

Interview with
Tom Krauska

Mr. Cox: Today is October 9, 2001. My name is Floyd Cox and I am a volunteer at National Museum of the Pacific War. We are here today as part of the oral history program in conjunction with the oral history program of the museum. We are here in Windcrest, Texas interviewing Mr. Tom Krauska regarding his experiences during World War II. To start with I would like to express my appreciation to you for taking the time to participate in our program. Would you tell us when and where you were born?

Mr. Krauska: Somewhere along the line God saw fit to let me come to life on December 15, 1919. I was born in Saint Louis, Missouri in humble surroundings. I was the last of three children born to my parents. My parents were Thomas Ignatius Krauska and my mother was Mary Ann Krauska. They were both of Polish descent. They spoke Polish around the house all the time. Up until the age of six or seven they tried to get me to speak Polish. They gave up on me because I liked to yell and play and I couldn't remember those Polish words. We lived at 4417 Itasca Street in south Saint Louis. It was primarily a Dutch and Polish neighborhood. We moved several times but we stayed in that neighborhood until I was called in the service. I was trained and educated by Catholic Nuns in Saint Cecilia Church. It was the best education I could have gotten anywhere. It was great and we all came

out smelling like a rose because they were all such fine teachers. They were also loving teachers and I will never forget them. I remember them in my prayers many times because of the way they treated me and my family. I'm sure they had a lot to do with me still living today because they taught me how to live, how to have fun, to get educated and stay educated. I was in the Catholic school for eight years. I played soccer and was pretty good at it. I went to a public school after grade school and it was a different atmosphere. It was a good high school, education wise but there religion wise there just wasn't any religion in a public school. It was a big school. We had about six or seven hundred in our class. During the four years of high school I became a pretty good gymnast. I put on a lot of muscle in places that people would like to see it. I really enjoyed working in gymnastics and putting on good shows as a gymnast. We participated in gymnastic tournaments in the high school, the city and throughout Missouri. I did fair. I wasn't at the top all the time but came pretty close. I tried to convince my kids to participate in gymnastics and I had a daughter that turned out to be a state champion in gymnastics. My Dad was one of the old timers who believed that the man of the house should be educated and the women were down there below somewhere. My Dad didn't give my sisters, who were older than I, an opportunity to go to college. One sister of mine was smart as a whip but they wouldn't give her any money to go to college. They told her if she wanted any education she would have to do it on her own and

go out and find herself a job. That was the attitude, not just with my Dad but a lot of other people in those days. The breadwinner was the man so he got to go to school. My older sister was Betty and Florence was next. We were all about eighteen months apart. We were very close and stayed very close. My older sister was a brain but she couldn't go to college.

Mr. Cox: What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Krauska: When he started out during World War I he was a machinist. He was very good with his hands and working with tools of all sorts. During World War I he wasn't drafted because he had skills in mechanics. They kept him in an ammunition plant there in Saint Louis. He worked many hours more than the people in the military worked I'm sure but he was working for the government making ammunition. He stayed in that job for the rest of the war. He had a brother that went to France. He got shot up but he didn't die. His name was Frank Krauska. He was my God Father. My father had three brothers. There were four boys in that family. I never did know my grandfather. My dad was about eleven years old when my grandfather died and he became the breadwinner. He remembers his dad working for five cents an hour. I'll never forget, it was amazing the way they lived. They came over from Poland on ships that were as crowded as they could be. They couldn't get out of Poland fast enough at that time. Conditions were really bad over there. I had

the opportunity about two years ago to go to Poland and walk the streets where my parents and my dad's folks were raised and lived. They had a rough life when they were growing up. I thank the good Lord for that opportunity. My dad's mother came to the United States to follow her husband who had come over earlier. He had a friend here who got him a job. His friend said, "Ignatius come on over, I've got a job for you." They saved fifteen or twenty dollars for passage to come over on a boat. I really don't know how they did it. My grandmother claimed it was so crowded with people but somehow they lived through it. When they got to the United States my grandfather worked for five cents an hour but it was better than what they had in Poland. He never did make a lot of money, just existed really but my grandmother was a seamstress. She took in work and she had a business of her own making dresses for people. My grandmother lived to be eighty-six years old.

Mr. Cox: When you got out of high school where did you go from there?

Mr. Krauska: As I said my dad thought boys should go to college so I was going to go to the University of Missouri but it came down to dollars and cents so I checked with Saint Louis University which was about five miles up the road from where we lived. It was in mid-town of Saint Louis. We had a campus of four big theaters for one, not a little campus at all. We had a couple of catholic churches close by. Saint Louis University had a big catholic church and being catholic to begin with made it a lot easier

going there. I was a server and altar boy. I went into college right out of high school. I met the gym teacher and he asked if I had ever done any cheerleading because they needed cheerleaders. I said, "No, but my friend who came from Cleveland high school with me was a cheerleader." He said, "Well I can teach you." There were three of us who had been in gymnastics at Cleveland high school became jumpers and tumblers all over that football field. I had never led a cheer in my life but I was a cheerleader for five years at the University of Saint Louis. The others finished their school too. I worked in the gymnasium as well. I got all my tuition paid after the first semester for working in the basket room. When it was slow sometime I would take my books over there and study until nine o'clock at night and then go home having all my studying done for the most part. It was a great opportunity for me only because I was a gymnast, I knew the teacher and he had control of the job. He wanted us as cheerleaders because we could tumble and he wanted us to tumble up and down the field. We put on hand balancing shows as well and I must say we were good and people really enjoyed it. It was through that that I got to know people. It really loosened me up in meeting and dealing with people, which helped me a lot in later years. When I went to law school you could get in to law school with two years of academics in another graduate school. You can't do that now. You have to have a degree to get in now. I don't know how I picked law because my dad didn't encourage me one bit I know that. He was happy

I was getting my tuition paid for. While I was going to college both of my sisters were working. We had a two family flat as we called it in Saint Louis. We had four rooms, a kitchen which was also our dining room with all of the utensils there. We had one bathroom with a tub and my parents had a room. My sisters had a room where they had to sleep together and where was I? I was in the so-called living room. We had a couch that we could pull out. At the time when I was needing a couch when they got that house all they had was a roll away bed. I had to take that roll away bed out of the closet every night and that is where I slept. I was sleeping on that roll away even when I was in college. We weren't a wealthy neighborhood by any means but we weren't poor. My dad never even once thought about going and getting a bigger house. "Tom can just sleep on that roll away or that sofa." I guess it brought me up the right way. I was convinced I was the poorest guy in my law class. Some of them had jobs but most of them were rich kids. I think it made me a much better man in the end because I learned to appreciate the dollars you make.

Mr. Cox: Were you a senior in college when Pearl Harbor occurred?

Mr. Krauska: I was still in law school in my senior year. I got my draft notice and I thought I was going to go. They called me to come on down and I pleaded with them because I was in my last year of law school. Things got so hot that we combined one full semester in the summer's program.

That was a summer I will never forget. I hitch hiked to school every day. I didn't ride the streetcar.

Mr. Cox: Why did you hitch hike, to save money?

Mr. Krauska: Yeah, to save money. It was thirteen cents to get on the streetcar. I didn't even have thirteen cents. Thank God I had that job at school. There was a chili joint on campus and that is where I ate lunch for fifteen cents. I had chili almost every day. I'm not kidding. I got the gang at school to eat chili too. All the crackers you wanted and maybe a hotdog thrown in once in a while. A friend of mine who was the manager of the municipal auditorium was in control of the shows that came to town. When they came to town and he needed people to stand behind the bar to sell cokes and beer I would do it. I wasn't even twenty-one when I did it but I did it. I made drinks and pass them out and collected money for them. I got three dollars a night for that. I worked about three hours. That was money I didn't have before and in between shows I could even pull out my book and study for the next day.

Mr. Cox: Did the draft board get you at that time?

Mr. Krauska: I managed to get out of law school then they were after me. They gave me a reprieve, you might say. I told them I need to take the bar exam. They didn't even want me to graduate. One guy had told me I could

always come back to school later. I didn't want to go back later I wanted to go ahead and get it over with. I wanted to take the bar exam and if I flunked it fine and if I passed it that would be great. They let me take the bar. They had some bar courses that you could study for the bar exam that were about \$500 dollars. I didn't have \$500 dollars so I went ahead and took the exam. There were seventeen in my class to take the bar. Two of the guys in my class that were from the richest parents flunked the bar. I had to rake up the money to just take the bar exam. It wasn't long after that I was drafted. I had taken the bar, that was all I asked for, and lo and behold I passed the bar. I made a statement that I've been quoted many times since. When asked what was the best thing that happened to you at any given time I said, "The day I picked up the Saint Louis Post Dispatch and it showed that I passed the bar." I ran up to the corner to pick up the paper because it had a listing of all the people who had passed the bar. They didn't write a letter to you they put it in the newspaper. Somewhere I have that newspaper article that showed that I passed the bar. I came home and I was saying bring on the draft board, I didn't care, I passed the bar.

Mr. Cox: During this time had you taken any examinations for pilot training?

Mr. Krauska: I did, I took some exams when I was in law school. I took some exams for pilot training for the Navy. They were going to call me and send me to a Naval Training School somewhere in Illinois. They weren't going

to put me in pilot training they were just going to make me a Naval Officer and I wasn't too happy about that. I wanted to fly. I had also taken the Aviation Cadet Program with the Army. I took the exam for that and passed it. I didn't hear from the Army but I heard from the draft board. Before the Army could call me for flying the draft board called me for the Infantry. I went to the Infantry at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. I think it was May 17, 1941 I was drafted into the United States Army at Jefferson Barracks as a Private. I mean a Private, the lowest thing you can get.

Mr. Cox: Even with a law degree?

Mr. Krauska: Oh that didn't mean a thing. I walked in there and this guy passed me a bunch of shoes and he said, "How did you happen to get in here with a law degree?" I said, "I don't know, ask the draft board." I was embarrassed when they would ask why I wasn't in OCS. My first day of being drafted at Jefferson Barracks, I'll never forget it. I had worn a size eight and a half D shoe for many years. The guy looked at me threw me a pair of shoes size nine and a half. I said, "That's not my size." He said, "Put tape on the darn shoes and get out of here." I had to take them. I got my uniforms and I was ashamed to wear the shoes because they were flopping all over the place. (Laughter) You're laughing but what I'm telling you, is the God's truth. We went on a troop train to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I was ashamed to tell anyone I was a lawyer.

Some of those guys that got on that train had about a third or fourth grade education. Some of them could not write their name but they were drafted. We were all in Company B, 329th Infantry in Shelby, Mississippi. I'll never forget it though. It really made me a man. I learned to appreciate how bad things were around the world and around me. We lived in tents for a long time. I learned to help people because they needed help. One guy could hardly write. I worked with him to write his name and finally he was able to write his name. He had to sign the payroll and could barely sign his name. Being an educated man at that point I became Flight leader real quick and then Platoon leader. These guys were getting stripes and not even an eighth grade education and here I am with a college degree and they wouldn't give me one stripe. I complained about that but they said they couldn't give those stripes away because they belong here in this outfit. That was their attitude. I transferred out after four months in the Infantry. I had four months of training I will never forget. President Roosevelt drove by me and I saluted President Roosevelt. In Camp Shelby we watched a parade go by. I never had seen a president before. He was in a big ole car waving to the people like he knew what in the hell he was doing. (Laughter) That was quite an experience that will live with me forever and I'll never forget it. You have to look back and see that it made me a much better man. I appreciated the people that were around me. I helped more people as a result of that experience. I used to sit down

with people who couldn't remember the orders of the day. I got them to learn the orders of the day.

Mr. Cox: How did you get out of the Infantry?

Mr. Krauska: I told these people at the induction center when they drafted me that I had taken these exams and I was waiting to be called to go into Aviation Cadet Training. They said, "Well, when that happens we'll take a look at it and decide if we are going to let you go or not." That was their attitude. Four months later they caught up with me. They told me they had gotten a letter from the Aviation Cadet people saying they want you for flight training. Their attitude was that it was up to me to get out. There was an Aviation Cadet man at Camp Shelby. He was in the headquarters building I know that. As a Private, you didn't go into the headquarters building. I went up there and found that guy and he found me name and said, "We'll get you out of here. In about a week or ten days I was on my way to the Aviation Cadet Center in Nashville, Tennessee. I didn't even know there was one in Nashville, Tennessee I thought it was down in Texas somewhere. I spent about two or three months in Nashville pulling KP, guard duty just about anything to keep us out of trouble. We'd sleep and eat and that's about it. We didn't have classes of any kind. One day after about three months they called off some names and I was one of them that would be transferred to Aviation Cadet Center at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio,

Texas. We had barracks in Nashville and it was warm. We get to Texas we were in tent city. They had about six or eight of us to a big tent. All we did was eat, play guard duty and KP. That was worse than the infantry. It seemed like every other day we had KP or guard duty and then march in the meantime. You marched to this and marched to that. We even marched to church believe it or not. All the Catholics would get together and march to church. I had learned to march real good in the infantry so I knew how to march. I was platoon leader. For some reason I used to walk a thirty-inch step. It came natural to me I guess. That Sergeant, I thought I would never forget his name he was really a great one. He really took a liking to me because I could walk this thirty-inch step. I became the lead man and everybody had to walk that thirty-inch-step. He thought I was pretty damn good because I could make that thirty-inch step every time. He actually got down and marked the prints on the ground. That is how I got picked as platoon leader.

I finally got called to go to a civilian flying school out of Forth Worth I can't remember the name of the place. They had about a hundred cadets there learning to fly. I did pretty well. I went through primary school there.

Mr. Cox: What does primary school involve?

Mr. Krauska: You have to take a lot of basic classes on flying to begin with. You have to study meteorology and Morse code. You learn all the basics of flying.

They have a bunch of mock up stuff too where you learn to maneuver the pedals down below and work with the stick. I did pretty well on that. There were four of us assigned to this civilian instructor who was probably thirty years old. He had done a lot of flying in civilian airports. I didn't have any problem in primary school at all. In fact all four of us breezed right through.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember what kind of plane you were flying?

Mr. Krauska: It was a PT-13. It was a good airplane. I really liked it. We spent three months in that phase of training and then we were all transferred to Greenville, Texas right outside of Dallas. There was a huge and I mean huge sign that was right across the main street of town. I'll never forget what the sign read, "The blackest land and the whitest people". You never saw so many black people in your life that were in that town. I couldn't believe it. I went by there many times for many years and it was still there. I went by there about a year or so ago and that sign is gone. Somebody got smart and took that damn thing down or burned it. I told my kids you are going into the land of the blackest land and the whitest people. They said, "I don't see any black land around here." These kids were smart too. (Laughter)

We had the same instructor in basic school that we had in primary. In basic you got an airplane that had a variable pitch propeller. That was a problem with me and a lot of others. This guy had been a civilian

instructor somewhere. He came in as a 2nd Lieutenant with a commission teaching us how to fly that _____. I guess I had about seven or eight hours but I had not soloed yet when he took me up one day and said, "We're going to solo you today." I told him I would like to. He said, "You have to learn how to fly, you weren't taught very well." From the time that he met all four of us on the flight line we had to stand at attention. We really cussed him. He took me up that day and he put me in a spin and then he told me to get myself out. I said, "I know how to get out of a spin but you put me in something and I'm going around and around and I can't even get out." I was going down, down, down as he was saying this. We were going straight for the ground and he kept yelling at me.

He yelled at me so much I couldn't concentrate on what the hell I was doing. Finally, he grabbed hold of that stick and said, "Get your damn hands off" and managed to get it straightened out somehow. I was so scared I thought I was going to die. He zoomed the thing out and got away from the ground. The other guys had the same experience with him. He stood all four of us up the next day and said, "Krauska you are going to meet the board and you are going to be out of here before you know it. You better go back to the infantry." He looked at the other three and said, "A week from now another one of you will be going. The next week another will be gone. One out of four will make the grade." I wanted an audience with the Commander. I was a lawyer and

I wanted to let the Commander know what was going on. That is what I told that guy. When he took the stick away from me that day and we were landing I said, "I would like to talk to you, who in the hell taught you how to teach people how to fly?" He wasn't much older than me. All four of us were good pilots and he was going to wash all of us but one out. We landed and he told me I was going to meet the board. I didn't meet the board, they sent me straight to the old man. I told me I wanted an appointment with the General and they gave me one. I told the General what I thought of the whole operation having a guy like that as an instructor because he was going to kill people out there trying to teach them how to fly. They did kill a few people later on. The General went along with the instructor though. He told me too bad but you are going back to the infantry. They shipped me back to the training center at Lackland again and lived in that same tent city waiting for my transfer to Bombardier School. I had to wait around three months to get in the Bombardier School. In the meantime I had a good time in town. I did my guard duty and KP during the week. I was pretty good at KP and peeling potatoes. You had to peel the potatoes in those days. Now they have an automatic potato peeler. That is when I got to know San Antonio. My kids can't believe I was down on the San Antonio River a long time before they were born. I didn't enjoy waiting around because the war was going on and I wanted to get on with it. My friends and law classmates went through school with flying colors and didn't have any

problems. Me, I had a lot of problems. Maybe it was just me I don't know. Eventually, they shipped me out to Midland, Texas for Bombardier training and I graduated September 16th.

Mr. Cox: When you went through Bombardier School can you give us some idea what you did to learn to be a bombardier?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yeah, we spent a lot of hours on what they called a bomb trainer. It was on wheels and you could direct the motion of that trainer over the target. You are up about ten feet high and the bombardier sight was there. We learned that Norton bombsight inside and out. It was good training and it was a good school. We would have to sit on top of that trainer and they would have a moving target on the ground. It was sort of a little mouse running around that was your target and you would have to get it in your sight and drop your bomb. That is how we learned to work the Norton bombsight. Then you would have an instructor take you up and you would do the same thing in the air only you would be picking up a stationery target on the ground. They had the bombing range and eventually they had the targets out there. Some would be moving and some were still. The pilot would put you on the bomb run and then say, "You got it" and he would turn over the control of the plane to you with that bombsight. You are going at a slow speed and you are directing that plane right over that target with the knobs that you have in there. You had control of the whole plane with that Norton

bombsight. It was a fantastic instrument and we learned it well. I graduated and got my wings.

By that time I had met a young lady in town at a dance. We were there for a month before they would let you get off base. One month we were stuck in that hot weather in September in Midland, Texas with the wind and sand blowing it was something else. The only good part about it was I graduated and met my wife.

Mr. Cox: What was her name?

Mr. Krauska: Her name was Marion Coffman. She was a college graduate from Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas. She was a schoolteacher working at that time as a secretary to the president of an oil company. She had a big job. I met her at the dance the first week we were out at the Scarborough Hotel. I'll never forget that. The cadets walked in there and boy there was a bevy of women standing across the dance floor. I said, "Here we are guys, let's go." (Laughter) Everybody took off to somebody they saw on the other side. She came with me and that is how I met her. Following that she came out to the base on Wednesday evening when we would have ice cream, no beer, and sit outside the barracks. We couldn't sit inside the barracks. We would sit in the shade and just talk. She would come out every Wednesday and Sunday. When I could get off on Sunday we would go into town and spend the afternoon in town dancing at the hotel. That is how we got to know each other. She

learned to like me and I learned to love her and it was a great relationship. When I left there I was transferred to Combat Crew Training in Salt Lake City. In Salt Lake City they pair up the pilot, the navigator and the bombardier into crews. I don't know how they did the pairing up but they did. Our names were called up Krauska, and whoever, were going to that god forsaken place in Casper, Wyoming. Casper, Wyoming in the wintertime, the snow was higher than the sheds we lived in and so cold. They had to take shovels and shovel the way into the tarpaper shed. We had a potbelly coal stove for heat and that was all we had for heating. Everybody started pushing their beds closer to the stove. We had this heavy gear too. We flew in that stuff. It was hard enough just walking around in it much less fly in it.

Mr. Cox: What kind of aircraft were you flying in at that time?

Mr. Krauska: We were flying in the B-24. That was the Liberator. Those were the training planes. We were there three months.

Mr. Cox: Did you practice bombing runs and did you get your full combat crew at this time?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yeah we did practice bombing and we got our full combat crew in Casper, Wyoming. We got our gunners. We went out on a gunnery range and I learned how to shoot a 50 caliber machine gun. It is a good

thing I didn't have to shoot those things, they'll tear your arm joints apart.

Mr. Cox: Did you have a gun position on the B-24 that you were supposed to man during combat?

Mr. Krauska: After I dropped the bombs. Up until I dropped the bombs I didn't have a gun position. The first plane we had I had a set of guns up in front in the nose of the plane. Later we got the newer planes and they had a gun turret up there. This was before the turret and there was a gun up there with me. We practiced with that thing and it would tear you apart. It was a wonder it didn't tear the airplane apart. We didn't get the newer airplane until I was about half way through my missions. I didn't have any position then just drop the bombs and that's it. Get the hell out of there, let's go.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember the name of your crewmen that were on that B-24 with you?

Mr. Krauska: I remember the first crew we had. Ben Webb was a young man who had about two years of college. He had a temper on him that was something else. I guess I have a temper too and we sort of clashed once in awhile. Ben and I had a difference of opinion. The crew stayed together for a long time. We went through Combat Training together and then we went to California. We waited around there to get an airplane. We

actually ferried a new airplane over. That was part of the job of going in to combat at least it was with us. We took that plane over to Hickam Field. We landed at Hickam Field, Hawaii. When we got there the people at headquarters didn't even know we were coming.

While we were in Casper, Wyoming they shipped us to Langley Field, Virginia. We got there and no one knew we were coming. At Langley they had what they call LAB, low altitude bombing training. We flew on the Atlantic coast on missions out there and eventually we did searches for airplanes at night on the water. We searched for German Submarines on the east coast with that LAB training. We did that for six months at least. We saw several of them but they told us not to drop anything and to radio back to tell them where they were. They wanted the Navy to get to them. The Navy couldn't find them but we could find them by radar when they surfaced. When they didn't surface we couldn't see anything below the water.

Mr. Cox: Did you have a radar operator on board?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yes, we picked up another man. We had ten men on the plane including the radar operator. I could work the radar from another unit that we had for radar bombing. I learned how to radar bomb. That was a good assignment at Langley. They treated us like kings over there. By that time I was a Lieutenant so I was a king. (Laughter) There is a big difference in being a Private and a Lieutenant. We finished up at

Langley and we had orders to go to California to pick up a new airplane and take it overseas. We got out there at some airfield in California. It was a crew-training outfit. Everybody was headed for the Far East. I had this radar training and we had the radar works on the plane that we had been trained for. We take off from California and head for Hawaii. I had never been to Hawaii and here we come girls. We were looking for a good time. We get to Hawaii and for the second time they don't know we are coming. We land the airplane and check in and they ask what we are doing there with that airplane. We told them we were Bombardiers that drop bombs at low altitudes. The people at the flight line had never seen an airplane like we had and they wanted to know what kind of plane it was. We told them we fly off the water and drop bombs. We were told at Langley that we were to go to headquarters and we would be reassigned to an outfit that was headed to China. We were mainly to get Japanese shipping coming out of China going to Japan. We were to blow up these ships. That was what we were told but the people at Hickam Field apparently didn't know anything about it. No one knew what to do with us. We had this low altitude stuff and no one knew what to do with it. There were about six or eight crews trained that way. They said in the meantime they were going to put us out at Kahuka Airbase. We joined a squadron out there. They wanted to know what they were going to do with all the radar that we had on the plane. We told them that we knew how to use it and they wanted to know if we

knew how to train people. The radar man for that outfit became a great friend of mine. He helped me and I helped him. He was the radar man for that wing. He asked if we could teach him how to use the radar. He said, "We have some more of this stuff coming in. We don't know why it's coming in but we'll put it on an airplane and you guys can train someone else to do this kind of radar bombing." So we did. We did radar-bombing training for about four months. We trained others who had regular training but not radar. Most of it was low altitude bombing. We trained other crews how to use the radar bombardier.

Mr. Cox: Did you enjoy training these guys?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yeah, and they really enjoyed it too. Can you imagine flying off the water and picking up targets? It is exciting. We also learned how to use it at higher altitude. You couldn't do much at higher altitude but you could use it in a way. If you went over five thousand feet you would have to use something else. It wasn't much good over five thousand feet. We were told that we were going to Guam.

Mr. Cox: At this point in time were you assigned to any particular Bomb Group?

Mr. Krauska: Yes, it was the 11th Bomb Group. I was in the 42nd Bomb Squadron. Jesse _____ was the Captain and Commander. He was a tremendous guy. Eventually, we heard about the invasion of Guam and the Marines went in there. The engineers went in there. We were told that they had

no airstrips there but by the time we got arrived there would be an airstrip there. We didn't know what kind of airstrip it would be but we knew there would be somewhere we could land. In the meantime they had transferred us to the western part of Oahu. At the northwest end of the island there was another airstrip, it was a fighter strip. They were looking for places to keep this unit together. It was spread out and they put them all together on the northwest end of the island. It was a longer strip that we could use. We lived in tarpaper shacks up on the hill. It was almost primitive and that is how we lived. We would fly our missions and train other people and at least every third or fourth day we would have a day off. We would go to Oahu. We would hitchhike to Oahu. Someone would always pick you up because you were in uniform. It was a great tour over there. I really enjoyed it and I got to know the island real well. Bombed the hell out of all the other islands.

Mr. Cox: During this training regarding the use of radar did you ever have any casualties of any of your flight crews?

Mr. Krauska: We lost some when we got over into combat but we didn't lose any in training. We had some good pilots in training and luckily we stayed together. The B-24 was a sturdy airplane. It looked like hell but it was sturdy. You would think it would fly when you looked at it.

Mr. Cox: What Tom is looking at is a model, in this home of a B-24 that is a

replica of the plane that he flew when he was in Guam.

Mr. Krauska: We got to Guam and thought there was going to be a strip there. We didn't see a strip. We flew over the island and the airstrip was to the northeast of Agana Bay. That is where we had to come in to land. When we landed I looked out of the plane and wondered where the airstrip was. They had metal pieces about two and a half feet long that they had clamped together. They would put these things on top of what they thought was sturdy ground.

Mr. Cox: Marsden Matting is what they call that.

Mr. Krauska: It was some kind of matting but I don't know what they called it. We had never seen an airstrip like that. That strip was there for the whole time I was on Guam. That is where they kept the planes in little coves that they had for some protection. We had our own airplane and we took care of it.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember the number of your plane?

Mr. Krauska: I was in the 42nd Bomb Squadron and we had four flights of four.

Mr. Cox: Did your crew name your plane?

Mr. Krauska: I was on three different crews. When one guy was killed I would replace him. I was the number two Bombardier for the whole outfit so I had to fill spaces. It wasn't easy and some guys never did really adjust

to the Bombay. I flew forty missions in that B-24. I flew three different planes during that time. During that time I had four different pilots. I can't recall if any of the planes I flew in had been given a name by its crew.

Mr. Cox: Can you remember the name of the best pilot you flew with?

Mr. Krauska: Yes, it was Phil Kroh. He was from southern Illinois. He was a hell of a pilot. He would get in the B-24 and fly like a fighter pilot, it was unbelievable. He would go up by himself every once in a while and he would come around and zoom over that island and really put on a show. He was the best pilot I ever flew with and he flew by the seat of his pants.

Mr. Cox: The whole crew had a lot of confidence in his ability?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yes, and I flew with him I guess about two thirds of my missions. He was really good. I flew about five missions with one guy who didn't follow the navigator's instructions and I got pissed off at him and we had to get off of his crew. I knew the guy in primary school at Lackland but he thought he was also the navigator. That guy caused us to drop bombs on what we thought was a target. The radar man said, "The target is straight ahead." We climbed up to altitude after the bombs were dropped. This happened about the time they were trying to invade Iwo Jima. This was south of Iwo Jima. The target we were after was

north of Iwo Jima. When we figured out where we were the navigator said, "We couldn't have dropped those bombs on our target because we are far from our target. We had been in storm and rain. There must have been a typhoon close to us because we were at twenty thousand feet and we dropped just like a rock to five thousand feet. A fifteen thousand foot drop just like that. I couldn't believe it, the pilot couldn't believe it. We got up to altitude again and we had a clear sky. The navigator took a fix on the stars. It was the best fix he ever took in his life. It was the smallest triangle he ever saw. We were at the wrong place at the wrong time. The bombs were dropping in what was then the path of the invasion force going from Guam north to Iwo Jima. We were south of Iwo Jima when those things _____.

Mr. Cox: You were in the path of our own invasion fleet?

Mr. Krauska: Yes, in the path of our own invasion fleet. We may be in a court martial hearing over this. When we got back to Guam we told the truth about what happened. Boy they put out the word real quick. We knew what the fix was. The Navigator had a good fix. We got the word to the Navigator people in the combat crew going up there. They avoided it and nothing ever happened. Could have been disastrous. We could have been faced with a court martial.

Mr. Cox: When you were flying out of Guam were all of your missions involving

of the laying of mines or did you do some bombing also?

Mr. Krauska: Oh yes we did a lot of that. When I laid mines we only had about ten missions with mines. I flew about thirty regular missions. Some low altitude and some high altitude missions. We flew about twenty-five thousand feet dropping bombs.

Mr. Cox: Describe a typical mission that you had that you can remember all the details.

Mr. Krauska: I can remember details on two or three of them. The first one I really remember we were flying at high altitude. It was when we first started bombing Iwo. We were some of the first that started bombing Iwo at high altitude. They had anti-aircraft guns that were unbelievable. That had radar searchlight that would pick up and wait until you got close to the island and there we were right in the middle of the searchlight. They had great searchlights on Iwo. We radioed back that we had to get something to get those searchlights out of there because we couldn't even see what we were doing. We had several like that where the searchlights would just hit you. We had no fighter protection at all.

Mr. Cox: Did you have any Japanese fighter planes attack you?

Mr. Krauska: No. It was just the anti-aircraft fire. They had been in there but we had ripped up all the airfields with the bombs that we were dropping. Every day they would come back and fill in the damn holes and we would go

back and blow them up again. It was a daily affair. We would take pictures and take them back to the squadron. They wanted to get to the shipping coming out of _____ Jima and going to Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima did not have any ports at all. There were places where a motorboat could go in but that is about all. We laid mines in the harbors of the one just north of Iwo Jima. I can't remember the name of it. There were fighters on that island too and we bombed the hell out of it. They couldn't keep their fighters on it. It was the main port for relieving goods from Japan. They finally got around to letting us use this equipment to lay mines. I had never seen a two thousand pound mine in my life but I saw them. I helped crank them up into the Bombay of the B-24 Liberator.

Mr. Cox: How many would you carry on at one time?

Mr. Krauska: At one point we had four but that was a big load. Usually it was two. They were huge. They were about twelve feet long. We had a special crank to get them up in the Bombay. We would take turns cranking them up.

Mr. Cox: Did these mines float on the surface?

Mr. Krauska: No, they were too heavy. They were two thousand pounds so they went straight to the bottom. They told us these mines would go to the bottom and as ships passed over them it would blow them up. We were told that

there were seventeen ships sunk with those mines. On the other hand, after the war I had a classmate from law school that was a Lieutenant Commander of a small ship that went into the same harbor. There on the beach they had a bunch of these big mines. They must have floated and the tide just washed them up there.

We had one mission where we really got shot up. We were right off the water. We were about one hundred feet off the water. As we approached the island I could see where the sand was. You couldn't see anything beneath the water so all you saw was water. I dumped a mine in that harbor with the water splashing up on us. I flew some real low missions over there. One mission we had a B-24 that had a hole in the right wing where the gas lines are. It was where a twenty-one millimeter shell went through. We had one knock off part of the tail. One went through part of the fuselage near the tail. They counted fifty holes in the plane. They took a picture of it but I didn't get one. There were twenty of us in that plane and not one of us were hit. That was the roughest mission in the whole squadron. We had others that got shot but nothing like this. The plane was a wreck and they took the engines off and had to junk it. It was still lying on the side and people saw it when they came in. Everybody walked away from that airplane. God must have been with us that day. We must have lost a lot of gas and one tire was almost shot off. When we landed the other tire that was shot up too went flat but other one drug as we landed. It was dragging and dragging

and drug us off the tarmac to the right side. Sparks were coming up and we were lucky we didn't blow up.

Mr. Cox: You said this particular bomber was scraped so did they reassign your crew to another plane or did they split you up?

Mr. Krauska: They split us up and put us on different crews. We were lucky in our squadron because we only had a few planes that were shot up. We lost two crews along the way. We got some new crews that didn't know anything about radar and they just got shot up by anti-aircraft. In my squadron we lost three airplanes that never did come back. There was a good friend of mine in one.

Mr. Cox: After you were assigned to another aircraft when you were getting ready to go on another mission did you think about what you had just been through?

Mr. Krauska: You can't help but think about it. You don't worry about it, you just have a job to do. Luckily I was a little older than some of the people. Some of them were just eighteen year old kids.

Mr. Cox: While you were in the Air Corps do you remember anything in particular that was a humorous event?

Mr. Krauska: We had a few jokesters in our outfit that were always joking around. They really made it a lot easier for us I think. We had a gang down

there that really worked together.

Mr. Cox: You said you flew forty missions off of Guam?

Mr. Krauska: Yes, actually forty-one but we didn't get credit for that one where we dropped the mines in the wrong area. Every one of them were good missions and only got shot up once. That one would make a believer out of you.

Mr. Cox: For the benefit of the reader Tom has a model of a B-24 and the name of it is "Wild Ass Ride" and it has a picture of a scantily dressed female riding a bull. Was this number 210995 the number of the plane?

Mr. Krauska: Yes. My son that was in the Navy ran into a Japanese guy in the Philippines who made these. He asked me to send him the information and he had one of these made up. I sent him a picture so he used the picture to paint this model.

Mr. Cox: Was that the last plane that you flew off of Guam?

Mr. Krauska: Yes.

Mr. Cox: What was your pilot's name on this aircraft?

Mr. Krauska: The fellow died after he got home. He set up a flying school and some kid froze at the control and took him in. That was Phil Kroh. I flew about twenty missions with him. I flew with about six different pilots and all of them were good pilots. They were good formation pilots.

Mr. Cox: When you would go on a mission flying with a bomb, how many planes were in your flight when you took off?

Mr. Krauska: Just one. We took off at different times. We all headed for the same area at different times. Maybe that is where they made a mistake because every fifteen or twenty minutes a plane would be coming in. They would be ready for us. We didn't use radar all the time depending on how low we were going to get.

Mr. Cox: Were all of your missions flown off Guam?

Mr. Krauska: Yes, we flew off Guam but we had to go to the Navy on Saipan to get the mines. We flew off Saipan with the bombs and they were so heavy. There was a runway at Saipan that we had to really rev up to get going to take off because when you got to the end of the runway there was a big drop off. You went off the cliff and you were headed for the water. No one ever went in the water. I don't know why the Navy didn't do it and use their own Navy planes but they didn't. The Air Force had the job.

Mr. Cox: Were you still at Guam when the war was over?

Mr. Krauska: No, I left before that. When I was there twenty-five missions were enough to get you back to the States and I flew forty missions. I went back to the States and I had so many points they said, "You don't want

to do any more flying do you?" They told me they would put me in some kind of desk job of some kind. They told me they were going to send me to a school in New York City. The war was almost over and more and more people would be coming home and they told me, "We are going to have to council and guide people who are not graduates like you to go back to school or whatever to prepare them to get jobs. Everybody is coming back at the same time needing jobs and jobs are going to be scarce so we are concerned." I said, "Well I'm concerned too because I'll need a job too when I get back." Anyway that is what they had me doing. They sent me up to New York City and put me in a hotel on VJ Day. I checked into that hotel on VJ Day and I'm telling you New York City was just crazy on that day. San Francisco got wind of it before and went crazy out there even before that. I didn't think I was going to get out of the airport. In those days the planes were smaller and it took you about six hops to get you to New York. Luckily I got a taxi and went straight to the hotel and by nightfall New York City was crazy. My wife, who was in high school at that time, remembers it well. My mother got real sick and she was dying. I got emergency leave to go back to Saint Louis. I had to fly one of these planes that were like puddle jumpers that flew for two or three hours and landed. I finally got to Saint Louis and my mother was in real bad shape. There was no question that she was going to die because she had brain cancer. While I was home a friend of mine that I went to school with was there.

He was a star pitcher in grade school. He was one step ahead of me. He stayed at Jefferson Barracks the whole cotton picking war. He was a Master Sergeant down there. He was running the whole damn show. He was star pitcher on their team that is how he got the job. They wanted him on the ball team down there. He pitched the whole damn war. His name was Norman Vanhouser. He was a Processing Officer. I told him how many points I had. I had more points than you could shake a stick at I think it was one hundred and forty points. I went to him and told him about my mother dying and they wanted me to go back to New York and no telling when I would get out of the service. He said, "We'll get you out of the service right here. You've got enough points you don't have to go back to that school." So I was discharged at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.

Mr. Cox: Tom, thank you for taking time to relate your experiences to us. Your story will be a fine addition to the archives of the museum. And thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Krauska: You are quite welcome, it has been a pleasure.

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