

TRANSCRIPT – CARL ROBERTS

Interviewee: CARL ROBERTS

Interviewer: TIFFANY PAESCHKE

Interview Date: April 5, 2012

Location: Charleston, South Carolina

Length: 42 minutes

TIFFANY PAESCHKE: This is Tiffany Paeschke. P-A-E-S-C-H-K-E, interviewing Carl Roberts--Mr. Carl Roberts. And where were you born?

CARL ROBERTS: Spartanburg, South Carolina.

TP: What year?

CR: I ain't going to tell you that--1929.

TP: Okay, very good. Did you grow up there? Did you spend most of your life there?

CR: Yeah, what time I wasn't in the Navy.

TP: Right. And then so you--what did you do when you were there, just go to school?

CR: Yeah.

TP: What was your--what did your daddy do? Where did your daddy work?

CR: He worked in the God damn cotton mill. That's all there was there.

TP: Really? Did your mom work? Did she stay home and take care--

CR: She worked in it, too, because they had it during World War II, and everybody worked, except me. I was too young.

TP: Did you have siblings--brothers and sisters?

CR: Eight.

TP: Eight, wow. Older or younger?

CR: There they are right there.

TP: Wow, that's fantastic. So, older and younger--mostly boys.

CR: Only one was younger. One girl.

TP: Which one was the younger one?

CR: That one right there.

TP: Is he still alive?

CR: Yeah.

KAY CERCOPLY: Uncle Ralph's dead. Uncle Joe's the only one still alive, and you.

CR: Oh, yeah?

TP: And Joe is older?

KC: Uncle Joe's a year younger than you, isn't he?

CR: He's two years younger than me.

TP: Okay.

KC: This is Uncle Joe, and that's Daddy, and that was Uncle Ralph, and that was my daddy's daddy. That's Uncle George and Uncle Bill, and Uncle Gene.

CR: I forgot what George did. I want to say somebody was--one of his kids or somebody was cutting up when they was taking this picture, and he was mad as hell.

KC: His kids were not acting right? When was that taken, do you remember?

CR: I don't remember.

TP: Okay. So, then you were seventeen when you enlisted in the--

CR: The day I was seventeen years old was the day I raised my right hand.

TP: And you went into Spartanburg?

CR: I went in the Navy.

TP: You went in the Navy. And what did you--where did they take you from there? Where'd you go?

CR: Oh, I went to basic training first

TP: Where was that?

CR: In Maryland.

TP: For how many years?

CR: About six weeks.

TP: Oh, that was quick.

CR: Then I graduated from that and started fighting. I was fighting before I got there. The God damn war was on.

TP: Where did you go from--after basic training?

CR: To the brig.

TP: Before the brig. Was that World War II?

CR: Yeah.

TP: Where were you then?

CR: I was on the carrier, the USS Leyte.

TP: Okay. That's when you were on the Leyte, okay. What did you do on that?

CR: On the ship?

TP: Yeah.

CR: Very damn little.

TP: But you lived on it, right?

CR: Yeah, I stayed hid.

TP: Did you have a job on it?

CR: Yeah, I was a seaman, Seaman First Class.

KC: What's a seaman do?

CR: Very damn little. Well, we swabbed the decks, chipped paint, we painted one day and chipped it off the next.

TP: So you had more work?

CR: No. Well, we had to do it. That was our job.

TP: So, taking care of the carrier.

CR: Yeah, babysitting it.

TP: Right. And how long did you do that?

CR: Oh, about six months. We finally got the hell out of there.

TP: Where were you? What ocean?

CR: Pacific.

TP: And then what happened after you got out of there, after six months?

CR: Oh, I was on based on shore duty, but I was a king then.

TP: You were on what duty?

CR: Shore duty, on the shore--stationed on the land. I wasn't on the ship anymore.

TP: Still World War II? So, were you fighting?

CR: On the ship? No

TP: No, on land.

CR: I was when I was in Korea, I was, yeah.

TP: Just in Korea, but not during World War II?

CR: Well, the Korean War wasn't over

TP: Okay. So, you--okay, so then what happened? You left World War II. Did you have any civilian time between the wars?

CR: No.

TP: You went straight from World War II to the Korean War?

CR: Mm-hmm.

TP: And you were still in the Navy.

CR: I was in the Navy.

TP: So, you were back on a carrier for the Korean War?

CR: Mm-hmm, for a while.

TP: And then tell me that story again about why you went from--because you quit the Navy to join the Army. Tell me that story.

CR: Like I said, this friend that I was a friend of--me and him was buddies. He wanted me to go in the service with him. I said, "Okay." Well, shit, I'd already been in service, see? So, we went down and signed the papers, and took me in the Army. Well, that's what this guy told us. He said, "I'll tell you what the deal is." He said, "Both of you can go, but one of you will have to go in a different branch of service. One of you will have to go in the Army." I said, "I'll go in the damn Army, I don't care. I ain't scared f them son-of-a-bitches." That was a damn lie, but I went--I wanted--volunteered to go in the Army. I said, "From now on, I ain't going nowhere damn where. I'm going to be Mama's baby. I'm going to stay home shitting and crying."

TP: So, then what happened, you joined the army and you got off the carrier, and

then what happened?

CR: Then I went to Korea. And I stayed in Korea for almost four years.

TP: And that's when you saw combat, right?

CR: Mm-hmm.

TP: Right.

CR: That was a bloody mess, man, God damn. I wouldn't take nothing for that experience though. Traveling is the best education in the world for you because you meet different people every day, and you--some of them you get accustomed to and you like them, and some you can't stand. There was a few of them I run across, too, that I couldn't stand and I whooped the shit out of them.

TP: Well, clearly, you were meant to be a soldier. And so how long were you in combat in the Korean War?

CR: Four years.

TP: On land?

CR: Fighting?

TP: Mm-hmm.

CR: Fighting in the bars, fighting on the streets, every damn where.

TP: Where in Korea?

CR: Seoul, the capital. I never will forget one night--well, see, I had a younger brother that was handicapped. And everywhere I went when I was a kid, I had to take him with me because I had to babysit him. I'm walking down the street one day in Norfolk, Virginia, and--see, back when I first went in the military, they was segregated. In other words, you had blacks on some ships, you had whites on ships, but you didn't have--they

wasn't mixed. But they changed that shit right after I went in. And God damn, I got drunk one day when I was in Norfolk, Virginia, walking down the street, a big old fat nigger woman, and it was raining like a son of a bitch. I said, "Watch this." I just walked over and I knocked her flat on her ass right on the street. But that was my next court martial.

TP: What was your first?

CR: Hell, I can't remember what my first one was.

TP: How many did you have?

CR: Too damn many. I kept them busy. See, they had what they call a Captain's Mass, and they hold that every Friday morning. Well, and I was there every damn Friday morning for about six months, going up before him, see. But luckily, he asked me one day, when I went in there and he said, "Roberts, what the hell is it with you?" He says, "Every damn Friday, you're the only one in here that's been here before." I said, "Well, I like you, Captain." But that was a bunch of bullshit, too. I just couldn't stand that bastard.

TP: How long was he your Captain, the whole time?

CR: Oh, no. I got away from that son of a bitch right quick. They transferred me off of that damn carrier to a--shit, I can't remember where I went after that. But I enjoyed it. I wouldn't take nothing for that training.

TP: So, then you left in 1952, is that what we decided? And what did you do then? What was your life after the military like? What was your life after combat like? Where'd you go?

CR: To Korea, that's where I went.

TP: No, I mean when you were done.

CR: Oh. I got out and got a damn job somewhere. I don't remember where.

KC: Wasn't it in the metal plant? Wasn't it the Coca-Cola plant, or one of the plants--sheet metal? Sheet metal, you did metal--made those metal boxes at the Coca-Cola plant.

CR: I don't remember now.

TP: Was it back in Spartanburg?

CR: Yeah.

TP: And your family was still there.

CR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, my mother and all of them was still alive then.

TP: And you stayed there until recently?

CR: Oh, hell, no, not until recently.

KC: We moved to Charleston when I was three.

TP: You moved to Charleston when she was three.

KC: So, that was 1961, or 1960, was when we moved to Charleston.

TP: Did you get married?

CR: Married? No, I didn't get married till I got away from that damn shit.

TP: How old were you when you got married?

CR: Honey, you're asking me stuff now that I done forgot all about.

TP: Maybe your daughter can help.

KC: He was married in--Ann was born in fifty-five. Ann was born in fifty-four, so you were married in fifty-three.

CR: That sounds like a winner.

KC: Yeah, because she was born a year and two days after their anniversary, my sister.

TP: And is your mom deceased?

KC: Yes, my mom is deceased.

TP: When did she die?

KC: My mom died December 31st, eight years this year.

TP: I'm sorry.

KC: Died in her sleep. We've got one brother and one sister, and I'm the baby.

Right Pops?

CR: Mm-hmm.

KC: We're a team, right? We're a team, me and you.

CR: That's right. If you cross us, you get your ass kicked.

TP: I believe that. What did you do when you moved to Charleston? Did you work?

CR: Yeah, I was an automatic transmission mechanic.

TP: You were what?

CR: Automatic transmission mechanic.

TP: Where did you work?

CR: On the base.

TP: Oh.

CR: I was in the service then, too, see.

KC: He had his own business. Didn't you work for the Coca-Cola plant in Spartanburg?

CR: No.

KC: What was that place you worked in Spartanburg? You worked at the mill and

you worked somewhere else there.

CR: Beverage Air.

KC: Beverage Air, that's what I was looking for, yeah. That's where you made those metal boxes. I still have those. He's got kind of little trinkets.

TP: Were you a mechanic in the military? I mean when you were--was that--

CR: I was a God damn troublemaker.

KC: Besides when you were in trouble. You worked in the carpool, didn't you?

You worked as a mechanic?

CR: Yeah, the motor pool, yeah.

TP: So, that's how you learned to do all of that?

CR: That's how I learned to drive all them vehicles.

TP: Where were you when you worked in the motor pool?

CR: Where was I? In Korea.

TP: Oh, on the ground?

CR: Mm-hmm.

KC: Did you travel anywhere else besides Korea during the war?

CR: Not that I remember, no.

KC: How much did you make?

CR: It wasn't very damn much. That paper there will tell you how much I made.

KC: I think it was a hundred and something dollars a month, and when you get in trouble, then they made you pay thirty-five dollars out of it.

CR: Yeah.

TP: That's a lot.

KC: And six months hard labor, yeah.

CR: And I stayed in God damn trouble.

TP: You paid a lot of fines.

CR: But I enjoyed every damn minute of it.

TP: Were you still--did you stay out of trouble once you got out of the--once you got back into--

CR: The outfit?

TP: Home?

CR: Shit, no. I got in more trouble then.

TP: Well, I bet you're sorry you're in a wheelchair now, that kind of puts your-- you can only have your arms to fight with now, right? And your mouth?

KC: This is a picture of them when they were--him and his brothers when they were little.

TP: You all were dressed very nicely.

CR: I can't see it. I got to see what you're looking at.

TP: Don't they look nice?

CR: Oh, God damn, that's when I was a baby. That's me right there.

TP: Let me see. I can't see the photo. A lot of brothers.

CR: Seven boys and one girl in that family.

TP: That poor girl.

KC: She was the oldest.

CR: She was the oldest, and she made us walk the damn line, too.

TP: I bet she did. I bet her mama--I bet your mama made her help. That's cute.

CR: That's me.

TP: Mm-hmm, with your daughter. And that was in Spartanburg? What year would that have been?

KC: 1954.

TP: 1954.

CR: Yeah, hell, I don't know.

KC: Well, I'll be fifty-five, and she's three years older than me, so she's fifty-eight, so count back.

TP: She looks happy. That little baby looks happy, doesn't she?

CR: Mm-hmm.

TP: These photos are great.

KC: There's a matchbook (unintelligible 00:20:25) in the scrapbook.

CR: Hell, I can't see that.

TP: Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines? A place in Washington, D.C.?

KC: That's just tape, Dad, it's okay. One of the bars you must have went to?

TP: Did you drink some beers there?

CR: Oh, yeah, I drank plenty of beers.

TP: Well, so what else would you like us to--what do you want to talk about? You want to talk about anything in particular?

CR: Women.

TP: Women, oh, my. I didn't expect that.

KC: Do you know any of these people in these pictures?

CR: Do I know who they are? Some of them, I do, yeah.

TP: Are some of these--do you still have contact with any of these guys?

CR: No. You mean the ones I was in the service with?

TP: Yeah.

CR: No.

KC: There's one in here, he has the address. I was going to try to look up the man, the one he was court-martialed with, the one he got in trouble with all the time. This is dated 1952. Heath--Glen Heath, do you remember him?

CR: Heath? Yeah.

TP: Is that the one you joined the--went into the Army with--left the Navy and went into the Army with?

CR: Yeah, he was the son of a bitch that got me in all that trouble.

TP: He was your buddy.

KC: That's the one that he's got his address.

TP: He lived in Florida. He was from Florida.

CR: Yeah.

TP: I wonder if he's still alive.

KC: I don't know. I was gonna try to look him up. What pictures he has are in your hand, but he has a signature, a name. He's in the papers, the court-martial papers and stuff, all the information about him and what bar they were going to. Walking down the street and getting out of the chicken coop. Do you remember getting in the chicken coop? Do you remember them putting you in the chicken coop?

CR: Hell, yeah.

KC: How'd you get out?

CR: I don't remember.

KC: You were little then. You squeezed out through there, didn't you?

CR: I was a midget. That's the best training in the world.

KC: What bridge is that?

CR: That's the damn Seoul--that's the bridge in Korea, across the Seoul River. I don't know why in the hell I didn't put dates on the back of them damn things.

KC: Because you weren't going to forget them.

CR: That ain't me on there. That's a damn battleship, and I wasn't ever on a battle ship. I was on an aircraft carrier.

TP: There's writing on the back of that picture. It says it's you.

CR: What was that--that damn carrier I was on, them's five-inch guns there, see. The diameter of the bullet that they shot, that come out of that thing, was five inches in diameter. That's how big around they were. And I was a hot shell man on that son of a bitch.

TP: You were what?

CR: Hot shell man--catching the shell. See, when you're in them turrets like that, you got the--when them shells come out, you got to knock them down on the deck, and then pick them up and toss them overboard. And I never will forget one night we was down there in Cuba. They fired that damn gun, and it was night.

KC: In Cuba?

CR: Yeah. We was just taking in fire then. And we blasted that thing. Me, like a dumb ass, standing there looking at the end of the barrel. And that flare, when it come out of there, I couldn't see a damn thing. And that first shell I tried to catch, I couldn't catch

it. It rolled up my arm and it just peeled all the damn meat off of my arm. That thing was hot. God damn, it was hot. See, we wore asbestos gloves up to here. And we just had our t-shirts on, and that's what we wore.

KC: What were you doing in Cuba?

CR: Getting away from work--trying to, anyway.

TP: Well, okay, so you know, I'm doing this project so you--to have your voice on recording, and to have a transcript done, right. All of this will be written out for your family to keep forever. So, is there anything else you want to add, knowing that your great-grandchildren will be listening to this one day?

KC: You know how many great-grandbabies you got?

CR: Great? Three.

KC: Two. Those over there, and your little buddy.

CR: Oh, yeah, okay.

KC: And Celeste, your granddaughter--your great-granddaughter.

CR: That's it.

KC: You've got two granddaughters, Jennifer and Nicole. And you've got how many children?

CR: Me?

KC: How many kids do you have, yeah.

CR: Shit, I don't know. Three, I think.

KC: Yeah, I was gonna say, you better have only three.

TP: As far as you know. Would you--if your--do you have any--are there any boy grandbabies?

KC: One great-grandson.

TP: If he wanted to join the military, would you say okay?

CR: Yeah. If he's still alive when he gets old enough.

TP: True.

KC: He's bad like you, ain't he?

CR: Yes, he is.

KC: He's four.

TP: Do you think the military treated Korean vets--or the government, do you think the government treated Korean vets well? Were you all well received when you came home?

CR: As far as I know, we were, yeah.

KC: Did you have a lot of eye contact with the Koreans over there when you were fighting?

CR: Only when I was in the bar room because we fought every damn time we went on the beach. Every time we went on pass, we got in a damn fight with somebody.

TP: But you weren't on the ground, like out of the bars fighting.

KC: You weren't shooting them on the ground. Were you shooting the Koreans on the ground? Shooting them.

CR: Oh, hell, yeah. I don't know whether I killed any of them or not, but I'm sure I probably killed two or three anyway.

TP: And so, you were being shot at?

CR: Shit, yes, I was being shot at.

KC: Were you scared?

CR: No, I was too damn dumb to be scared. If I'd been scared, I wouldn't have ever went over there. I would have stayed--I would have went over the damn hill, stayed in the States.

KC: What did you all sleep in?

CR: Sleeping bags.

KC: Did you have tents?

CR: Mm-hmm. And we had to pitch that tent at night and take it down in the morning.

TP: And carry it? Did you carry it?

CR: Yeah, we carried it in a pack on our back. And then when we got to where we were going, we had to pitch that tent, put the tent up, had pegs, we had to drive in that God damn sandy soil over there. It was hell to get them pegs to stay in the ground. It was so loose, that sand. We were driving it in sand, see.

KC: How many of you slept in a tent?

CR: They had about six pegs with each one of them.

KC: How many people slept in one tent?

CR: Two.

KC: The same two slept together all the time?

CR: Well, that's when you was buddies, see.

KC: Who was your buddy?

CR: Shit, I can't remember his name.

TP: It wasn't Heath, huh? The one you got in trouble with?

CR: He was for a while, yeah.

KC: Was it cold?

CR: Oh, cold. God damn, you can't believe how cold it is over there. Ain't no place in the world colder than that damn place.

KC: Snow?

CR: Snowed every day, rained every day.

TP: Have you been back?

CR: No. I don't want to go back. I ain't missed a damn thing over there.

TP: Do you know why you were fighting that war?

CR: That was a damn political war, politics.

TP: Like what specifically?

CR: What do you mean, what specifically?

TP: What politics were involved?

CR: Damn people that had the money, their sons never did go to war, they stayed home, while the rest of us were over there fighting our ass off for them, and the rest of them sitting home eating peanuts and popcorn and Crackerjacks and all that stuff. And never did go into combat. Some of them did, but most of them didn't.

KC: What was the war about? Why was there a Korean War?

CR: A Korean War? Well, you know how the United States did, they want to get their nose in every God damn thing.

TP: The history books say it's because they were scared of the spread of Communism, right?

CR: They used that as an excuse, yeah. It never did take hold though.

KC: Did you have to rescue any people over there?

CR: Mm-mmm.

TP: We saw that--we read that you won a medal in World War II.

CR: They give that to everybody.

TP: Oh.

CR: The Good Conduct Medal?

TP: No, Good Conduct was Korean.

KC: Victory Medal.

TP: Victory Medal was World War II. Do you know what that's about?

CR: No.

KC: And you got an Honorable Service label button.

CR: That's a ruptured duck, what's called a ruptured duck.

KC: What's a ruptured duck?

CR: Well, a button they put in your collar, was just like a--well, it was like another button, but it wasn't.

KC: What was the Victory Medal for?

CR: Everybody got one of them.

TP: Kind of like the Good Conduct Medal in the Korean War?

CR: Mm-hmm.

TP: It's kind of the--

KC: What is this?

CR: Certificate of Graduation.

KC: Did you buy this photo album from the Navy, or did somebody--did they give it to you?

CR: I can't remember.

KC: How about this wallet?

CR: That was my Korean wallet.

KC: It's got his I.D. (unintelligible 00:35:03) here.

TP: That's neat. Remember what the certificate was? Remember what you graduated from?

CR: I don't know what it is. It says this is to certify that Carl C. Roberts has successfully completed the Army--I can't read what that is.

TP: Let me see. Clerical Procedure and Typing Course.

CR: Oh, that's when I graduated from Clerk Typist School. Yeah.

TP: But did you use that skill? Did you use those skills? Did you use your typing skills?

CR: Oh, yeah. Hell, yeah. If I wanted a damn ID card, I'd just sit down at the typewriter and type me one out.

TP: Okay, Mr. Roberts.

CR: I put all that stuff to use.

TP: That's right. I'm glad to hear that. It sounds like you have --

CR: I used it and abused it.

TP: Yeah, okay. Well, is there anything you want to add?

CR: I'm just glad it's over.

TP: Glad it's over? Glad to be in this place?

CR: No.

TP: No? It seems like they treat you very nicely.

CR: I'd rather be somewhere else.

KC: Do you remember these papers?

TP: Why Pittsburgh?

KC: 1945.

CR: This is when I was waiting on--waiting for the Japs to sign the damn surrender papers.

KC: Were you in Philadelphia? Pittsburgh--Pittsburgh paper, were you over there then?

CR: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

TP: This one's August fifteenth, what's that one?

KC: August tenth. Four cents, the paper costs four cents. May 8, VE Day. You remember these papers?

CR: Oh, yeah.

KC: This seems kind of nice. It's got a map of the Germans in Italy, and Truman.

TP: Yeah. I read where they were going to close the downtown stores in downtown Pittsburgh to observe the ending of the war. I don't think we do that these days.

KC: I don't know why he kept one of these.

TP: I don't know, but that's neat that he did.

KC: Pretty good shape to be as old as they are.

TP: Okay. So, I'm going to conclude. Is that good? Everybody good? I'm going to conclude, is that okay? Are you finished?

CR: Yeah.

TP: You ready to go play cards?

CR: No, I ain't going to go play no cards.

TP: Kay, what is your last name?

KC: Cercoply. C-E-R-C-O-P-L-Y.

TP: C-E-R-C-O-P-L-Y. Okay. Kay?

KC: Yes.

TP: So, this concludes my interview with Carl Roberts and his daughter, Kay.

And I thank you very much.

CR: You're welcome.

KC: And my father-in-law was in the Normandy -- whatever you call that.

End of recording.

Verified: KC, 4/26/12; TP, 4/26/12