

Transcription of Dick Cromer's Interviews

Interview #1:

Interviewee: Richard Cromer

Interviewer: Vidya Lala

Assistant Interviewers: Amisha Lala, Nita Lala and Rohan Lala

Interview Date: Tuesday, November 22nd, 2012

Interview Place: Mechanicsburg, PA

(Vidya Lala) Richard Cromer was born on the 13th of September 1927 in Carlisle, PA. He fought in World War II in the army and was a commissioner. This interview is taken place in Mechanicsburg, PA. My name is Vidya Lala. I'm the interviewer. Also present is Amisha Lala, Rohan Lala and Nita Lala.

What is the highest rank or grade that you held?

(Richard Cromer) The highest rank, in the service?

(Vidya Lala) Yeah

(Richard Cromer) First Lieutenant

(Vidya Lala) Who was the troop or battery which you served in?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I served in an organization called the Army's Security Agency, and it was a unit of its own.

(Vidya Lala) Who was your commander?

(Richard Cromer) Good gracious girl! Do you realize how long ago that was? I don't know names. He was a captain, but I don't know his name anymore. That was a long time ago.

(Vidya Lala) Did you serve on the Battalion, Regiment or Division?

(Richard Cromer) Battalion. Regiment or Division. No, I was attached to the Fifth Air Force. But I was in the Army, not the Air Force. It was just an attached organization. And we were attached because we used their facilities. That's all.

(Vidya Lala) What was the date of your enlistment?

(Richard Cromer) February one of 1945.

(Vidya Lala) How old were you?

(Richard Cromer) Just turned eighteen.

(Vidya Lal) How long were you... What was the length of your service?

(Richard Cromer) Well I was in for a year and a half in the Regular Army. And when I was discharged, I was a Sergeant and then I came back and I had the GI Bill, which gave me four years of college education and I joined the ROTC there and when I was finished with the ROTC I was commissioned to Second Lieutenant.

(Vidya Lal) What was the place of enlistment?

(Richard Cromer) What was the what?

(Vidya Lal) The place of enlistment.

(Richard Cromer) Initial enlistment?

(Vidya Lal) Yes.

(Richard Cromer) Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

(Vidya Lal) Did you have any previous occupation?

(Richard Cromer) Occupation?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah, like a job?

(Richard Cromer) Course. Gracious. Yes. I had a lot of jobs as a kid. Part time jobs. You know when you are growing up. And... Oh man, I had multiple jobs. You'd get something that would be run three or four months and... or during the summer months, between school. One year in college, I shoveled coal. At those days they had a lot of coal burning furnaces and this gentleman came down from the coal mines and then I went to work for him unloading coal trucks, at twenty-five cents an hour. So I don't think that you would find too many work that many... work at that kind of wage anymore. Do you?

(Vidya Lal) No, probably not.

(Richard Cromer) No, yeah. But just a lot of part time jobs, until I got... until I graduated.

(Vidya Lal) How and why did you join the service?

(Richard Cromer) How what?

(Vidya Lal) How and why did you join the service? Were you drafted or...

(Richard Cromer) It was a combination. Yeah, I saw the draft board coming, so I enlisted. A lot of guys did that.

(Vidya Lal) At that time did you feel that the draft was necessary and fair?

(Richard Cromer) Yes. Well, who wants to be drafted? But it was during wartime and you had to do something to save your country, so... I don't think the draft was fair, because there were a number of guys that found reasons why they didn't pass their physicals and make it into the service. You know, but that's any kind of a deal you do. There is always a little side kick there someplace, right?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah. Has your opinion of the World War II draft changed since then?

(Richard Cromer) My opinion of the draft?

(Vidya Lal) Yes.

(Richard Cromer) Well to be very honest with you, I don't think there is a draft anymore.

(Vidya Lal) Yeah I don't think there is much.

(Richard Cromer) No, I don't know of a draft. If there is they missed me, but I don't. I think a draft is a necessary evil, in order to build your military strength up. And if somebody asked me, I would say that every young person, including both sexes, should serve at least two years in the service. You gain a world of experience that you just don't have when you are not there.

(Vidya Lal) Describe the circumstances in which you first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

(Richard Cromer) Ohh. Well. I think it was down town, Carlisle, at a little shop called Chocolate Shop World, where the kids gathered and I just happened to be there and you heard this news come across the radio and we couldn't believe what they were saying, because Orson Welles pulled a stunt short time before that I think it was, where he said about that there was an invasion of aliens coming into this country. Well it was a stunt. But he had everybody scared to death. But that was back then and so you weren't quite sure of what was true or what wasn't true, 'till you saw it on the screen. That's a movie screen, not a tv screen. They didn't quite have tv yet then.

(Vidya Lal) What were your initial reactions to entering military service? Like with family and friends and know that you were going to leave them, and stuff?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I don't know. I don't think there was any objections. Everybody was in accord that we should be doing something to help our country. Now, women worked their back ends off during that war too and war jobs that because most of the men being in the service couldn't be done without the women, and they did. They did a lot of work there.

(Vidya Lal) Where did you train as a recruit?

(Richard Cromer) Where did I...

(Vidya Lal) train as a recruit?

(Richard Cromer) Oh. I'm a little...

(Vidya Lal) Sorry. No, its okay.

(Richard Cromer) No, I have a hearing problem in my left ear there. I was down to Fort McClellan, Alabama, which was an infantry camp at that time. I don't know if its still in existence or not, but that's where I did my initial training.

(Vidya Lal) At what posts were you stationed at during the stateside service?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I went to school. After I finished my basic training, I went to school in Orange, Virginia. That place called Vidco Farms, which was a school for specialists and I left there and went to California as a delay and route. I'm going overseas, so we went out there and left out at Camp Stoneman, California., sailed out of there and then took one of those small banana boats over.

(Vidya Lal) What was your opinion of the weapons you saw and used in the service?

(Richard Cromer) Well, they were... If you look at today's weapons, they were quite dated. But they at the time that's what we had and we used them and they were effective. But any weapon that does the job its intended for is not... I'm not sure about all that. But somebody has to be out there and do the shooting and the killing if you want to win a war and our objective at that time was to win the war. There is a lot of unhappiness going on then, during that period of time.

(Vidya Lal) What were your opinions of the equipment, clothing and rations you were issued?

(Richard Cromer) What could you do about it? That's all we got. And the clothing was warm, the food was alright—most of the time it was powdered food. And you learned to eat powdered milk and powdered eggs and powdered potatoes and you know all those kinds of things. But at least it's something to eat, so that was the main part. I have no objections to it. I mean the only objections... if you didn't like it you didn't eat it; if you didn't eat it you didn't last longer, right?

(Vidya Lal) Yup. What did you think of the quality of leadership while you were in the service?

(Richard Cromer) Well anybody could be questioned as to their abilities. Harry Truman didn't like General McCarthy. I had to stop and think a minute there. He didn't like General McCarthy; he was a damn good general. But the same way with General Patton in Africa with the third army. But those guy had a job to do and they did it. So you got to do it, you know?

(Vidya Lal) What did you think of the discipline at the time?

(Richard Cromer) Well as I said at the beginning, I think that everybody should have some military time, because of discipline. I think if we had more discipline today we wouldn't have all the problems we got. But that's my personal feelings, so. We had a

couple of, during basic training, we had a couple of platoon sergeants that were tougher than nails. But they had a job to do and that was to get us tough too. So that's part of the training.

(Vidya Lal) What forms of off duty recreation were common? Like what did you do in your leisure time?

(Richard Cromer) I don't know... in basic training there wasn't much 'cause you were gone all the time. In training, unfortunately I learned to smoke in the Army, because you would have break time and of course the break time was let's grab a smoke. You know everybody smoked, so you smoked too. It was a... it was a bad habit to get into but at the time it was something that was... it was accepted and we didn't realize what the dangers of it was then. And... But we had a PX and you could go there and buy things, various things when you had a couple hours off. When I went to school in Virginia, I was close enough that I could hitchhike home over the weekend and then I would get a weekend pass. And those days it was safe to go out on the road and hitchhike, you know. I wouldn't want to try it today. No way! But then you could come home and there would always be something going on—chase the girls around or whatever you know.

(Vidya Lal) How adequate was the medical care?

(Richard Cromer) How?

(Vidya Lal) How adequate was the medical care?

(Richard Cromer) Adequate! Well, I guess it was alright. I didn't... It certainly wasn't like it is today. Those days when a guy got wounded out on the field, you know it could take days before he could get back. Today well they fly in with those choppers, pick a guy up and get him back to a major hospital within a couple hours, which is saving these guys now. I don't... I don't know. I didn't make gripe with the medical deal.

(Vidya Lal) Was drinking a problem in your unit? Was drinking a problem in your unit?

(Richard Cromer) No. Not then.

(Vidya Lal) How about drug use?

(Richard Cromer) We didn't even hear of drugs. I mean it might have been around, but we didn't—I didn't... The only one that I ever heard of one time was, there was a band and they had a drummer called Gene Krupa. I don't know if you had ever heard of him or not. But boy he could play drums like you couldn't believe. And he played with Harry James and some of those big bands in the days and they joked about he must have been smoking marijuana 'cause nobody could beat a drum like he did. But I didn't know. I never saw him smoke marijuana. I wouldn't have even known what I looked like if I did see him smoking it so. I can't even recall ever hearing of drugs in those days. Not today you know you could walk down the street and somebody taps you on the elbow now. Am I right?

(Vidya Lalá) Yeah

(Richard Cromer) Just don't get involved with them.

(Vidya Lalá) Yeah. What military slang words or phrases were popular during your military service?

(Richard Cromer) "Kilroy was here." Did you ever hear of that one?

(Vidya Lalá) Yep.

(Richard Cromer) Okay. "Kilroy was here." Well, 'course there was always the "draft dodgers"—they called them. Right? The guys who skipped out of the area. I don't know what else.

(Vidya Lalá) Did you know any instance of ethnic or racial discrimination?

(Richard Cromer) Well now you are leading me into a bad question. In those days, we had segregation of black and white troops. And the black troops were basically into transportation. In the states I didn't run into it, but when I was overseas we hit a couple of places where there were transportation course guys and they were all black. But, I don't know, maybe I looked at it differently but I didn't see or think of any kind of problems. I understand there were a lot of problems with segregation. I didn't personally see it, so I can't... I can't talk about something I didn't see., right?

(Vidya Lalá) Yup. How was the morale of your unit?

(Richard Cromer) Good!

(Vidya Lalá) It was.

(Richard Cromer) Oh go ahead. Finish the question.

(Vidya Lalá) Oh it's okay. I was going to say like from getting mails from home and...

(Richard Cromer) Oh well mail call was always a challenge: you wanted to see who got the most letters and make sure you got one. And every now and then a box would come in with some goodies in it and you better well share those because if you didn't you lost the box! But I remember my mom sent me a box. And I say that getting soap was a difficult program. And bless her heart, she sent me a big box of ivory flakes. Well there was nowhere where I could use ivory flakes, right. So we need bar soap but she didn't realize that so we passed that out to the hospital court. They liked ivory... ivory snow I guess it was called. I don't know, flakes or something. But anyway it was a powdered type of thing and we needed bar soap. But the one good soap at the time was Hershey's Chocolate soap. I don't know if you ever knew that they made soap or not.

(Vidya Lalá) No. I didn't.

(Richard Cromer) Well they had some kind of a byproduct from the cacao. And they made big... well they were bars about yay big like that that I'm sure the government must have paid for them somehow, I don't know, maybe Hershey donated them, I don't know. But we went overseas we, well we got.. we each got a big bar of that chocolate soap or Cocoa soap. That's what they called it, Cocoa soap. And... But anything you got from home was always welcome.

(Vidya Lal) What affect did combat have on the morale?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I don't know. I wasn't in combat. I mean everyone despised the fact you know you'd get your head blown off. But nobody liked it but again it was something that had to be done

(Vidya Lal) What factors helped improve the morale?

(Richard Cromer) Well, more mail, right? And every now and then they brought in entertainers from the states and they'd put on a show for you—like Bob Hope. Those kind of things, you know. They were pretty good. But that was basically about it.

(Vidya Lal) How and to what extent were religious convictions expressed in your unit?

(Richard Cromer) Religious?

(Vidya Lal) Yes. Were there any religious...

(Richard Cromer) Well, I don't know. I don't... I don't know how to answer that. I don't recall seeing any kind of problems with it. I mean you either... you went to chapel or you didn't went to chapel. It was really that simple. And when we got into Japan in the occupation, there was a Nisei woman that worked there, got a job on the base and her husband—she was an American—I said Nisei but she was basically American—and her husband was a minister, came over from Japan, right before Pearl Harbor. And I don't remember now... No he met her in America, yeah. But when he went back to Japan, they threw him in prison because he had married an American and they had some pretty rough times during that war, even though they were native Japanese. And a couple of us guys from the base, learned about this little church here in the town and we went down with basketballs and baseballs and we made ice cream one time—they never had ice cream. So it was a neat affair and the kids loved it. I mean, boy you talk about the kids, they would pile in there by the hundreds! And no animosity. The only place you'd run into trouble would be if you went into some of the little country towns, if you were walking around. And the old Japanese weren't happy with us, but I always had a comeback 'You started it; we finished it!' What else could you say, right?

(Vidya Lal) Did you observe any newspaper or radio war correspondence?

(Richard Cromer) Did I do who?

(Vidya Lal) Did you get any information from newspapers and radios?

(Richard Cromer) Well there as it a newspaper. I think it was called *Army Times*. But every now and then that thing would come out; it wasn't something every week you had, you know. But I dealt with radio, quite a bit. So when I had off, the last thing I wanted to do was turn on a radio and listen to it, right.

(Vidya Lal) I understand. So you were not in combat?

(Richard Cromer) No.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. Did you go overseas?

(Richard Cromer) Yes!

(Vidya Lal) What were your feelings towards going overseas?

(Richard Cromer) It was an experience. I don't know that I had any kinda problem with it. It was just happen to be that that was part of the deal. That's what I trained for and the job I trained for required that I'd go overseas. And we were replacing some of the guys that had been in heavy combat and wanted to get home, so our job was to replace them. Let them come home and we filled in for them.

(Vidya Lal) Where did you go overseas? Like, which countries?

(Richard Cromer) Japan. I stopped on Guam, I stopped on Saipan. We stopped briefly in Honolulu. And just like that the name left me. It'll come back! But when we came home, we had about fifteen hundred Hawaiian troops on and I'll never forget we...The skipper of the boat told us we were stopping in Honolulu for one day and then unload these troops. And for some strange reason, the boat broke down for about seven days. So we had seven wonderful days going through Honolulu. Now this was after the war there, you know; they had started to clean up the island. But it was a nice little break. And some of that water down through that way gets little rough too, so you enjoy the calmness, by not having the boat rocking all over the place, right? You ever been on a big boat?

(Vidya Lal) I don't think so.

(Richard Cromer) Oh okay. They can rock funny sometimes. They go forward and they go sideways.

(Vidya Lal) Did you assist in the establishment of civil affairs government in liberating friendly countries?

(Richard Cromer) No. That was on the other side, where that developed more. I did travel through, we called it Hiroshima, today these people call it Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, where the atomic bomb fell. And that was a horrendous mess there, but that thing saved one heck of a lot of lives.

(Vidya Lal) What were your reactions to V-J Day—Victory over Japan?

(Richard Cromer) Wonderful. Happy. Right? Sure. That meant we wouldn't have any five or six years to serve like some of those poor guys did, yeah.

(Vidya Lal) How was the morale and discipline of your unit after the End of Hostilities?

(Richard Cromer) Well, that's hard to answer because I was just going through basic training at that point then, so I didn't have any... I mean everybody had a job at that point of making it through basic training. So, hard question to answer though.

(Vidya Lal) Agreed. Do you remember any of the awards and decorations you received? It's alright if you don't.

(Richard Cromer) Good conduct medal, the Occupation of Japan...there was another one and I can't think of what that was. I will have to get my discharge papers out and look at that thing—I think that will say it.

(Vidya Lal) Alright. Do you think that the awards and decorations were distributed fairly?

(Richard Cromer) I think so. I mean it was pretty... what I saw was pretty packed. I mean if you were in a certain theater, well that's where you were and then you got a ribbon or a medal for that. You know if you climb Mount Fuji, you got a ribbon for that I guess, I don't know. No, I think it was all pretty fair. Some guys wear, you know you see these guys with about four hundred ribbons on there and you wonder how they can participate in all those things, but they were, I would guess, they were all fair.

(Vidya Lal) Alright. Describe your welcome home to the United States.

(Richard Cromer) Oh my gracious! There was fifty thousand people out there greeting us! No, by that time, you know things were pretty settled down. And I don't know it was not like V-J Day, when you know everybody just literally tore New York City apart. When I came home it wasn't like that at all. I was just happy to be home in one piece and get started with my life again and you know.

(Vidya Lal) How long did you remain in the service after the End of Hostilities?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I was in the Reserves for eleven years afterwards and I got discharged with a term they used at the time 'I was in grade too long.' And they had an expression called 'at the convenience to the government' they discharged you. So if you were not in an active Reserve unit, why they discharged you.

(Vidya Lal) Do you remember the date and place of your discharge?

(Richard Cromer) Sure. Yeah, I got discharged in Camp Stoneman, California. And it was—I think it was—July the 30th, of 1947. Yeah. That's where I got discharged from the service—my official discharge wasn't until a couple days later. We had a thirty day grace period there of being discharged out of the service.

(Vidya Lal) What did you do after you were discharged?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I went downtown and grabbed a great big steak and milkshake—that's not what you want to hear, is it? Well, I came back home and a group of us guys, that all went into the service together decided that we were going to go back to school. And a local Pastor in our Carlisle, grabbed a bunch of eight of us and we went to Gettysburg and he personally saw to it that we were all admitted. And today we might have a little problem with doing that. But regardless of grades or background, we were all admitted there and we got a—I got a four year education because of my time in the service.

(Vidya Lal) Describe the ease, or difficulty, which you readapted to civilization.

(Richard Cromer) I didn't have any difficulties. I thought it was pretty neat. No, I mean you didn't have somebody yelling at you all the time—do this, do that—but that didn't bother me. No.

(Vidya Lal) Before the war, did you graduate from high school?

(Richard Cromer) Yes.

(Vidya Lal) When?

(Richard Cromer) When?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah.

(Richard Cromer) 1945.

(Vidya Lal) Alright. Did you go to college or a trade school before the war?

(Richard Cromer) Yeah, I put one semester in. And that's where I started with this ROTC Program. And when I turned eighteen, I knew that the greening wasn't far behind, so they let us finish—all of us that started—they let us finish that semester and then we got our greenings. So, at that point, why I enlisted, and they gave us the option of sailing the draft or being enlisting, so I did.

(Vidya Lal) What was the name of your college?

(Richard Cromer) Gettysburg College.

(Vidya Lal) Oh. Okay. What degree were you pursuing?

(Richard Cromer) Bachelor of Arts.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. So you went to a college under the G—

(Richard Cromer) GI Bill.

(Vidya Lal) What was the name of that school?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I just gave that to you, Gettysburg College.

(Vidya Lal) Gettysburg? Which—okay, so you did it under ROTC... Was there a degree attached to that?

(Richard Cromer) To the ROTC?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah, like for the college. Was there a degree? Did you also pursue art, or...

(Richard Cromer) Bachelor of Arts—from the college, not from the ROTC. Is that what you are asking me?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah.

(Richard Cromer) From the college. Yeah. Now my major was Political Science and Economics. And for some strange reason, I ended up with a minor in Mathematics and English Literature. So, I don't know why, but I did.

(Vidya Lal) What does the GI Bill mean to you?

(Richard Cromer) Well, it meant an education, for me. Paid my way through school and bought my books and gave me some spending money to pay for my room and board. At that time—I don't know if you have looked at colleges recently, but I understand they are a little expensive. My tuition was eight hundred dollars. Plus books and board, you know, but eight hundred dollars is what we—is what it cost.

(Vidya Lal) Wow! Did you join the National Guard or Organized Reserves after the war?

(Richard Cromer) Yes. I joined the Reserves, not the Guard.

(Vidya Lal) For how long did you belong to the Reserves?

(Richard Cromer) Eleven years. Oh wait a minute now, let's see. Yeah, eleven years. I got... it was 1958, when they discharged me. And that was a messed up affair. My job transferred me to Texas and, with my MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] background, I couldn't get a unit of what my specialty was and all I could get into down there was field artillery and I elected not to do that, so they elected not to keep me.

(Vidya Lal) What was the—Identify your Reserve Unit.

(Richard Cromer) I don't know if we had a name. It was just the Army Reserves. And at one time it was called an Army Security Unit because at that time the War College—the Army War College in Carlisle—had a school there of the Army Security Agency, so it just fit. And we were just a Reserve Unit. There must have been a unit name to it. I don't know. I never... All I did was go to meetings and being that I was an officer I had to give lectures, so that was it.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. What—With whom do you feel most comfortable discussing your wartime experiences?

(Richard Cromer) Well, my fellow veterans, yeah.

(Vidya Lal) Do you still keep in touch with friends from the war?

(Richard Cromer) Not from my unit I don't. No. There aren't any of them around through here. Most of those guys were in California from what I can gather. But there was one guy, that was in that unit with me, he was from Mechanicsburg. But every now and then I'd call him, but that was it. But it's not like some of these—some of these guys who were in the navy, they have ship reunions every year, where these guys all get together and have a great big party. We don't. We didn't do that. You're quite.

(Vidya Lal) World War II was a significant national experience. What, if anything, did it teach you about America?

(Richard Cromer) About who?

(Vidya Lal) World War II was a very national experience. Did it teach you anything about America?

(Richard Cromer) Oh, About America. Yeah. It taught me that we have the best country in the world, that's what and all due respect to where you came from—I'm not saying anything derogatory about that—but I'm a firm American. And I think we've got the best country in the world. We've got some lousy...okay I better not say that. I get carried away once I'm...

(Vidya Lal) Have you read any literature on World War II?

(Richard Cromer) Read any literature? Sure.

(Vidya Lal) Do you agree with the messages they portray?

(Richard Cromer) Well, some of them are a little, a little flamboyant I guess. I mean it all depends on who the author was. If he was—If he got carried away a little bit, he would make things sound pretty good. It's like any kind of a book. You know there's fiction and you can build up most any kind of a story, if you want to, right? I like to stick with the facts of this, about the war, and of course I'm an admirer of the Civil War. I had a great, great grandfather that fought in the Civil War. He was a Maryland Calvary—Al Fredrick Marilyn. And I just happen to have his discharge papers from the service. He was a Confederate prisoner and I have his saber that he used in the army. So, I've got some military background. I have been doing some research; I found out that I have a great, great uncle who fought in the Revolutionary War, too. So, things go back or go forward, whichever way you want to word them work at it, you know. Then I had a grandfather that, he went out west. I don't know if you ever read about the Oklahoma Land Rush, when the country, the United States, gave out land out west. Well, my granddad went out there and he homesteaded right next to an Indian Reservation. There's the map he used when he went out there. And he was there fourteen years. And then came back east and luckily he met my grandmother and they got married. I'm a prodigy of that marriage, you know. That doesn't have anything to do with the war but, you know that's all part of our heritage, I guess, right?

(Vidya Lala) Yeah. What were your expectations at the end of the war—as for world stability?

(Richard Cromer) Well we had all hoped there would be stability with it, but that must be the war to end wars. And well, as we all know that didn't happen either. And I just don't think—we've had war ever since time began. Look at the Bible. They were fighting all the time. Samson took on the big Giant. And, you know, one way or another, there was fighting, no matter where and I just don't think—I hate to say it this way—I just don't think we'll ever stop fighting, because you and I get together and we disagree with something, well then, it may escalate into a fight. And if we got people following us, well then we got more people involved and I just... I really hate—I got some great grandkids coming along and I hate to see them caught up in all this mess but I don't know what else is going to happen. I really don't. This thing over in Iran is horrible. They are trying to stop that bomb program there and they don't seem to be... there I go again. Sorry about that.

(Vidya Lala) Its alright. Do you have any other... Anything else to say about your experiences?

(Richard Cromer) I'm just lucky that I made it through and I'm thankful to God that I made it through yeah. And I really... I don't look at my service time as an infringement on my life, I just I think it was just a part of a phase of growing up and I was thankful for it.

(Vidya Lala) Thank you so much for your time.

(Richard Cromer) You mean that's it!

(Vidya Lala) Yup.

(Richard Cromer) Oh, I thought you were going to ask me something hard here.

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Interview #2:

Interviewee: Richard Cromer

Interviewer: Vidya Lala

Assistant Interviewers: Amisha Lala, Nita Lala and Rohan Lala

Interview Date: Saturday, June 03rd. 2012

Interview Place: Mechanicsburg, PA

(Vidya Lala) Recalling that you were first in Regular Army and then after being discharged you became a Sergeant and after getting an education, you returned to

become Lieutenant, could you share some information on the differences between these different positions?

(Richard Cromer) Sure. The differences between which?

(Vidya Lal) These positions—the different positions

(Richard Cromer) Oh, well Sergeant is enlisted man. Okay. And that's about a third rank up—well it's fourth rank. Well you have Private, you have Private First Class, you have a Corporal and then you have Sergeant. And then they go up—Staff, Master, First—you know, that kind of thing. And then the Lieutenant is the—he is the step into being an officer. First is the Second Lieutenant, then a First Lieutenant and then you go on up to General. So, as you can see I was down the ladder.

(Vidya Lal) What were—

(Richard Cromer) Does that answer the question?

(Vidya Lal) Yes.

(Richard Cromer) It does

(Vidya Lal) Yeah. Were there specific roles or responsibilities that come with each job?

(Richard Cromer) Sure. Yeah. So now what? Now you going to ask me what I did, huh?

(Vidya Lal) Yup.

(Richard Cromer) Well, it's difficult for me to answer that because I was in security work. And a lot of the stuff is rated as secured and not to be published. Okay?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah, I understand.

(Richard Cromer) Not for general information.

(Vidya Lal) Yes. I completely understand. Alright. Could you describe the typical training that you received?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I don't know about typical training. When I first went in the service, I went through basic training in Fort McClellan, in Alabama and that was in infantry training. After that was completed I was selected to go to this school in Virginia and that's where I went then for security work. And we had to learn, one of the things we had to learn was code. And you know all of those things fall into place. And as an enlisted man I was working with several other enlisted men and then when I became an officer I had charge of a couple of guys that were into this security detail. Alright?

(Vidya Lal) Okay. Were you trained in first aid, signaling, radio or the use of any special equipment?

(Richard Cromer) I'm not following you. First aid?

(Vidya Lal) Were you trained in first aid or signaling or radio?

(Richard Cromer) Oh. Or. Okay. No, no, no. I don't think I was trained in first aid. That's a Corman.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. How about

(Richard Cromer) It falls into that category. But your next question was?

(Vidya Lal) Signaling?

(Richard Cromer) Yes.

(Vidya Lal) Radio?

(Richard Cromer) Yes.

(Vidya Lal) Is there specific details you could tell us about the training?

(Richard Cromer) Well, we spent a number of weeks learning code. You had to be able to send and receive code. And then after we finished with the schooling, then we went to were assigned to a unit and went into that unit then and did our work we were supposed to be doing.

(Vidya Lal) Okay.

(Richard Cromer) That doesn't answer that too good for you does it?

(Vidya Lal) No! No, it does actually.

(Richard Cromer) Okay.

(Vidya Lal) It's perfect! What was your opinion on the political atmosphere during this time?

(Richard Cromer) Well. Good gravy! President Roosevelt had, had just died about the middle of '45 I don't remember the exact date. And Truman—Harry Truman—took over, and he was an old, ex-army man. I think he was a captain in the army, in World War I. I didn't think too much of him, but you know he... our country was in some trying times at that point. And we were trying to come out of the recession that we had been in, in the '30s. And of course the war pumped that thing up because there was a lot of war productions that were being done and gave a lot of jobs out while then when the war is over, a lot of those jobs became non-existent, so it was another time of... Well I think in the '40s with the advent of the war, gave a lot of people jobs and a lot of people who were unemployable had jobs and became more incapable of handling their family with their finances and that type of thing. So after the... let's see go ahead. Truman went out, then a great General by the name of Eisenhower came in and he really... He was an army man and he really took charge, as an army man would take

charge and proceeded to guide the country into a good program of getting out of that problem, you know. It's a shame that we had term limits at that point and Roosevelt started that thing, thankfully because they were afraid that somebody would step in and become a dictator. So by limiting it to two terms, it gave a man a chance to work a program he believed in. I'm not sure about this regime today, I think it took him four years to convince himself, he was doing something, now he's going to take the next four years and try to do something else. Okay. Let's get off of that part of me.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. Sounds good. Describe your experiences in the Fifth Air Force Unit.

(Richard Cromer) I wasn't really in the Fifth. I was just assigned to the Fifth because of our security unit. And they had an area on their base that we could set up our program. So I really wasn't in the Air Force. I was strictly Army.

(Vidya Lal) Okay. What were your views on the use of the atomic bomb?

(Richard Cromer) Had to be done. The Japanese were prepared to kill everybody they could kill. And they were preparing for some big movements and we just... I don't like these atomic weapons. They are disastrous. But somewhere along the line, something has to be done with them and I'm very concerned with Iran now, with them trying to get this nuclear thing going over there. Nobody seems to know how to stop it.

(Vidya Lal) Agreed. Was it difficult to readjust to society?

(Richard Cromer) No, I loved it! I didn't have any problems, but again, I wasn't in that—I wasn't laying down in the jungles with snakes and everything imaginable—ticks—crawling all over me, like the boys in the infantry units were. So I didn't have that problem of coming back. And as soon as I got out of the service, I enrolled in school, so I had four years there to try stuffing things in my brain.

(Vidya Lal) Did you work after?

(Richard Cromer) After what?

(Vidya Lal) After you came back.

(Richard Cromer) Well, just part time jobs. No one wanted to hire you. I was in the Army Reserves and well it was against the law to restrict you from being hired. But it just happened to be that there weren't any jobs available that you were looking for. That's one way they could get out of it. But going to school, I had part time jobs in the summer, each summer. I even drove school buses for two summers so. You know I had variety of things to do. But, I wasn't on Wall Street, if that's what you meant.

(Vidya Lal) Oh, yeah. I know what you mean. What was your favorite memory of being in the war.

(Richard Cromer) I don't know. I... One of the things that I did enjoy was when I got into Japan on the Occupation Forces, there were two other guys and I got involved in a little church in a town outside the base and these little kids in there never heard of ice-

cream, basketball, baseball, so we got those things—we got baskets and basketballs and we got baseball bats and gloves and balls—and we made ice-cream a couple times for them and just to see all those kids, you know, screaming in delight, I thought oh boy, this is pretty good, so. I think that we really helped them—and I'm sure it happened in a lot of places throughout Japan—but I felt that we contributed something to these young people in trying to understand that we weren't beasts out there that tried to kill them and that we were trying to teach them some of our sports

(Vidya Lal) That's wonderful. Did you build strong relationships with your comrades? And are you still in contact?

(Richard Cromer) No, no. I don't know... There was one guy that I was... We palled around together because he was from Mechanicsburg. And we both had different things that we wanted to do. I wanted to travel and I'd hope on a train—we'd have free access to the trains over there, the service people—so I could hop on a train and go it on a weekend, I'd get a pass and go any place I wanted to as long as I was back on Monday morning. And I did. I travelled around a lot through there. And that was an ambition of mine. I thought that a lot of Japan was familiar—was similar, not familiar, to Pennsylvania. And I was surprised to see that. Now, of course the rice patties and that type of thing, where they had their farming was on a hillside, we don't do that. And I didn't see horses that used for pull their equipment but I don't think the parts that I was in I don't think they had farms that were that large, you know they were sort of small, family type things.

(Vidya Lal) What was your favorite place that you went?

(Richard Cromer) Favorite place that I went? Oh, well Mount Fuji Islands.

(Vidya Lal) The volcano right?

(Richard Cromer) Yep, yep, yep. While I was there, I picked up, I picked up a painting on rice paper of Mount Fuji and it shows a little village of it and I can see if I can find it before you go.

(Vidya Lal) Okay.

(Richard Cromer) Yeah. That was pretty neat. And then I got down to the... I got down into the Southern part of Japan and I got to swim in the East China Sea, well you don't do that too often, do you, right?

(Vidya Lal) Yeah. That's actually really cool.

(Richard Cromer) That was neat.

(Vidya Lal) Describe the ROTC Program at college

(Richard Cromer) Well, its ROTC. Did you take ROTC at school?

(Vidya Lal) There's actually a program at our school.

(Richard Cromer) Yeah. I know, I'm happily—well not involved yet, but we are trying to come up with some medals for the kids over there. Well, you just start out as basic training and of course it was after—it wasn't a full time thing. It was a lot like a regular class. Well you took a class that had three credits, you took ROTC. And each year well you moved up and advanced into what all you were learning, until the time of graduation. And you got your gold bar pinned on you, as Second Lieutenant. And I was, I was lucky because some of the boys that I was in the ROTC with got called back in for Korea. And I did not get called back. I don't know if it was because of my flat feet or what happened there.

(Vidya Lal) Describe your experiences in the Reserves.

(Richard Cromer) Well, it was basically you... I think we, at that time, I think we had a meeting every other week. And you went to it per week. In a case, I lived in Carlisle so we had a Reserve Unit at the Carlisle Barracks, as we called it then; now it is War College. We'd go for meetings and we'd have a Reserve Unit there—maybe fifty sixty guys. And we'd get involved with the training. And every summer, we would go to a two weeks summer camp, and of course with me being in army security that Reserve Unit at the Barracks was infantry, so I went up to... well I went down to Virginia to a base down there for a couple years and then I went up to Fort Devon, Massachusetts for two years and then they disbanded that. And then I got out of the Reserves, so. But it was, it was basically a Reserve Unit type of thing that they tried to keep your training updated, in case we had to be called back in. I don't... I don't know if I agreed with all that but anyway.

(Vidya Lal) Did anyone in your... Did anyone else in your family or any friends serve in this war or any previous war?

(Richard Cromer) Oh my gracious. Yes! Absolutely! I had a great, great, great uncle that was in the Revolutionary War. I had a great grandfather that fought in the Civil War. He was in the Maryland Calvary on the Union side and he was wounded and he was captured as a prisoner down in Virginia. I had two uncles that were in World War II at the beginning. And then my brother, Wendin, he was six years younger than I so when he turned of age, I took him down and enlisted him into the Air Force. And then when my daughters go old enough to be married, why my one daughter married a young man who had been—he joined the Reserves I guess it was—anyway he, when he finished college he joined in with the Pennsylvania National Guard and he got called over. He was into Bosnia for almost a year. And then, and then for this war, I have a grandson who was in Iraq for three one year terms. And he was with the Eighty-Second Air Borne and he is now out and doing a good job. But you know we've had, we've had family in protecting our country, you know.

(Vidya Lal) Describe your nationalism towards America and what influenced it.

(Richard Cromer) Describe my who?

(Vidya Lal) Your nationalism towards America.

(Richard Cromer) I'm not sure I understand what you're asking me. I'm an American. Is that what you mean? No, you don't mean that.

(Vidya Lal) I know you're American. I don't know we can skip this question.

(Richard Cromer) Well, no. You've must have some reason to ask me that. What were you—I'm not sure what you are looking for.

(Vidya Lal) I was just wondering if you could explain how you feel about America and...

(Richard Cromer) I love it! It's my country. Yeah. I think we've got some... We've got a lot of problems in Washington. And I'm scared to death that they are going to mess this up with some of this stuff that they're trying to shove down everyone's throat, but I don't know. We've been in bad spots before and we pulled out of it and I hope we can do it this time.

(Vidya Lal) Did religion affect your views on war?

(Richard Cromer) Did who?

(Vidya Lal) Did religion.

(Richard Cromer) No. No, because if you look at the bible, they have been fighting ever since the beginning of time, right? I don't know why. Nobody can ever get settled.

(Vidya Lal) Have you discussed your war experiences with members of your family?

(Richard Cromer) Yeah, my grandson and I talked. I wanted to hear about his 'cause he was in the worst messes than I was over there. That mess over there is terrible. Our boys are all coming back—a lot of lot of mental problems, you know. I just hope the country stands in back of these boys and takes care of them. We called it battle fatigue—I forget what they, they got a name now for it—

(Vidya Lal) They do have a name; I don't remember it. [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]

(Richard Cromer) No, I don't either. But that's not important now, we know what it is.

(Vidya Lal) How has your experiences changed your views on life?

(Richard Cromer) Give me that again.

(Vidya Lal) How's your war experiences changed your views on life?

(Richard Cromer) Well, I don't know if it had changed it any. I just sorta went along, you know. I grew up in a period of a war and I knew that one day I was going to have to go in. And I think, I think all young people should serve two years in the service. I don't care who they are or what they are, they should serve two years. You really learn a lot in there. And there's some valuable lessons that you can... Now you can be a real knucklehead and get in trouble all the time and that doesn't work but the Army has a way of taking care of those guys, too. So, it was, I think it made a better person

out of me and being able to learn how to get along with other people. That's a hard job sometimes, you know. I may not like you, but if I got to work with beside of ya, I better figure out how to do that without being antagonistic to you all the time, so.

(Vidya Lal) What would you say is your philosophy of life?

(Richard Cromer) Live and let live. Right? Yeah. I don't know what else to say. I'm... I feel we have to protect ourselves in today's world because Jolly Rodger, Joe Blow, whoever he is out there doesn't like our way of living and he's out to destroy us, so if we want to continue living like that, we've got to learn how to combat that type of thing. And that, that takes some lives, unfortunately. We've, we—I've belong to this organization called the Sojourners, I don't know if I told you that before. We were made up of ex-military, all branches—and officers and masons. And we started a program of putting flags out for the service people that'd been killed and I think first time I think it was only four hundred. This time it was seventy-two hundred. That's a lot of lot of people. But we put flags, we put flags up around Memorial Day down at the Indian Town Gap—have you been down there?

(Vidya Lal) No.

(Richard Cromer) Oh you've got to go see that that is beautiful down there. Good gravy that's—I mean it's a cemetery but it's really done up nice. And then in November, last year we went down to the Masonic home in Elizabethtown and put the flags up out there. An that's over Veteran's Day, so you should try to talk your parents into driving down to Elizabethtown and see that. They're up for a couple of days. They don't leave them there for weeks because the flags deteriorate too fast. But you'd be shocked when you see it.

(Vidya Lal) Well thank you so much for your—

(Richard Cromer) That's it!

(Vidya Lal) That's it.

(Richard Cromer) You didn't even ask me what kind of ice-cream I like!

(Vidya Lal) Which kind of ice-cream do you like?

(Richard Cromer) I like butter pecan!

(Vidya Lal) Well that's good!

(Richard Cromer) Did you bring some along?

(Vidya Lal) No I didn't! Next time.

(Richard Cromer) Okay.

(Vidya Lal) I'll come and visit.