

## Interview with Joseph Sasser

### Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Program

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Interviewed by Janis Kozlowski, National Park Service  
Transcribed by Professional Transcripts

*This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Joseph Sasser was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.*

*The transcript has been lightly edited.*

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(The dictation starts out with dialogue after the phone was answered by Mr. Sasser and before the interview starts.)

**Joseph Sasser:** This is Sasser speaking.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Good morning, Mr. Sasser. This is Janis Kozlowski up in Alaska.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes! Good morning to you.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Is – did I call you on the right phone number?

**Joseph Sasser:** Absolutely.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. [0:00:18.1] Are you willing to allow me to tape our conversation today?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay, great. Great. Thank you so much. Okay. [0:00:28.9] First question for you – what do you remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor? Do you – where were you at the time and what were you thinking?

**Joseph Sasser:** I was thumbing a ride back to school, college, and it – I heard it over a radio, a car radio. I don't know really the reaction that I had then. It was just stunning at least. Really at that particular time I don't have a great deal of reflection on that day except I knew where I was.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you recall that it made you – did it propel you into going into the service or any other kind of action like that?

**Joseph Sasser:** At that particular time, no. I waited until the draft came around, which was in 1942, in November of '42. I waited for the draft. We started really in September with that. We knew where we were going. Just as we turned 20 years old, they drafted us, so I waited for that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I had some ideas of joining the service before that, but then I opted to just go through the draft.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:02:14.0] Okay, and then – and what did they draft you into?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, I was in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and was sent to – from there up to California to Fort Cronkhite, just across the Golden Gate Bridge. It's a little cove out there on the Pacific where the coast artillery battery was located. That was where I first went, was to the coast artillery.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did that seem like a good choice for you?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, it did to me. I did very well there and they wanted me to stay, but I didn't get to stay very long in the coast artillery. [0:03:03.3] My company commander and some of the sergeants there wanted me to stay with them and did everything they could to keep me, but Captain Willoughby's organization of the 7th Provisional Scout Company, he had carte blanche to call anyone he wanted to on the West Coast I guess. So he picked me and about 115 other Mississippi boys to go down to Monterey, California, to Fort Ord. So, that's where we went to from there. We went from the coast artillery, I'd say, to the infantry.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did he pick the Mississippi guys for a reason?

**Joseph Sasser:** I have often wondered about that. I don't know. I really – I've just wondered about it because the company was only a little over 200 men and there were more Mississippi guys in it than anybody – any other state. I never did know why that they picked the Miss – that particular group of guys from up at Fort Cronkhite to go down to Fort Ord.

**Janis Kozlowski:** That's interesting. How about you personally? [0:04:39.1] Did you have a skill they were recruiting for?

**Joseph Sasser:** Did I have – pardon me, I missed that question.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you have a particular skill that they were recruiting for?

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**Joseph Sasser:** No. No, I guess not. As far as I know. I have to say I have no idea. Maybe they just wanted young guys, you know, perhaps feeling like it – that we were more adventurous than an older person. I just – all of us were just – most of us were all just 20-year-old guys.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. Maybe they thought those Mississippi boys were reliable and just wanted to keep them together (laughter).

**Joseph Sasser:** I'd like to think that. I'm not sure about that. Perhaps the fact that Mississippi was rural and we worked long and hard. Perhaps hardened and accustomed to strenuous work might have been one reason that they picked us out, but that I don't know. I never got an answer to that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:06:01.3] Okay, so where did you go – you were in training then and what were they training you for?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, we were very curious as to what the 7th Provisional Scout Company – what part that they would play in the war and the type of training that we were getting, we all suspected that it was for some special mission. We did not know what or know where, but it was very strenuous treatment that we got there in Fort Ord with the 7th Scout Company. It was – the training we got was very severe, but I – after a period of time, they pulled me off the line and I started working as an assistant in the company clerk's office. So, that's where I spent the last few weeks with the 7th Scout Company. Again, but again, I was transferred to the 50th Combat Engineers, and that was just a few weeks before we went on convoy to – from Monterey there to San Francisco to board a troop ship. Of course by that time we knew where we were going.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Where were you headed?

**Joseph Sasser:** I avoided these transfers. [Note from Mr. Sasser: Actually, I tried only to avoid transfer from the Coast Artillery to the 7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company, not transfer from the 7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company to the 50<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers]. Most of the guys I knew were in the 7th Scout Company, so I have a soft spot for those guys there. I took most of the training and I knew them all because I was – I was also the mail clerk. I knew everybody there by name and maybe something about them. We had – In the 7th Scout Company we had sergeants that had been involved in the Dieppe Raid, had been trained by British commandos and our training, I assumed, was very much like that, that the commandos, the training that the commandos got.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, that sounds like pretty arduous and difficult training then.

**Joseph Sasser:** It was. Very severe. Yes, we – nobody at the camp at Fort Ord, and there were a lot of soldiers there, but when we got out on our speed hikes there was nobody that could keep up with us. We passed everybody. We trained – we would hike for an hour and then strip to the waist immediately and take about 30 minutes of calisthenics and then back to putting our clothes on again and our shirts on. This was with full field pack that we were hiking in too, so that's a pretty good load itself. But we had a pretty good reputation around the camp. I mean, the other troops there knew who

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we were. [0:09:47.6]. I don't know whether they knew what we were going to do, but those guys on 7th Scout Company group went up on submarines to Attu. Of course I avoided that and I am thankful for that, but I did come in on Massacre Bay. They landed in on the Holtz Bay side of Attu, which is on the north side and I landed in the Massacre Bay area, on the south side, which was where the majority of the soldiers came in. The 7th Scout Group surfaced there – the submarine surfaced about 5000 yards offshore and they paddled in to shore from that distance and then spent a great deal of time in the mountains, the snowy mountains. We didn't have that much snow in the valley of Massacre; however, there was snow on top of all of the mountains there. Gilbert Ridge is on the east side of Massacre Valley and the snow was down part of the way, but not all the way. You could travel where the snow had melted and so forth, but later at night, you know, at some of those places where the snow had melted it had frozen over and it was difficult to scale the mountains through that area where it was melted. After you got to the snow you could walk in that with ease, no problem. But it was cold up there and they had more snow on the mountains on the north side of Attu than we had on Massacre.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:11:58.0] Did you have good enough equipment for the conditions that you were in?

**Joseph Sasser:** No, ma'am. We did not have the proper equipment, clothing that is. I had – I had leather boots, when we should have had shoe packs. Of course, remembering this, the prediction of the capture or retaking of Attu was only supposed to take two or three days and it lasted for 20 days. So, I guess they felt like it didn't matter a great deal as to what sort of equipment you had. We – I did have – we did have rain suits, but that was somewhat of a – and it rained a good bit up there, but that could prove a disadvantage to you because of the fact that you would – as you were walking and so forth, you would perspire. You didn't get enough air, then you perspired and then when you sat down to take a break then you got cold, so it was..... The rain suits did keep us dry in one sense and then on the other hand you perspired and your clothes got wet from that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you were bound to be wet one way or the other.

**Joseph Sasser:** That's right. At nighttime, after a day of hiking and working where we were trying to get the supplies off of the beach and so forth, we would get in our foxholes and take off our socks and we would put our socks close to our body and then our body heat would dry those socks out overnight so we could – we had an extra pair of socks. But the leather boots were just a – they were just a bad choice to have given us that. With the shoe packs we could have done a lot better and been better protected. Otherwise, you know, I had enough clothing. I wasn't dressed in – like some have said that they were dressed in a summer uniform. I was not. I was in wool and we had a jacket to put over and so forth, so I didn't experience the real chill factor that some did up in the mountainous area where it would snow. Some scout companies spent several days, I think they went three days without anything to eat or drink. They were eating snow to get some liquid into their system. That's from my talking with them. Most of those boys that were in the 7th Scout Company are deceased now. There is – I know of

two in Mississippi that are still living. At least they were a year ago, but I haven't bumped into any of the rest of them. I've checked on a few of them and most of them are deceased. I had a copy that I got from the day room, from the company clerk's room, of everybody who was in the 7th Scout Company, so I knew by the serial number which ones were from Mississippi. Of course I knew the guys pretty well too. In particular, a mailman is pretty popular, you know, because he's the guy that's gonna give you the letter that you're looking for.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Right.

**Joseph Sasser:** You're hoping it's good news and not a Dear John.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Right, yeah. You were bringing something good to their otherwise rather bleak days I imagine.

**Joseph Sasser:** Absolutely. That's true. That's true.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:16:26.1] When you – you said you were sleeping in foxholes at night?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, yes, we had foxholes there just off the beach at Massacre Bay.

**Janis Kozlowski:** You said you were trying to dry your socks next to your body and so forth, but were those foxholes dry?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, your body heat would dry them out pretty well.

**Janis Kozlowski:** But were the foxholes themselves dry or were they wet?

**Joseph Sasser:** Oh, the foxholes themselves?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, they were dry.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** They were dry.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And since you were part of a provisional company, then you probably did okay in terms of food and water and those kinds of things?

**Joseph Sasser:** [0:17:13.6] I was not with the Provisional Scout Company. I was transferred to the 50th Combat Engineers before I left Fort Ord, so I did not go up to Attu with the guys that I had trained with. They sent me over to the engineers and I had had no engineer training whatsoever, so I was kind of lost. I didn't know – really didn't know what to do and that's the reason I guess that I suppose I did several detail, some detail work, that is rescuing a few guys that were stranded for one reason or another and one

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night we were – I was with a group of five of us, I believe, that we had one B.A.R. with us. The rest of us had the old Garand rifles. We were guarding a pass to Chichagof, I believe it was or Sarana Bay, I'm not sure which it was, but we were just sitting ducks up there. We would – nothing happened, but that was just somebody to alert the other troops down in the valley that the Japs were coming and perhaps by that time they would have wiped us out if they had come up there. I had that particular detail and then I had one to rescue a guy up on Gilbert Ridge there that had lost his way. We got him down from there. After we got to Engineer Hill, not knowing it was Engineer Hill at that time but later after the battle was over – because it was named after the 50th Combat Engineers actually, that's where everything ended there.

**Janis Kozlowski: [0:19:29.9]** So what happened there that made that the namesake of the 50th?

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** What happened on that hill that.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Oh, okay. We – I was doing some detail work out there as well, as for my experience and I had gone out into the valley in front of Engineer Hill with two other guys to pick up a guy that had shell – he was shellshocked. He just lost it. We had to get him back, so we did do that. Coincidentally, it was the same route that the Japanese took when they came up the valley there to Engineer Hill a few days later after I had been over there to pick this guy up. They – that was the route that they took, same one that we did going out into the valley to get this guy. So, all of this on Engineer Hill, just happened overnight. Everything seemed to be in good shape. We knew that we had cornered the Japanese and had no idea that they would – they would make Banzai attack however. I and two other guys pitched at the crest of a ravine initially, then for some reason or another we moved up about 40 or 50 yards up the hill, which was close to the embankment from the road that was being built on Engineer Hill and going down into the valley. So we moved up there and sometime early in the morning, it must've been 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, the screaming came that the Japanese had gotten through – some had gotten through on the other side of us, behind us, and how far they went before they were killed I don't know. I never did run into them. It was the ones that were in front coming up the ravines that the engineers encountered. Now there were other units there on Engineer Hill. There was a medical unit. There was some – there were a few other eng – another engineer outfit entirely. I don't know where they were from or what. There were a few casualties we had there in a medical tent that were being treated there also. So there was a medical unit there and the engineers. Primarily that was about it. We made our way from where we were when they came up those ravines and we made our way up eventually to the roadbed where we got into a more secure position. From there the Japanese just kept coming up the ravines and kept just – stacked on top of each other. Some, seeing that everything was futile, nothing they could do, they just took their hand grenades and pulled the pin on it and blew their stomach out completely. Had a lot of those in the ravines that we discovered after everything had quieted down. After killing them we had to go down and get them and drag them up there and put them in a grave.

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**Joseph Sasser:** We had – the vision was not – not bad. We did have a little flurry of snow that morning. I do recall that, but that wasn't even enough to dust the ground at all. Just a flurry. As far as vision is concerned, we could see a pretty good distance even as daylight came, as it crept in, we could see out into the valley and we saw another group of Japanese coming. I don't know how many sorties that they had, but that was one of them and then those that had gotten behind us, and then there were others that came before that. It appears to me that perhaps there were about three different charges against Engineer Hill, as I can track these things together.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

**Joseph Sasser:** I survived that with no casualty. The doctor from – in the medical unit, he wanted to get into the fight and he didn't have a rifle. He got a rifle and got up there and he was next to me. I say next to me – you know, 15 feet or so. I noticed that he did not make any move. Come to find out he'd been shot right in the head. His name was – Bassett was his last name. I think his first name was John, but I'm not positive. He was from San Diego. So, since some of the guys had to get out of the – had to run up to this embankment so quickly, some did not – some got up in their bare feet, so we took the boots off of the doctor and let some other guy have them, to put his boots on. In my unit I have no idea how many – I was in Headquarters Company, so I didn't know guys that were in Company C – A, B, C, or so forth. I didn't know them, so I don't know how many that we lost. I do know that one guy in the Headquarters Company captured one of the Japanese. I understood that he made him take off all his clothes. Whether that would be a fact, now I don't know. I do know he was a guy that – forgotten his name, but he was from Steubenville, Ohio.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:27:22.5] Where did they take Japanese prisoners, do you know?

**Joseph Sasser:** I was never aware that we captured any until I heard about the one that this guy in my outfit caught. I didn't know that there were any. I think they indicated 26 maybe. I'm not sure. They did capture some. I don't know on what terms, what the conditions were, when these guys were captured. I do remember reading about one who was trying to commit suicide, but his hand grenade wouldn't go off, so he lived and survived it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you were just 20 years old when you were in the battle there in Attu. What was..... [0:28:15.5]

**Joseph Sasser:** That's correct. Yes, ma'am. And I had been in the Army only about less than six months. I was inducted on November 13, 1942. We left Ford Ord – we left San Francisco, I believe, on the 22nd or 23rd of April. We stopped at Cold Bay, Alaska because of a storm, which delayed the initial date to attack Attu, which was initially scheduled for May 9th, whereas we took a couple more days. The 11th was when we went in on Attu. I didn't go in until the 12th. I stayed aboard ship there for the day, but no action was going on except everybody was working on the beach trying to get all the equipment off of it. Of course, that was a mess there too because in that tundra the machinery was bogging down. They finally learned what to do, and that was get in the

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little stream where it had a rocky bed and go and just take the stuff..... They had Half-tracks that they were pulling. They pulled them right up the stream there and that got them out of the tundra. The tundra is deep. It's – I'm sure you perhaps are acquainted with the tundra.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Sure.

**Joseph Sasser:** So, you know, it's – it's up to about knee level I guess. Pretty hard to travel in it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:30:19.0] So, did your training prepare you for that kind of travel?

**Joseph Sasser:** Not at all. I know my 7th Scout Company did, yes. Yes, my 7th Scout Company did, but my Combat Engineer, I had no training whatsoever, in the 50th Combat. None whatsoever. They were just – I would do what I could I guess for self preservation as well as doing my duty to follow orders to, say, rescue someone or to go out on this – with this group or that group and so forth. That was about it for me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** You had your youth and fitness going for you.

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** You had your youth and fitness going for you.

**Joseph Sasser:** I did. I sure did. Yes, ma'am. I was an athlete in high school. I didn't play college ball. They looked at me as a freshman for basketball, but – and I could've gone out, but I didn't. I didn't choose to do that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:31:36.1] Well, did – when did you find out that you were going to Alaska?

**Joseph Sasser:** I was doing some work with some officers from – in the 50th Combat. We were doing some stencil – we were doing some typing and some stencil work and one of the officers got a map out for us and he said – he circled it. He circled Alaska and all of the whole chain – Aleutian chain, and said we're going up there somewhere. He didn't know at the time where. That's when we knew we were going.

**Janis Kozlowski:** What did you think about that? Did it make a difference to you where you went or.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did it make a difference to you where you went or did you have.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, really it – it really did because I always wanted to go to Europe myself rather than to be out on a desolate island in the Pacific. But you know, I wouldn't take anything for the experience of what I had there. I think I grew up not only



physically, but mentally as well. I do. It made me know that I was a survivor, that I knew how to survive for a long period of time, I could do that. I just knew how to take care of myself and those around me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So it matured you.

**Joseph Sasser:** It surely did, yes, ma'am. I even – after the battle and – see I spent 21 months up there. After this, Attu, I went over to Adak at a staging area before going into Kiska and I went on Kiska as well.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So what did they have you do at Adak?

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:33:46.8] I'm sorry, what did they have you do at Adak?

**Joseph Sasser:** We really did nothing. There was just a staging area. It rained I think every day we were there. We were sleeping in pup tents. We had to dig a trench around our pup tents to drain the – to try to drain the water off, but it still got inside the pup tent and we still got wet, but, you know, it was in July. It wasn't all that bad. It wasn't that cold. So we did all that, but we just – we did no training whatsoever. It was just a staging area before going – we left Adak and went to Kiska. I don't know what ship I was on at that time. A troop ship of course, but we – I landed at Gertrude Cove on Kiska. I can't tell you a great deal about that. It was just – I stayed on that for maybe 30 days and went back to Attu. That's where I left. Totally, the number of months I spent in the Aleutians was 21 months. So, during that period of time I thought that I would try to see if I could enlarge my vocabulary, so I began to – as I read the Time magazine or whatever I was reading and came across words, I would copy them down and look in the dictionary. I finally got to where I used those words in my vocabulary. By the way, I copied those down in a little notebook and I still have it by the way. I brought it home with me. I wish that I had a diary of my activities and really what happened day by day up there, but that's hindsight now. When I got on the train at Camp Shelby to go out to – we went to Sausalito. That's where we got off of the train then. I did have a daily diary, so I still have that. [0:36:28.8] I was writing letters for guys. We had a lot of illiteracy here in Mississippi. Many of the boys that went out to California could not write their names. They couldn't even write their wives, so I was kind of a self-appointed writer for those guys. Some of them I was trying to teach them how to write their names, but later they bussed those guys in to the University of San Francisco and they began to – they taught them there really how to write their names. I didn't know the technique for it or how to go about that. I'm not a teacher, so I didn't know how to instruct them really.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So, when you were – where you instructing the guys in the 50th when you were in Alaska? Is that what you're talking about?

**Joseph Sasser:** No ma'am. I was talking about the ones that were in Fort – Fort Cronkhite.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, okay.

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**Joseph Sasser:** When we were up at Fort Cronkhite.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. When you were the mail clerk there.

**Joseph Sasser:** I was not the mail clerk there. I did do some – I'd had some ROTC training, so I was out teaching them how to about face and right oblique, left oblique, to the rear march and such. I was doing that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I think being able to do that and so forth the officers and the sergeants saw that I probably had a little more training than these others and that's one reason I guess that they wanted to keep me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** It sounds like you served a useful role there.

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, I guess I did. I suppose so. We had a – I used to do the writing on Attu for the cook. He was a Chinese guy. His name was Hong Ye "Tommy" Hom. He and I got to be real good friends, but he couldn't write. He didn't know how to write, so I wrote his love letters for him. He came from Pueblo, Colorado, so I wrote his letters for him. I believe he was the only one that I did, yeah. By that time I would say I'd been separated from the guys – most of the guys that I went into the service with from Mississippi. I was not with them anymore. One or two that stayed with me and were transferred every time that I was.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:39:36.3] Did you cross paths with them anywhere?

**Joseph Sasser:** Did we do what?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you cross paths with them anywhere?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, the 7th Scout Company after the battle?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

**Joseph Sasser:** My paths – my path crossed a few of those guys after Attu. Those men who were able from the 7th Provisional Scout Company, which were very few, they went on down to Hawaii and they went to Kwajalein out in the Pacific out there, South Pacific. In fact, I talked to a guy just before we left there and he was killed on Kwajalein. He was from a little town up north of where I live here in Carthage. He was killed there. He had gotten a Japanese flag. He showed it to me. Then a guy – one guy that was from my county, I bumped into him as I was going over to Adak from Attu. That was before going into Kiska. He was aboard ship, but he was on his way back. They sent him back to the States. I think they – I don't think out of that 200 and some odd men with the 7th Scout Company there was about 20 or so that were able to walk out of

there. They had frostbite and gangrene set in. Just all kinds of things happened to them.

**Janis Kozlowski:** That's a pretty high casualty rate.

**Joseph Sasser:** It was, absolutely. We had a professional boxer in our outfit. His name was Stanley Hasrato from Pennsylvania. He was an up and coming boxer and boxed some pretty high class boxers I'd say. He got – he got his feet frozen. They had to amputate some of his toes. Of course that ruined his boxing career. Might have been a good thing for him. I never did like the cruelty of boxing anyhow, but he couldn't box anymore after that because he'd lost those toes and you don't have the balance that is necessary with those toes taken off.

**Janis Kozlowski:** That was on Attu, right?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:42:22.9] So, did you – the Combat Engineers – did they do quite a few kind of recoveries of people that were – that had – Americans who had died or who had injuries where they couldn't get out? You were kind of a rescue crew?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, that's what they used us, a few of us in the Headquarters Company. Now, if you were in another company there, they were trained in using Caterpillars and Half-tracks and such as that, moving equipment and supplies off of the beach, but I was not trained in that. I knew nothing about it. I didn't know anything about the surveying department. There was no training in that, so I was just kind of a loose gun I guess you'd call it. When they needed a detail, I was it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. So you did a variety of things then it sounds like.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, Ma'am. I did.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Rescue was part of it. When you rescued guys, where did you take them?

**Joseph Sasser:** We brought them back to the medical unit.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that on board the ship?

**Joseph Sasser:** Medical station. No, no, this was on land. This was on Attu.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** We brought them back to the medical tent and left them there. Never did know what happened to them after that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you also recover men who had died in the battle?

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**Joseph Sasser:** Not – none of our men, no.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I was involved in that – I was involved in only getting these Japanese out of these ravines that were coming up from the valley, up Engineer Hill.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And what did you do with.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon me. We would put a rope around their feet and drag them up the hill. Where the bulldozer had dug a hole, we would dump them in that hole. I don't know how many would be in a – in one grave even. There would be maybe 10 or 15.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Were those.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Later on, as I understand it, the Japanese came to Attu, got all those guys and took them back.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. So the graves were somewhere near the road, somewhere.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am. It sure was. Yes, it was.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** It was there on Engineer Hill where they were all buried. I say all of them in that particular part of the battle, meaning that the Banzai attack. That was the group that we were dealing with.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. [0:45:31.3] How did all that – the battle and, you know, seeing dead people – how did that effect you at that young age?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, now that's a good question. Frankly when I got to Engineer Hill, there had already been a battle just around the corner from that at the foot of Nees Peak and Nees Peak is at the end of Gilbert Ridge. There were foxholes all out there. When we came up and made the turn to go to Engineer Hill there were, oh, five, six, seven maybe dead Japanese laying around there. Well frankly I was a bit nauseated at it, but I tell ya, I saw so much of it before the day was over I just – I got used to it. It didn't bother me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. Did you see.....

**Joseph Sasser:** It doesn't bother me today either, you know.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So, as you look back you don't have bad memories or memories that haunt you about that battle?

**Joseph Sasser:** No, I don't, and I've often wondered. In my dreams I've never dreamed about that part of my service in the Army on Attu. My dreams have never been about that. I've often wondered why because that was something different, when you're called upon to man up, man a rifle and you shoot and kill. It's a difficult thing.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, maybe that's a blessing you weren't haunted by that your whole life.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes. Yes, ma'am, that's true.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you see other fellows in the 50th or others that you encountered during the battle of either Kiska or Attu that really had a hard time handling the experience?

**Joseph Sasser:** I never saw anybody that had any problem whatsoever. We had – did have one guy that – and I don't know what his trouble was. It might not have been the experience on Attu, but we did have one guy that did have some nervous problems and I don't know what happened to him. He might have been wanting to get out of the service or something. Just never did figure him out.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

**Joseph Sasser:** But that's the only one that I can recall. But he did have some mental problems, some anxieties there that were rather strange. I couldn't explain what they were, but you could just tell that he was different and that he responded differently than others would.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. So, the two weeks or so that you were on Attu sleeping outside and maybe cold and wet during that period, were you pretty exhausted when it was over?

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, ma'am. To tell you the truth I wanted a bath so bad I didn't know what to do. I hadn't had one since about April 24th or 25th or something like that. I think I took one bath on the troop ship and they were stacked up six deep on the ship. I just didn't want to – I just didn't like the idea of sleeping that close so there was a Hispanic guy named Delgado. He and I got together and we went down to the floor below where all the barracks bags were and they were pretty soft and rather than sleep up there with the rest of them we slept down in the hold after that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter.)

**Joseph Sasser:** Another thing, you know, if I – I can improvise things and if things are not going normally I can move to something, an alternative, and substitute something in place of it and get along, but again I think it's a part of my just being a survivor.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Right. Mm-hmm. That adaptability I'm sure was very important in the war.

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**Joseph Sasser:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Sure was. [0:50:37.3] One of the best experiences I had in the service was the time that I spent at Washington and Lee University. I really enjoyed – I really enjoyed that. I was over there for I think about a month. I am not sure how long, but we were taking training so that the troops that were coming back to the States – they could have some recreation for them. We were just learning how to do that. We had Ivy League coaches there and back in the '40s that is when Ivy League football was in the heyday. So – and the names of those guys I didn't copy down, but there again too I wished that I had written down the names of those coaches because they were well known in the athletic field. We had an All-American football player from the University of Texas. I recall his being there at Washington and Lee. But we – it was, I would say most of it was along the athletic range of entertainment and the other part would be of working up skits and putting on a little play of some sort. We had the advantage, at least when I was there – I think they had a new class coming in every month. We had the advantage of these guys that had been in the stage performance of *This is the Army, Mr. Jones*. It was on Broadway I guess in New York. They did their last performance and those guys had to go somewhere. Well, a lot of them wound up at this special service school at Washington and Lee when I was there. We had to put on a skit and those guys were really helpful in helping us put that thing together. I was a squad leader because I was the tallest in the group. For no other reason I got that honor or position. We came in – my group came in second on the skit. We had to do one for everybody to see. We didn't win, but we did come in second.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, that's pretty darn good.

**Joseph Sasser:** I thought it was too.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Now, were you at Washing.....

**Joseph Sasser:** We couldn't have done that without those guys coming from that Broadway play up there. I think I have a record somewhere, I do, when all of them sang the last tune and so forth and before they just disbanded. I think I have a record of that here in my library.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh. Is that when you became interested in music?

**Joseph Sasser:** No, ma'am. [0:54:24.3] I became interested in music when I was – let's see, I was about 12 or 13 years old and I had a sister that was three years older than I was. My mother wouldn't let her go out and dance back then. We're talking about back in the '30s, the early '30s. So, she wanted somebody to dance with, so she got me and taught me how to dance. At that particular time I despised it, but after that I always loved her for having taught me how to dance.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter.)

**Joseph Sasser:** So, that was quite a thing. On the music end of it, I always liked music. I collected a few records before I went into the service. I went off to school that summer – college that summer before I went into the service, with a suitcase full of

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records. I took them to school and then left them. I wish I'd have kept them for later, but I left all those records. I don't know, I've just always liked music. It was just some – we had new radios to listen to. I used to catch the live broadcasts from stations located out of New Orleans. We used to pick up a station up in Pennsylvania and Atlanta, Nashville, Tennessee. I just liked the music. The big band really was what I liked best of all. I have a lot of copies of the big bands as they played live that I've transposed over to a CD. I bought cassettes. I enjoyed that when I was a kid on the radio, car radios and there was an advantage really to the radio back then because you and your own imagination could picture what was going on there. Now you can see what's going on there with television, but I always thought that, you know, what I think is going on there as I listen to that music, my friend over here is listening to the same thing. He probably looks at it a little differently than I, so I still like radio. I collect radios. I have about 10 or 15 I guess, old radios. I haven't gone into it in a big way, but..... I've got some real old ones too.

**Janis Kozlowski: [0:58:00.6]** Were you able to continue your interest – pursuing your interest in music while you were in the service? Were there opportunities there?

**Joseph Sasser:** No opportunities. No. No, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So it wasn't until after you got back of the service that you could continue to pursue that interest?

**Joseph Sasser:** And I didn't for a while, for a good while. There was a period of the '50s and '60s that I just divorced myself from it, but my wife didn't dance. One thing is I just kind of left it alone and then our children came along and that, but I still kind of kept in touch with music until I really got involved in it about 25 or 30 years ago.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. Yep, life got busy there for a while.

**Joseph Sasser:** Absolutely. I have been transferring some music from tapes that I made 25 years ago. I had 16 – 17 tapes, two hours each. We just finished recording those from the tape. There are 34 CDs now that I have. The big bands and singers too, you know. Dinah Shore, Margaret Whiting and Jo Stafford, singers which I like very much. Patti Page came on a little bit at the end of the war. Doris Day was..... and many others. I have – now I have about 34 albums of music, CDs. Each album contains about 40 CDs.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I love that era too. It sounds like you have quite a collection.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am. I do. I do. And then I have – other CDs that I have made besides that which – I don't know how many. I never did count them, so I don't know how many I have of them. But it's been fun. I've – my wife was ill from the time she was about 35 years old or a little less even than that. That occupied a good bit of my time. I had to have a hobby and music was one of them. **[1:01:10.9]** I got into the trapping of fox and raccoons. I even had a trapper to get me some, enough raccoon skins to – I sent it up to Newark in New Jersey, I believe. I believe they tanned them for me. Then I sent them to this guy in Wisconsin that made me a raccoon coat.

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**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh. Do you still have it?

**Joseph Sasser:** I still have it, yes, ma'am. I still wear it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I bet that's nice!

**Joseph Sasser:** I haven't grown out of it. I'm still kinda skinny.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter).

**Joseph Sasser:** Then I decided, well, since I was trapping why don't I just do that for – get something for my daughter, so I got the – a red fox for my middle daughter and she got a coat made for her. She liked that real well. My oldest decided that she would have a gray fox. I got enough of those and cut out the white belly, but they had a little tinge of red in it, red and gray, real pretty coat.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Sounds beautiful.

**Joseph Sasser:** Then I got for my youngest daughter, that's the last one. I said, Joann, what kind of fur coat do you want? She said, I believe I'll just go to the store and buy me a blue fox. So, I got caught there on that one. (Laughter.) She's still got that blue fox. It was pretty.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I bet.

**Joseph Sasser:** [1:03:10.9] We had blue fox on Attu. I've got a picture of me holding a little baby blue fox there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, so you saw them there.

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** You saw them on Attu?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes. Yes, ma'am. You know, they named that theater there on Attu the Fox Theater.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I – after the blue fox?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yeah, after the blue fox.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh.

**Joseph Sasser:** That's what I assume. I've got a picture of that theater there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And that's where – is that where they played movies?

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**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am. In fact Errol Flynn came over and he and some girl, I don't recall who she was, they put on a performance for us.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh. Did you get many USO shows like that while you were in the Aleutians? [1:04:00.6]

**Joseph Sasser:** We had – we had a group. Let's see, one girl was a violinist. She had – she was a violinist with the Phil Spitalny Orchestra. That was an all girl orchestra. She played the violin. I recall her mainly because it happened to be real cold and I had – while I was aboard ship – a troop ship, I got one of those Navy masks to wear on my face. I rounded the corner one day and ran into that girl violinist and she liked to have fainted when she saw me with that black mask on. At first she didn't know what she ran into.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter.)

**Joseph Sasser:** I guess some different kind of animal, I reckon.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Can I travel you back to Kiska for a minute?

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon me, I didn't hear that question.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, let me ask you first. You've been talking for about an hour. Do you still have a little time or would you like to.....

**Joseph Sasser:** I've got all the time you want, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. Can I ask you some questions about Kiska?

**Joseph Sasser:** Oh, yes, ma'am. Yeah.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:05:25.7] So, what do you remember happening on Kiska when you landed at Gertrude Cove?

**Joseph Sasser:** Gertrude Cove. I recall this, that it was a – that the coast line was pretty rough with rocks and such as that. It was a little bit difficult getting from the ship on shore. Getting there, I don't remember a lot about it because really after we got over there and there was nobody – it was just us and no Japs, there wasn't anything to do.

**Janis Kozlowski:** How long did it take you to realize there wasn't anybody there?

**Joseph Sasser:** I think it was on the second day. I don't recall – I don't recall the exact date that we went on Kiska, but I did go in on the first day of invasion there – and we found out – I think it was the second day.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. [1:06:31.9] Do you remember what the weather was like at the time? Could you see what was happening and know that.....

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**Joseph Sasser:** There was a lot of fog. There was a lot of fog there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So that.....

**Joseph Sasser:** A lot of fog there. And that's the reason that we had the casualties that we had, was because of the fog. You saw an object there and you knew that you were positioned here and he was positioned out in front and you assumed that he was enemy and we did have some – I don't know what the number of deaths were, not a lot, but even one you know is a death.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** It's bad.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did the 50th suff.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Even if you had one of them.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did the 50th suffer any casualties there?

**Joseph Sasser:** Did what?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did the 50th suffer any casualties there?

**Joseph Sasser:** No, ma'am. No, ma'am. I don't recall any of them having any – I don't recall any.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:07:36.2] Did you feel relieved after a couple of days to realize that it was over?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am. We certainly were. We certainly were. They moved out quite a number of men from Kiska, of course in fog, you know they were able to evade our Navy and get out of there. It was a great move for the Japanese. Well, I don't call things lucky, but providentially things just worked out for them, that they were able to get in there during the fog and then going out and get beyond the reach of our Navy.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

**Joseph Sasser:** They did leave a lot of booby traps on Kiska and there were some casualties from that. Now, to what extent, I don't know. There were none in my outfit. This was just – this was what people told me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you remember seeing evidence of the Japanese occupation when you landed at Gertrude Cove?

**Joseph Sasser:** Not at Gertrude Cove. No, ma'am. I saw it as we advanced on inward there at the airport that they were building there. I think they had – I read that they left a plane or two, I believe, there at the old airport. But they had very crudely been working on that. They didn't have the real equipment like we had and create like a landing strip as quickly as ours could. They just didn't have the equipment there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So if you got all the way over to the airstrip you marched pretty far from Gertrude Cove across the island.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yeah, well, I was over there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah. That must've been a tough travel over land on that island.

**Joseph Sasser:** (Laughter.) You know what, I don't recall how I got over there, but I do remember that landing strip that they had.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, I've been to Kiska.....

**Joseph Sasser:** There's also a volcano on Kiska.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you see that when you were there?

**Joseph Sasser:** It didn't erupt while we were there, but I understood that there was one and also there's one on Adak.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, uh-huh, yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** Volcanoes on both of those islands there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:10:26.6] Did you work with Canadian troops when you were on Kiska?

**Joseph Sasser:** I did not. I was aware of Canadian troops being there. In fact, I encountered them on Attu before and I assumed that they were transported over to Adak as a staging area before going into Kiska, but I didn't know – I didn't encounter any of the Canadian troops on Kiska.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** But I did see them on Attu before we went over to Adak.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. And do you remember if you had good air support on Attu or Kiska? [1:11:09.8]

**Joseph Sasser:** You know, I don't know – I'm not aware of any air attacks on Kiska, though I know that there was from reading it, but nothing when we landed that I know of.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

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**Joseph Sasser:** Now, you know, I don't know if – whether they had any battleship or anything like that, that was bombing the island as well. On Attu, that day that I didn't go in, on the 11th, I was standing out on the deck of my troop ship there and that Battleship Pennsylvania was letting them go pretty fast. It would shake my britches leg, I recall that. There was quite some distance from us but you know the Navy at Kiska, other than the troop ship I was on, I don't recall any air attack, bombing before we went in but I'm sure that there was.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

**Joseph Sasser:** I understood they had really plastered Kiska, but then again I don't recall anything of that nature.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. [1:12:54.2] Do you recall the name of the troop ship that you were based on?

**Joseph Sasser:** No, ma'am, I can't. There was – I got on one, one troop ship, and it seems to me like the name of that was – I've got it somewhere here in my stuff because – I think it was called the Zeilin. How do you spell it? I don't – I can't tell you. I wound up on that ship and I think it was a hospital ship.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you say Zeilin, like with a Z?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I've got the name of that because it came out of the paper here in Mississippi about these guys down here south of where I live that were on that ship and I recognized the name. So I cut the article out, wrote a letter to the guy, and got a response from him. So I've got the name of it. One of the troop ships that was up there. It might've been the hospital ship, but it may not have been. I think the name of it was Zeilin.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I can find it sometime if you'd like to have that name. I think I can get it for you.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay. That would be great. I'll do some research myself too and see if I can find it just in case.

**Joseph Sasser:** All right. Okay.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:14:28.5] Okay, tell me what – so then they pulled you off of Kiska, then what happened? Are you still there?

**Joseph Sasser:** (Recording is cut off) .....boat or a ship or whatever they called it. Every time that the waves would hit that bottom, you know, you'd think that thing was gonna crack half in two.....

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mr. Sasser?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Somehow you cut out a little bit, so when I asked you what happened.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Is that right? I'm hearing you very plainly.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, your phone cut out after I asked you what happened when they pulled you off Kiska. Could you start over please?

**Joseph Sasser:** I could. Yes, ma'am. We went from Kiska to Attu and we got on a flat bottom ship or boat. I don't know what they call it. I do recall that as the waves would hit that bottom of that boat there it would just – the whole thing would shake. You know, I'm trying to think of the distance between Kiska and Attu. I've got it in my mind maybe 200 miles, but I'm not sure about that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** It's a long way.

**Joseph Sasser:** I'm not sure how many were on that ship that we were on. It was – it was in July or August or something like that I guess, when we went back to Kisk – back to Attu. Then I went back to my old outfit.

**Janis Kozlowski:** It sounds like that was a long memorable ride between.....

**Joseph Sasser:** (Laughter) It was, I tell you. I just thought that boat was gonna break half in two, but..... That might've been one of those Higgins boats.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** They built a lot of them. **[1:16:31.5]** By the way, while we are talking about that, my very good friend is the only survivor and daughter of Andrew Jackson Higgins, who made those boats.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Your – now tell me that again. Your oldest daughter?

**Joseph Sasser:** No. A good friend of mine is Dawn Higgins-Murphy and she is the only daughter – survivor of the family of Andrew Jackson Higgins who made the Higgins boats in New Orleans and around the country in World War II.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, yes. He's a famous guy.

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**Joseph Sasser:** She lives in Jackson, Mississippi, and I gave a program in Jackson to some veterans a few years ago and she – it was about music, the part that music played in World War II. I think the title is *Music, the Not Too Silent Weapon of World War II* and she is an accomplished pianist. Are you here – still with me?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes, I'm here with you.

**Joseph Sasser:** Okay. All right. Good. So I could see as I – I played a little music and so forth and I saw her tapping her foot. Then I went out and started talking to her, introduced myself to her and so forth. Since then we've become real good friends. She likes music, particularly piano music and I do too. So I had come across a lot of different types of music and piano playing, even the old ragtime piano, honky tonk piano. I am not so much classical minded, so I don't have that, but we got to be real good friends. I keep in touch with Dawn and Bob. In fact, my Aleutian Island group met here in Jackson a few years ago, two or three years ago. I got them to come out and I wanted Dawn to present the program, but her husband just did an excellent job of it, telling us all about Higgins and how that began. They also have a book out of Andrew Jackson Higgins that is an excellent book. I enjoyed it very much.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you remember the name of it?

**Joseph Sasser:** I think that's the name of it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** Andrew Jackson Higgins. I don't \_\_\_\_\_ (recording is cut out) studio office, not right now, I'm not at the house. I've got that book. It's a good book about his life.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I'll have to see if I can find that.

**Joseph Sasser:** He was quite a guy. He drank hard and he worked hard and he was somewhat of a genius in a sense. He knew how to get things done and to get them done on time and I always liked that too. First, if a person tells me they're going to be here at – well, for instance you – we had an appointment at 10:30 and you called at 10:30. Now, if it had been 10:45 or 10:50 and I hadn't heard from you, I would almost feel like I had been stood up.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** You know, I – and if I can't make an appointment and be there at the designated time, I will call the individual and tell them I can't make it. But you know, so many people don't do that, so you sit there and you wait and you wait and they never show up. I told somebody once – I got kinda riled up one time. This lady said she would come over at a certain time at a certain day and I just finally told her, I said, you know I spent that whole day for that appointment with you and you never showed up. You

never called. I said, don't ever do that again to me. I tried to do it not too harshly to a lady, but I tried to get my message over. I like promptness.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah. That's just not good behavior.

**Joseph Sasser:** That is not. It's really not and it's really an imposition on the person that they have to wait. So, I appreciated your being right on time.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, I always try and be. (Laughter.)

**Joseph Sasser:** Did you get – I sent you some pictures.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I got those just yesterday and I wanted to thank you for them. These are beautiful.

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, I just thought that you might know what your subjects look like (laughter).

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, I've had them sitting out here as we're talking, so I feel like I'm talking to you.

**Joseph Sasser:** All right. Okay. Well, it's been a pleasure talking to you. I don't know what we can talk about. Any other questions you'd like to ask?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Can I just ask you one – a couple other things about you finishing out the war? [1:22:24.0] Did you – what happened after you – they took you out of Alaska? You continued to serve in the war capacity, right?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, ma'am. I came back and came to Camp Funston, Kansas. That's adjacent to Fort Riley. From there that's where I went to Washington and Lee University for a month and then came back. Then we were transferred. All of us went on maneuvers down to – they weren't maneuvers. We went down to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. That's on the eastern side of the state of Oklahoma. Well, I was the mail clerk there and did a lot of – few other things. We went to Chicago on a truck driver strike and sat with truck drivers, scabs, as they moved the perishables over Chicago. We slept in Marquette Park on the south side. One of our guys stole a trolley car (laughter) while we were there and they didn't do a thing with him. Guys always looked for some kind of entertainment, so he did that. Then that was – we got back and that was in July 1945. Then we went on maneuvers and we went to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. That's out from Fort Polk, Louisiana, close to Columbia. I'm not sure what city was close by. Anyhow, I never did go to the city. I went to Baton Rouge when I could take off from there. It was about 102 or 103 out in the woods with mosquitoes, nets and so forth keeping the mosquitoes off of us. We were preparing to go back and we were going in to – we understood that our area would be in the – an India area where we would be. That would be from where we would – we would go there first I guess as a staging area and later the World War II Museum in New Orleans sent me a map of just exactly what the strategy was in attacking Japan. So I looked from that map. It was talking about the different units. From then I figured out that I would be going in from the

India area. That was very, very, very interesting to me to get that map and to see that. Of course, thankfully President Truman authorized the atomic bomb. We saved a lot of lives by that atomic bomb or it would have been a bloody bath, I mean for the Americans to have gone in Japan and fought on their ground. It would have been a house to house situation. With – you know with their beliefs and such as that it's an honor to die for their Emperor and such as that. That made them a lot more tenacious and difficult to ride out. So I was glad. I was in Baton Rouge when we heard that. No I wasn't. I was at Camp. I was thinking I had left. It came out that day at Camp Claiborne and somehow or another we escaped down to Baton Rouge to celebrate.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you were grateful to hear the.....

**Joseph Sasser:** That kinda finished me up. [1:26:44.2] I was discharged back from Camp Claiborne to Muskogee, Oklahoma, to Camp Gruber and was discharged there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Okay.

**Joseph Sasser:** I think October or November. I forgot which. 1945. I got out pretty early because of the number of months that I had spent in the Aleutian Islands, the 21 months. Gave me a lot of points. So, I got out pretty early. Some of the guys that I had been associated with there, they didn't get out until '46.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So it all depended on points.

**Joseph Sasser:** It was the points you had, that's right. They gave you stripes for every six months that you were overseas. In a sense I guess I wasn't overseas because I was still on American territory. I guess they considered it being that. After all, you know, that territory there that we were taking back was maybe the only land that we got back from the Japanese. I'm not sure of that. There's something connected with Attu and it being recaptured and the Japanese had taken part of America.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm. Yep.

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, I always said about the Aleutian Islands since I'd been up there, that Seward did one good thing in purchasing Alaska and Aleutian Islands for \$7,200,000, something like that. Some of the other things he did while he was in office were very detrimental to the South. I'll put it that way generally. He wasn't very kind to us. I'll say that. [1:29:01.9] You know, I'm old enough that I remember my grandmother telling me about the Yankees coming across Mississippi, from Meridian going across – through Meridian to Jackson and to Vicksburg, and that they had to bury..... She was 12 or 13 years old at that time. She lived to be 89 years old, so I got to talk to her before she passed away.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I bet she had some interesting stories.

**Joseph Sasser:** Pardon?



**Janis Kozlowski:** She must've had some interesting stories.

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, it was. It was, yes. The fact that she remembered those as a little girl, you know, 12 or 13 years old. So, they had to bury the food and bury the valuable in the ground. The Yankees made a trip across the state of Mississippi and they – it followed a highway, a major highway that goes across the state of Mississippi. It was Highway 80, US 80. So on either side of that is what the Yankees – that was their route across Mississippi. So it went through the place where my grandmother lived. So, that's kind of the story of my life I guess. (Laughter.) You've heard most of it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, thank you so much. I appreciate your time today. I hope I didn't keep you too long.

**Joseph Sasser:** Not at all. I set aside today. I got up real early this morning. I got up at 5 o'clock our time here and I did a business transaction. [1:31:02.2] A friend of mine from Jackson just spent the night with me last night and he and I have some business to attend to. My wife is deceased, so I've got the whole house by myself. He came over and spent the night and we did our business. So, he had to get back. He was having a wedding at his house this week for a couple from North Carolina, then he was going to Mayo Clinic, and then he was going to the Catskills in New York. I think he'll be back – oh, he's going up to Michigan too.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh boy.

**Joseph Sasser:** He just got back from Paris, well not Paris. He flew to Paris and then drove on down to Nice, pretty close to Nice. He is one of my rich friends.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter.) Sounds like he really gets around.

**Joseph Sasser:** He has his own private plane too, by the way. He's a retired Navy Reserve. He was a pilot. He got out as an Admiral, so he did pretty good. He's a good pilot. I know that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** He pilots his own aircraft?

**Joseph Sasser:** Yes, he does. Still does.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh.

**Joseph Sasser:** Yeah, he's – he's 70 some odd years old. He's still doing that. Still gets his physicals. He gets – the Navy provides him a physical I believe every year.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Wow, that's great.

**Joseph Sasser:** And then he gets another opinion on his own at Mayo Clinic in Minneapolis.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Mm-hmm.

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**Joseph Sasser:** So, he travels a good bit. They're on the road..... I wish you could see their house. Oh boy.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Beautiful, huh?

**Joseph Sasser:** I tell you, he's got about 15 or 20 acres, a lake and a house that I think the ceilings are so high I look for a cloud – see if there's a cloud up there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** (Laughter.)

**Joseph Sasser:** Scared it might rain (laughter) the ceilings are so high. I spent the night with him not too long ago, but we enjoy each other. We've been members of a poker party for about – he since 1958 and I since 1953. There are only two of us that remain living from the original poker group that started in 1953.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Boy, that's a long.....

**Joseph Sasser:** It's a friendly one. You know, we have limits and you can't lose over \$5 or \$10 in all, if you lost every hand. And too, my preacher comes – my preacher lives next door to this little place where we play. He comes over and has a beer with us and talks with us and then he leaves and so forth, but you know.....

**Janis Kozlowski:** Sounds.....

**Joseph Sasser:** .....preacher wants to come over that's fine. We don't care.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Sounds like a nice group.

**Joseph Sasser:** It is. It is. Good group and it's good – it's something that you can look forward to, kind of offbeat from your normal paths that you – everyday things that you do. We get to meet each other, kinda kid each other about without any fist fights and we don't get ugly with each other. It's strictly recreational. That's it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** It's good to have friends like that.

**Joseph Sasser:** Good to have them, I'll tell you.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah. [1:35:13.5] Well, Mr. Sasser, I'll let you go. I bet you've got a big day planned. You seem like a pretty active fellow, so.....

**Joseph Sasser:** Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do this afternoon. I'm going to – I'm trying to clean up this studio and office so that my nephews will not think too unkindly of me when they come up. One is from South Carolina and one from Florida are coming in next Wednesday and will spend the rest of the week with me, and my daughter from Houston, Texas, is coming and she'll be staying with me. I have two daughters in

Jackson, only 53 miles from here. So, we all are planning to get together and enjoy ourselves.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Kind of a little family reunion.

**Joseph Sasser:** A little family reunion, that's right.

**Janis Kozlowski:** That sounds nice.

**Joseph Sasser:** One of my nephews just sold his company. He asked me if I'd seen it in the Wall Street Journal. I said, no, I don't even take the Wall Street Journal anymore. I said, I may go by the bank up there and see if I can read theirs, but I never did get by there. But he sold his business for \$200 million, so it went pretty good I thought.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, he sounds very successful.

**Joseph Sasser:** I believe he can live comfortably and he's getting ready to retire. I told him, I said, thank goodness. I said, I think you are fixed up well enough that you can – you will be able to enjoy your retirement.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Absolutely.

**Joseph Sasser:** My other oldest nephew, he's already been retired for quite some time. He owned a part of the Orlando Magic I think they call them. NFL basketball – no NBA. National Basketball Association, yeah. I think he owned the Magic. He was in on the initial buy of that. He sold out though a number of years ago.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, that was a good buy.

**Joseph Sasser:** It was a good purchase, I'll tell you.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** It sure was. Then I lost my sister about two years ago. She passed away. I am the only one left. I depend on my friends and they've been very kind to me, and my daughters are very loving girls and they love their daddy. When they call on me I am always here if they need me. One of them is moving, so she asked me to come down, so I went the day before yesterday. I drove down to Jackson to see where she was moving and what kind of house. She was selling her house. She just bought a swap, but she got into really a little bit better neighborhood. Jackson, Mississippi has some bad areas. They have a lot of killings, a lot of murders. But you know, it's mostly. Sadly I say it, it is mostly black on black.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, that's a shame.

**Joseph Sasser:** It is. It's a life, you know. I don't care what color it is. You know, it's a life of a soul and it's just sad that it is that way, but a lot of these cities are that way. New Orleans, you need to watch out where you go down there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** You all may not have that problem up there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, we do. We do have it.

**Joseph Sasser:** Do you?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, probably not as bad as some of the bigger cities, but we do have those problems too. Yeah.

**Joseph Sasser:** [1:39:06.4] Well, listen, if I can be of any further help to you or if you have any further questions or if something comes up just give me a call. I would be glad to talk with you again.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. It's been a real pleasure talking with you today.

**Joseph Sasser:** My pleasure too. I enjoyed it very much. Maybe we will just keep in touch with each other.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes, let's do that.

**Joseph Sasser:** All righty. That sounds good to me. You have a good day, you hear?

**Janis Kozlowski:** You too. You take care.

**Joseph Sasser:** Thank you, ma'am.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Bye-bye.

**Joseph Sasser:** Bye.

**End of interview at 1:39:44.9**