

Charles R. Cross
Narrator

Mike Russert
Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers

Interviewed on July 15, 2004
Kingston, New York

Interviewers: This is an interview at a Motel 8 in Kingston, New York. It is the 15th of July 2004 approximately 10:30a.m. the interviewers are Wayne Clark and Michael Russert. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

Charles Cross: My name is Charles R. Cross. Date of birth is June 16th, 1915. I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

Interviewers: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

Charles Cross: I went to Brooklyn Tech High School. I graduated in January of 1933. I was in the electrical section of the courses, as there were four or five different courses there. Architectural, Mechanical, Electrical, and I don't recall what else. There was another one called a college prep course for anybody who intended to go to college from there, which I had no chance of doing [Laughter]. The next eight years I worked for a Japanese importer in the Empire State Building in New York and became known as a cable clerk. In those days, it cost a lot of money to send plain language messages back and forth across the sea so we did something called a CDE or code. Five letter groups. We had books in which a whole letter of credit would be one word and one five letter digit. I became a cable clerk and I worked for them until 1941. Things were getting a little tight with the Japanese at this point. They were freezing our assets we were freezing theirs and everything that came in required an import license and everything that went out required an export license. The company's said they would give us time off while we looked for another job. So I did that and I worked for a company that made radios, Hamill manufacturing. I worked there for about six months and got drafted out of there.

Interviewer: Can you tell me where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Charles Cross: We had just come out of the movies. I wasn't married then but my wife and I were at a movie in the afternoon and turned on a radio when we came in the house and that is when we heard it. My reaction was bad, I heard radio operator and he said "I guess we have to go off the air". And we did. We declared an emergency and went off the air the following morning.

Interviewer: How did you feel since you worked with a Japanese company?

Charles Cross: They treated me very well. I never had any problems one way or another with them. My boss was one of my best friends, a little Japanese guy named Iama. Unfortunately, I think he is long gone by this time, but I worked for him for a number of years and I never had any problems with him one way or the other.

Interviewer: So you were drafted...

Charles Cross: Yes

Interviewer: When were you drafted?

Charles Cross: Friday the 13th of February in 1942. I did everything on Friday the 13th. That was the day I went into Normandy as well.

Interviewer: Where did you go for your basic training

Charles Cross: I was at Fort Dix and they gave an exam and I aced it. It was a GE electrical exam and they told me that at that point the only place I could go would be signal corps. So when I got my orders, they put me in infantry in Camp Croft in South Carolina. So I put in 3 months there, from February until April. Somehow I was transferred back to signal corps in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. I went through a course as an enlisted man. Fixed station radio operating; I did that for about 5 weeks. When they pulled me out of there I did Japanese phone for the next 3 months and then because I had applied for OCS they held me back and the rest of the of company went to Camp Crowder heading for the Pacific. I was held back at Fort Monmouth and went through OCS in September, 1942. I graduated a Second Lieutenant on December 18th, 1942. With all my background in Japanese, they sent me to Florida to learn radar. I ended up in Deerfield, Florida, which is now the international airport between Clearwater and Tampa. I spent my time down there learning radar, which at the time, was very basic radar. From there I was transferred out to Jefferson Barracks in Saint Louis, Missouri. I spent 5 weeks out there. Then I got on a troop train as a commander of the train and went back to Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts. And then, I went to England because of my background in Japanese.

Interviewer: You were able to speak Japanese?

Charles Cross: No, I did not speak any Japanese. Since I worked with them I picked up a few words. But I did not speak the language.

But, I ended up in England. First I was up with a company in Northern England and I was transferred from there to their higher headquarters, where I stayed for a couple of months. Then I was assigned to what became my permanent designation: the 877 Signal. I stayed with them for the rest of the conflict.

Interviewer: You mentioned you lived in Normandy... was there any evidence?

Charles Cross: July 13th 1944, we went into Omaha the same as the troops did on D-Day. By that time, it was pretty well cleaned up and everything was pushed back about 10 miles back. We went to an encampment in Normandy in a little place called Libeole. We were there from July until September. And then we moved down to Rheims, France. We stayed there until April of 1945. Then we moved to Monchengladbach in Germany. And then in June of 1945, after the war

had ended, I was bumped because I did not have enough points. Someone was sent to replace me. My major said, “you go with us anyways...”. So I went with him to Camp Lenore, but then my replacement came down [Laughter] and I had to go back.

Interviewer: What did your unit do when you were with them?

Charles Cross: I was with the 16th Air Depot Group which did the repairs and supply of all the communications equipment for fighter air craft for 9th Air Force. We were a part of 9th Air Force service command. Our service command headquarters was in Luxemburg at that time and we operated from there. The group did all of the maintenance and supply for the 9th Air Force fighter planes. My company was doing all the on-board radio and radar for the 9th Air Force fighter places.

Interviewer: Did you find that you and your group had to do repairs often?

Charles Cross: We did a lot of repair of radios and radar that went into the planes. When we were in England and France, our depot group was supplying service groups. Those service groups were at the airfield where these planes would be and we would maintain them at that point. We were the high echelon, 3rd or 4th echelon repair. I did a lot of traveling in England at that time down to the Dover coast, where most of our service groups were.

Interviewer: You said that one experience that you had was to watch from the coast of England the planes that went overhead to the Normandy invasion. Can you describe that?

Charles Cross: That was June 5th, the night before they went out. I heard that General Eisenhower was on our other side of the field. We weren't allowed over there, it was a restricted area, and we couldn't get there for many months. I heard he was there and saw the glider pilots and the troop carriers off that night. There were thousands of B26s flying overhead. And we knew that something was going on and then the next morning we knew that it was D-Day. But we did not go out until 37 days later. The liberty ship that went from South Hampton to Omaha Beach in Normandy was called the Daniel Beard. My brother, who was in the transportation company, was on the pier, and I learned from him later that the Daniel Beard had sunk in a channel. It had hit a mine. My brother was in the transportation company and he was a company clerk in South Hampton.

Interviewer: Were you ever aware in your movements of the existence of concentration camps?

Charles Cross: No. We only read about them in the Stars and Stripes magazine. But when we went into Normandy I was with an advanced party and I remember we were in Jeeps that climbed the hill that the poor guys had to climb on D-Day. One day, while we were bombing Shiloh, we were in pup tents in Libeole, which was about 10 miles from Shiloh. You could feel the ground vibrating when you were sleeping there because 10 miles away was the shelling. We went a couple days later and there were no buildings standing.

Interviewer: You were in England during the V2s and V1s coming in?

Charles Cross: I was on leave back in London and if you heard them 3 or 4 seconds after the motor stopped, you were okay. It didn't hit you but somewhere else. But it was a scary thing. I was in a hotel in Trafalgar Square in London and one hit a block away and it was a scary thing.

Interviewer: Did you have any connections/communications with the civilian people?

Charles Cross: When we were in England, we met a family there, I don't remember their name, but they took us into their house and we exchanged cigarettes and candy to them for meals. Those are the only people I really had a connection with. In France, we had a language problem. We did in England too but not as bad. We had an officer with us, Lieutenant Doria, who is from this area, I believe from Poughkeepsie. He was a radio repair officer and he spoke fluent French. We got along with the French well because of him. We got local supplies, such as beef. We got sick of eating canned beef for 30 days so he went out and killed a cow for us. When I was in Germany we had the no-friend policy. You could not talk with the German people at all, except strictly on business. We had German people working for us in one of the camp, who were German civilians, mostly old men. Everyone 10 years old or older was most likely in the German army. The only people we could find were older German men. So they worked for us.

Interviewer: You ended up in the reserves after the war correct?

Charles Cross: I put in twenty and a half years further in the reserve. I came out of the army and President Truman promoted us. I was promoted to Captain on terminal leave. I got two promotions beyond that in the reserve. I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Interviewer: When did you retire?

Charles Cross: 1966. I wasn't paid until 1975 because you don't get paid in the reserve until you are 60. My neighbor just retired from the 548 Reserve in Kingston. He had at least 4 years in the service and then active duty in the reserve. He will not get paid until he is 60. He retired when he was 57 and I asked him "Did you get paid yet?" and he says [Laughter] "No. I'm starving to death for the next three years."

Interviewer: Did you make use of the GI Bill when you left the service?

Charles Cross: I had a GI mortgage in Long Island from 1952 until 1954 when I sold the house. Otherwise, I did not take advantage of it. The VA man who was working the VA at the time told me he could get it back so I could get the GI mortgage at my present home, but I never did.

Interviewer: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

Charles Cross: I'm a VOW member and I'm also a lifetime member of the MOAA. Which stands for Military Officers Association of America. It used to be TROA.

Interviewer: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone?

Charles Cross: I had one man who was my cryptographic sergeant and was a staff sergeant when I was in the service in France and Germany. He contacted me 10 years ago. He sent me a letter. He had found my name through the computer most likely. He and I have been corresponding ever since. He got out of the service and went home to St. Louis in 1945. They tried to keep him in the service and he said "No. I don't want any part of the military." So he got out. However, he rejoined the Air Force the following year and went through a twenty-year service. He retired as a Master Sergeant in the Air Force. He now lives in Moreno Valley in California near Riverside. He and I have been corresponding by computer mostly since then. He

is the only one of the entire company and group that contacted me. I do know through the MOAA that my old major died about 5 years ago. His name showed up in the column of the magazine. He is the only other person I have contacted within the last sixty years.

Interviewer: How do you think your time in the service changed your life?

Charles Cross: It pays off in a pension[Laughter]. My time in the military was a good thing. Many people look at serving in the military as a bad thing; I do not. I enjoyed my time in the service.

Interviewer: Very good, thank you very much for your interview.