

Joe H. Crawford

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NELSON: Hello. Today is January 19, 1994. My name is Charles Nelson. I am a volunteer with the Midway Village & Museum Center, which is cooperating with the State's efforts to collect oral histories from Illinois citizens who participated in the momentous events surrounding World War II. We are in the office of the Midway Village & Museum Center interviewing Joe H. Crawford who lives at 4245 Oaklane Road, Rockford, Illinois, 61109. Mr. Crawford served in the branch of the United States Armed Forces during WW II. We are interviewing him about his experiences in that war. Joe, would you please start by introducing yourself to us?

CRAWFORD: My name is Joe Crawford and I live at 4245 Oaklane Road south of Rockford on the Kishwaukee River. I have been here for a little over 20 years in Rockford. I was here earlier. I have worked for several companies in town.

NELSON: Okay. Would you give me your place and date of birth?

CRAWFORD: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on November 13, 1921.

NELSON: We would also like the names of each of your parents.

CRAWFORD: My Father's name was Chester A. Crawford and my mother's name was Mildred C. Crawford.

NELSON: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

CRAWFORD: I had one sister, Rachel Crawford.

NELSON: Are there any details about your parents and/or your family that you would like to give?

CRAWFORD: Well, if you are taking histories of wars, my father was in World War; my grandfather was in the Civil War; my great grandfather was in the Revolutionary War. We've hit them all it seems, down the line.

NELSON: Wonderful. What was life like for you before the war, specifically during 1941?

CRAWFORD: I was in California. I was working for Douglas Aircraft Company. I was young and single and went out to the West Coast to have a good time in California. You know how that is. When the war—I was there when Pearl Harbor happened and so I came back to enlist in Kansas City.

NELSON: What thoughts did you have about the war before United States became directly involved in the conflict?

CRAWFORD: I figured it was inevitable that we would be involved because I was in high school. That was one reason I took ROTC in high school because it looked like we would be involved sooner or later. I'm glad I did that preparation.

NELSON: How did you hear of the December 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese? If so, where were you and what were you doing at the time? What was your reaction and response of those around you?

CRAWFORD: I was working 2nd shift at the Douglas Aircraft Company and the National Guard was conducting a mock raid on the aircraft plant at the Santa Monica plant and I was standing at Wilshire Boulevard thumbing a ride into town to see a friend of mine. I lived in west Los Angeles and a fellow picked me up in a '36 Ford. He said, "What do you think of the war?" and I said, "Who won?" because I thought he was talking about the raid by the Air Force

against the National Guard at the Santa Monica plant. And I said, "Who won?" He said, "Well, you better listen" and he turned on the radio and I heard Roosevelt announcing it again about the December 7th raid on Pearl Harbor.

NELSON: Had you formed any prior opinion or developed any feeling about what was taking place in Europe or Asia?

CRAWFORD: Well, as I said earlier my opinion was that we would be involved in the war, hence the term world war, because we can't stay out anymore it seems.

NELSON: Did you recall reading newspaper accounts of German Aggression in Europe?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yes, yes.

NELSON: Did you have any knowledge of Hitler's speeches, ideas or actions?

CRAWFORD: Oh yes, yes.

NELSON: What events led you to enter into the military services? Were you already in service, drafted, or did you volunteer?

CRAWFORD: No. I volunteered. I went back home to Kansas City from California to enlist. In fact I went out to California—I went out to March Field first and took my physical for the Air Force and I passed everything and so I said, "I'll go back home and enlist." And there I didn't pass the ___?___ color confusion test. The little dots, the little brown reddish dots and so I went in the Infantry, which I know more about.

NELSON: Was your response to entering military service influenced by family, your friends' attitudes toward the war, the threat to national security or any other considerations?

CRAWFORD: The threat to national security, I guess. My parents had to sign for me because I was young at the time. They

had to sign for me. My Dad had a fit when he found out later what branch I had selected.

NELSON: What branch was he in?

CRAWFORD: My Dad was with the engineers over in France in World War I.

NELSON: When and where were you inducted?

CRAWFORD: In Kansas City.

NELSON: Do you have any special memories of this event?

CRAWFORD: No. I just was there in the office and we took the oath.

NELSON: You said you were 17 years old?

CRAWFORD: No, in 1941, I was 19.

NELSON: Nineteen years old. Yeah.

CRAWFORD: You had to be signed for at the time. Later they moved the age down.

NELSON: What happened after you were inducted? Where were you sent?

CRAWFORD: I went to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis for some processing. Then I went down to Camp ___?___ in Texas when I had my training. What we call the Infantry Basic Training.

NELSON: That was your basic military training?

CRAWFORD: Yeah.

NELSON: What were you trained to do?

CRAWFORD: Well, it sounds kind of smart, but we were trained to kill people, but that's what that branch of the service did. I was trained in the weapons. I was in heavy

weapons training company at Camp ___?___.
(Some interference here).

NELSON: What did you think of the training? (More interference).

CRAWFORD: The training then? It was reasonable. But one problem was it was very early in the war. The equipment that we had wasn't bad and we had enough rounds of ammunition for a good practice on the range. I would say it was reasonable, everything considered. It wasn't as bad as it was the year before, of course when you had the National Guard running around with sticks over their shoulders in place of guns.

NELSON: Did anything special happen there?

CRAWFORD: No, except I got a little bit sick from all the shots but nothing exciting.

NELSON: Tell us about your other training camps you attended.

CRAWFORD: That was all, there. We left from there and went out to San Francisco, Angel Island and took off from there to go over to Oahu.

NELSON: Did you have any leaves or passes?

CRAWFORD: No.

NELSON: If so, how did you use them?

CRAWFORD: No. Sorry, I did have an overnight pass and we went up to Fort Worth and came back. That was it in the States.

NELSON: What do you recall about the places you were stationed, the friends you made, your association with civilians?

CRAWFORD: I guess one of our problems was we had very little association with civilians because we weren't in any one

place very long and when we got over to Oahu we were really out in the field and we spent all our time doing fortification and stuff you see. We were expecting an invasion at any time from the Nips—the Japanese.

NELSON: What was your military unit?

CRAWFORD: When we left the states and went to Oahu, they put us in a big compound there by the theater and they said "You, you and you go to E Company and you, you, you and you go to F Company. I was assigned to G Company, 21st Infantry, part of the 24th Division, which was formed out of the Old Hawaiian Division.

NELSON: What were your assigned duties?

CRAWFORD: I was a rifleman. Did more digging than rifling because as I said we were so busy putting up the barbed wire, digging emplacements, putting up big bunkers. Labor battalion was really what it really was.

NELSON: This next part is about your active participation in the conflict. Where did you go after completing your basic military training?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, well I just mentioned that—going over to Oahu right after Pearl Harbor. Well, we got there in May, late May, early June of '42. We were the first bunch of replacements to come in there. We came into Pearl Harbor like being across from the USS Republic, a big transport, and we could see the mess and the damage at Pearl Harbor as we went up. They put us all in little sugar cane cars on a little engine and we went chugging up the side of the hill to go out to Schofield Barracks which sits in the center of the island on the planes ___?___ up there. And we went up in that.

NELSON: What was the date? Do you remember the date?

CRAWFORD: Not the exact date. As I say it was '42, late May or early June of '42.

NELSON: What did you think of the nation's war efforts up to that point?

CRAWFORD: Well, everybody was kind of staggered. I know that the aircraft people responded very rapidly. There were a bunch of planes setting outside of the hanger at Douglas Aircraft where I worked with OD paint on them scheduled for England. The 820s – 820 bombers. I worked 2nd shift and so I didn't go back to work until Monday afternoon, after the Sunday attack. When I got in there they had already changed the Bulls eye, the British marking, to the star of the United States plus they had a bunch of transport DC-3s scheduled for the Netherlands East Indies and again those had been painted then. They were shiny; they were painted OD and they had a star and then sent them over to Oahu right away to bring back wounded. So they moved them as far as I could see.

NELSON: Would you consider this entering the first combat zone?

CRAWFORD: Oh yeah. I'm sure. We were sweating out the Battle of Midway, which came a little bit later, and fortunately they didn't make it to Oahu, but they had an invasion force schedule for Oahu. And they could have taken it if they had landed the troops right away because we had nothing there.

NELSON: I believe that. Taking this one at a time, please tell us in full detail if possible, the approximate number of types of casualties, how they occurred and how they were treated.

CRAWFORD: Well, as I say, on Oahu, I got there late after the Pearl Harbor attack and we lost some fellows in the outfit I joined. They were hit by strafing. Wheeler Field sits right next to special barracks and they were strafing Wheeler Field and the barracks, too. And we had couple guys get

hit, but fortunately no one was killed. But my unit wasn't really involved.

NELSON: Did your mental attitude change as combat continued.

CRAWFORD: Well, later on when I did get into combat, I don't know how to answer that question for sure because it was later on when I got into combat.

NELSON: You didn't consider this combat?

CRAWFORD: No.

NELSON: Well, okay, let's say later on when you were in the Philippines. (Disconnected conversation). Okay. What did you think of the war so far? Did you write any letters home?

CRAWFORD: Oh yeah. I was writing letters home but I also I got my commission in Australia and I had to censor mail down there so then I was careful about "leaky" letters. There were a few events that happened in the Pacific down there where some how or other they got information that we were going to land on a certain island and it was hurtful. We had some bad casualties. Most of the fellows in our outfit they were very good about it. They didn't write anything home or tell anything. So actually our letters home were rather nondescript. It was kind of "We were taking more training, etc., etc."

NELSON: Did you receive any packets from home?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yeah. I got a packet from Australia. I met a fellow there and his family was very nice to me.

NELSON: What type of things did you receive?

CRAWFORD: I got a fruitcake one time. Some of the fellows got Listerine bottles that had liquor in them instead of Listerine.

The packets we liked and I got a couple, were things like A-1 Sauce and hot sauce and sauce and spices so we could zap u that food which was a GI ___?__.

NELSON: Did most of the fellows write or receive letters?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

NELSON: Did you forge close bonds of friendship with many or some of the combat companions?

CRAWFORD: Well, when I really got in combat I had my commission then and my job then was to see that the men did the job. I know it sounds rather crass but you avoided very close bonds particularly with the enlisted men, although I liked to. And I know a lot of them and since then I have formed some close bonds. We had a reunion here in the city just this year, or just last year, 1993. With some of the enlisted men who were under me during the war, but if you formed too close a bond and then he was killed a gone it was tough. You just couldn't do too much of it.

NELSON: Did you ever have to help retrieve a wounded body from the field of combat?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yeah, several times.

NELSON: During your combat duty, did you ever capture any enemy prisoners? If so, please describe the circumstances.

CRAWFORD: Oh, we had a couple cases where they came out of caves and we would take them back to S-2 And I interrogated some of them later when I was an Intelligence Officer when I was in S-2. I took a course in "'pigeon Japanese" and I could interrogate them with basic questions as to who their ___?__ for example. Who were their officers? We had a lot of data on officers. Nip officers could keep track of them there. Yeah, we had a few cases. And

we had a few cases where we lost them, too. They'd surrender and somebody shot them on the way back, which we didn't like. But it happened.

NELSON: Now these questions probably are more for people in Europe, but I will read them anyway. Prior to the end of the war were you aware of any civilian concentration camps existed. If so, please explain how you learned about them and how much you knew at the time.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, we liberated—I guess they weren't really in a camp, but they were literally under guard on Palawan in the city of Puerto Princesa, which is a—Palawan is a far western island in the Philippines and there was a camp. Some of the guys learned about a camp, and it was a concentration camp for civilians up on a little island north of Palawan. They went up there.

NELSON: Run by the Japanese.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, yeah.

NELSON: What was your highlight occurrence of your combat experience?

CRAWFORD: I don't know the high light of combat, I guess, is the day you were hit you got a couple of purple hearts. The whole combat experience, I guess—the times you really felt the best I guess was when we liberate some civilians or we would—You see the Japanese had civilian laborers on a lot of the airstrips around there. They brought them in from Java, Sumatra, and Borneo. They brought them in from all over and they were just laborers, and boy they were like slave laborers. They weren't getting fed very well and to liberate them you see in that sense was just very, very rewarding. Very good.

NELSON: You said you were hit a couple times

CRAWFORD: Oh, yeah.

NELSON: How did that occur?

CRAWFORD: Well, the rounds came a little too close to me. That's all. I got some shrapnel in my butt. Fortunately, it was just minor things.

NELSON: Was this from aircraft?

CRAWFORD: No, it was from small arms and also from rifle grenades. Explosive devices of theirs. Mortar rounds. I'm not sure at that time.

NELSON: Tell us what you and other men did to celebrate America's traditional family holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas.

CRAWFORD: It depended on where you were. When I was on Oahu we got some bad turkey and we all celebrated Thanksgiving there by spending our time in the latrine. It was really bad. Christmas came and went. The holidays usually just came and went. We hardly ever had time off just to celebrate. We did have a chapel on Biak. We had a chapel there and if we weren't working, you know, out in the fields shooting each other, we would have services in the chapel there at Christmas or whatever.

NELSON: When and how did you return to the United States after the end of the war?

CRAWFORD: Well, I returned—I went from the United States to Oahu on the USS Republic. I was down about the "Z" deck, way down at the bottom of the ship and I could just see big bull's eye painted on the outside of that damned ship. And I swore to myself, "By God, I'm going to come back a little bit better off than I went over." So guess where I was put. I came back from Nagoya, Japan way down about "Z" deck again even though I had my commission. But, I left from Nagoya and came back about the same way as I went over, but it was damn good of course, to be coming back

NELSON: What happened when you arrived in the United States?

CRAWFORD: Well, we landed in Portland. Actually Vancouver barracks, that's across the river from Portland. I got a lot of back pay as I hadn't been paid for some time, so we went out on the town. We had to have a beer for Sam and a beer for Fred and a beer for George. All the guys said have a beer for me when I left Japan, so I had lots of beer. Meanwhile, I was chomping at the bit to get on a train to go back to Kansas City. I was separated at Fort Leavenworth and we were waiting for a train. They just didn't have enough trains running at the time.

NELSON: Please tell us about your military rank and your decorations, especially your campaign decorations.

CRAWFORD: As I said, I was a corporal on Oahu then after I had been there a little while. Then we went on down to Australia in late '42. I was just trying to remember. It was getting toward springtime of '43 because when we hit Australia it was down under, it was wintertime down there. It was fall. It was colder than hell and all we had were tropical things. Anyway, I was a corporal. I went to OCS, Officers' Candidate School in Brisbane and got my commission. I was a nice fresh 2nd Lieutenant and then later on I went to 1st Lieutenant. If I had stayed in a while I would have probably been a captain. I was executive officer of the company when I left. That would have been a lot of fun, too. I was executive officer of our company and the captain of our company was the supply officer and he didn't know anything about running a line company. It would have been fun too. We were scheduled to—We were all set up to land in Japan. We had our maps out and we had our boats at Zamboanga in the Philippines and we were getting ready to load the boats. We loaded the boats on paper. You make a big lay out on the table and you load in all the trucks and guns and

whatever. We had our boats loaded on paper and the LSTs had come in Zamboanga to start to load up for the invasion of Japan. Anyway, I ended up a 1st Lieutenant.

NELSON: What about you decorations? You got 2 Purple Hearts.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, I got 2 Purple Hearts and an air medal.

NELSON: That's unusual for an infantryman to get an air medal.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. I'll tell you how really started was, I got a call from division headquarters and they said, "Hey Crawford, how many times you been up?" I said, "I don't know. I really hadn't kept track. Didn't keep a log or anything." They said, "You been up about 12 times?" and I said, "Oh, I guess so". They said, "Can you turn in some dates and times". I said, "Well, I can approximate". The reason was, the Air Force General was giving out bronze stars to the Air Force people and it wasn't supposed to be that way. It was only supposed to be for ground troops. Our Division Commander, he said, "Well, I'm going to give out air medals, so, myself, Charles Foltz, who was our regimental S-2 and couple others of us, got air medals. We had a big decoration ceremony up in Nagoya. No it was at [Hitachi] Barracks which was just outside of Hiroshima.

NELSON: Then you also got a Bronze Star.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, got a Bronze Star, but the one that was best is the combat infantry badge. That's the big long blue one with the musket. That was our best one, plus campaign ribbons.

NELSON: Do you remember how many campaigns you were in?

CRAWFORD: Well, yeah. Let's see. We had New Guinea at [Hollandia?] then we had the Philippines of course. The Philippines was quite a prolonged one,

because you see, we would go from island to island to island. In our theater we would count each little island as a separate campaign really so it's kind of hard. We had the general Philippine ribbon, then, of course, we had the Pacific ribbon. Then we had arrowhead decorations on your campaign ribbons for each landing you make. We probably made 10 to 20 landings at least in our outfit alone. Some were hot and some weren't. Some we got shot at and some we didn't. So the Pacific campaign was kind of tough in that respect. They just talk about the Pacific campaign and hell in the mean while a guy might have been on a dozen islands down there. Each one could be a real hot, sometimes short and sometimes long campaign. We got down to Mindanao and that thing went on for quite a while down there. It's a big island, a lot of area.

NELSON: How did you get along with the men with whom you had the greatest contact?

CRAWFORD: Well, that was my outfit. I think we did pretty well because, in my 4 years of service, I had 2 years enlisted and 2 years commission time. So when I had my commission in talking to an enlisted man, I knew what he was thinking. I knew what the guys were thinking because I had 2 years of it myself. I think we got along real well. The fellows themselves, they—this was something that I never mentioned. Just come to think of it. I hadn't thought about it for years. They turned me in for an award. The men in my platoon—I was very touched about that. In fact, it bothers me now to think about it. (Sounded teary). Sorry.

NELSON: Were there things you would do differently if you could do them once again?

CRAWFORD: Well, it's a basic arm of the services. All the other services really are dedicated to supporting the Infantry, you see--Artillery, quartermaster, ordinance, all those people. It's the best part of the service.

NELSON: What was the most difficult thing you had to do during your period of military service?

CRAWFORD: To write letters home to the fellows that had been killed—writing letters to their parents. That was bad.

NELSON: Is there any one thing that stands out as your most successful achievement in the military service?

CRAWFORD: One of the times I got hit. We closed up a gap on a ridge, you see, which moved the whole campaign forward and enabled the Air Force to move in and use the air strip which was below the hill there and that sort of thing. We felt it was very critical to the campaign. So that was always—I gave us a sense of accomplishment to have done that in a particular campaign.

NELSON: How did you learn about VE Day and what was your reaction to it?

CRAWFORD: Well, we were right in the middle of a campaign on Biak and we didn't have much time to do anything about it. We just said, "Boy, that's great." We kept right on. We were busy.

NELSON: How did you learn about VJ Day and what was your reaction to it?

CRAWFORD: Well, on VJ Day we had so damn much shooting going on from the other troops. There was another aircraft unit down the road a ways and they were shooting off rounds and stuff and we heard on the radio and we had to damn near get in our bunkers because of the stray rounds coming down from all these other clowns shooting so much ammunition.

NELSON: What was your opinion of the use of the atomic bomb when it was first used against the Japanese civilians in August of 1945?

CRAWFORD: Absolutely correct. If it hadn't been for that, I wouldn't be here. So

don't ever—At the time there were no more issues involved as I said, well, I haven't said yet, but when we got into Japan, I was in charge of Hiroshima getting rid of the weapons, ordnance and ammunition in that area. I talked to many civilians there. I had a Japanese girl there with me as a translator and she told that to them at the time it was merely bigger weapon that they had and that was in the rules.

NELSON: And you haven't changed your mind in the last 50 years?

CRAWFORD: Absolutely not. No, I haven't. Some of our men are claiming—some of our men—some of the fellows in our outfit are claiming radiation problems from being in the area. I went in with the Navy crew and they had what they called "cutripiers" at the time, which is a radio-active sniffer. And, of course, the radiation levels then, they said were okay, but we know more about radiation levels now than we did then. And the town was fairly hot.

NELSON: What city was this, Hiroshima?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, Hiroshima.

NELSON: When and where were you officially discharged from service?

CRAWFORD: At Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

NELSON: When, what year? '45?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, '45. You see I had 90 days leave coming that I never had. Terminal leave. I had that coming, but my official discharge date was in February.

NELSON: Do you have any disability rating or pension?

CRAWFORD: No.

NELSON: Do you have any opinions or feeling about our nation's military status or its policies?

CRAWFORD: Well, I think we should try to maintain our troops and services that we have now and keep them in as good a shape as possible. One of the biggest things, one of the troubles is, when we finish up a war, Congress is cutting back on things so darn much that, then you got to go through a big scramble again to try to get things back up to par. Fortunately, with Korea we still had a lot of stuff around a lot of equipment I came close to being called back for Korea. I was in school and my military occupation specialty at the time was a small unit commander and they were yanking them, those guys, off campus. I was going to school in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I would see some guy disappear and I would say, "Where's Fred"? "Oh he got called back in". I was in the reserves. I joined the reserves in Ann Arbor to make a little money, while I was in school. I was on the GI Bill, I didn't have a lot of money, so fortunately that's what saved me. They said they would take the whole unit if we got call back.

NELSON: Do you have any contact with the Veterans' Administration?

CRAWFORD: No, other than my insurance. I have been carrying insurance for years.

NELSON: What is your opinion of the Veterans' Administration if you have any contact with it? Well, you don't have any contact...

CRAWFORD: No, I have no contact.

NELSON: Would you like to tell us about your family support, how your family supported you during your military life?

CRAWFORD: Oh, yeah, I was very fortunate. I got good support from my family and they wrote me regularly, my mother and dad and my sister, of course, that

was my main family and my other relatives. I was engaged when I went into service. I wasn't going to get married because I was afraid the branch of service was in I might leave a widow so we didn't get married but we were engaged. Well, after I had been overseas about a year and a half I got a letter from my mother saying, "Joe, I'm sorry to tell you but Mary's engaged to Earl, another chap, you see, so I lost that engagement.

NELSON: Dear John.

CRAWFORD: Dear John but didn't even get a Dear John letter. So many fellows did in my outfit but I didn't get any and my mother had to tell me and so my present wife, I dated her a little bit and I just wrote her a letter when I was in Australia. Well, I'll just write you a letter and see what's going on. Well, boy, we just kept writing and writing and she got together with my folks and she and my folks had it all set up really.

This taped interview stopped abruptly at this point.