

Recorded Interview

New Orleans, LA 2011

William John Krul, (KIA) Company A, 409th Infantry, 103d

Recorded Interview with William James Krul, *Son*,

My father, a World War II veteran, was William John Krul. He was born on March 21, 1918 in Hamtramck, Wayne County Michigan and living in Hamtramck at his parent's home when WWII broke out. He was 24 years old and probably working at some local factory when he was drafted in December 1942. My mother and father had been married just a little over a year when the war started. Since he was married his parents had real concerns because they said, "There is a war on. You are getting married. What if you have a child? And we get involved in the war? This conversation occurred around May, 1941. His brother, Steve, was also in the war.

My father was inducted at Fort Custer in Michigan. From there he went to Shreveport, LA and Camp Claiborne, and from there to Camp Howze in Texas. From there they went overseas.

I do have quite a few of his letters, warrants and other documents that my mother gave me. I just recently found out that

one of his really good friends was in the same regiment, but a different company.

He was assigned to the 409th infantry regiment right from the beginning. Once they left Camp Howze they took a train to New York and Camp Shanks. They went overseas in 1944.

The only letter I have is an old birthday card that he sent to me. I do have other items like a warrant where he made notes like, "Honey I love you," on it.

My grandparents received some information that when he was killed he received head wounds. Apparently, he said, "Oh, my God, I'm hit," and that was all. That is the only information I have and that is just hearsay.

His brother, Steve, who was older than my father, entered the service after my father. He was in motor transportation or motor repair in Europe (France, Belgium and a number of other areas). I think he was a tech 5, similar to a corporal. He returned in 1946. We had lots of interaction after the war and we were very, very close. I was 2 ½ when my father was killed-in-action on December 19, 1944.

Many others in the 409th, his company, and his platoon also gave their lives. I remember my father's funeral. It was the first real remembrance of my father. I don't remember much prior to that. In 1949 his body was repatriated back to the United States,

and by then I was 7 years old; so I do remember the funeral. His funeral was in June of 1949. I remember a very, very long procession going from the church to the cemetery. In fact, they gave a 21 gun salute at the cemetery. I didn't like loud noises so I put my fingers in my ears. I remember his body being laid out in my grandparents' home in Hamtramck, Michigan. Quite often, depending on your ethnic background, -we were Polish-, the body was in the casket in the parlor. The casket was closed of course. He had been deceased for five years. I remember my mother going onto the back porch and crying terribly. She had on a black dress. I remember asking her, "Mommy, why are you crying?" By that time she was already remarried and she a child from her new marriage to my step father, who was also an Army veteran. That's all I can recollect.

For awhile I wondered about my dad and his life, what he did. My grandparents used to tell me a little bit here and there. They said, "Yes, he used to bring money home when he worked and put the money under the plate to help the family along." Of course this was prior to the war.

I didn't get too involved researching my father's life until later. I was already married, I had children and I became interested in genealogy. By then my mother had given me quite a bit of the original documents that she received from the Military, such as:

- Your husband “is missing in action.”
- Your husband was “killed in action” with the actual letter from the chaplain identifying how my father was killed.
- The circumstances surrounding his death.
- Where he was killed.

The letter from the chaplain indicated that my father was the 3rd platoon commander in Co. A.; he was a staff sergeant. Normally, a commander of a platoon was a Lieutenant, but in times of war, “if you are it, you are it!”

They were near Bollenborn, Germany at the Siegfried Line. The assignment was to secure a pillbox or a bunker at the top of this hill. There was a hidden pillbox. My father was leading his troops up the hill to secure the bunker. He was shot, killed and was listed MIA. Six months later he was listed as KIA.

I was doing more research in 2004-05 on my father’s life. After reading all the documents and books about the 409th, I thought –“You know what? He was really “meritorious.” He didn’t sit back, but said follow me.

I sent the chaplain’s letter to the Army Records Office in St. Louis. They sent back and said they didn’t have a lot of information because the records burned in 1978. So I took all the information my mother gave me, made copies of it and I sent it to

the Army Records Office. In the summer of 2005, I received a letter from the record's office that indicated that, based on some secondary information they had, and the letter I supplied, my father was going to be awarded a *Bronze Star with Valor*. That was presented to the family by the military in 2005. It was presented during a County Board of Commissioners meeting. It was written up in the newspapers. We were quite proud of that.

I started doing more research and I discovered a few more things. I decided to find out where my father's body rested from the time he was buried in December of 1944 until his body was repatriated in 1949.

In the records I found another letter that was written to my mother based on a letter she wrote asking where her husband's remains were. The answer from the military was, "We have no record of his interment." That was in 1946. They had no idea where my father was buried. So I began pursuing it more.

Thanks to a member of the 103d, and specifically Zack Sigler, he said to write a letter to the Individual Deceased Personnel file. I had never heard of this file. So we sent this letter and a couple of months later I got this packet of 70 pages which I found unusual. I opened it and started to digest the information.

In 1947, there was a group of workers in the area where my father was killed that were going through and checking for old left-

over mines. They noticed a bunch of trees that were felled. They checked the area – no mines. But after closer inspection they saw a uniform. Then, they saw a couple of uniforms. They moved the trees away and found two bodies that had not been buried; one of the deceased men was my father. The other soldier was Pvt. 1st class Ore Emerick from Ohio. The bodies were properly put into a box and taken back to the nearest village. The military was notified and identified my father, not only by his name and serial number in his helmet (bullet ridden helmet by the way), but also by his clothes and dental records. Both men were identified and I have all those records.

My father's body was then taken to Neuville, Belgium which is the location of the Ardennes American Battle Memorial. The body was buried there and my mother was notified, as were his parents (my grandparents).

They all wished the body to be repatriated. So after 2 ½ years of lying unburied, and then being buried, the body was again exhumed and sent to Hamtramck, Michigan. It put a little closure on it. For now I know where my father was buried, and about the fact that his body was not found. How was it that his body was not found?

At this time the 103d was pulled back across the Siegfried Line and they had to go north to shore up the south flank of the

Battle of the Bulge. The Bulge and Vosges areas were a combined campaign called the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign. There was not time to get the bodies because of the pull back. They thought they would come back later to get their killed. When they went back after a few months his body was missed.

One of the other letters that was in the packet was a description of the contents found on my father. One thing found was a pocket watch. The watch was gun-gray in color and the crystal was broken. One of the hands was damaged. It didn't work. It had lain there with him for years. I wondered, "Where's that watch?" My grandfather, he passed away many years ago, gave me his old safe that he used to use when he was making moonshine back in the 20's. I opened the safe remembering that there was an old watch in there. I pulled the watch out and the watch matched the description of the watch found on my father. I did not know it was the same watch until I got this information. That was last year—2010. My grandfather had the watch because it was sent back to my mother (who was living with my grandparents at the time) and the watch was in that safe. It was sitting there in that safe since the 1940's. A friend of mine told me that he knew someone who could restore it. About a month ago, I got the watch back fully restored and it works. What a keepsake for my kids and my grandchildren.

A prayer book came back also. There were some letters, but I never did find them. His rosary came back. I gave that to my eldest son.

His Cactus Patch was given to my mother. He was also awarded posthumously, the Purple Heart. I sent for the medals he never received: the European Theater, Victory medal, Good Conduct Medal, and the other WWII medals.

I know exactly what hill my father was on when he was killed. A friend of mine who was in Vietnam went to the military Records Office in Suitland, Maryland and was able to get some records for me, including the morning reports and the maps of the area. I knew what hill and what time of the day, because Company A was attacking this one hill about 12:45 pm encountering heavy artillery. There were pillboxes on the hill. It all fits with what I have learned. It is still an open area: farmland and small villages.

My father was born in a house in Hamtramck, Michigan. He was delivered by a mid-wife. My mother was born in Perth Amboy, NJ. From all the records I have he was promoted very fast. He was older than most of the men. He went to Hamtramck High School and was on the football team. I have pictures of my mother and father on their honeymoon. He was about 5'10".

I believe that a person is never gone so long as they live in your memory.

He was a member of the Knights of Columbus. Everyone seemed to like him. They honored him when his body came back. They even named a class of men after him.

My mother told me that, “God was good to me; He gave me, two great men.” “But the love is different. The first one is your big puppy love, your really true love. The second one is also love, but a different kind.”

My stepdad was a veteran, too. He was a corporal assigned to training in Oregon. He was about to be sent overseas when he got sick. He went into the hospital, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and almost died. Not much was known about the disease in 1944. He was discharged for medical reasons. But, I do have his military picture and all of his records. They were very valuable to all of us.

People often ask me if I was the first person in our family to go into law enforcement. I say, ‘yes and no.’ Then I show a picture of my dad on Safety Patrol at St. Florian Grade school. I also found out that at Camp Howze he was assigned to prisoner transport. That is similar to law enforcement, picking up AWOL soldiers and bringing them back.

He was inducted in December of 1942, and he was already a Staff Sergeant by the time he went oversea in October of 1944.

I have many pictures that tell many things. All the families, both my maternal and paternal, know each other very well. They were all very close to each other. They all said such good things about my dad. He was fun loving, yet caring too. No one ever had anything bad to say about him.