

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

INTERVIEWEE: Reuben KAMMLAH (RK)

Interviewer: Ed Metzler (EM)

EM: This is Ed Metzler and today is the fourth of November 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Reuben J. Kammlah. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Let me start by thanking you Reuben for taking the time to talk with us today. Let me ask you to get started by telling us your full name and when and where you were born and a little bit about your parents and that kind of thing.

RK: I'm Reuben J. Kammlah and I was born December 27th 1917, and I'm 84 years old.

EM: And where were you born?

RK: In Fredericksburg.

EM: Okay, so you're a local person.

RK: Local person.

EM: And who were your parents?

RK: Louis (garbled) and Amanda (garbled) Kammlah.

EM: And where did you live in the Fredericksburg area?

RK: Well, I can tell you it was pretty close in town.

EM: Okay.

RK: Let's say up at the...well I want to say at the ... oh, I'd say at the ... Andy's Diner...no it's not ... no it's not ...

EM: Over in the general area of Andy's Diner.

RK: Yes.

EM: Okay. And so what did your father do for a living?

RK: He was a fireman.

EM: A fireman.

RK: A fireman for Fredericksburg.

EM: All right. And so you went to school at Fredericksburg Highschool?

RK: Fredericksburg Highschool.

EM: Okay. When did you hear first about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about that?

RK: No, I don't. I just knew it had happened.

EM: Yes, so how old were you then when the war started, if you were born in seventeen?

RK: Seventeen, I was ...

EM: So you were about twenty three or twenty four.

RK: Yes, twenty three.

EM: So you were out of school then.

RK: Oh yes.

EM: And what were you doing then for a living?

RK: Well, not much of anything back then.

EM: Those were tough times weren't they?

RK: Yes.

EM: So what made you decide to go into the service?

RK: Well, I knew it was going to be in ... inducted into the service. But I had to decide which one I was going to go and all those things that go with it.

EM: Uh huh. So why did you decide to be a sailor?

RK: Well, I liked the idea of getting out on the sea, and getting into the Pacific and all that stuff.

EM: Getting away to some place exotic?

RK: Yes.

EM: So where did you volunteer for it? Did you have to go into San Antonio?

RK: San Antonio.

EM: So, did you go in with your parents or what?

RK: Yes, parents. I had my parents with me.

EM: So tell me about what it was like to go into the enlistment office.

RK: Well, it was quite an experience to get enlisted into the service but I finally got to it and I guess I did all right.

EM: So then you must have gone off to basic training somewhere.

RK: Yeah, San Diego.

EM: San Diego. So How did you get to San Diego from Fredericksburg?

RK: They put us on the train.

EM: Okay. So, had you ever been on a train before?

RK: No, not before.

EM: Well, what was it like?

RK: It was quite an experience

EM: Tell me some of those experiences. What do you remember about being on that train?

RK: Well, it's kind of guessing only. Along with all the good things we seemed to travel with (garbled). And that's about the size of it.

EM: So were there other people on the train that were going to basic training on the west coast?

RK: I'm pretty sure there was.

EM: Okay, but you were kind of traveling alone.

RK: I was traveling alone.

EM: Yeah. It was kind of lonely for some one who had never really been alone before.

RK: That's right.

EM: You'd never seen the western part of the US either.

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: What was it like, looking at that Arizona and New Mexico?

RK: I had been out there on a car trip with the wife but that's about as far as we went.

EM: Now, were you married when you went into the service?

RK: No.

EM: You were still a single man.

RK: Still single.

EM: Okay, okay. So tell me about San Diego training camp.

RK: Well, I guess it's like any other training camp. It was quite an experience, but you get the hang of it.

EM: Well, did they... what did they train you at? Did they make you run and do calisthenics?

RK: Yes, that's about the size of it.

EM: What was the food like?

RK: It was kind of ... It was alright I guess

EM: Not exactly Mom's home cooking.

RK: Not exactly Mom's cooking, no.

EM: So, did you know what kind of position you were going to get when you got out of basic training?

RK: No, but I knew I was going aboard a ship and well, that was it. And I didn't know whether I was just going to be a sailor aboard the ship.

EM: Did they ask you what you wanted to be?

RK: Yeah, I told them I wanted to be a gunner's mate.

EM: A gunner's mate?

RK: Yeah.

EM: All right, so, that would be an interesting position.

RK: Yeah.

EM: So when you got out of training then, when did you go aboard ship?

RK: Oh, I don't know when that was.

EM: So, where were you headed out? Where was the ship going?

RK: Pacific.

EM: Okay.

RK: To Pearl Harbor.

EM: Going to Pearl.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Do you remember what the ship was?

RK: Yes, the US Algorav

EM: Ummm.

RK: A-l-g-o-r-a-v.

EM: US Algorav. Let me write that down.

RK: Okay.

EM: Now what kind of a ship was she?

RK: Mostly I'd say some kind of a carrier for servicemen.

EM: A troop carrier?

RK: Yeah.

EM: Okay, so you headed out to Pearl Harbor, is that right?

RK: Yeah.

EM: Do you remember anything special about the trip out to Pearl Harbor?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: That was your first time to be on the ocean, huh?

RK: Yeah, out to sea.

EM: How did that feel?

RK: Oh, it was just something different.

EM: Definitely something different.

RK: Yep, yep.

EM: Did you get sea sick?

RK: No, huh uh

EM: That's good.

RK: I didn't get sea sick, thank God.

EM: Yeah. So you went into Pearl Harbor. What was it like going into Pearl Harbor the first time?

RK: Well, we were so unacquainted with these islands it seemed a little bit awkward. I don't know, it just...I guess I had to get a little acquainted with it.

EM: Right. Do you remember what the date was? Are we talking 1942 when you went over there to Pearl Harbor?

RK: Nineteen forty two.

EM: It was in forty two. Was it summer time or do you remember what time of year?

RK: It was sort of summer time.

EM: Sort of summer, okay. So once you got to Pearl Harbor then what did you do?

RK: Well that's when they headed us out for our next sea stop.

EM: Uh huh. Are you still on the US Algorav?

RK: Yeah.

EM: Okay, so once you went to Pearl, did you stay at Pearl Harbor very long?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: Just how long?

RK: Well, just enough time where they got me aboard a ship.

EM: Okay.

RK: Maybe a day or two.

EM: Okay, so just a real short break.

RK: Yeah.

EM: So what ship were you on then.

RK: Algorav.

EM: Okay so you're still on the Algorav.

RK: A-l-g-o-r-a-v.

EM: Right. So the Algorav and you head out from Pearl Harbor again. Where were you going?

RK: Oh, from Pearl Harbor we went to Eniwetok.

EM: Eniwetok?

RK: Yeah.

EM: So did that take a long time to get there?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: Was this a pretty fast ship?

RK: Oh, it was, I guess it was regular ...

EM: Average, huh?

RK: Average.

EM: So what did you do then when you got to Eniwetok?

RK: Well, I (garbled) with clothes and helped (garbled) the others. You know there were decisions about what we were going to do, given to everybody (garbled) and every thing like that.

EM: When you were on the Algorav, what was your responsibility, you were ...

RK: To keep my guns and everything in good shape.

EM: So you were a gunner's mate?

RK: Right.

EM: What were these, anti-aircraft guns or...?

RK: Anti-aircraft guns.

EM: What, thirty millimeter or ...

RK: Thirty millimeter.

EM: Okay. Did you have other guys in your gun crew? Were there other men? Or were you just there alone on the gun or what?

RK: Well I was alone on that gun, yeah.

EM: Were you up on the bow, the stern or where?

RK: This wasn't aboard a ship, it was still on the land.

EM: Okay, this was at Eniwetok?

RK: Yeah.

EM: So when you were aboard the ship what were you doing, just ...?

RK: Cleaning the ship's gun mainly, cleaning the barrel, the gun, and stuff like that.

EM: So just keeping everything clean, getting it ready.

RK: Getting everything ready.

EM: So when you got to Eniwetok then you got off the ship.

RK: Yeah.

EM: And you were then assigned to an anti-aircraft gun position.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Okay. So Eniwetok had been taken from the Japanese already.

RK: Right.

EM: What was there on Eniwetok, an air force base, a naval air station? What else was there?

RK: A naval air station. That was about the size of it.

EM: Was Eniwetok a large island, a small island?

RK: A quite an island, quite a large island.

EM: Were there native people there or just service men?

RK: Service men.

EM: Only service men?

RK: Yeah.

EM: Tell me where you lived on Eniwetok.

RK: Where I lived?

EM: Yeah.

RK: Well, it was mostly aboard ship I guess.

EM: Okay.

RK: They'd take us up on the island, on the land, on the sea, on the island, and then they'd bring us back to our ship we were on aboard.

EM: I see. You stayed assigned to the ship but you would go ashore to man the gun.

RK: Right.

EM: The anti-aircraft gun

RK: Yeah.. Well, the anti-aircraft guns were all aboard the ship.

EM: So which anti-aircraft gun were you assigned to then, in the front of the ship or the back of the ship?

RK: The front of the ship.

EM: I see. So you were up in the front part. How long did the Algorav stay in Eniwetok? Was it there a long time?

RK: No, it wasn't there a long time.

EM: What happened then?

RK: Then we went to, oh, ... I can't (garbled).

EM: This was to another island?

RK: To another island.

EM: Okay. What was the Algorav's assignment at this next island?

RK: Well, the next island would be, oh, I don't know. I forgot about that.

EM: It wasn't Peleliu?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: Or Guam?

RK: I believe it might have been Guam.

EM: What did you and your ship do when you went there?

RK: We mostly got ready for ... cleaning the guns and everything you know.

EM: Uh huh.

RK: Make sure everything was in good shape.

EM: So you got every thing in good shape. When you went to, we think it was Guam, what did

you and the ship do? Did you go into the port there or ...?

RK: No. We stayed aboard.

EM: Okay.

RK: We (garbled) We stayed aboard.

EM: You couldn't go ashore.

RK: Huh uh.

EM: Okay. You stayed aboard. Were there other ships with the Algorav?

RK: Yeah. I guess there was. Not many.

EM: Uh huh.

RK: I didn't see. But there were some other ships there.

EM: Did you ever get to use those anti-aircraft guns against the Japanese?

RK: Yeah. Sure.

EM: Tell me about that.

RK: Oh yeah. We used to ... I got a few of them.

EM: You did?

RK: Yeah.

EM: What kind of airplanes were they? Were they Zeroes or what, do you know?

RK: I guess that's what you called their planes. We got a few of them.

EM: Uh huh. So they came and attacked the ship?

RK: Right.

EM: Okay. Do you know how many you shot down?

RK: I'm not sure because that was quite a chore to keep the gun in shape to be able to shoot it down and everything and so I never could keep track of them.

EM: So that's hard work.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Was your ship ever hit by fire from the enemy?

RK: No, huh uh. Never was.

EM: That was lucky.

RK: Lucky. It was lucky.

EM: Yeah. The Japanese were attacking the ships or were they attacking the island?

RK: The island.

EM: Do you know where those Japanese had come from?

RK: No, I don't. I have no idea. Don't know where they came from but they were there.

EM: How did you feel when you shot down a Japanese airplane?

RK: It made me feel good on the inside.

EM: Why?

RK: Cause it was the enemy.

EM: That's right. How many battles would you guess or how many times did you use your gun against the enemy?

RK: Well, I used it quite some.

EM: Was the Algorav, did it go to another island after this island?

RK: Oh yeah.

EM: So where, do you remember where else the Algorav went? Sounds like she went to a lot of places.

RK: Well, we went to Iwo Jima.

EM: Okay. Was this when Iwo Jima was being invaded or was it after we had taken it from the Japanese?

RK: After we had taken it from the Japanese.

EM: What did Iwo Jima look like?

RK: It was just another island I'm pretty sure, and it hadn't been torn up too bad.

EM: Really?

RK: No. It was just another island.

EM: They all look alike after a while.

RK: They all look alike after a while.

EM: When the Algorav got to Iwo Jima, what did you do then?

RK: Well, there we stayed on our ship and got that in shape, the guns. And we didn't go far. We just stayed aboard. But we were ready for any attack or anything like that.

EM: Did you get attacked at Iwo Jima?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: Okay. I guess the Japanese air force had been pretty well taken out.

RK: (Garbled) pretty much before.

EM: Uh huh. So how long were you at Iwo?

RK: Oh, I don't know. I don't seem to remember.

EM: Was it a short period of time or a long period of time?

RK: A short period of time.

EM: After Iwo, where did you go?

RK: Well, after Iwo Jima, that's about as far as we got.

EM: You didn't go on to Okinawa?

RK: No, huh uh. We did go to Okinawa.

EM: You went to Okinawa too?

RK: Yeah. We went to Okinawa.

EM: Yeah. That was after Iwo Jima then?

RK: Yeah, that was after Iwo Jima.

EM: What happened at Okinawa?

RK: Well, nothing much. It was just another island.

EM: Did you stay aboard ship there as well?

RK: Oh yeah. We never did leave the ship.

EM: Uh huh.

RK: We always stayed aboard.

EM: Were you ever engaged with the enemy when you were there?

EK: Huh uh. It had been taken by Americans.

EM: Uh huh. So you were just kind of doing guard duty then?

RK: Right.

EM: As a ship. Did you go ashore on Okinawa?

EK: No, huh uh.

EM: So you stayed aboard ship?

RK: Stayed aboard ship.

EM: What was the food like aboard the Algorav?

RK: Well it was at best mediocre.

EM: More mediocre food, eh?

RK: Yeah.

EM: You never got any fresh meat or anything ...?

RK: Huh uh. Nothing like that.

EM: What kind of meat did you get?

RK: Well, I don't know.

EM: Spam?

RK: Yeah, something like that. Spam and stuff.

EM: Yeah. Powdered eggs.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Frankfurters and that kind of stuff.

RK: Right.

EM: Did you ever, were you ever allowed to go ashore on liberty or leave.

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: They kept you on that ship the whole time.

RK: Right.

EM: What did you think about that, having to be on ship the whole time?

RK: Well, there wasn't very much we could do. We kept pretty busy you know trying to keep our guns and everything in good shape.

EM: Right.

RK: Time passes by.

EM: Yeah. Do you remember any of your buddies that you came to know on the ship?

RK: Well, there was a couple of them that were pretty close. They were on the same, same gun and station, same gun that I was.

EM: Right. Where were they from?

RK: They were from California.

EM: Both? Was there one or two other guys?

EK: Two other guys.

WM: And both of them were from California?

RK: Yeah.

EM: How about that. Remember their names?

RK: Yeah ...

EM: That's alright, we don't need those.

RK: I forget who they were.

EM: Yeah. Did you stay in touch with them after the war was over?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: Okay. Have you been in touch with any of the people you on the ship with after the war was over?

RK: Some of the ship-mates and everything.

EM: Were they from the Fredericksburg area?

RK: No. From different areas

EM: So after Okinawa, then where did the Algorav go?

RK: It went back to the states.

EM: Was the war over at this time?

RK: It was over at that time.

EM: Do you remember when they told you that the war was over?

RK: Oh yeah.

EM: I'll bet there was a celebration then.

RK: You got that right.

EM: A real party.

RK: A real party.

EM: Tell me about that party.

RK: It was a good feeling.

EM: They didn't sneak any beer aboard ship did they?

RK: No, never seen any.

EM: Dog gone. That's too bad. So after the war was over you came back to the states, is that right?

RK: Right.

EM: How did you feel to be headed back home?

RK: Great.

EM: You were ready to get all this behind you, huh?

RK: Right.

EM: Did you come back to, where in the United States on the Algorav?

RK: Well we came back to ... oh to ...

EM: San Francisco?

RK: San Francisco.

EM: Or San Diego?

RK: San Francisco.

EM: So back to San Francisco.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Had you ever been to San Francisco before?

RK: Huh uh.

EM: So I guess you got to ...

RK: Quite an experience.

EM: You got to see the Golden Gate Bridge.

RK: Oh yeah.

EM: What was it like in San Francisco?

RK: I guess it was just another island. That's about the size of it.

EM: Yeah. So when you got back to state-side were you then discharged from the navy?

RK: Yeah.

EM: So you had enough points. I guess they called them points didn't they?

RK: Right.

EM: What did you do then?

RK: I went on home.

EM: How did you get home?

RK: They put us aboard a train.

EM: Another train.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Was this train ride any better than the first train ride you had?

RK: Yeah, I guess so.

EM: Well you were headed home.

RK: Headed home.

EM: How long did that take?

RK: Not too long.

EM: So the train would come into where, San Antonio?

RK: San Antonio.

EM: And who came ...

RK: They put me on a bus.

EM: You took a bus on up here to Fredericksburg.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Who was there to meet you when you got off the bus?

RK: My wife was.

EM: So when did you get married, before you went overseas?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: You weren't married yet then.

RK: Huh uh.

EM: So she was your girl friend.

RK: Right.

EM: Got you. Was she glad to see you?

RK: Oh yeah.

EM: And your parents, were they there to see you?

RK: They were there, yeah, yeah.

EM: When you were on the Algorav in the Pacific did you write home, write letters home very often?

RK: It didn't do any good anyhow.

EM: Why is that?

RK: Cause the didn't reach the (garbled).

EM: So you'd write letters but they didn't reach home?

RK: No, not too much.

EM: Really? And you were you ever able to get mail coming to you from home?

RK: Huh uh.

EM: So very few letters ...

RK: Very few.

EM: What about your officers that were your leaders, and the captain of the boat, of the ship, what were they like?

RK: Pretty good guys.

EM: Really? They were friendly with the enlisted men?

RK: Oh yeah. Very friendly.

EM: So you felt good about the people that were leading you guys there on board ship.

RK: Right.

EM: Did you ever have any problem with diseases when you were over there? You know a lot of people, you know, would get bitten by mosquitoes and get dengue fever and malaria and these kind of ...

RK: No, never was.

EM: So you never had a sick day over there.

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: You were very lucky.

RK: You got that right.

EM: When you came back to Fredericksburg after the war was over, was it any different than when you left it to go to war? Had things changed?

RK: Oh, not really. It was the same.

EM: So things hadn't changed a whole lot.

RK: Huh uh.

EM: Were you considered a war hero at that point? Did people make a big fuss over you?

RK: Well, they welcomed us.

EM: Yeah.

RK: But that's about the size of it.

EM: Yeah. They didn't make too big a deal.

RK: Huh uh.

EM: When you think back to when you were there in the Pacific, can you think of any humorous incidences where you maybe played jokes on some of the guys or they played jokes on you or something funny happened? Anything come to mind?

RK: No, not really.

EM: And what about a period or time when you were really under stress or feeling badly about the whole war, any of the times like that?

RK: Oh yeah.

EM: What was the most disturbing thing that happened to you when you were there in the Pacific?

RK: Well ... there wasn't much to disturb you though __only good, good shape and of course that was when we were chasing and everything.

EM: Yeah, that was when things were going well at that time.

RK: Things were going pretty well.

EM: Did any of your buddies get wounded or hit by fire from the enemy?

RK: No, huh uh.

EM: That was very fortunate.

RK: Very fortunate.

EM: That's very good. Did you ever actually see any Japanese either prisoners of war or anything like that?

RK: Well, I'd seen Japanese.

EM: Where was that?

RK: That was at Iwo Jima.

EM: Uh huh.

RK: That's about the size of it.

EM: Were they prisoners or ...

RK: Prisoners.

EM: Uh huh. What did you think about how they looked? Did they look ...

RK: Well, ...

EM: Skinny or beaten, or ...

RK: No, they just looked like any other ...

EM: So, after you returned home, after the war was over ...

RK: Yeah.

EM: What did you do then?

RK: I tried to stay home to recover from it.

EM: Uh huh. What do you mean recover?

RK: Well, I had to get used to not taking orders and everything like that, and well it's just a full recovery from taking orders, from senior ...

EM: Officers.

RK: Officers, yeah.

EM: How long did it take you to recover from that?

RK: Not too long. Not too long.

EM: Getting used to civilian life again ...

RK: Yeah.

EM: Took a while.

RK: Right.

EM: What did you do then? Did you get married?

RK: I got married, right.

EM: Right soon after you came back?

RK: Yeah.

EM: And what kind of job did you go to?

RK: Well ... I was mostly helping with different things ...

EM: Uh huh.

RK: At the home.

EM: Right, right. And your father was still a fireman at that point.

RK: Right, yeah.

EM: What did you miss most of all when you were in the Pacific?

RK: What did I miss?

EM: Yeah, what did you miss the most?

RK: There wasn't very much that I missed.

EM: Miss your family, miss certain foods?

RK: Yeah.

EM: Miss being able to go to a ball game?

RK: Right. There weren't very many things that you could do aboard a ship.

EM: It must have been kind of boring.

RK: Yeah. We got pretty bored. I guess that's about the size of it.

EM: Yeah. Thinking back then to your total experience in the Pacific, you went away as a twenty two year old young man and you came back a war veteran ...

RK: Right.

EM: How did you change during that period of time? Did you feel totally different or ...

RK: No, not really.

EM: Did you look at things differently or how did Reuben change as a result of being in the Pacific?

RK: Oh, I don't know it was just a different feeling again to be home.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. So you did have to adjust to not taking orders.

RK: Uh huh. Right.

EM: Anything else you had to adjust to?

RK: No, that's about the size of it.

EM: Is there anything else you would like to discuss or to mention to me while we've got this opportunity relating to your time in the Pacific?

RK: Well, it was quite an experience, let's put it that way.

EM: I bet.

RK: And I was lucky that I got out of that whole mess.

EM: Yeah, cause a lot of people didn't get out of it.

RK: Right.

EM: If we hadn't dropped that atomic bomb on Japan you might have been part of the invasion of the Japanese islands.

RK: The Japanese islands, right.

EM: Do you remember when you heard about them dropping the atomic bomb?

RK: Yeah. I heard about it.

EM: What did everybody think about that?

RK: Well, they were thinking that that was the end of it.

EM: But they had to drop another one.

RK: Yeah.

EM: So you were I guess probably at Iwo Jima at that time.

RK: Iwo Jima. Right.

EM: Oh, no, no, no. I'll bet you were at Okinawa.

RK: Okinawa

EM: Yeah, you were at Okinawa.

RK: Yeah.

EM: Okay. I appreciate you, taking the time, Reuben, to share your experiences for the library of the museum and glad you are doing as well as you are.

RK: Thank you.

EM: And just want to thank you again for taking the time.

RK: Thank you.

Draft transcribed May 2010 by Don Ingels