

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Gulf War

Personal Experience

O H 1409

CHARLES R KOLLAR

Interviewed

by

Angela Cellio

on

November 21, 1991

Charles Kollar

Charles Raymond Kollar has been a resident of Youngstown's West Side for his entire life. Chuck (as he likes to be known) was born during the Depression on February 15, 1931, to Charles and Mary Kollar. Chuck has two other sisters. Following graduation from Ursuline High School, Chuck studied pre-dentistry at Youngstown College for one year from 1949-1950. Chuck then attended Central Missouri from 1950-1951, where he played football.

The Korean Conflict led Chuck to enlist in the United States Navy in 1951. He was a torpedo man in the Submarine Service and served much of his time in Pearl Harbor. He was discharged in 1955, and on October 1 of that year, he married Margaret Brown. Instead of returning to his dental studies, Chuck took a job at Ohio Bell Telephone Company. The Kollar's devoted their time to raising a family.

Chuck is the father of seven children, two of whom served in the Persian Gulf from 1990-1991. He is very active with his family in outdoor sports such as boating, fishing, and hunting. Chuck also enjoys skiing, football, and woodworking. He retired from Ohio Bell in 1986, after 31 years of service, and he enjoys devoting his time to his hobbies. Chuck's service awards include the United Nations Award and the Good Conduct Medal. He is very active in his church, Holy Name, as he is a member of the church choir.

C This is an interview with Charles Kollar for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Persian Gulf War, by Angella Cellio, on November 21, 1991

Okay, Mr. Kollar. To start off, I would like you to tell me a little about yourself.

K I worked at Ohio Bell for thirty-one years, and I retired in 1986. Since then, I have been trying to catch up on the things that I have not been able to do while raising children and working. I did a lot of fishing and hunting. We go down to camp a lot. We usually go hunting all over the state. We fish in New York or anywhere that we feel like going. I have been doing little things around the house, like remodeling one room at a time, painting, and fixing up the outside of the house. It is in between hunting right now. One more week and I am off again. So, that is how I spend my time.

C If you would, could you tell me a little bit about where you were born and growing up, stuff like that?

K Well, I was raised on Osborne. That is part of the West Side. I lived there with my mother and father. I have three sisters and two brothers. The oldest sister has died. I had one brother that died when he was young. I went to Holy Name grade school, Ursuline High School, and Youngstown College for a year. Then, I went out to Missouri and played football there for a year.

Then, the Korean War started, and I enlisted in the Navy in the submarine service. I spent approximately four years in Pearl Harbor. Well, I actually spent about three and a half years there. We had our tours over in the Korea area.

I got discharged, came home, and was really planning on going back to school again. I was going to go back to school again. I was going to go back to Youngstown. I had been in pre-dentistry before I went in, and I was going to come back, finish that up, and go to dental school.

I met Peg, and we decided on having a family instead. We have seven children. They are all active. The boys have always been active in sports. They fished and hunted when they were young, and as they grew, they began branching out into things that they liked to do the best. All of them like water skiing. Our summers are spent at a lake somewhere on vacation. I taught them all how to ski. They all learned how to ski when they were six, seven, and eight years old. They love the outdoors.

As they grew, they got interested in football. They kept us busy trying to keep up with five boys. They all played football. Chuck played for a while in college. Jimmy went to college, but he did not play football. Ken played at Syracuse. We had kids playing in grade school. We had kids playing in high school. We had children playing in college.

It was very hectic trying to keep up because we did not believe in them playing without their parents observing what they were doing. We were active in the booster clubs. Also, we went to all of the games. We never missed.

In college, it was hard to keep up with Kenny playing at Syracuse because he

played all over the country. We would see four or five games a year, and he was there four years. By the time all the kids got out of school, I was ready to retire. They all went on to higher education. Of course, Laurie is now in college. My son Gregg did not go on to higher education. He went into the Marine Corps.

In the meantime, I built this room from scratch. It used to be part of the garage. I tore the garage down, totally excavated it, and put this room on. The children helped. That took a year. So, I am an active person. I do not just sit around. Sitting around talking is not my interest. If I am not interested in the television that night, I work downstairs on my fishing or hunting stuff. That is pretty much how I grew up. Of course, I was a Depression baby. Things were tough when I was young. During the Depression, my father was working one day a week.

C Where did he work?

K He worked at US Steel. He was a steel boy. He was taking care of our family, plus my aunt next door. Her husband died in 1931 from the flu epidemic. So, he supported her, and he supported us, my two aunts and our family.

It was tough. Of course, I never knew that I was poor. I did not know that I was poor until I was older. After I came out of the service, I realized what I did not have. But, we never lacked for love or for food. You did not know that there was anything else. Was there anything else more important?

My mother was an organist at Holy Name. That is how I got interested in music. She was an organist for sixty years. I have sung in the choir since I was twelve. There were a couple of brief pauses in my singing career that are as follows: when I was in the service and when I was in college. After I came back, we lived at Lake Milton for four years, and I did not sing in the choir, then. Other than that, I have been active in the choir singing. I used to sing at weddings and things like that.

C Would tell me again about the time you were in the service.

K I went into the service, and I really did not have any direction as to which way I was going to go once I enlisted.

C You enlisted, then, in what year?

K In 1951. I think that the Korean War started in late 1950's, and I enlisted in the spring of 1950. I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center for my boot camp. While at boot camp, I really wanted to get into the submarine corps. It is tough to get in because it is a special type of person they will pick to go. You had to go through many interviews with psychiatrists and other things to make sure you fit into a submarine crew.

From the Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, I went to Torpedoman's school in Newport, Rhode Island, to learn about torpedoes. I wanted to be a torpedoman. I forget exactly how long I was there. I was there six weeks or something.

From there, I went into New London for submarine training. After submarine training, I went to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to get on my boat. It was a new commission, and we were in a yard. It was already commissioned when I came aboard. We were still fitting it out, and soon, we took it out for sea trials. As soon as it was accepted by the Navy, we left for Pearl Harbor.

We went to Pearl Harbor, if I can recall, in early 1952. We left in the winter. We went around through Panama to Pearl Harbor. We operated out of Pearl. We were on the newest boat out. It was the newest constructed boat. We were busy. They kept us operating all of the time, intercepting convoys, and practicing. Practice for us and mainly practice for the convoy escorts because we were one of the first deep dive subs before the nuclears.

So, we were always out. They always wanted us out because the conflict was on, and we were always making patrols. Every three months, we would go on patrol for a month. Then, we would switch to a six month tour in Japan as part of the United Nations forces.

When I was in Hawaii, it was not all war for us anyway. We had a real nice scooter. It was a one hundred foot sail boat in Honolulu. A friend of mine and I spent a lot of time going to sea. People going on cruises would have to act as a crew. We spent a lot of time there, so we got to know them. We were usually in charge of one of the crews raising sails, lowering sails, and all those kinds of things.

I had an opportunity to get out of the service and go to Samoa as part of the crew on the sailboat. It was leased by National Geographic for a year to go down to Samoa. I wanted to go, but I had not been home in three and a half years. So, I came home, and I missed that trip. I did see it in the National Geographic. I saw some pictures of it in later years. I enjoyed the service.

I enjoyed submarine duty because the people were good. It was relaxed as far as so called discipline. On other naval ships, bit ships or surface fleets, you have to be saluting and things like that. As far as discipline, discipline was there, but the people were very well trained. They knew their job, and they knew what had to be done. They did not have to be told what to do.

We had our routine that we went through at sea, and when we were at port, we had things to do, too. There was never any conflict. The people got along even under stress times. I enjoyed it. I learned a lot about people, and that is about the end of my service career. Unless you had any particular questions that you wanted to ask.

C. No. It is kind of a good lead, and it seems to follow the idea that since you were in the military, your children would be in the military, also. Would you tell me about them? I know you have a son in the Marines and a daughter who was in.

K. Yeah, Gregg is in the Marine Corps and, Laurie is in the Navy. All through our children's lives, we try to guide but not lead. For example, when they decided that they wanted to play football, we let them. I played football, and it hurts. It is a hurting sport. I do not care if my children play football, basketball, baseball, are in the band or the choir, or

whatever. The only thing I required of my children is that what they started that year in school, they had to finish.

In other words, you went out and made the team, and two weeks later, you said that you did not want it and quit the team. That is the one thing that we did not allow. The one boy made the basketball team, and then, he decided that he did not want to play. I said, "You know that you robbed somebody out of a starting position. You committed yourself for that season. If you do not want to play next year, then, do not play." They made up their own minds of what they wanted to do.

Gregg, I think early on in his senior year, decided that he wanted to join the Marine Corps. Well, I would have rather seen him go into the Navy or something like that, but he decided on the Marine Corps. We just wanted to make sure that was what he wanted as his vocation. If that was the vocation that he picked, I thought it was great. He is the one who has to live it. I could tell him to do anything that he wanted to, but he has to live with his own decisions.

He was seventeen when he made up his mind that he wanted to go for the early enlistment. He had a hard time getting in because he had hurt his knee playing football. He had numerous reexaminations by the Marine Corps to make sure that he would be able to perform once he was in. Eventually, he was accepted. He stuck with it, and he did go. I am proud of him. He is doing a good job. He has been promoted because of honorary promotions. I do not think that is the way it is called, but his promotions have not always flowed with the time element. Because he has been doing a good job, they have promoted him. He is doing good. He is happy with it now. He is a career man, but he loves his vocation. He likes that type of thing, and he is a true Marine.

Laurie is the same way. She wanted to go to the Navy. We try to make sure that is what you want to do, and then, we are supportive of that decision. So, it is the same way if our children went to school and wanted to take up engineering. Kathy wanted to be an LPN, and you try to be supportive of the role that they pick, rather than pick what they have to do in life.

Each one of them branched out, and they all seem to be doing well in what they chose to do. It seems to be working in doing it that way. Gregg likes it, and he is a Marine. He stands tall all of the time, and if you see him in a crowd, you know that he is in the Marine Corps. He loves it, and he is doing well. He has been in for twelve years now, and he is already a Gunnery Sergeant, which is good for the time element. His career looks good for the future. He knows that if war comes, he is signed up, and that is part of his enlistment and commitment to his country. So, he is happy, we are happy, and his wife seems to be happy, too. We are glad that it worked out.

C Well, that, in fact, did happen to him. He had to go to war. Was that a shock for you? Was it something that you expected? How did you feel when you found out that he had to go?

K Well, when the whole thing started over there, I knew that they would be gone. As for Laurie, I did not think so because she was in a secretarial job in the hospital, at the time,

so I did not figure on her going over. I think that her going was more of a shock than Gregg. Gregg I expected, but her, that was something when she said that she was going

She seemed to be happy. She was apprehensive. I am sure of that. I think that we all would be. That is part of it. That is part of their commitment, so if you have to go, you have to go. How do I feel? Like any parent. Concerned. I was more concerned about Laurie than I was about Gregg. I do not know why, but I was

C I was just going to ask why

K Why?

C Why were you more concerned about Laurie than Gregg?

K I think that is more within Gregg's element. They go through the war games constantly. They are in the desert. He has been in twenty-nine palms several times on maneuvers. They go through that, and they live that life. Laurie was in a secretarial job, and then, she went right over to being a corpsman. I think that she needed to be mentally being prepared for what was going to happen. If war would have turned out like they predicted, Gregg would have been more prepared for it than Laurie. That is all.

Laurie is a strong person. She adapts well, but I was more concerned about Laurie. Especially with what they were saying about the the gas, the missiles, and the threat of nuclear war. To me, a woman is a solid woman. I am from the old school. Yes, I believe in equal rights, but still, I believe that a woman is a woman and should be treated like a woman. I do not necessarily go along with a woman in war, but I have to bend with the times I guess. So, I guess that is why I was more concerned, not that she could not take care of herself. It was more like what war had to offer for a woman versus a man.

C Well, it was certainly a surprise. I know that Vietnam women were over there in medical duties, but I think that a huge number of women went this time. It was surprising for everybody.

K Yes, it was. They had helicopter pilots. You know that they are in all of the branches. They are in tank mechanics and airplane mechanics. In any branch of service they are to be in, they are there. I think that everybody's feeling toward women in war has changed since Desert Storm. They still think that they should be treated like women and like ladies, regardless of what their title is. I do not like to see them lose that.

C Well, let me ask you this, then. I do not know if this is on the subject, but it just popped into my mind. Do you think that a woman serving in a war like that changes their situation to where they are not to be treated like a lady anymore? Does it change them in some way?

K It changes everybody. When you are working side by side with somebody, it puts it into a different perspective. I think that if you just watch the movies and see how the woman's role has changed in everything over the years, you would see that we are losing some of that. I like to refer, like I mention this many times to my children, my boys, gentleman is gentle man, and that is the way that they should be towards their mother, their sisters, and anybody else. Be a gentle man.

I think that they lose a little bit of it. Yeah, they have to. I think that in the early stages, a woman is trying to be like the man, and she puts herself in the position to be treated like a man and lose that man/woman relationship. I am not talking sexually. I am talking about the way you treat each other.

I still do not like to hear foul language or anything else in front of women. To me, it just rubs me the wrong way. I do not like it. They put themselves in that position when they are in that atmosphere. That is what is going to happen, and yeah, it does. I mean, you lose something. You have to. But then again, they want to be there, and they have every right to go. If you chose that role as your vocation as a woman, then, that is all part of the game. I do not know if that makes sense or not.

C No, it does.

K That is the way that I feel.

C It makes perfect sense. So, when Gregg and Laurie were serving in the Middle East, what were you doing in the meantime? What was your reaction, and were you apprehensive?

K Yeah, at the first part of it when everybody was just going over there. Everybody was sort of optimistic that there would be no war. The longer the Iraqi's waited for a war to begin, whether it be their initiative or ours, the more we prepared. The more we prepared, the better prepared we were to meet anything that was coming at us. It just drug on and on and I figured, well, sooner or later, they have to realize that they are going to be out-gunned and out-manned.

They did not make their advance on Saudi Arabia right away. How could they expect to hold out once we spent six months gathering all our forces over there? With other countries coming in and all the modern weapons, and, of course, no one knew what we had, at the time. At least, we did not.

As the time wore on, you started to get a little more optimistic, and all of a sudden, we started the bombing. I sat in front of the TV for many, many hours. I do not know what I thought I could do. You felt that it was on, and you felt a part of it.

I do not know if you would want to see your son or daughter walk on the TV set or what, but it was mind boggling. From the time that they started their bombing, they had the coverage on, and they showed the films of things like that. It just grabbed me. I was retired, so I was home. I had the opportunity most of the time to watch it.

It has been a long time, and then, when the war started, I sat here for most of the one hundred hour war watching what was going on. Like I said, there was just

something You waited to see Gregg or Laurie, but did I see them? Of course, Laurie was back home when the war started, so that was half of it. The battle was over for her She was back here in the States She was supposed to get discharged, and then they, ended up extending her

We were fearful, and we did not know where Gregg was That was the biggest thing that I was concerned about He never wrote His address that he had on his envelopes gave no indication of who he was with It would have been much easier to follow if the progress of where he was was a little more descriptive It was tough to wait, and you did not want to leave the house in case Tina would get a call You know, we wanted to help her She went back to the base, and she wanted to be home She wanted to be close to his base if he needed anything She did not want them looking for her if they had a message for her

C That is Gregg's wife?

K Yes. It was stressful I guess that would be the word for it

C Did you ever get the feeling, or did you ever think for a moment that he might not come back?

K Oh, yeah.

C What is that like? I cannot even imagine it

K Well, I do not know It is your son, daughter, or whatever It is a very sick feeling What if? What if? I have seen so many guys that were butchered, paraplegics, and suffer If it was going to happen to myself, I just hope it was quick and clean If it is to be as the TV coverage was going on how light our casualties were, you get a little relieved But, it is that first push You have to go through the mounds and the trenches they dug out for oil, and the mine fields The mine fields have got to be scary. That would be very terrifying for me to have to go through it I guess being through some of that away from home, you know things that we went through in the service I put myself in his place, and it would be terrifying to breach a mine field I never had to go through a mine field I sure cannot imagine what it would be like

I was more concerned if he got hurt. You do not want him to hurt God forbid that he got killed You just hope it is clean If the Lord wants to take him, He is going to take him. You felt bad for the other parents. You heard of the ones that got killed Then, you think of your own son, and you feel bad for the parents You sit and watch TV, and you do happen to get the names of some of the ones that were killed and some of the interviews that they did with them afterwards It would be very hard, very hard

C Did he get in touch with you quite often?

K He called several times He called us when he was off eating One time he called and told us he had tendonitis, shortly after he went over in September He called us once after that from Kuwait City, several days after things quieted down

C Were you able to get in touch with him at all?

K No

C. Was that frustrating?

K Not really That part of it was not because the mail was even slow at the good times When they were over there before it started, it would take quite awhile for the mail to get to him, so I understand it Not being able to get in touch with him was not one of my priority items It was more of a safe and sound issue. There was no way to know

C I know your position on your children serving in the military, how proud you are, and that is wonderful When Laurie was over there, when Gregg was, too, and the war started, did you ever think for a minute, "I wish that he never would have enlisted? I wish that he never was in the military?"

K No It never entered my mind It would be the same if he was a policeman or a fireman My son, Jimmy, is a sale's manager down at Youngstown Rubber, and he has to drive to Cleveland If he would get into an accident on the turnpike or if I would be fearful of an accident on the turnpike, it would be the same thing and the same feeling You put yourself at harms way everyday As far as being in the military, the use of gas would have been terrible

When I was in the service myself, you never think of danger It is not a part of your life You are young, you have a job to do, and you are busy doing your job Those things do not concern you If it did, you would be useless as far as the military

So, I know that Gregg would be a good soldier He is a good Marine, and he knows his job I know how he treats his people He treats his people good You want to make sure that his people are treated good He mentioned in many letters that he wanted his people ready for it, and when it came, they had a job to do They were focused on their job and when they are focused on their job That is the least likely time they are going to get hurt. The same as if you run a press in a mill You know what you are doing, and you focus your attention on it To me, I felt that he is a career soldier, and he is a good one That would get him through, if his company was going to get him through It was because he is a good Marine

C Was he in a dangerous position over there?

K Yeah, he was, because they were making raids before the action got started He was in an Aide and Silencer Batting Mobile, breach the lines and come back, breach the lines and

come back. He got hit by friendly fire once. I knew with the mobile halinser would be right up there behind them. They are going to be up close to the lines, supporting the infantries. I mean, you would be in the thick of it, and that is where you would want to be.

C When did you find out he was going to be able to come home? What was your reaction?

K Well, coming home was no biggie. We heard that he was okay. No news in those cases is great news. As long as we did not hear anything, we knew everything was fine. I do not remember if he called here or if he called Tina. Tina called us, and then, he called here.

I do not remember the events. Just hearing, however, we heard the first time that he was fine. He had gone through the whole engagement, and they were back. It was great, and it was a good feeling. Coming home and seeing us was great, once you knew he was okay. Then, coming home was just a routine matter. I knew that he would get home whenever. Once he was safe and sound and we knew he was safe and sound, we were very relieved. I do not remember how long it was from the end of the active combat to when we heard from him.

C Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to add?

K About the kids being in Desert Storm or what?

C Anything.

K Well, I think that it all started in Baghdad. Everybody wanted to get to Baghdad. The President decided to end the war before we got to Baghdad. I think that was a mistake on the part of our country, if we made that decision. I am sure that the British did not like it too much.

I know that General Schwarzkopf did not like it. He made the statement that he wanted to go, however, he did retract that statement. In the past, I do not know if you remember Korea. McArthur wanted to go right into China because the Chinese were the ones pushing the war in Korea. We had them running. We had them going back, and he wanted to go in after and just take it right back. He got fired, and they were afraid of China.

In Vietnam, we fought that war with our hands tied behind our backs. There, they wanted to go after the source, and they were bottlenecked. Even though they did not bomb it, they did a decent job of it. They stopped short, and they tied the guy's hands. They wanted to go in there and save the people from the North Vietnamese who had no rules. I do not know who sets the rules we were playing by, but they sure have strung our boys over there. A lot of our good kids got killed for somebody's decisions.

When it was going on in Desert Storm, my thoughts were, "I hope they do not set all kinds of rules that we have to follow, that no one else has to follow." Many of our

boys died because we did not use the military machinery that we have available to us and the technology that we have. When they started bombing, started showing what they could do with our bombers and our guided missiles, and how much could be done without the loss of life, it was unbelievable that we could get in and get out.

We destroyed their radar, kept moving right on down the line, and kept on destroying one thing after another. The communications made it much easier for the following aircraft that came in to soften it up for the ground war. I felt things were going well, so somebody had learned a lesson. You do not fight a war and set some kind of rules that no one else follows. It will cost the life of our kids.

Then, when he stopped where he stopped, I said, "Oh boy," and sure enough, look what happened. I think a lot had to do with their rebelling and expecting support. They did not get any support, so they got slaughtered. That could have been eliminated, if Hussein would have went north. We should have went north and went right after him. He should have paid the price.

I think that we should have went north and followed him out. He was the one that caused the problem, so he should have been the one to pay. I have read a little bit about him. He thought that Stalin was the greatest thing, and he followed Stalin. You know what Stalin did to his country, and everybody else he came into contact with. I would have liked to see them finish it. That is all. I think, maybe, that it is a lesson to be learned for the next President. I think that was an error. I think that Schwarzkopf was right.

C Do you think something like this with Hussein could blow up again like it did last year? Since it was not taken care of?

K Well, I do not think it will be to what he thought he could do. I do not think it will involve all of the Arabs. If not him, it might be somebody else, maybe Iran next time. I think that he is out of business for awhile. He does not have the money, he does not have the resources, and he certainly does not have the equipment now. The countries that were willing to supply him before, Russia, China, or someone else, could sell them arms. I think that it would be harder for him to amount to something like that in our lifetime.

There is Iran, Syria, Jordan, and whoever wants to start the next one. It all depends on how they and their people interpret what happened in Iraq. Was it worth the effort? It is still brewing with the Israelie situation. It just seems like there is a constant time bomb. Now, the communist threat is ebbing, but now, you have the Arabs and the East. What is going to happen over there? I would like to see it end, but there is no guarantee.

World War I was the war to end all wars, and we are going strong. The only thing now is that we can get there faster and get it over quicker, but war is war. I think that the United States has to learn that once they commit themselves for the sakes of the troops, you got to go with everything you got. You go as far as you have to go to get rid of the source. It could happen but not Hussein. It could be with Lybia. What are we going to do now? It is going to be interesting to find out. Of course, I think that our president is

going to take care of some of our domestic matters if he and the Republican Party want to get reelected. He is going to have to start showing some more interest in the United States.

C Well, it sounds like you have a very admirable family, very close knit, and something to be proud of.

K Yeah, we do. I do not know what I would do if we had one of the kids be an outcast. My children all talk to each other, they all help each other, and they are here all of the time. As a matter of fact, the summer time gets to be a pain, and dinner time looks like the old times. Now, they come back, and they bring their wives and their friends. Well, we like our children to come around. Their friends still come around, and we enjoy it. If the house is full, it is nice. We have grandchildren. We have a big enough house that when they all come, they can all crowd around. We seat twelve at our family table in the front room that we converted into a dining room because we needed more room. We have three eating places on this floor, so we can get them all in. We can seat about twenty-four people.

I made a lot of compliments on the kids. They are not perfect. They are like us. They make mistakes, but they are good kids. They treat our friends good. Our friends are still mister and misses to them. Even though they have grown up, people will still come up and say, "Hey Chuck, how are you doing?" Well, they would never think of doing that to Mr. Nemeck, or Dr. Jack. They are still Mr. and Mrs. Nemeck, even though they have hunted with us and have been at camp with us during the week or for a week at a time. Some of the people go with us and encourage them, "Oh, just call me Jack." They will say, "No, Dr. Hotzbaugh, you are Dr. Hotzbaugh." I like them. They are good kids.

C A lot of respect.

K They treat their elders good, and they treat us good. I guess that is most important now. I am happy to say that they treat us well and they treat each other well. We want to keep a close knit family, and we hope that they pass that on to their children. I hate when I see other families where this brother does not talk to that one for years.

C It is a waste.

K. Blood is thicker than water.

C Well, this has been very interesting, and I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

K Quite alright.

End of Interview