

**Transcription: A.C. Kellams**

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*Today is Wednesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and this afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. A.C. Kellams. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Kellams is in Sweetwater. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let me talk to you today. It's an honor for me, and it means a great deal for everybody that works at the Land Office, but also all Texans that honor your service.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, I'm from Oklahoma.

*Yes sir, well, you're in Texas now, so – we'll still be glad to salute your service. Sir, the first question is maybe tell us just a little bit about your boyhood and your life before you went in the military.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, I was raised on a farm.

*In Oklahoma?*

**A.C. Kellams:** In Oklahoma, southeastern Oklahoma.

*OK, what was the name of the town?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was out in the country but the nearest town was Pittsburg.

*Pittsburg, Oklahoma.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*And did you have any siblings?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yeah, sister and a brother.

*OK, and what were your memories of growing up on the farm?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was good. Hard work, fishing and hunting, and just all good, it was all enjoyable.

*What types of crops did your family grow?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Corn, cotton, and had feed for the cattle and stuff.

*You mentioned that you were out in the country. Were you able to attend school regularly?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah, I graduated from high school.

*And when you graduated, do you remember what year that was?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, not offhand.

*Was it before the war had started?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir, three years before. I guess it was '40.

*OK, so you graduated from high school and you were there in Oklahoma. Did you keep working on the farm or did you go off somewhere else?*

**A.C. Kellams:** I graduated from high school when I was 16, and I went to work at the naval ammunition depot there as a field timekeeper. I delivered blueprints all over the base there for 'em.

*How did you find that position?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, my father was \_\_\_\_ machinist out there, and they was hiring, and I got a job out there.

*What do you remember about working there at the depot?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was great. I did everything under the sun. I was a field timekeeper and delivered blueprints all over the base with about 35 sections, and I had a 1946 pickup, and I enjoyed it. I learned, I operated all the \_\_\_\_ out there, and learned to operate it all.

*So I imagine then you were working out there when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the war started, is that right?*

**A.C. Kellams:** When did it start?

*December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941.*

**A.C. Kellams:** I was out there then, yes sir.

*Do you have any memories of learning that we were going to war?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No, I was just dreading it. Don't wanna be drafted.

*How long after the war started before you signed up or you were drafted into the Marines?*

**A.C. Kellams:** I'm not positive. It was two years. So I was 16 then, and I was 18 when they drafted me.

*So when they drafted you, I imagine you went –*

**A.C. Kellams:** San Diego, to training, yes sir.

*MCRD San Diego.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Went to Camp Pendleton for advanced training.

*Tell us about some of your memories about boot camp in San Diego.*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was tough. It was good.

*Was that the first time you'd been away from your home?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well yes, for a long time, yes.

*Tell us a little bit about the other men that were in boot camp with you.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, just a good bunch of men. Everybody worked together.

*I imagine everyone was probably pretty young.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir. Well no, there was some of the men that was on up into their 30's.

*OK, and when you were going through that training, I guess you had to know that you were going to be at some point probably seeing action yourself and combat.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, I figured we would, but I was lucky.

*Are there any things about your training, your time in boot camp that stand out to you?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was all a good experiment, and I took over a platoon, trained men, taking care of them, you know, marching, done everything, and then from there went to San Diego, and from there all up and down the coast in the Marine Corps.

*After you graduated from all your training, do you remember what unit you were assigned to?*

**A.C. Kellams:** 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. I'm not for sure just how it was. Like I say, I'm 84 years old. I'm slipping pretty fast.

*Well I understand, sir, but I'm impressed that you remember as much as you do. Every little bit kind of helps. We try to record these stories so that future generations understand what you and your fellow Marines went through, and the sacrifices you made, and it kind of all comes together like a patchwork quilt.*

**A.C. Kellams:** After finishing up training there at Camp Pendleton, we shipped to San Diego. Then from there went up the coast all the way to different towns. I drew a blank right there. I should've wrote all this down, what I did.

*Do you remember what battalion you were with in 6<sup>th</sup> Marines?*

**A.C. Kellams:** 6<sup>th</sup> Marine, 8<sup>th</sup> Marine, 6<sup>th</sup> Division or something, I'm not positive.

*I understand. After you graduated and you were assigned to a unit, did they ship you overseas across the Pacific?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yeah.

*And where did you go to?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Just as blank as I can be – Guam, Okinawa, and wound up at an air base in China, where the Japanese, moved the Japanese out and took over halfway, controlled it for ‘em.

*What memories if any do you have about Guam?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well it was tough, but I enjoyed it. Learned a lot. Grew up.

*What were your memories about the Japanese soldiers? Did you face any of them?*

**A.C. Kellams:** We just were moved to China, Tsingtao, China, and moved ‘em out back to Tokyo, and no, they were our prisoners. We didn’t have no, just contact with them, just with guards over them until we got ‘em back to Japan, away from Tsingtao, China. There was an air base there.

*You mentioned being in Guam and then later Okinawa. Do you have any thoughts or any memories about Okinawa?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was at the end of the war and it was just kind of patrol duty.

*After the war did you stay in touch at all with any of the Marines you served with?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No, I sure didn’t.

*When you were there and you were with that unit throughout the Pacific and the different battles, did you have any Marines that you were close to that were your buddies in your platoon or that sort of thing?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, had several of them. They was all good friends, good buddies. I was sarge in the barracks, in charge of a platoon.

*You had mentioned to me, sir, before we started, that you were a mortar man. How did you come to be assigned to mortars?*

**A.C. Kellams:** That’s just what they give me in training for, 60 millimeter mortars, and also the rifle range.

*Sure. What did you think of the mortars? Did you enjoy it?*

**A.C. Kellams:** I got pretty good with ‘em. We’d take training a lot of times, be out in rows or what’s a barrel and things, and we learned to operate it and do it right.

*How about your unit’s leadership? Do you remember much about your platoon sergeant or your platoon commander or any of those sort of folks?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No sir. Later, after \_\_\_\_\_, I was in charge of a platoon, and then I was in charge of a barracks, which is several.

*During the war, you mentioned earlier you had a brother and a sister. Were either of them in the service during the war?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No, my brother was four years younger, then he was in the Air Force later.

*So you were the only one in. Did your parents write to you regularly?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*Were you able to get letters and packages?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir. And my pretty little girlfriend did, too.

*Where was your girlfriend, was she back in Oklahoma?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes. The lady I married.

*That's great. Did you get married after you got back from the war?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, about a year and a half later.

*About a year and a half later. That's great.*

**A.C. Kellams:** She'd become a school teacher.

*That's great. So when you got back, then you settled back in there in Oklahoma?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*Do you remember what it was like that day when you finally got home from the war?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Great, it was great.

*Can you tell us a little bit about what made it great or anything about that day that stands out to you?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, just getting home with the family and friends.

*Do you remember what some of the first things were you did after having been gone for a long period of time?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No I sure don't. Like I say, I'm losing it fast. I just had open heart surgery and then I had a pacemaker put in and everything. It's just about to whip me.

*Well I understand. That's kind of how life goes I guess. You sound like you're doing really well though.*

**A.C. Kellams:** I'm doing real good.

*That's great. How did you come to end up in Sweetwater?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, my home's in Snyder, Texas.

*Your home's in Snyder? When did you move to Snyder?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well in '51, '54, I'm not sure. It's been a long time. Lived there a long time.

*What caused you to move from Oklahoma to Snyder?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, I moved to over in Hobbs for a while, oil field, working in the oil fields. Pulling units and stuff like that.

*What oil company did you work for?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, we just worked for different oil companies, independents. Snyder Wells Service is where I worked out of, what was the company.

*My grandfather worked for 30 plus years for Sohio.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Sohio? He was a pumper or something, wasn't he?

*Yeah, he worked out on a lot of the different pump jacks and things of that sort.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Or through a hire man then.

*My father, he and his family, and my father, they all lived out in one of the oil camps out there not far from Midland, just a little oil camp that's pretty much not there anymore.*

**A.C. Kellams:** What was it?

*It was out in Midkiff.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Midkiff? Yeah, I know where it's at.

*Yeah, little town of Midkiff, and so they were all out there in the Permian Basin in the oil business.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Still in it?

*Well no, my grandfather is deceased now, and then my dad didn't go work in the fields. But he did work in the fields when he was in high school. He'd go work on some of the rigs and things of that sort. I've got an uncle that worked on the oil rigs for a long time.*

**A.C. Kellams:** I did work on the drilling rigs. We could pull a unit so, but did work over jobs, worked for 'em for a long time at Hobbs, New Mexico.

*Out in Hobbs, New Mexico?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Mm-hmm.

*I know that area is often called Little Texas because there are so many –*

**A.C. Kellams:** Permean Basin.

*Yeah, Permean Basin, and then also that part of New Mexico they sometimes call Little Texas because there are so many Texans that moved to that part of New Mexico. I know if you live in Hobbs or some of those areas, it's easier to come into Midland Odessa if you need to get stuff. So you did that sir for all those years, and then I guess you retired from working out in the oil fields?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well yeah, then moved to Snyder and got a job there managing a company, well servicing company.

*OK, that's great.*

**A.C. Kellams:** And pulling units, look after, and to get jobs for them and everything else from the companies.

*After you'd gotten back from the war and you were working in the fields and that sort of thing, did you, I imagine you ran across a lot of guys that were fellow veterans.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh, yes sir. Yeah, that I went to high school with. But they was all foreign. They took to the Navy and the Army. Proud of that, I like the Marine Corps.

*Well, you know it's the few and the proud, and it's a very traditional branch of service. It's still the same uniform worn, the dress uniform today is the same that's been worn since World War I, still the same traditions and customs and courtesies, and that's drilled into every new Marine. You definitely learn that. When I went to boot camp, I went to San Diego just like you did, and it's still the same location, the same treatment.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Which Marines was you in?

*Marine Corps.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Camp Pendleton?

*Well, I went to San Diego for my basic training and then we did some of our field training up at Camp Pendleton.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Back in them mountains.

*Yeah, up in the big hills.*

**A.C. Kellams:** We dug in one night, and then woke up the next morning being in bed with poison oak.

*Oh, that's not good.*

**A.C. Kellams:** And my buddy was a redhead and real white complected, he was pitiful. His wife was coming in that weekend. He was eat up with poison oak.

*Wow, that's horrible. That would be miserable.*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was. And some of the peaks we went over at night, we had to crawl back over the day time. It was so scary.

*People don't realize how hilly that area really is.*

**A.C. Kellams:** They sure don't.

*It's a tough terrain and half of the recruits in the Marine Corps still go to Paris Island if they're east of the Mississippi, and if they're west they go to San Diego, and they joke about how out west, if the temperatures are cooler, but if you're at Paris Island where it's east, it's very flat. So it's kind of a tradeoff. One place you go you got the steep hills, and the other place, you've got the humidity and the heat.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, at Camp Pendleton you got the desert and the mountains.

*And then 29 Palms is another big Marine training base now out in the desert, and that really is the desert. It gets up to 120 plus degrees.*

**A.C. Kellams:** What place is that?

*29 Palms. That's probably about halfway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, out in the middle of nowhere. There's really nothing out there other than the base and the little town of 29 Palms, and it's a huge, huge base and it goes for miles and miles and there's just nothing but desert, but it's a great place to train because of that. So sir, when you were on Guam and Okinawa and China and that sort of thing, did you ever have any doubt that the U.S. was going to win the war?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No, I knew we was going to win it. Really, I never was really in combat, just between 'em, I was lucky I wound up at the end of it.

*That's right. And when you were moving through from islands to islands, I guess at some point, people I've talked to and from books I've read, there was a lot of concern about a final invasion of the mainland of Japan and how it was going to be just a really bloody battle.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah, I was lucky.

*Do you remember talking about that or preparing for that?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah, thought we was going to do it. At the same time everybody at the air base said that the Japanese had took over. We were setting within 10 or 12 miles of it. We went there and cleaned it up and captured 'em all and moved 'em back to Japan.

*Do you have any memories of learning that the atomic bombs had been dropped and that the war was over?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, faintly, just barely. We had a lot of touch and goes. We was lucky. We landed on Guadalcanal and we just about over ahead of us after the Air Force I mean come in and bombed it all, was a ridge, mountains like, and we was on the beach, wide open, nothing between us and them. We was lucky.

*I know Guadalcanal was a very bloody battle, very important battle for the Marines. When the war was finally over and you got to come back, do you remember kind of how long it took you to get back? Did it seem like it was a long time or was it pretty short?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It took several days to get back to Camp Pendleton. I believe I was discharged from San Diego.

*Did you take a train back home to Oklahoma?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Bus. Well it may have been a train. Traveled both.

*Did your girlfriend and your folks, your family, did they know that you were coming home or did you just surprise them?*

**A.C. Kellams:** No, no, we called back. My girlfriend, my wife now, wrote me a letter about every day. My sea bag had a third bottom of it full of letters from her.

*I bet that was one of the happiest days of her life, too. It's hard for those that are serving on active duty and in combat, but in a lot of ways it's probably worse for the families and loved ones back home because they have no idea of knowing what's happening and just kind of live with that fear and that worry, hoping they don't get a telegram or somebody doesn't show up at their door telling them that something's happened to their loved one. I've got to think that's worse than actually being there, in my mind.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yeah. Well I was lucky I didn't hit the main battle. It was just mop up details.

*But of course they have no way of knowing that.*

**A.C. Kellams:** That was rough though, back on Saipan and the problem through there, a lot of them would be scattered up, 10-12 feet apart going through there, and one of them would raise up out of the ground and start shooting at you, things like that. Of course you didn't know where it was coming from.

*What about your gear and your equipment? Did you feel like you had pretty good equipment?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah, had the best. After I become a platoon leader, I carried a carbine, and I could hit a penny at 20 feet.

*Oh wow. You preferred the carbine to any other?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well the M-1 was the best, other than that BAR, they're pretty heavy, more fire power, but in just training the carbine, yes.

*What about food? How was your food while you were there?*

**A.C. Kellams:** It was great.

*It was. Did you mainly eat the C-rations?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah.

*Did you often after things settled down, were they able to set up mess tents and serve?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah, we had tents, and then later on we had barracks like the air base in China there was barracks and things like that.

*I know people often in the service complain about quality of food and that sort of thing, but I think some of them might just be picky eaters, too, but I can imagine living off of nothing but C-rations after a while would get kind of old.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Ah, it wasn't bad.

*You mentioned you got letters and that sort of thing. Did you get much news from the outside world? Did you know what was going on big picture-wise?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yeah, we knew pretty well what was going on. My sister wrote regular, and my girlfriend wrote regular, some other folks received mail regular, and what was going on. I was in the tail end of it and I was lucky. We did more of the mop up details, but that was dangerous.

*Oh sure, because a lot of it, people don't realize especially the Pacific a lot more so than in Europe is that the mop up detail there could go on for months and it was very dangerous.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Like we'd spread out 10-12 feet apart and somebody would raise up ahead of us and start firing a machine gun. Go to bed and in the morning, there would be someone, a man setting over with their throat cut. It was really more dangerous than when you were straight in battle.

*I don't think people realize that the Japanese soldiers culturally just did not want to surrender or couldn't surrender.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Like we'd be on a hillside, mainly just stuff on the hillside, and an old boy next to you, well he'd have his throat cut. Someone had come in there dressed as a Marine and you'd get up and someone setting there with their throat cut or a knife in their ribs. Spooky.

*Well I know that in Iwo Jima for example, there's that famed photograph of the five Marines and the Navy Corps man raising that flag on Mount Suribachi, and a lot of people don't realize that three of those six men got killed later in that battle, because even though they had reached the peak and they put the flag up, there was still a lot of fighting to be done and the Japanese were so well dug in and really just refused to surrender, and the mopping up there was brutal and three of those men were killed along with many, many others. When you were in those mop up situations, what type of things would you do to try to root 'em out or try to make sure they didn't sneak in on you at night and that sort of thing?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well, like on Saipan, Guam, dig 'em up in caves. For instance on Guam, there was a deep cave, there was a split. On one side they kept the civilians, the Japanese, and then they was on the other side, and they \_\_\_\_\_, things like that. They'd come, you could come up on them anywhere. They just didn't give up.

*Do you remember if your unit had flamethrowers?*

**A.C. Kellams:** Oh yeah.

*Those I imagine from what I've read were pretty effective in clearing out a lot of caves and fighting holes.*

**A.C. Kellams:** They sure were, yes sir, they sure were.

*But you yourself never operated one, right?*

**A.C. Kellams:** I operated some of them, yes.

*Tell us a little bit about those because I've always heard that they have a real strong odor.*

**A.C. Kellams:** I don't remember that.

*I've read that the smell of the kerosene and that sort of thing could be really strong, and also operating one was dangerous because if you got, if the flamethrower itself got hit by a round, it could explode.*

**A.C. Kellams:** That's right.

*It made it even more dangerous than just having a regular weapon. Well sir, I tell you, I really appreciate you letting me talk to you today and interview you.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*I know you said there's a lot of things you can't remember, but just the little things you do remember help add to that overall story, little bits and pieces, and I think hopefully we were able to document some of that so that, we have here at the Land Office, we have documents that go back 200-300 years ago. We have stuff here from back in the Spanish Land Grant days. So our hope is that these interviews will last as long as those documents and maybe 200-300 years from now somebody might be listening to these interviews and they won't know you are me from Adam, but they'll be able to hear these words and maybe glean a little bit of knowledge about what it was like when you were in war. So I really appreciate that and I know that Commissioner Patterson is a Marine veteran and myself, but even the people that work here at the Land Office that aren't veterans really do thank you for your service to our country.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Well OK, yes sir.

*Like I mentioned before, we'll be making copies of this interview onto disk for you that we'll mail to you so that you can have it to give to your family or your kids or grandkids or any of that sort of thing.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*They might like to have that as something that they can listen to in years to come as well.*

**A.C. Kellams:** All right sir.

*All right sir, well I really do appreciate very much and thank you very much.*

**A.C. Kellams:** Yes sir.

*All right sir, have a very good day.*

**A.C. Kellams:** You too.

*Take care, bye bye.*

*[End of recording]*