

Charles Raymond Cassely
Narrator

Michael Russert
Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers

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Charles Raymond Cassely CRC

Michael Russert MR

Wayne Clark WC

Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?

CRC: Charles Raymond Cassely, I was born one – twenty one - thirty three, and I was born in Lynn, Massachusetts.

What was your educational background, prior to entering the service?

CRC: High school.

Did you work before you went into the service?

CRC: Yes I did.

Where did you work?

CRC: I worked at Boston [Unclear] Railroad.

Did you enlist or were you drafted?

CRC: I enlisted.

Why did you decide to enlist?

CRC: I really felt my country needed me. I was in the National [Guard] at the time. I had to get discharged from the National Guard to enlist in the Army.

So you were in the Massachusetts National Guard?

CRC: Yes, the 26th Division.

How long had you been in the National Guard?

CRC: Well I was in, probably, two years, but they found that I was underage and it was only a couple of months until I became of age. So they separated me for a couple of months.

What kind of training did you have in the [National] Guard?

CRC: We were combat engineers. [Unclear] first combat engineer.

Why did you decide to go into the National Guard?

CRC: A lot of friends were in it and it was someplace to go in the summer.

Why did you pick the Army? Was it because you were in the [National] Guard?

CRC: Probably.

Did your training in the National Guard help you later on in the Army?

CRC: Without a doubt, very much so! In basic, especially.

After you enlisted, where did you go for your basic training?

CRC: Fort Dix

What was basic like for you, already having some training?

CRC: It was really a snap. We took sixty eight weeks of infantry basic, but I knew the drills. I did all that, I knew quite a bit of things.

After your basic training, where were you assigned?

CRC: Korea

Were you assigned right away, to the 25th Division or did you go as a replacement?

CRC: That, I don't know, but it was funny because we got to [Unclear] and they took with us on the train and we went to Sesebo, [Japan] and from Sesebo, they put us on a ferry boat. We didn't have any weapons, we had nothing. We then landed in Busan [South Korea].

When was this, when you reached Busan?

CRC: The first part of February, I would say.

What year, please?

CRC: Nineteen fifty two.

Did you have sufficient winter equipment and clothing?

CRC: I think we only had just our field jackets, but right there in Busan, we got in the truck. They took us right up to [Unclear] was in reserve at the time and they took us right there and that was where I was assigned.

You said you were assigned without any weapons?

CRC: Yes.

Had you had training back in the States?

CRC: Yes, that was the sixty weeks of training. We fired every weapons the infantry has.

What was your unit within the 25th Division?

CRC: It was the 14th Regiment.

What kind of weapon did you carry?

CRC: Like I said, I was in the 81 Platoon. So, I carried a carbine for say three or four months. Then I was a [Unclear] observer and then I became Italian recon sergeant and I carried a 45 caliber handgun, [Unclear] carbine, too.

So that was fully automatic?

CRC: Yes, it would be with the switch.

Did you have just the fifteen-round magazines or-

CRC: No, it was thirty rounds taped together so it would be sixty rounds in a rifle.

What did you think of the carbine?

CRC: I thought it was sufficient.

Did it have adequate knock-down power?

CRC: Yeah, I thought so, anyhow. The forty-five definitely did.

Could you talk more about some of your duties and experiences with the [Unclear] Platoon and then as a forward observer and a recon-

CRC: Yup, they made me a gunner before I went on line, which I was only in for a couple of weeks, I think. So I was a gunner and when we got on line, we zeroed in the gun on certain places. That's all we had to do the call back and say barrage one and the guns would shoot barrage one. I then went up as a radio operator for the FO, who got rotated home so I became the FO. This was on hill twelve-forty three. They called it the Punch Bowl. It was the highest hill that the UN held at the time. Then I become a foreign observer, there isn't much to that except you stay there on top of the hill. They were

mountains, of course and we were just back, let's say, twenty feet from the mountain. There's a picture where the bunker is and I'm holding a [Unclear] gun. We built all our bunkers to withstand mortar fire and artillery fire.

Would you tell us about the first time that you came under fire, or attack?

CRC: It was probably in the Punch Bowl, there wasn't much. It was at night, everything was under fire and at that time from then on, [Unclear]. And then, we'd take it the next day and next night. Then they would pull up, it wouldn't be anything to take it, but they used [Unclear] and then we touched it and it went back up.

What were living conditions like in the bunkers?

CRC: It's really [Unclear]. We all slept next to sandbags, the rats were terrible. They bothered you constantly. In the summer, it was probably about a hundred and twenty degrees and in the winter it was, I would say twenty below. Terrible. And then in between, it was mud.

What was your food like?

CRC: We had c-rations, you know, I have some at home. I took some, from 1995, they were. That's basically what we ate, if you wanted to walk down to the bottom of the hill in the morning, you would get a hot plate, like [Unclear] eggs, but it really wasn't worth it.

How often did you bathe or change your uniforms?

CRC: Sometimes it was a month.

Did you ever get trench foot being out in the-

CRC: Never had anything. I had tonsillitis when I was on Heartbreak Ridge and they had to take me back to a hospital and I was in an ambulance. I felt so terrible because all these guys are wounded and here I was with tonsillitis. So I had to go back for a few days to get shots.

How would you rate your equipment?

CRC: Very good, I never had any problems when I was in my three year enlistment and so forth. I don't think I ever had a problem in the Army. It was something that I was going to make my career until I met my wife and I connected myself that way.

When you were on the Italian Recon Unit, did you go out for night ambushes and so on-

CRC: Yes I was on recon patrol. It was also my duty, which was top secret, which was to make up patrol plans, where they would go on patrol at night. Where I would go, because most of the time I would go on patrol with rifle men. I would take rifle men from each company and pull patrols too. Just recon patrols, basically. No combat patrols.

What did you think of the North Koreans as opponents?

CRC: I never fought them. I fought the Chinese all the time. The 26th Chinese Division. When we moved, they moved and actually when we moved from the Punch Bowl to Heartbreak Ridge, they used to greet us company by company. "Hello [Unclear] company, glad to see you here!" [Unclear] A lot of psychological warfare, like during Christmas. They used to play *We'll Have a Blue Christmas without You*. You could hear it all throughout Korea, so they played on your nerves.

How were your relationships without your unit? Pretty close?

CRC: Oh yeah, we never had a problem, like I said.

Now did you have any blacks in your unit?

CRC: Yes we did, as a matter of fact, in basic training, there was Blackwell, his name was. We would wrestle like once a week in the barracks. Where I come from, on my street alone, we didn't have any blacks, that's for sure, but we did have a Greek family, an Irish family, a French family, an Italian family. So, no one was really prejudice. I was in basic training and of course they put you in alphabetical order, so I was in ABC. So you figure, how many Italian names are ABC? So we got to the first level, where we could go out to the [Unclear] and have a beer, so we're walking across the street and this guy from New York said, "What do you think, we're in a platoon with all these guineas?" That was the first time I ever heard that word. I didn't know what it meant and I felt very stupid. I figured, 'They're from New York, they know everything.' But I had no prejudice at all.

What were your officers like?

CRC: Not In basic, but in Korea, Captain Cod, I don't know his first name, he was a west point, an Italian commander, But in eighty one, we were moving to cool off, relieving the Ethiopian scent. They had their guns right on the line, which was terrible because flash [Unclear] would see it at night. At that time, he was my company commander and he came up with the Italian commander, by that time, I had taken all the [Unclear] because I knew they were going to ask me. My duty was to go built our little 81 Platoon. Like I said, I shot all [Unclear] I knew right where we were. He came up and put the map on the jeep front and said, "This is our coordinates." And I didn't know what to say, but I knew he was wrong. Finally I said, "I've got a problem." So I told him, "Captain, you're in the next valley." So they did it again and he said, "Thank you I think I was [Unclear]." That's when I made sergeant. About a week later, he wanted me back as recon sergeant. He became Italian commander and I became recon sergeant, which I think was very nice.

How long were you in Korea?

CRC: About eleven months, it could have been twelve because I was in [Unclear] Harbor, going home on my birthday, in 1953, January.

Did you ever have much contact with the Korean people?

CRC: Only when we were in reserve and they hated us, as far as I'm concerned. I used to have to take [Unclear]. We had a Missouri mile, it was the exact same thing as the front line, only a mile back. If they made a big push, and we fell all the way back, everything would be there. Not the guns, but all the bunkers and stuff. I used to have to take about thirty of them out there and work on that. Like I said, they hated us. [Unclear.] It is funny, when I sold my house last year, I had a Korean couple come in, a nice couple. When they said they were Korean, I said, "I was in Korea in the early fifties." And they said, "Thank you, I've never met a veteran of Korea." And they thanked me! But at the time, they didn't thank me.

Did you ever have much contact with the Korean Army at all?

CRC: None.

How about any of the allied troops, like the-

CRC: Turks. The Turks used to be on the lefts of us, the whole time.

What did you think of the Turks?

CRC: They were vicious. I would never want to fight the Turkish Army [Unclear] if it were even. They're [Unclear] professionals. They stay in the Army all their life, I mean, these guys were older than us. If they got wounded, they got patched up and came back. To me, they were terrific fighters.

Do you think the Chinese feared them?

CRC: I don't know, I don't even know if the Chinese was in front of them. It was our Regiment, and then them, so I don't know if the Chinese were in front of them. It could have been [Unclear]. That, I couldn't answer.

When you left Korea, in January 1953, where were you assigned?

CRC: I was assigned at [Unclear], Staten Island. And [Unclear] was a C.A.P. a half field with buildings on it. Here, I was an infantryman. I never saw, or touched a gun bigger than a 75- recoilless and they put me in the anti-aircraft [Unclear]. I had to be a platoon sergeant of one of the platoons. The [Unclear] gun [Unclear]. Like I said, I had never seen a 90-mm gun. They were in a dilemma, so that's when they sent me down to see an atomic bomb.

Tell us about that.

CRC: That was a very interesting thing. We got to Camp Desert Fox, in Nevada. We did critiques almost every day, but almost every night they would drive us, I think it was seventy five miles, to Las Vegas. So we got into Las Vegas, and we were there for fifteen days. We had a very good time, the whole thing was never bad. And this was the time they fired the atomic bomb out of the 280-mm cannon. We all went out there and got into trenches, I think it was a mile away. They told us to put gas-masks on and bend down into the trenches, until we saw this huge bright light, which was in the middle of the

desert, with the sun. This thing was like someone flashed a flashbulb in your eyes. You saw it, you couldn't help but see it. And that was when the radiation went by, so you could stand up. We stood up and a lot of us, with the gas masks, the helmet didn't fit that good and we started to watch the mushroom form. Thirteen seconds, I think it took, for the shockwave to get to us. And we were watching this for thirteen seconds and then you saw a swirl of sand coming at you and you heard the noise. The noise blew a lot of guys' helmets off, or they were ducking and they fell off. After that, we just got up and we formed one line across the desert and walked through ground zero. We didn't have any badges on to celebrate things that we had. They sent me papers quite a few years ago to ask if I had any of these diseases that I guess some guys caught. But it was funny too, because these jack rabbits would run along the line and they couldn't get by us because we were on giant line. So they couldn't get by us. [Unclear] The sheep were staked every hundred yards and you're wondering why they're screaming. When they turned around, the whole one side of them was singed. The other side was away from the radiation. They had tanks and trucks and the closer you got, the more demolished they were. They had a forest [Unclear], they had a train. All that was demolished, you know, thrown around. There were also sheep in bunkers, but I don't know the outcome of them. It was an experience.

Did they give you any kind of eye protection, to wear over your eyes?

CRC: No, you had to take the gas mask off, because you can't be walking around the desert with a gas mask. They didn't give s very much, for fifteen days, they just told us what was going to happen. They never took us out of the trenches or anything.

Did they ever check you or anything?

CRC: No, that's when they sent me letter about ten years later, wanting to know about my health.

Do you think you've suffered any effects from this?

CRC: Gee, I don't think so, unless it could give me emphysema, but I was fairly healthy all my life until I got this, and that's my own fault. That was smoking three packs a day, so I can't blame the Army for my emphysema.

Did you ever get contacted about these groups called the Atomic Soldiers?

CRC: No.

They never contacted you?

CRC: Nope, never heard of it!

There's a group called the Atomic Soldiers. After you did this, you did this only once, what was your next assignment or duties?

CRC: I was a Raid Platoon Sergeant in Staten Island.

What rank were you? Were you in Sergeant first class?

CRC: Yes.

Was that your final duty post?

CRC: Yes.

When did you leave the service?

CRC: September 4th, 1954.

Did you ever use the GA bill?

CRC: No, you know what I did though, I think for about six months to go to college, I took over a GI mortgage. Like, a four and a half percent GI mortgage from another veteran. That's about the only thing, and then tax write-offs. As a matter of fact, coming from Massachusetts, I got three hundred dollars a [Unclear]. That was the state.

Did you ever join any veterans associations?

CRC: I'm part of the American Legion.

Have you been active in it?

CRC: No, not really, but all my friends are in it so [Unclear] but I'm not active in it.

Did you keep in contact with anyone that served with you?

CRC: I worked at Roosevelt Raceway, it was a track and I used to see this one guy that was in my [Unclear]. His name was Paulie [Unclear], he came from Brooklyn. When I first got out, I think I went to Brooklyn, because a lot of them were from Brooklyn. I went to Brooklyn and saw a couple of them. They were working when I wasn't and I was still in the Army. They were drafted, so they got right out. But they were working, they couldn't stop and talk, so I never bothered anymore.

How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

CRC: My wife?

Your Life.

CRC: Oh! It matured me. When I was in Korea, I was in charge of a lot of guys at 19 years old. I was a sergeant at 19, so it matured me quite a bit. And in my opinion, I think every kid, if they have one leg or one eye or anything to join something like the service. I would say, I remember my cousin, he was in the CCC, during the depression. I think that would mature a lot of people and educate them on facts of life I think that's a very good thing for people. Men and women.

Are there any other stories that you want to mention that you didn't?

[Pause]

CRC: No I don't think so.

Okay, why don't you hold that up and tell us when and where that was taken?

[Interviewer hands C.R. Cassely a headshot from his time in the service.]

CRC: Probably in Lynn, Massachusetts.

[C.R. Cassely shows a photograph of him as a Recon Sergeant kneeling in front of a Bunker, holding the recoilless rifle.]

[C.R. Cassely holds a photograph of an 81-mortar]

[Shows a photograph of C.R. Cassely in the Reserves since he first got there]

[Shows a photograph of C.R. Cassely holding a Chinese Burp Gun]

[Shows a photograph of C.R. Cassely]

This looks like you trying to keep warm.

CRC: This was about thirty below and I was in a Jeep. We had to go back to [Unclear] with no windshield or anything.

Did you ever have any problems with frostbite or anything?

CRC: Nope.

[Shows propaganda leaflets from Korean and Chinese soldiers asking Allies to give up.]

[Holds up leaflet from Allies asking opposing forces to give up.]

Thank you very much for your interview.

CRC: Thank you, gentleman.