shot. There were some Japanese soldiers in there. So they come crawling out. I'm trying to think of the one, one was Tennessee, they called him Tennessee. They sent me up. They said, set your machine gun up and fire into that hole. Every minute or two, give them a spurt, so they can't come out while the demolition men will work

them on the side of the mountain. They were digging and putting in charges to blow the hole, which they did. But this one Tennessee guy, they felt that he had been shot, and the bullet came out on the other side. But he had two shots, one on each side. And when I drug him out, they wanted to lay him down on the stretcher. But he said, "No, I can't breathe, leave me standing." The other guy was Georgia, but he didn't get hurt. Right there in ____(?). So that's why we had to be careful with outposts.

JR: Right, for protection. I'm curious to know, can you tell me what was important about the souvenirs? Why were they important to you guys?

EK: Because you could go to Henderson Field, with a flag, you could probably get five or six quarts of Seagrams Seven. Or you could trade for cash. \$100 for a flag, or like my hari-kari knife, that was worth quite a bit of money. It was real nice. I have a souvenir I kept. I showed it to her. A little box I got off a Japanese soldier. But that was reason they'd get the souvenirs. They'd even put their lives on the line.

JR: Very intense.

EK: Then some of them- I didn't go with them- a lot of the Japanese had gold teeth. Coming home- I'll never forget coming home- two or three of the guys had gunnysacks full of gold teeth. A gold tooth was a \$5 bill or what have ya. And they'd go pull their teeth out, these damn Japanese.

JR: That's pretty amazing.

EK: Yeah, you know, we didn't think- for some reason you got immune to this situation.

JR: Well, I think part of that is your mind has to adapt to the environment that you're in.

EK: Yeah. You know it's funny. I had- my son-in-law had me come down and talk to his class, oh this was a year or two, and I got some real nice- I was looking at them- some real nice letters from these kids, thanking me. And the only one that didn't get to listen was a Japanese girl. And I thought she was probably embarrassed that I was going to talk like I did. But I did get a little letter from her, apologizing because she couldn't make it. These kids didn't have a inkling of what took place. Not interested in it, or geography.

JR: Now in 1946 you came back to the U.S. What do you remember about your last day of service?

EK: The day I left service? Oh let's see. I had to wait a couple hours and this was at Newport Beach. Camp Pendleton is where I got my discharge, and then I had to go to Newport Beach and I got a bus. I could've waited for the Marines to go to San Diego but I caught a bus, 'cause I was anxious to get home. So I got a ticket. I was glad to come home. However, I had a mind to rejoin the Marine Corps. And if it hadn't been for the fact I had to come home to get reenlisted, I'da probably been in there now. God knows where I would've been. But then I got home and went to work for Tex- a fellow named Tex- an electrical deal. I worked for him for about a month, and then the longer I waited, the less I thought about it. When Jack posed to me about joining the National Guard, I just forgot all about the Marine Corps.

JR: So you're coming back on the bus, how did you feel about coming back to Chandler when you saw Chandler again?

EK: Coming back into Chandler? Well it was nice you know, to be home. I'll never forget the incident that happened, it's a situation at a restaurant. I come home in my uniform, and what have you, in Gila Bend. We stopped at a restaurant. I was standing, I was the only one standing, and there were no more seats. And there was a younger fella sitting there, and the cook came around with a butcher's knife, and he said to him, "You see that Marine back there?" And the kid said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, by God, I want you to get up and give him your chair," which embarrassed me. I remember that very plainly, 'cause that wasn't what I went out to fight for, something like that.

(Pause in recording)

JR: ...Turner, he was in the Battle of the Bulge, the, um...

EK: The village. We went to this village, and they had all these shacks. And when you walk in, there's a little cubbyhole on the top. I walked in, and I stood on that door, I don't know, looking around for what have ya. Went on in, and another kid came up behind me, and there was a Jap that shot him. Could've been me. But you know, I'll tell you another little story. When were in Camp Pendleton, this one kid went out and bought an old jalopy car. I don't know, \$150 or something. We all pitched in and bought the car. So we'd go to Los Angeles, to the USOs, you know. We had this one kid, we called him Red, 'cause his hair was red as could be. We got to the USO, and we had a table setting there. And of course, we had the movie stars and all come in, and we danced with them. Well after he got to feeling pretty good, he decided he wanted a certain record to be played, and it was this famous orchestra. I can't think of the name, one of those real famous deals. Anyway, he went up and asked them to play the song, because his girl had broke up with him. So he wanted to hear this song. I

can't remember what it was. It was a song that meant a lot to him because of his girl. Well, he waited and had two or three more beers. Pretty soon he was pretty drunk. About the third time they hadn't played his song, he jumped up on the platform and said stop the music! This is God's truth...stop the music! And Max Beera- I don't know if you know anything about boxing, but I did, because I was boxing. Max Beera had a brother named Buddy Bear, who fought heavy duty. He come down, and he was s small guy. Well he got Red and carried him down to the table, and said, "Okay boys, let's go." He threw us out. He kicked us out. I'll never forget that. He [Red] really took it hard that his gal broke up with him.

JR: That's a funny memory that you have. Going back to- you were talking about some of those strong memories that you had- and you talked about when you were on Okinawa and there were a lot of Marines that were coming out, and they had passed away, and they had them in trucks. Was there any kind of special thing you would do to pay tribute to those soldiers?

EK: No, you get pretty hardened out there. You really do. It's just something. Just like when Tennessee was shot. He was a good friend of ours, but it happened. And these kids, we had no relationship with them but they were our brothers as far as we were concerned. They were up there fighting. They were fighting going up that hill. And I remember, I can smell that even today, and the noise of the flies. The flies were so thick, [bodies] three or four cartloads, stacked just like wood. Just- real bad.

JR: And how did you feel when you saw that?

EK: Well, you're saddened by seeing it. No one wants to see anybody like that. But consequently, I guess maybe that could've turned more hate towards the Japanese. It's just something you take in stride. Who knows, maybe next thing it could be you?

JR: Well let's jump up a bit and we'll talk about when you came back in 1946. You said that you were happy to come home to Chandler. Do you remember how you felt when you saw your family?

EK: Oh yes, I was glad to- well actually my mother, and my sisters, and Martin were in Texas. They had been back there a couple of months. My dad and my sister Helen were living near Goodyear, which was Ocotillo then. Sam was an electrician, I think, at Burt Stroud's place. So he was there, and my dad was standing with him. And Richard. Richard had come home. He was working for public service. And so I come home and I didn't want to go any place. Richard said, "Let's go out," and I said, "No." I guess it was six months before I finally started going out again. I just wanted to be

home. And that's where I had to be real careful with Richard. The first time he come in and didn't wake me, you jump up fighting. So I told him, "Don't come in like that, just open the door. Knock on the door and make sure I'm awake." In fact, last night, I was asleep and my nephew come in and shook me, and I said, "Don't do that." (Speaking to his daughter) In fact, you did that too one time and I told you not to do that.

Daughter: Yeah, probably, probably.

JR: What kind of work were you doing when you came back?

EK: I went to work for a fellow named Tex. He was an electrician. And wired up, in fact, Queen Creek School. And then I wired up the telephone company.

JR: Was it Mountain Bell at the time?

EK: Uh huh. Sam Bell was his name. And he had this property. He had a ranch there and he wanted some work done on his house, so Tex and I helped him rewire, what have you. And then I went to work with R.W. Hanna. He had part of Ocotillo. In fact he's the one that named Goodyear- he changed it to Ocotillo. And he sold part of the ranch to the Bogles. So I went to work for them as a water foreman. So I did that, and then I got into cattle. Then I started to work in cowboying on the SV ranch.

JR: Where was the SV Ranch?

EK: At Ocotillo. He had some yards there that we fed, and then we'd run cattle out in fields. Alfalfa fields, and they'd graze.

JR: When did you join the National Guard?

EK: I think it was right after I got back, I think it was in '46.

JR: One question I want to ask you, what type of medals or citations did you receive while in the service?

EK: I got the Southern Theater, and then medal for being in combat, and in fact, I got two stars. This is, I can't remember. There were my two stars for the battle. These I got in boot camp, expert sharp shooter. I got \$5 a month for being an expert sharp shooter. That was in boot camp. But I'm too old to remember all these. I didn't even think about that.

JR: Tell me a little about your wife, that you met. Tell me what her name was.

EK: Lylda May Lang. And her nickname was Socks.

JR: When did you meet her?

EK: When? I think it was about '49. Got married Christmas of 1950.

JR: And you met her in Chandler?

EK: Yeah, at the Western Tavern. Which was where Serrano's is now. It was called Yorktown then. She was from a pioneer family. And her family had been there for many years. Her mother's maiden name was Lilywhite. Her dad was a bishop there in Mesa.

JR: How many children did you have?

EK: We had four children. These two right here, and two that I adopted.

JR: Can you tell me your children's names?

EK: Oldest one is Nick, the next one is Terry, which is Terry Cooley now. Then Janet Kleinman, and Peggy Dotson. I did have an affair and had a child, and I lost her when she was 34 years old.

Daughter: It wasn't an affair, this was before you met mother.

EK: Oh yeah, I had a relationship before I met their mother. I see what you're saying. I never stepped out on her.

JR: When did your wife pass away?

EK: 1987, November the 3rd in 1987. She's been dead 22 years.

JR: And later on you met Michel [Larsen]?

EK: I had been- Socks had passed away, and I met Michel, I think a year after she passed away. Which wasn't long enough. I was still tore up pretty bad. I don't think I gave Michel a fair chance. I was farming a lot, had a big farm out here and I was busy. Also was cowboying, running cattle. I was pretty busy. I had a lot of energy.

JR: I want to ask you about one more thing, and you said that you'd joined the police department. Can you tell me about that?

EK: Yeah, when I got of the service, I worked for Tex [the electrician], I don't know, it seemed like these couple of jobs. I knew Roy Wolfe, ran cattle, what have ya. Well he was appointed Chief. And so one day he asked me,

“You want to go to work as a Chandler police officer?” And I said, “Yeah, I’ll give it a whirl.” So I worked for the City of Chandler.

JR: How long were you a police officer?

EK: A couple years. I was busy trying to get ahead farming and working cattle. [Ernie worked several jobs at one time] So Roy Wolfe hated to see me go, this is God’s truth, he told me I was the best officer he ever had.

Daughter: Why don’t you tell a story dad, about Bonnie? ‘Cause that’s some of the history here in Arizona. About when you were a police officer and Bonnie Jr. came in.

EK: Well that’s- when I was on the police department, I come in one time at 12:30 and some guy had laid his body down on the floor. Of course I helped him up, got him going, whatever. So Len and Bonnie wanted me- he said, “Ernie, if you’ll come in and have your meal between 12:30 and 1:30,” he said, “I’ll charge you half price on your meals.” So I come in, and there were several incidents, people are drunk you know. Or they get rowdy. And then I had quite a few- there’s another time I’ll tell you about. I got a call from Roy and he said a certain address, there’s a fellow beating his wife. I go around and he’s beating on his wife. So I got there and got out, grabbed him by the- not the neck- and said, “You’re under arrest, come on get in the car.” So I was taking him in the car, and the door opened, and wham! His wife got a broom and was beating me on the head with a broom. So I just grabbed him and threw him back into her, and said, “He’s yours.” When I got back, I told Roy, “Don’t you ever send me on a deal like that. I arrested him and he was beating her, but she didn’t want him to go to jail.” Quite a few incidents like that. And then I had some rough ones too.

JR: You said you served for two years on the police department? Do you remember what they were?

EK: It was in the late ‘40s.

JR: I just have a couple more questions for you, kind of ending questions to think about. Do you feel like your service in WWII affected the rest of your life?

EK: Well, I’ll put it this way; I think it gave me a lot of knowledge. And I believe that I grew up. I was kind ornery when I was a kid and I think I went through a lot of changes. A kid should have a year or two of military service. I think we’d have a lot different respect, and what have you, as a whole, because I think a lot of our younger generation has no respect or no- oh what do I want to say? I think I learned a lot from that, you know.

JR: You've gone and you've done a couple presentations to kids that are in schools, about your time in service. Thinking about your time in the military, what lessons do you feel like you would want to tell those children?

EK: I learned that there was a lot about this world that I didn't know. And I felt like if I could expose these younger generations, younger kids, to some of these obstacles and good things, and what have you, I was going to do it. Because kids nowadays, and it's a way this country has changed, we don't demand a respect consequently. I say that our nation has suffered from it. Maybe I'm barking up the wrong tree. But that's the way I feel. I feel I was lucky that my dad was strict, and he had goals, and he had certain rules. And what have you here nowadays, kids don't have them. And that's why we have so much trouble as it is. But I felt like I've left my mark in Chandler, as well as a little bit in the Marine Corps. I think.

JR: How do you feel about having served for the Marines?

EK: It's like I told my grandson, there's no other service. I'll tell you what, you learn from them. You learn from them, there's no pussyfootin' around. You know, just like the one GI said, if an officer comes to you and says, private, go move that mountain over there, you don't say well, how am I going to do it. You say yes, sir, and figure out how you're going to do it. They had a D.I.- the other day she [his daughter] was mopping the floor and I told her about my D.I. He came in for inspection and he'd look at the floor and he'd say he wanted that floor clean enough to eat off of. They demanded discipline. Which we don't have now. And it's nobody's fault but the parents. They're so damn busy trying to make a living they don't have the time. I don't know if times will ever change or not. I may not ever see it.

JR: Are there any other thoughts you'd like to share before we end? Anything you want to tell your grandchildren do you think?

EK: I don't know that I've talked too much about my military service, other than I went in the Marine Corps, was in World War II. So many little things that you miss and can't talk about. I think if they look deep down they can see from my record that I made a mark. I feel like I have anyway.

END OF INTERVIEW