

Chapter 01 – Introduction

Announcer: George Krumme was born and reared in rural Oklahoma, about five miles northeast of Okemah. His early education took place in a rural school. He finished high school at age 16 in Bristow and then attended Oklahoma A&M as a music major.

World War II changed the course of his life. He left A&M to study weather forecasting at Spartan School of Aeronautics and then taught aviation cadets in Texas. Krumme enlisted in the Army Air Corps and received training in mathematics and physics at Pomona College in Claremont, California. Reassignment to the infantry led him to Europe during the Battle of the Bulge, and he was awarded a Purple Heart.

After the war, he returned to Pomona to earn a bachelor's degree and was named to Phi Beta Kappa. After graduation, he returned to Bristow, joining his family as a partner in Krumme Oil Company.

He moved to Tulsa in 1960 and studied on nights and weekends at The University of Tulsa to earn his master's degree in petroleum engineering and Ph.D. in earth science.

He was active in Democratic politics for half a century and served as a National Committeeman from 1976–1996.

Listen to George as he talks about living during the depression, J. Paul Getty, the Battle of the Bulge, and other fascinating aspects of his life on the oral history website Voices of Oklahoma.com

Chapter 02 – 9:35
Mother and Father

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling. Today's date is February 28th, 2014. George, state your full name, please, and your date of birth.

George Krumme (GK): My name is George William Krumme and I was born on December 15th, 1922.

JE: And you are how old as of this day?

GK: I am now 91 years old.

JE: Any significance to George and William? Were you named after someone?

GK: George and William both run in the family, in the Krumme family. In a sense, I was named in a traditional manner.

JE: Alright. We're recording this interview here in our recording facilities at voices of Oklahoma.com. Where were you born?

GK: I was born just half a mile from Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse, which is a little schoolhouse – gone now of course – about three or four miles northeast of Okemah, Oklahoma.

JE: So, you were born on the farm?

GK: I was born on my father's farm.

JE: Right there in the house?

GK: Yes, although we did have a doctor – the doctor came from Okemah. So we were not completely rural.

JE: Was that normal for that time in 1922?

GK: I think so, yes.

JE: Were you first born?

GK: No, I am the fourth of five. I have two older sisters. The next came my brother – my older brother Roy Harlan Krumme – and I had a younger brother, Jeff Brian Krumme.

JE: What was your mother's name, maiden name?

GK: My mother's maiden name was Ruth Brian – which of course is where the Brian came from – my younger brother's middle name.

JE: Where did she come from and grow up?

GK: Both my parents came from Missouri. She, mostly from the Springfield area. My father came from St. Joseph in the northwest corner of Missouri. Both came to Oklahoma. My father before statehood, and my mother about statehood time – I don't remember – and not sure I even could find out the exact date when they came.

JE: And then your father's name?

GK: My father's name was Roy Archibald Krumme.

JE: So then, why did they even come to Oklahoma?

GK: Looking for land, looking for an opportunity for a new life.

My paternal grandfather, of course, was a farmer and obviously most people were farmers back in the early 1900s and my mother's mother was a widow, her father died of the white death. Isn't that what they called tuberculosis in 1895 when she was about five or six years old.

So, since there were eight children in the family, a widow had to scrounge around. They came to Oklahoma because one of her son-in-laws had come and was successful and encouraged the family to come. They came to the area of Weleetka, not too far from Okemah.

JE: When your father came, were there any stories about land run or did they homestead?

GK: No, although my father who came in 1900 his family came in 1901 to the Chandler area – now the Chandler was sac and fox country – it could be homesteaded, but there was no run as such from my understanding of it.

But my great grandfather on my mother's side had come and bought, paid cash for the right to continue and work out the homestead of a previous person who had come and had worked out the homestead for a couple of years and wanted to go to green pastures.

So my great grandfather came, bought it and worked it out and didn't live too long thereafter. But that was near Chandler which was in Oklahoma territory. But my grandfather moved to the Okemah area.

No, I have my family wrong, it was my great grandfather on my father's side who settled there. But it was my grandmother's father on my father's side – I guess I should say the Krumme side. Vut her name was Scottish-Irish. I'll think of it in a minute.

JE: Sure. So your mother, what kind of personality did she have?

GK: Oh, mother was a very sweet woman. I guess all mothers – you have a prejudice in that direction – but she really was. She was very popular with things. She was an intelligent woman, liked to read, she could sing songs that she had learned when she was young.

People entertained themselves in those days. And she could play somewhat on the piano well enough that she played for the moviehouse in Okemah in the silent movie days when you had to have music in the background. She was a good enough piano player to play for that sort of thing, but she was nowhere near a professional.

JE: Is that one of your early recollections of her?

GK: Well, a little. But mainly it was her singing. She knew song after song of the olden days, folk songs mainly.

JE: Right, and then your father's personality – what was he like?

GK: My father was efficient, he was a businessman. He was the oldest son – he had an older sister – but nevertheless, this is a farm community near Okemah. Eventually they had come from St. Joseph, Missouri to near Chandler. The house they moved in is still there. It was a simple house – farmhouse – one room with a fireplace in between the kitchen and the house.

And I can't say that it's there this day, but it was there about three or four years ago when I was there. So it's over 100 years old and still standing. It stores hay. They have a corrugated iron roof, but hay is stored in it and it's obviously not been lived in for 100 years now.

JE: The first house that you remember, then, living in?

GK: My father had an opportunity at the age of about 30. This would have been 1924, January 24 because I was just a year old. He owned the farm near Pleasant Valley but had an opportunity to lease a country store at Tuskegee, Oklahoma, which is about halfway between Okemah and Bristow.

It's in Creek County – not Okfuskee County where Okemah is – and it was north of the Deep Fork of the Canadian. Deep Fork runs just at the edge of Okfuskee County in Creek County, and when Deep Fork came out you couldn't go to Okemah because the bridge, actually, and the bottom would be covered completely.

So this pointed him toward Bristow even though he was a native, shall we say. At least living in a residence at Okemah and on the farm there. So we turned toward Bristow simply because Deep Fork cut us off from Okemah completely.

Under a long term lease, the following year, he leased not just the general store – which is a large general store owned by Nestor, who had owned two or three thousands acres there – which he had bought from the Indian [unintelligible].

He also, the next year, ran the cotton gin and leased several thousand acres because Kit Walker, who was the original person who had put it all together... They had found oil in his place and he didn't have to spend the time running that store and the cotton gin.

So my dad took it over and ran it probably for the next, oh, maybe 20 years. I was gone during the war and I can't remember what time he abandoned that lease. He didn't manage it after 1936 because the rural areas started emptying here in Oklahoma during the depression. Not just because of the depression, but also because of the drought.

For both reasons, an awful lot of the people who were sharecropping on property that he was leasing from Kit went to California. The country emptied and he could see that there was no possibility of really continuing to make a living there. So he opened an implement store in Bristow and we gradually, all of our efforts went to Bristow, Tuskegee.

There's no longer – there's not a house within a half a mile – maybe within a mile and all that's left. His foundations, like much of the rural area, has been abandoned.

JE: Krumme Oil was established in 1933?

GK: No, dad was in the truck and implement business, but anybody with any initiative realized that the real money in this area was in oil, particularly in the teens and twenties. But even in the thirties – by the time he had an active business in Bristow – it was Krumme Truck and Implement, he sold international trucks, McCormick deering, farm implements, tractors, et cetera.

But he invested in a few wells. I don't know that he invested in drilling, but nevertheless he became interested in it. He had already expressed an interest and encouraged my brother Harlem when he went to college in 1937 to study petroleum engineering. So it's obvious that he was already interested in it, but it was really about 1941 or 1942 that he began buying properties as the major oil companies abandoned their properties to move into deeper stuff.

They're older property – their stripper properties – they began to sell and he began to buy some of them.

JE: He was really quite a businessman.

GK: That he was, indeed.

JE: ... And a risk taker.

GK: Yes, he had to be.

And of course, he always said he couldn't have made it if it hadn't been for borrowed money. His saying was that borrowed money makes good business better and makes bad business disastrous. But he was fortunate enough to be able to borrow money and have good enough business to pay it back.

Chapter 03 – 13:30

The Depression

John Erling (JE): What are your memories as a boy growing up and what did you do for entertainment and that type of thing?

George Krumme (GK): Well – two brothers as I've said earlier – my mother wanted to be with my father. That meant that while he ran the store at Tuskegee, which he did even when I'd gone to college and gone to the army.

Therefore, weekends she took particularly the two of the youngest back to Tuskegee and summers we worked at the store in Tuskegee. If you can call it work. We did clerking and sacked. We sold sugar and beans – and stuff of that sort – from bulk. We had to put them in sacks, and then weigh out 5 pounds, take a piece of twine and tie them up. We were capable of doing that.

I can't say we were worth much, but we did do some things. But that kept us, somewhat, from having an active life in Bristow schools. So I didn't play football. But all three of us played in the band. None of us played football by the way, which was quite popular then.

JE: So your elementary years were there in Bristow.

GK: Yeah, I went two years to a country school at Tuskegee. The first two years, oddly enough, I went to my aunt – who had been hired probably due to dad's influence – to teach elementary; the first four grades.

So I actually started school at Tuskegee at the age of five because my aunt – who was a widow – had one boy who was six months older than I, and she wanted the two of us to be in the same class. So she encouraged my starting first grade when I was almost six.

When we began to be interested in Bristow as a residence, my older sisters were having to go to high school and, of course, there were no buses at that time. They would have had to commute from Tuskegee, which was then extremely difficult. 18 miles of dirt road, and when it rained, it was a bad dirt road.

So for the first couple of years, my mother and father arranged to have my two sisters board in Bristow to go to school. But then we had my older brother coming to the same place, and they could see not only was the economy encouraging moving to a larger place than the country, but also that we were all gonna have to go to school. They wanted us to go to school, obviously, to high school.

So we actually moved to Bristow in 1930 when I was not quite eight years old. Well, I had two years of schooling at Tuskegee, but at that time in Bristow, and an awful lot of other towns in Oklahoma, had schools that you could enroll in first grade either in September or in January for the second semester, which meant that there was actually what they called 1-A and 1-B.

At any one time, there were two classes for the first grade – clear through the elementary classes – and as far as I know, clear through high school.

Every one of them had a grade of 8-A, 8-B, whatever. Anyhow, a teacher interviewed me when I first came in and decided that instead of starting in 3-B for my third year, that I was already ahead of the kids there in class. So I moved to 3-A immediately, which put me a half a grade ahead of people my age and almost a full year because I had started a little early.

Then when they cut out the half grades when I was probably in the seventh grade, maybe in the eighth. Instead of moving me back, they moved me ahead, which meant that I graduated from high school when I was 16 and there are advantages to being ahead of your age group, but there are disadvantages too: you're a little bit immature somewhere – I mean a lot – I would say immature.

So your social relationships were a little unusual, but there were several other boys in my class I know who were 16, likewise. So I was not completely unique.

JE: What year was that when you graduated?

GK: I graduated in '39.

JE: 1939. We do have the Dust Bowl days. The depression, you say from 1930, '32, '36, you were 8, 9, 10 years old. Talk a little bit more about those days. And did you actually experience the Dust Bowl?

GK: Bristow was far enough east that the Dust Bowl directly didn't affect us. In fact, it's the westernmost tier of counties of Oklahoma and the Panhandle. And of course, particularly Texas, Panhandle and Kansas clear through the Panhandle that were really in the heart of the Dust bowl.

We did, a few times a year, have dust come in – enough so that it would limit the visibility. And an odd thing that I can still remember is that it had a distinctive odor. The dust carried an odor with it that I believe I'd recognize today. I'm not sure. But at any rate, we were not directly affected by it, but we were affected by the drought. The drought was generally throughout the midwest.

JE: And the days of the depression...

GK: Times were hard. The worst part of the depression really probably was '31, '32, '33 and '34. I'd say maybe '33 was the very worst by my memory. Kids came to school barefoot – no shoes. And the rotary club there – and other entities in town – had enterprises to raise money to buy shoes. And many people were encouraged to give shoes and the shoe repairmen would repair them free to give them to kids – or at least as free as they could afford to do.

And to – I know the rotary club because I've done some historical work and reading the old newspapers – the Rotary Anns ran, opened a cafeteria for children with no food, no lunch, didn't have enough money to bring anything from home. Some were free, and those who wanted to eat there, after all, they would like to have a little bit of income from it.

My memory is that you could buy a small lunch for children for 10 cents, maybe 15 cents at times. They actually ran that for several years at the Washington School, which was the more rural of the two. We had two elementary schools in Bristow. The Edison School was on the more affluent side of town. Even there, though, they did open a cafeteria where elementary kids – at a very nominal expense – could eat. Times were hard.

JE: Did you sense families were moving to California? We hear those stories –

GK: Yes, throughout that period. And of course, one thing that kept Bristow alive even through the depression was there had been an oil boom in the early twenties – and the oil boom was over before hard times started – but they still had to have pumpers and roustabouts. Even when oil got down to 40 cents and 20 cents a barrel, it paid to produce the wells.

And the one bit of stable income came from oil companies – and there was a couple of refineries in Bristow that stayed alive. Banks were already closing and, at the time Roosevelt was inaugurated, there was a bank panic – you might say – in the country. Some states, including Oklahoma, had already closed banks on a temporary basis, but the national administration closed all of them in the state, from my memory, is a couple of weeks. It varied from state to state depending on the strength of the banks at the time in Bristow.

Bristow did an unusual thing that was a little bit unique, I think, even in Oklahoma here. The Chamber of Commerce issued scrip – that is to say paper money – with the assurance that after the bank had opened again that the scrip would be redeemed. You see there was shortage of cash – you couldn't go to the bank and get cash – and therefore, commercial merchandising stores, et cetera, were helpless because people didn't have the cash to pay. You have to have cash just for the transactions.

So Bristow filled that in with scrip – which is paper money that's outside of the system itself. The local historical society has a couple of copies of some of that scrip. People never lost a dime but the only place that they would give scrip... They wouldn't issue scrip to anybody except someone who had a paycheck. And the paychecks were essentially all oil company checks from producing companies and the refineries. So the checks were given in exchange for the scrip.

And then when they actually could cash the checks of course, then the Chamber of Commerce had money to redeem all the Bristow scrip money that was there. But actually when we're talking about money, it's a little interesting. There was a similar situation throughout many of the sharecropping and country stores throughout the South – trade tokens is what you would call them.

But actually, the merchant who owned the store would buy brass coins with his name, et cetera, and the denomination. The previous owner of the store that dad leased in 1924 had what everybody called Walker money. It was round coins from a dollar down. I think they even had pennies. I know they had nickels. And when dad came, of course, he couldn't redeem the walker money at least certainly for a while. But running the store on a long term basis, he took a five year lease, he used what was called generally Krumme money. It was octagonal rather than round to differentiate it from the Walker money which was around and it was in denominations from a nickel up to a dollar.

A farmer or sharecropper – either one – had no cash at the beginning of the year because times were hard. Even in the twenties. Times were hard in Oklahoma in the twenties almost as much as in the thirties because

agricultural products were sold for so cheap – a result of World War I in the teens having increased production so much to supply Europe and our own efforts in Europe. They overbuilt farming, they bought machinery, they broke out land that probably was marginal in the first place.

And then after the war, when the demand dropped, Europe began to produce its own agricultural products. There was an oversupply and the price dropped drastically in '21 and '22. My father told me it did not pay him to reap his – I guess he had some wheat – but mainly cotton. Cotton and corn. And he said he left it in the field until the following spring when the price was a little better – and he did harvest some then – but commonly people did not harvest in the '21-'22 because the price had dropped so much and it stayed that way throughout the twenties.

The two banks in Bristow of the four that were there originally – actually a third one had merged with one, so three banks went under – but they went under long before the depression. They went under in '24 and in '26.

And the reason they went under, I'm sure, was because of the agricultural economy. After all, Bristow really was agricultural at the time, except for the oil business. So two banks merged because one bank was in trouble and then the merged bank went under. And then in 1928, another bank, an old stable bank, also went under. I imagine that the third one might have gone under in the Depression, but it did change ownership. That 3rd bank was American National Bank, which eventually became Spirit Bank. And the person who probably saved that bank was Albert Kelly, old Albert Kelly. So it's a little bit of history that continues clear to the present day.

JE: It does indeed. But for the scrip and those special coins, that whole community really would have suffered.

GK: Some of the Bristow scrip was traded as far away as Sapulpa, Mannford, and Okemah and all of it was made good. But not many communities followed that. And as a matter of fact, governor Murray discouraged people from doing so. But it was a neat solution and it worked out very well.

JE: Alfalfa Bill Murray?

GK: Yes. Bill was governor at the time.

JE: Do you remember him?

GK: Oh, everybody remembered he was a real character.

JE: Were you around him? Saw him?

GK: Oh no. You realize I would have been 10 years old at the time.

JE: Probably one of our most colorful politicians.

GK: Yes. You may have read the story where Edith Johnson, I believe, was her name. An editor, probably society editor for the Daily Oklahoman – and maybe The Times, I don't remember exactly – but he's reported to have sniffed at him in print that you could see his winter underwear that he was wearing out of his sleeves. And that it was dirty.

Alfalfa Bill, at a big meeting, subsequently sniffed back at Edith and said “Edith Johnson don't know nothing about my underwear and she's not gonna learn anything about it either. She's not my type.” And of course everybody roared.

JE: I heard that he said, “If I knew as much about her underwear as she knows about mine, I wouldn't talk about it.”

GK: Yeah, that may be well true. I don't remember, really. But I've read about it since and, of course, everybody knew what was going on with Alfalfa Bill.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 04 – 6:18

No Plumbing

John Erling (JE): The means of transportation there? Cars, horses and buggies, the condition of roads?

George Krumme (GK): At the time that I was born – and first remembered – not many people had cars. My father had a truck by the time I was four or five years old. But all the haying that was done was done with mule power, shall we say. As a matter of fact, he bought wagons in 1928 or '29 when a Bristow hardware closed.

It had wagons for sale at the time and even though we are 18 miles away, he bought, I think, the rest of them. He bought maybe half a dozen wagons and I remember they would lead teams into Bristow, and then bring the wagons back to Bristow with the teams that they had taken in sort of a wholesale operation. So they were mainly still wagons being used in the late twenties out in the country.

Gradually trucks took over, as everybody knows, but cars – I remember my uncle had a Model T Ford. You could work on a Model T – and I remember watching him work – and he used to say, “I can fix it with baling wire and chewing gum.” Which was not quite true. But nevertheless they could be worked on quite easily by country people.

JE: So it takes you a long time to go from Point A to Point B?

GK: Yes, my family went to Phoenix, Arizona. My aunt took her car and several members of the extended family and my father had promised my mother's mother – my grandmother Brian – that he would somehow, if she would live long enough, take her to where her husband was buried in Phoenix – the original old cemetery – and put a stone on his grave. There's no stone on his grave. He had gone to Phoenix because he had tuberculosis in 1894, I believe it was, and had been there less than a month when he succumbed. They found him dead. But it was popular in those days for tuberculosis to go to dry country, where they thought there was a better chance, but he did not survive but just a few weeks.

No one in the family had ever seen his grave. So the whole family went west – and the point is, my memory is – that we drove 35 miles an hour. We bought a gravestone and then went on to the coast where we had family living there – both sides of the family – and saw the Pacific Ocean off San Diego and Los Angeles then came back through and took pictures of the

stone that was on my grandfather's grave and then came home. And as I say, my memory of the whole thing was 35 miles an hour over mostly dirt roads.

Highway 66 was not paved all the way at that time. In fact, in 1928 when the great Bunion Derby came through Bristow – a foot race all the way from Los Angeles to New York City – mainly California and Texas and parts of Oklahoma were paved, but most of it was dirt, some of it was gravel. So it was understandable why we took 66 back for part of the distance, but we went out to the southern route and it was practically all dirt.

JE: And dusty, dusty, dusty. You're 10, 11, 12 years old at about this time.

GK: About this time at the time we went I was only six, let's say '28. Yeah, yeah, '28. I would have been not quite six. Yeah.

JE: In your house and you had indoor plumbing?

GK: Oh no, we had no electricity.

JE: No electricity?

GK: We had a well in the backyard. Tuskegee happens to be an area where there's very little groundwater. People used to come to our well to get water to take to their homes or they would take sleds and an oil drum – 55 gallon drum – or a wooden drum. Most of them were wooden and go to springs to get water and have mules drag it back to their home. Water was scarce because there was no real groundwater in many places around Tuskegee.

JE: The home you were living at say 10,11,12. When did electricity come to it?

GK: After the war of 1946 of my memory.

JE: Oh, wow. So that's many years without electric.

GK: Yeah, and of course there's nothing there now but the East Central Electric Co-op still has lines through there because there are rural homes there. As

a matter of fact, the country has filled back up as roads improved, as cars improved, and as electricity became available in the country. You can live in the country and many people have moved to the rural areas there. So, in a sense, what was abandoned in the thirties has been repopulated. Due, as I say, to electricity and to the roads.

JE: Back to the bank, I should have followed up – does Spirit Bank have a bank in Cristo today?

GK: Oh yes. I think technically it's the lead bank. Maybe they may have changed it, but at one time it was the lead bank.

JE: President Roosevelt was President 1933-45. Do you remember hearing him on the radio and his fireside chats?

GK: We lived in the country without electricity.

JE: Oh, that's right.

GK: We had a battery operated radio as most people who had enough money to afford the radio did. By the time I was able to realize that I was alive by three or four years of age, we had a battery powered radio and, of course when Roosevelt spoke, everybody gathered around the radio to listen to him at the night time. But the chats –

JE: Fireside chats.

GK: Yes, the fireside chats we all listened to it.

JE: Was there other radio programming that the family would listen to?

GK: Yes, including Bob Wells, particularly when I was in Bristow.

We walked to and from school, nobody was taken to school in the car in those days, I'd say nobody, but that's probably literally true. So we walked home even for lunch because Bristow was a fairly small town.

JE: So how long? How far would you have been walking?

GK: In my case, about four blocks. But others walked up to 10 and 12. But nevertheless, Bob Wills was so popular and his program was at noon over KBOO here in Tulsa that you could walk along the street and you could almost hear every note from one house to another because everybody was listening to Bob Wills. That's not much of an exaggeration. It is an exaggeration, though.

Chapter 05 – 8:46

J. Paul Getty

John Erling (JE): Your father had a cotton gin –

George Krumme (GK): He ran a cotton gin at Tuskegee from 1925 – I think – he didn't run it the first year. I was not old enough to know that firsthand, but he told me later. I think that he had one year he ran just the store and then he ran the cotton gin and at least the acreage that Kit Walker had. But he also then bought and – maybe in 1929 or '30– a cotton gin at Newby and ran that cotton gin.

And actually, in the fifties my father was quite enterprising; he bought a closed gin in Bristow. Cotton was going out because of the boll weevil and the drought, although cotton stands dry weather very well. Still, if you don't have any water at all, you don't have any cotton and it was too dry to have good crops. But he actually took parts from the gins that he owned – the one that Newby – particularly the one in Bristow that he had bought – and built a gin at Plainview, Texas.

Now, he would have been in his sixties at the time and he regretted having done it because the gin at Swinney Switch near Plainview, Texas in the panhandle – where they raised an awful lot of irrigated cotton – ran 24 hours a day and he was looking after it. So it wore him out and he was happy after a few years that he sold it, but he was a cotton man, yes.

JE: Tell us what a cotton gin did.

GK: A cotton gin separates the lint from the seed. Both are valuable. The lint of course makes clothing – all kinds of cotton products. The seed itself – cotton seed oil – is an oil that's useful for numerous things. The cotton seed meal, the remnants of it, is a good cattle feed. They're byproducts of the cotton business.

JE: Let's follow you after high school. You graduated in 1939.

GK: Yes.

JE: Then what do you do?

GK: I went to Oklahoma A&M College. I played in the band and enjoyed it and thought that I might be a good enough musician to be a band director. After one year, I realized that I had a little talent for it, but I lacked neither the ability nor the interest to really be a good band director.

So I changed to pre-law the second year. I don't have any idea whether I would have been a good lawyer, but at least I was taking pre-law courses for one year and then the war came along. Well, the draft came along first, and I was not interested in being drafted. An impression of several of us that if we were in an essential occupation, we would not be drafted. And of course, if I had been drafted in those days – A and M was an infantry school and I wasn't interested in being in the infantry at the end of my second year.

Even though I had been very successful, I was president of Phi Beta Sigma, the freshman honorary fraternity. I was a good student and actually had been elected Blue Key as a sophomore, which is quite unusual. But I was unwise enough, and imprudent enough, and young enough, and immature enough, that I decided to take a course at Spartan School of Aeronautics in weather forecasting because we thought that would be essential and save us from the draft. There were several Tulsa boys who did the same thing.

I spent less than a year because the war started in December and they closed the school and we all got to stay. Most of us got jobs with the civil

service to teach weather forecasting to cadets, which I did for almost a year.

JE: J. Paul Getty owned the Spartan school.

GK: (chuckles) That's an interesting development. He had not intentionally bought either Skelly Oil Company or Spartan, but he was interested in obtaining control of Tidewater Oil company. And when one of the Rockefeller heirs sold his interest in Mission Corporation – which was a holding company that owned a big block of Tidewater stock – he bought it. What he didn't know until later was Mission also owned 58% of Skelly Oil company, which meant that he was W. G. Skelly's boss. W. G. Skelly had the mortgage that pledged that stock to keep Skelly Oil company alive and he couldn't pay it in the mid thirties.

So Mission, being the Rockefellers – and not known for their generosity when it came to business affairs – they foreclosed on and owned 58% of it. Mission Corporation was the holding company. They put the stock in and therefore Getty ended up with the control of Skelly Oil company. But Bill Skelly was running it. They had not been closest of friends. They were competitors back in the teens, but they kept that position because it was mutual advantage to the two of them.

Skelly wanted to run the company – could run the company and did well. Getty was interested in having the company be worth with something, of course. So Skelly maintained the operation as long as he was alive, to their mutual benefit. Most people don't realize that Getty really did own Skelly. But Skelly Oil company – Bill Skelly was a real citizen and innovative in his own way, too. He was interested in aircraft and he owned both Spartan Aeronautics and Spartan School of Aeronautics where I was going to school in '41, mid '41.

Getty wanted to shoot Germans and Japs, he volunteered to help in the war effort and they laughed at him. He was too old, for one thing, and too rich for another. He wouldn't have been affected whatsoever. But what the administration said, "If you really want to help in the war effort, would you please go to Tulsa – where you own essentially the control of partner aeronautics, which manufactures primary training planes – go and

straighten it out. They are not operated well and we get planes that are not really up to snuff. It needs to be improved.”

Getty came to Tulsa and built himself a bombing shelter out here on North Sheridan, someplace that's still there. But he also did straighten it out and lived at the Sophian Plaza at the time, which was the place to live in Tulsa.

JE: Didn't they say he also lived at the Mayo Hotel?

GK: He well could have. I just know that he did live at times at least at Sophian.

I stumbled across my certificate of graduation from Spartan School of Aeronautics. Oh, about 10 years ago. I don't know that I could find it now, but I was astounded to see that not only was that certificate signed by Maxwell Balfour, who was the director of the Ground School, The Spartan School of Aeronautics, but co-signed in blue ink by somebody I had never heard of.

When I was in school, J. Paul Getty signed my certificate and if I could find it, I'm sure'd be worth something to somebody. Not that I'd sell it, but I'm just simply saying that I'd never had any idea who J. Paul Getty was when they signed it. I just knew that I wanted that certificate to get out and did. And I was astounded to see he was active enough in the management of it that he signed our certificates.

JE: That's interesting that Bill Skelly, as big as he was in this town, was actually working for J. Paul Getty.

GK: That's indeed true. Yes. And I've read at least two and I think three biographies, including his autobiography about J. Paul Getty and in the story of Skelly Oil Company, which was written in the last 10 or 15 years. I have that too. And I've forgotten the name of it.

They brush over a great deal that do point out that Skelly did end up in the Getty empire, if you want to call it that.

JE: Right. So in time, then, did Getty own until his death or how did that work out eventually?

GK: Well, Getty controlled it. He never owned all of Mission Corporation. He just wanted 51% so that he would have the control of it. Mission didn't own all of Skelly Oil Company. They only, as far as I know, only owned the 58%. But control of Mission gave him control of Skelly Oil Company. And, of course, by that time for all I know Bill Skelly had bought some stock on his own, but I know the controlling stock did go to Mission which ended up being controlled by Getty, who eventually bundled it all together into what became Getty Oil company.

JE: You didn't see J. Paul Getty?

GK: Oh, no, no, if I did, I wouldn't have known it, I'm talking about in 1941.

JE: Bill Skelly, Did you ever see him? Were you ever around him?

GK: No, I don't think so.

Chapter 06 – 9:14

War

John Erling (JE): December 7th, 1941 – Pearl Harbor Day. Tell us about that day in your early records.

George Krumme (GK): Well, of course, it was a Sunday and I remember I had been to church. We had gone to church and we'd come home and we're eating at our family home on 49 West 11th and Bristow. And there we heard that – I cannot remember whether we heard directly over the radio, I rather suspect we did – an announcement that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. It's one of those things you remember where you were when you heard about it. And of course they already – and by that I mean the administration of the army, the armed forces – had begun to build up the army and we were woefully unprepared up until, say, beginning in about 1940.

But the Air Corps, particularly, began to have cadet classes et cetera. They needed teachers, they needed people to work as well as people to fight.

Those of us in the class – and I think there were about a dozen of us taking weather forecasting at Spartan School of Aeronautics – we all had the opportunity. I believe all of us did – I know I did – to become a teacher of weather to basic cadets, basic training, primary basic and advanced with the three levels and weather was taught at the basic course.

It was civil service and I had a pay of \$2,000 a year. I got every penny of it. There were no deductions whatsoever and I considered myself to be rich. I was 19 years old and earning \$166 a month clear was a real controversy as far as I was concerned.

Actually, I was married at the time. I married in December of '41 – Bristow girl that I've been going with

JE: And her name?

GK: Her legal name was Edwin Roll Stone Freeland. She was a member of the Freeland family, which was an early family in Bristow.

At any rate, I went to Randolph Field as an assistant instructor in meteorology – I can't remember the title, I'm sorry, but never the civil service position – received training at Randolph Field – just a month or two – and then went to Perrin field at Sherman, Texas to teach aviation cadets. That must have been in April or May of '42. And I taught until the draft board began to breathe down my neck.

I was in Bristow draft region, and the draft board sort of gave indications that I was going to be drafted even though I was in an essential occupation – shall we say – teaching aviation cadets weather. And the Superintendent of the school there at Perrin Field. The major, who was head of the ground school, had been a superintendent of schools in Wisconsin and had been enticed into the army just as I had been. But he was actually a major – appointed a major – but he was former superintendent. Nevertheless wanted to keep me. Apparently I satisfied him as far as teaching aviation cadets.

He said, "Why don't you enlist right here at Perrin Field? We'll give you a brief training and then you'll be back here teaching, but you'll be back as

an enlisted person.” I spent, I think, a week in rudimentary training at Perrin Field. I never went through basic training, I never did experience what all of the people who have been in the various parts of the army or navy.

Likewise, probably, shortcut that because he wanted me to teach and I got rudimentary introductory training on the ground and then went back to teaching as a private, aviation cadets who are also private, you realize. But what the major said was that they will never respect a person of the same rank: cadets. Also being about my age, most of them were 18-21 years old, so he immediately appointed me to be a corporal.

So I was a corporal from then on for a year or two. At any rate, I stumbled – while I was there – across a brochure that offered good students, shall we say, an opportunity to apply to a training to become weather officers. But it was not advanced, it was called premierology training and there were about a dozen liberal arts schools – universities – where that was carried on: Reed College, Carleton College, I think the University of Chicago Vanderbilt.

The school that I was sent to, though I was accepted by the Air Corps to go to a premierology school and I was sent to Pomona College in Claremont, California where I spent a full year while people were shooting each other all over the world. But I was in training in college. Originally there were about 250 of us at Pomona and, of course, the schools had been emptied of men by the fact that so many had drafted. They were eager to have a contract with the army for teaching.

At the end of that period, though, instead of becoming weather officers, they closed not only all of those schools but they even closed cadet training by that time. And I'm talking about 1944 – this is early '44, January of '44 – it was obvious that we were prevailing both in the Pacific and the European theater, but we were running short of men – active men – particularly ground forces, and I was given the opportunity to decide several things that I could do.

I could – in the Air Corps – I could have done electronics, which would have been marvelous for me. I wish I'd done that. But I elected to have

additional training in the army specialized training program but they closed that before I was ever enrolled in anything.

Those of us who were in the ASDP or going to be in the ASDP – were sent to the ground forces. I was sent to Camp Adair in Oregon near Corvallis and assigned to be a machine gunner in a rifle company. A rifle company has three rifle platoons and a light weapons platoon. That is a couple of squads of light machine guns – two light machine guns, 30 caliber – and three mortars – the light mortars 60 millimeters.

In every battalion, there is a heavy weapons company which has a water cooled machine gun. Ours were air cooled – light machine gun – air cooled. The heavy weapons company had bigger mortars, .81 millimeter mortars and water cooled, which can continue firing indefinitely. Ours, if you fire too much too long, the barrel gets red hot and begins to buckle. At any rate, I was a machine gunner.

Needless to say, all of us who had come out of the various branches of programs that have been cut. Our morale was not great and all of us ASDP people – there were several hundred of us, I know – after we've been to Camp Adair only perhaps a month were called to the baseball diamond for orientation, shall we say. And our speaker was George C. Marshall – a four-star general at the time – who was head of all forces. Not just the army, but the navy, all the armed forces. Apparently they were aware. And of course the 70th division where I've been sent was only one of many. It had been organized just for the war.

I used to know how many divisions were in Europe, but it's an awful lot of them not to include the ones in the Pacific but, nevertheless, we were just a small cog. That's what I'm trying to say. He came and told us – I can almost give it verbatim – “Men, you are called by your country because we need you. We are winning the war in the Pacific. We are winning the war in Europe. But we have found while we control the air, our navy is superior. In both cases, our weakness, both in numbers and in quality, is in the ground forces. We need infantrymen and you've been chosen because your country is in a position where we're short of people and we expect you to do your duty.”

Now, actually, it did make a difference to us. But I think time also made a difference to us and we gradually adapted and bonded as best you can. Any enterprise where you depend on each other. You have to have a bond.

JE: When he spoke and afterward – those you were with – were you gung ho?

GK: It helped is really what I can say. Being paid attention to helped. And I'm sure he didn't go to very many of those – he couldn't have – this was a busy man.

JE: And you knew General George C. Marshall, who he was?

GK: Oh yes, we knew indeed.

Chapter 07 – 11:55

Battle of the Bulge

John Erling (JE): You were assigned to what company?

George Krumme (GK): I was assigned to Company G in the weapons platoon, as I say, we trained at Adair. You would think that being in Oregon, they would have sent us to the Pacific – but they were having trouble in Europe by that time and could see the German army really was superior. After all, they'd been fighting for several years. They obviously were much more experienced, but we were having difficulty even at that time in July – this was after D-Day.

We were sent to Fort Leonard Wood on our way to Europe and we spent a couple, or three months there, and then went to Boston to be sent to the European theater.

We went through Gibraltar, landed at Marseille, were sent to the front – which by that time Seventh Army was occupying Alsace and Lorraine up near Strasbourg in the northeast corner, you might say, of France – and we were sent there arriving on New Year's Eve of 1944.

While we were on the trains traveling 4mph in 40 and eight dinky railroad cars over newly repaired tracks – it took us 10 days to go about 500 miles – the Battle of The Bulge started on the 16th. We were midway on our way to Strasbourg at that time and we were not really aware of it for several days – we were cut off, you might say, from communication – but we were stationed along the Rhine River. Facing the Rhine and, of course, the German troops were on the other side, but it was relatively quiet except that on the first day of the New Year.

New Year's Eve at midnight the Germans commit their last offensive of the war on the western front – probably the last one everywhere because the Russians were pushing the back – they had no opportunity for offensives on the east front.

But the last one was an effort to come drive down through the Vosges Mountains – which parallel the Rhine on the west side in France – to relieve pressure on the troops in the Bulge by breaking down through the Vosges – the Vosges were thinly protected by the Seventh Army because the third Army had been moved west to fight in the battle of the Bulge and the Seventh Army had spread out so thin that the Vosges was protected even by cavalymen with no cavalry – neither mechanized and certainly no horses by that time.

But nevertheless, there were cavalry units that were stationed in the Vosges, and the Germans believed they could break through. They did advance about 20 miles beginning at midnight of January the 1st – that is to say, between New Year's Eve and New Year's in the heavy snow and a complete surprise through very thin lines.

In the next three days, they had made about 20 miles pushing down in the Vosges. Now, these are big hills that are not mountains and the northern Vosges, the mountains are in the southern Vosges. We were in the low Vosges, But our division – actually the division was not all there – the three regimental units, the rifle companies were there, but the artillery didn't come for another couple of months due to delayed shipment.

The ships weren't available to send them. At any rate, on the evening of 2nd January, we were sent in a heavy snow from our stations on the Rhine,

west to resist the German offensive. We went into the Vosges during the night in trucks in extremely cold weather. It was extremely cold. We were dressed for it, but even so, it was cold and you have to sit in the back of a truck and can't move, can't get any exercise. It was a miserable night.

We arrived at a little place called Puberg in the Vosges after having been transferred a couple of times. It was chaotic. Trucks were stuck in the snow, and it was working in the dark and, of course, all you had was little blinkers. You couldn't have any real lights – no truck lights – you were working in the dark and all kinds of difficulties that you can imagine a chaotic situation like that.

But we arrived at Puberg, a little village – no more than a few 100 people, I'm sure – de-trucked, our commander was requested to take a couple of companies down a ridge going towards a little village called Wingen-sur-Moder, which had been captured that very morning by infiltrating German troops that the Americans had reason to believe – incorrectly were about 50 in number – which they had conquered the headquarters of one of the battalions for the 45th Division, Oklahoma's troops. We always claimed the 45th division as ours.

But at any rate, they had captured a hundred and some and killed a number in the invasion that morning without real resistance because they had come in at five o'clock while everybody was asleep and there was not a single soul up watching for them.

During the snow, they had walked single file several miles coming through the thin lines undetected completely until they burst on the American troops above Wingen. And then even, with the noise of their – the headquarters – had not alerted anybody, even though there had been fighting within a mile of the town.

At any rate, we – without going into too deeply – swept that ridge and then pulled back, which was a mistake. We should have stayed there, and we spent the next three days – not just us, but our entire division – trying to drive the Germans out of this little town, Wingen, which several hundred people – Puberg must have been less than a hundred – battalion was finally charged with the responsibility to go into the town.

Others had tried unsuccessfully and it made part of the way, we had an awful lot of casualties. The reason we had a great deal of difficulty was the German invading troops, infiltrating troops were not just 50.

I have written and I've forgotten how many – 700 – it was part of a regiment... A depleted regiment that's much smaller, of course. A regiment normally is about 3000. I don't know the German Army rules well enough, but this was the remnants of a regiment that had infiltrated and occupied it. They came through the line in the snow, single file, without ever breaking a line. Which is hard to do as you can imagine in the dark, starting at midnight until about five o'clock when they got where they were.

JE: Not breaking a line? What do you mean?

GK: Well, in single file, if someone slacks off and you lose contact with the person in front of you and you're in the dark, of course they might have followed the tracks, but it really was dark in the snow – midnight with no artificial light whatsoever. You almost had to touch the person in front of you and they had to be quiet because if they made any noise, an American soldier, someplace along the line might have heard them.

Their radio unit had been captured before they came through. They had no radio contact. And this entire unit, the sixth SS Mountain Division had recently come from Finland. Finland had surrendered to the Russians and agreed to help the Russians drive the German troops out of Finland. So they had had to walk most of the way around the coast north of Norway and a lake across to Denmark and then get back into Germany.

This was their first action, and these had been fighting the Germans for several years in Finland and were experienced troops. History people say this particular division of mountain troops probably were the most experienced troops on the western front, at the time, and one of the regiments depleted in size considerably, certainly, occupied this little town and our battalion was the one, theoretically, who drove them out of Wingen.

Ironically, they had received a messenger from the main lines. See, they had infiltrated, our lines were north of Wingen and... Wingen – they were completely out by themselves with troops to the north and we were trying to drive them out of Wingen. But they had infiltrated through the lines and the 45th Division had troops north of them and they were out like a sore thumb without any artillery support.

Without radio contact, they had come from Finland so recently they had turned in their helmets – they didn't even have helmets – they had the little caps that they wore when they didn't have helmets and they had no reserves of ammunition.

All the ammunition they had was what they brought with them – what they could carry in the snow – which is certainly limited, but they had captured a few tanks, American tanks in Wingen and had captured all the rifles, et cetera, armament that a headquarters company would have, which mostly would be rifles of one sort or another.

They had that ammunition and actually used our guns resisting our attack. We were successful, in a sense, of driving them back on the day that we did actually start through the village.

But the irony is, they had already had a messenger infiltrate through the lines with the message: “Retreat, come back through as best you can.” But they didn't get the message until about five o'clock in the morning. And they obviously did not have time before daybreak. And they could only have come back through the lines to the north, through the 45th lines in the dark.

So they resisted. As we entered, we lost numerous... Company F probably lost – well, I know – lost most; 19 men killed plus innumerable wounded. I don't remember how many,

JE: But if they had 700, you say?

GK: By that time, of course they were thin.

JE: How many did you have?

GK: Oh, we vastly outnumbered them.

JE: So you had more than 700?

GK: When we invaded, we invaded with two companies, we had about 300. And by that time we had captured so many of them and killed quite a few of them – that I have no idea how many were there.

JE: Were using a machine gun, were you?

GK: Well, I was a machine gun squad leader by that time.

JE: You were commissioned officer by that time.

GK: No, I was not. I was – I was a buck sergeant. That is the lowest sergeant, but I had been promoted from a machine gunner when we went overseas. See, I've skipped an awful lot of stuff, haven't I?

We had men who were old cadre and they were too old to go overseas. So several of us were advanced position instead of being a machine gunner.

By that time, I was a squad leader of a machine gun squad which contains a gunner, an assistant gunner, and two ammunition bearers who were supposed to continually feed ammunition. I had a machine gunner directly underneath me. I had four men under me.

JE: Wasn't it during this time–

GK: And that's during this period – but there were two companies going through the town and the companies of riflemen – it's about 150 – so there were 300 of us trying to go through the village. The Germans were bound to have been thinned by that time. There probably weren't more than well – I know when they left – 200 and some withdrew, so they were about half.

But at any rate, it was dark, we had gone through about half the village and were ordered to pull back for the night. It was getting dark enough so

that you really couldn't see when they counterattacked.

In the counter attack, they came down from the railroad in the backwoods – which was higher up – and a hill to the north which, about at all times, was occupied by the Germans. It was dark enough so that we couldn't see them, they couldn't see us, but our company commander Captain Cassidy – he was lieutenant at that time.

Lieutenant Cassidy found both our machine gunners in our weapons platoon had been wounded – Cassidy found Keeler's gun in the snow there when he left and wasn't experienced enough to fire it.

I was looking for Keeler, who had been wounded, and he gave me the machine gun and sat down with me behind a little picket fence and I fired back at the counter attack and was certainly the only machine gun that fired.

The Germans stopped the attack. Cassidy presumed that it was my firing of the machine gun that slowed them down. Who knows? But anyway we spent the night there and the irony is that we had been ordered to retreat. The Germans didn't need to counterattack any more than we needed to drive them out.

They would have retreated that night – which they did – all that they could gather together the non-wounded people who could go back. There were 200 some – I wish I had written some of that down – they made it back through... but back through the line, they were discovered and some of them were captured on the way out, way back through the lines.

JE: Were men around you being killed?

GK: In my company. We only lost one – killed in that drive because F Company had gone through first. Just one company, and they were the ones who really that morning had suffered the casualties.

G Company, and E Company went side-by-side through after them and we lost several wounded but mostly in the counterattack. But we were lucky in that we were going through territory that had been partially swept. We

had only one man killed and several wounded, and most of them were wounded during the counter attack.

Chapter 08 – 8:25

Silver Star and Purple Heart

John Erling (JE): But in this encounter you were awarded the Silver Star.

George Krumme (GK): I was awarded the Silver Star.

JE: Have you already talked about that? What you did? Because I have it here.

GK: Well–

JE: That you ran from a covered position, manned a machine gun all the while being subjected to murderous enemy fire to cover the withdrawal of the company.

GK: Well, that sounds like it was from the award that I was given because “covered by murderous fire” was one of the phrases that they commonly used. We were covered by fire. But that's overblown.

JE: Yeah, it does come from the award. That's what I'm reading from. And you showed remarkable leadership – leadership in organizing the defense, the house in which the squad had taken cover and in taking care of the wounded until relief arrived.

“His brave action was instrumental in enabling the company to reorganize attack and capture the village.”

GK: I've written about that. There is a regular segment of the regimental headquarters company that is assigned how to word those things. And they have a regular glossary of terms they use and you can recognize them there. You'll never really know what happened from that kind of award.

JE: Are you saying this-

GK: I mean, they always use – those are stock phrases. Essentially, It's true. But it's much–

JE: Grandiose?

GK: What happened was, Cassidy had this machine gun – he's the company commander – he had just been promoted because Lampson, our company commander, had been wounded in a booby trap. Yeah. And so he was new. But I was astounded. He didn't know how to fire a machine gun. It's not hard to want. You know, I mean there's no guard, there's no nothing. But he brought it to me. I don't mean he was looking for me. I don't know.

We bumped into another, but he had the machine gun and he gave it to me because I had been a machine gunner and I laid down and fired at the enemy. He immediately, as company commander, skipped back to get his troops.

We were already retreating and he wanted to go back with them and encourage them. But there were numerous wounded right by me behind the building where I had been, but it was dark, black dark except for the fires burning – burning in one building, there was a coal pile burning – but I fired at the Germans and he thought I drove them back. I didn't know I'd done anything great. I was firing machine gun!

Hell, that's what I was supposed to do. And I did fire at them right in the face of it. And, of course, they could see where it was dangerous and that they could see where the machine gun fire was coming from because the flash is so in that sense, I would have been a target.

But anyhow, we spent the night, you know, building, they're isolated from the rest of the company which had retreated two or three blocks back and they thought we were all captured or killed and there were about 30 of us in this building and they were tickled to death the next morning when they came through in renewing the attack, the Germans had gone.

They came across us and we hugged each other and had a big reunion right there. But they had thought we'd been captured or killed.

JE: What you've described, you'd say to yourself, it was no big deal. It was all part of what we do in battle. And somehow this commander must have liked you.

GK: Well, Cassidy thought that I'd really done something unusual.

JE: And so you had done something?

GK: I don't know if it was unusual.

JE: Yeah, but I don't know if you're being humble here or not, but you didn't think it was extraordinary. Is that – would that be accurate?

GK: Yeah, I just thought I did what I was supposed to do. But I will say that the rest of them at the time – the guys who came in thought I had saved something. It wasn't just Cassidy.

Because we weren't firing back at all. And I was – all of a sudden – firing a machine gun. Now the German machine guns fire almost twice as rapidly. We could tell an American machine gun from a German because it goes (vocalizes) and their's goes (vocalizing) brrrrt. And of course, we had heavy weapons behind us.

The heavy weapons platoon behind us – that had water-cooled machine guns – they didn't dare fire because they didn't know where we were. They didn't know where the Germans were, it was dark, they couldn't see anybody. And so they never fired anything during this particular action because they didn't know who was where.

So that was the only machine gun firing, and there may be a little bit of modesty on my part, but I was a little surprised to get a silver star, but they thought I deserved it.

JE: But you took care of the wounded.

GK: Oh, that's true, that's true. I was a sergeant and there was nobody else in that building other than the 30 who had a sergeant's rating. So I was the commanding officer, you might say, in that building for that 10 hours.

JE: But the award calls you a second lieutenant.

GK: I got a battlefield commission.

JE: Okay. But you became a second lieutenant.

GK: I became a second.

JE: Okay, (chuckling) very good.

GK: You'd have done better to waste your time reading my thing because you ought to read it.

JE: Were you given a purple heart?

GK: I got a purple heart, but I didn't really earn that.

JE: And what was it for?

GK: I got a scratch right here—

JE: Under your chin?

GK: Yeah, it's still there. It was part of an American bullet. I'm not even sure whether the rules at that time permit giving a purple heart for friendly fire. It was a mistake. Colonel Connolly after the war, our regimental commander asked me, "Were you wounded during the war?" I have a helmet with a hole in it. He had seen that.

By that time, I'd been transferred to headquarters company – the regimental headquarters companies – in Germany after the war. And he asked if I were wounded? And I said no, I gotta scratch once in my cheek. And I explained him this story that it had been an American bullet thinking we were Germans, and the bullet had hit the pillbox and a piece

of it – I presumed – had hit my jaw. And he said, “Well, did the first aid man treat it?” And I said he put a bandaid on it.

I got a call that afternoon from his clerk who said Connolly says to give you a purple heart, can you give me a detail or two so I can write it in? I even gave him the wrong date because I don't remember when it was – it was about a month before, two months before, perhaps.

So I got a purple heart and I'm sheepish about it. That's why you ought to read that damn thing I sent you. You enjoy it. In fact, I wrote a whole separate article that's under my name on Google that I wrote about the whole thing – because the pillbox was a German pillbox.

Actually, it was not a complete pillbox. It was for the soldiers' protection – walls this thick to protect them, but it's built by the Germans on French soil facing the Maginot line on French soil during what was called the phony war.

No action on the Western front all of the winter of 1939 when the Germans invaded Poland.

JE: Were they awfully anxious to hand out purple hearts?

GK: Well, Connolly like –

JE: Why would they do that for something that apparently – I'm gonna take you for your word – was as minor as what happened?

GK: Well, he knew that I had been active. Not just there, but other places and I don't know. He just thought I deserved a Purple Heart because I had a scratch and it didn't hurt him, of course, to have more purple hearts given he was a colonel. He wanted to be a brigadier general. He eventually was. But anyhow, that's all in my – I think you'll enjoy reading that.

JE: Well, I will. I just wanted to hear you say it. I could read it but I wanted also to hear you say it. You've told it now and when you hear that they cite you for having received the Purple Heart then–

GK: Well, I've told you the facts.

JE: You feel kind of funny then, don't you?

GK: Oh, I'm embarrassed. But you don't tell the colonel. Thank you, no. In addition to that I had a selfish interest in it.

Having a purple heart doesn't mean anything. I mean not to me. I didn't plan on running for office or anything. But it did mean five points on the way home. I got home probably a week early because I had a purple heart. Maybe two weeks. I don't know. That was months later.

Chapter 09 – 3:05

Dr. Krumme

John Erling (JE): Let's move on and get you out of the army.

George Krumme (GK): I'm out of the army.

JE: You go to Pomona college.

GK: Well, you see, I had a full year at Pomona. I had two years at A&M. Before A&M, I took a heavy course. I took a lot of hours. At Pomona, that was a year of full time training heavier than college. So they agreed that they would grant me a BA.

But as far as a degree in mathematics – which is what I had had more of at Pomona – I had none at A&M. But at Pomona I'd had a lot. And in my final year they agreed that if I'd go one semester that they would give me one.

But with a degree with a concentration in mathematics, they said, “You haven't had enough advanced mathematics that we, in good conscience, can say that you have a degree with a major in mathematics.”

So really, I got out with what I would call a “bastard degree” but I had 180 hours, I think. And all I have to have is 100 and 20 but they didn't fit.

But they were very generous – all colleges, everybody was generous to veterans at that time – and what I wanted was the degree. I didn't need to know advanced mathematics because I didn't intend to teach mathematics or anything of that sort. So it was mutually beneficial. I spent one semester there and graduated in January of '47.

JE: And then you went to work full time for the family company?

GK: Yes I did.

JE: Krumme Oil.

GK: Krumme Oil Company. Dad had bought several properties and he had brought my brother Harlan into it earlier. Harlan came back earlier because he went in earlier, he ended up a captain.

He had gone in as a second lieutenant because he had taken ROTC at Norman – therefore had gone overseas earlier than by a year and a half I think – and therefore was let out early.

I had come back to work for the company and dad offered me the same deal that he had offered Harlan. So I worked with the company from there on then.

JE: You went to earn your masters degree in petroleum engineering?

GK: Yes, I didn't go back to college, though, to get my masters until I had worked for the family company for a dozen years. But we moved to Tulsa in 1960 and you realize that I had gone to work with the company in 1947.

I had field experience for 12 years or more but knew that it would benefit me in my work to know more petroleum engineering. So I got a master's in the petroleum engineering having spent five years, nights and Sundays getting a degree, I didn't go back full time. I just worked nights and Sundays, I took off a semester or so and and swore I'd never want to do that again but got interested in a course or two in geology and got hooked on that – interested in it – and then spent the next almost 10 years working

on geological degree and got my PhD in '75. Not that I really needed it or rarely used it, but was interested in learning it.

JE: So you're Dr. Krumme?

GK: I am Dr. Krumme, yes.

Chapter 10 – 11:38

Politics

John Erling (JE): When did you get involved with politics?

George Krumme (GK): I was a little interested when we were still in Bristow – I was a precinct chairman. So I can't say that I started, but I really didn't get active in it until I became interested in the Vietnam war. I thought the Vietnam war was a mistake. I still think so. We should not have done what we did. It was worse than a mistake. As someone said, it was a blunder. We should not have been.

JE: How old then are you about this time when you're getting involved and really serious about politics?

GK: I would have been in my 40s.

JE: Okay. Your family had been a member of the Democratic Party for years --

GK: Well, my father had been an active Democrat, yes, active in local politics. A matter of fact, had gone to the '64 National Convention as an observer and in '68 was chosen as an alternate delegate.

That was the year of the Chicago riots, if you'll recall.

JE: Hubert Humphrey then would have been--

GK: Yes. Dad was an alternate delegate and had had a heart attack – not a serious one – a few months before. And I used that for, I really think, as an

excuse more than a reason to go with him or at the same time, I should say. I stayed in a different part of the hotel, et cetera, but was, with the Oklahoma thing, as just simply a guest – shall we say, as an interested Oklahoman. I was not a delegate.

JE: It was in Chicago

GK: In Chicago.

JE: So did you see the riots in the streets?

GK: Yes. The night that they marched from the convention hall back to the hotel, if I remember correctly, that was the one night I got a pass to go to the convention itself and sit in the bleachers and watch it. And I walked with the group that did march back to the hotel.

And actually, as far as the riot, I did not see it. I did march right along the edge of it where the young men with rifles in their hands with wide eyes – they didn't know what they're doing.

Thank God nothing happened in that regard. But my wife had come – she taught French. Eddy was a French teacher at TU. At that time, I've forgotten whether she was at TU yet or still at Memorial. But anyhow, she had been to France for training and flew back directly to Chicago from France. And I flew from Tulsa there. So she was involved in the part where the riot occurred.

Yes, she was there.

JE: She saw it.

GK: She saw it. She was involved in it. She talked to policemen. She objected to policemen. She helped one of the guys and the policeman threatened her, but she was in her forties and he wasn't about to bother her. So she got away with it. At any rate, I did not see the riots.

JE: And we should say, the reason for the march and the unrest... You can tell us why.

GK: It was due to the very active resistance to the war and there were groups who made theater of it, but it was all done due to the resistance against the Vietnam War and the police reaction to it, which by most people's standards, was exaggerated. It was greater than it should have been and it damaged the Democratic Party for decades still, to some extent.

JE: Did you go back then as a delegate? Was it in '92?

GK: I was a delegate in '72. We had an effort for McGovern here in Tulsa and what I'll call the party regulars really were supporting Humphrey.

If you were here at the time, I don't know, we won by Fannie Power. We were not a majority, but we were a heavy minority. People were really activated by the Vietnam War. There was a great number of democrats who thought it was a mistake to be there and were actively trying to get us out.

An awful lot of them became delegates to the Tulsa first district convention, but not enough to control it. But we were enough to be a serious participant in the activity. And the whole convention dragged on so long that the party regulars – people weren't willing to stay up until one or two o'clock in the morning.

It started at 10 o'clock in the morning and dragged on, and dragged on, and dragged on, and our contingent was more committed – shall we say – than the average democrat.

We stayed and many of the rest left until we were majority. By the time delegates were chosen, we were actually the majority and we elected the few delegates that we were permitted to elect in the first district – and I was one of the ones selected because I was a leader in it.

JE: So they were-

GK: It probably was Maynard Ungerman and I and several others. I was in the leader group of the McGovern people.

JE: The delegates all then would have been anti-Vietnam.

GK: Yes.

JE: So you went, and then...?

GK: I went to Miami for the convention as a delegate. Yes. And '72 McGovern – he ran and lost drastically. If you'll remember, he carried only two states I think in the general election.

But McGovern was the nominee and he-

JE: And he lost to Nixon.

GK: Of course, Nixon had already been elected in '68 – Humphrey had lost to Nixon '68.

JE: Right – so Senator McGovern was the standard bearer for the democrats, and he lost to Richard Nixon then in '72.

GK: It was a fiasco, you might say. He had chosen Senator Eagleton to be his vice presidential, and Eagleton was revealed to have had neurological mental treatments of some sort and withdrew, and Shriver became the vice presidential nominee then and they lost badly.

JE: Yeah, But you continued on. I mean, it didn't deter you from being involved.

GK: I continued to be active in local politics more than state at that time. But Ed Cadenhead was a professor at TU. Like many, he had been opposed to the Vietnam War – but I played tennis with him quite frequently. We were close friends.

He, in the '76 election, wanted to have his wife elected as a delegate, Peggy. Ed had run for Congress in this district in, I think, '66. I'm not sure, but had earlier run against Paige Belcher for this district Congress position unsuccessfully.

Times were tough then too for Democrats in '76, the next national

convention that would choose the next nominees. He wanted Peggy to be a delegate. So he made a deal with numerous active people who would be at the convention that he would support them.

They more or less worked up a slate. "I'll support your candidate or delegate if you'll support Peggy." And they worked up a group of compatible democrats and had no trouble whatsoever electing the whole slate, including Peggy.

And then – I was probably playing tennis with him – and he said, "Have you thought about running for a national committee?" And I said, "Oklahoma National Committee?" and I said, "Why would I want to do that?"

"Well," he said, "I have this group put together, it's a shame to waste it. We could have some influence on the state convention, and there you have some contacts of your own here and there and yon, you might make it." So being young and ambitious – relatively young, I guess I was 50 at the time – I said, "Well we might try it. Why not?"

So I ran for state Oklahoma National Committee. You have a committee woman and a committeeman. And Oklahoma City also had talked to J. C. Kennedy – who was an adviser from a lot and for the Edmondson group and a real politician.

He said, "Well, I have no reason not to support you." I said, "I will not run if you want to run and be National Committeeman." And he said, "I'm not interested in it, but I'll support you."

Well, this gave me a head start someplace else. I'd had relationships with him – brief, not close but brief. We carried on a campaign that was really uphill and we won out of the 700 total votes, I think we won by 13.

So a switch of seven votes, I got 300 and some against 300 and some and was elected national committeeman. And, of course, I was on the liberal side of the party. But most of the actives, in those days, certainly in the party, the liberal people are generally more active than the average democrat as you well know. It's that way in the Republican Party, too. The active people are the ones who are really committed to whatever direction

their orientation is, which is mainly conservative.

I was elected five times, and the first one I had an active opponent and the second I had a semi-active opponent. In the last two times, I think I didn't have any opponents. I was national committeeman for 20 years.

JE: And what does that mean?

GK: Well, theoretically you have influence on the National party – and certainly on the state level, you do. You're an officer on the Central Committee on the national level. Of course, you're one of about 500 and your influence varies depending on what kind of influence that you can personally carry.

I can't say that I ever had very much influence on the national level, except that I did originate in the confidence that I'm proud of on the state level. But the National Party had to tell us, here in Oklahoma, that the state party had to reapportion.

We were badly out of balance in the representative party with regard to the people. Every county had three members of the state committee, if I remember correctly. That meant that Beaver County had as many as Oklahoma County – a portion we had to reapportion because Oklahoma County and Tulsa County with maybe half the representatives in the state population.

I don't know it's that much, but at any rate, certainly a very heavy portion, maybe a quarter or a third had the same vote as to the two least counties, Cimarron County in Beaver County or whatever the two least ones are.

And it's difficult to have an effective organization when it's that malapportioned. We had actually filed a suit in which my name appeared first. I don't know previous that in federal court who blustered and threatened the party and eventually admitted I don't have any jurisdiction whatsoever, but you ought to do it.

I raised the issue while I was National Committee and had been the National Committee maybe for several years – I raised the issue and the

National Party looked into its central representative here and said it's unhealthy for the party to be this malapportioned.

They came and as a group called a meeting and said, we are not going to force you to do it. It's your party. You do what you want to. But if you want to vote at the national level at the national conventions, you're going to have to reapportion.

And of course, there's no point in having a party if you can't be involved. So we did accomplish that. That was, I guess, the one thing I think as a national committee man that I did, that I consider to be important enough to even mention the rest of it was just going to conventions and drinking coffee.

Chapter 11 – 8:57

Carl Albert

John Erling (JE): I noticed in the '92 National Convention, that was when Bill Clinton was nominated of all the delegates. Carl Albert was one of them.

George Krumme (GK): He would have been.

JE: Were you around him at all? Did you ever know him?

GK: Not well. I did get a call from him though, a couple of years later on the telephone. He knew who I was, obviously, and I certainly knew who he was.

But at any rate, he called and said "George the year I graduated from OU, and I think it was '31, I was Outstanding Male Student." and I said, "Yes Mr. Speaker, I knew that."

"And the Outstanding Female Student was from Bristow." "Yes. Mr Speaker, I knew that." He said, "I have a mental block. I know it as well as anything – I cannot remember – I cannot call up her name, can you tell me?" and I said "Half of Bristow, Mr. Speaker, would have known her name. You're speaking of Velma Jones, now Velma Collins."

“Oh,” he said “Yes, yes, yes, thank you very much. I just couldn't think of it.” I think that he needed the name because he was working on his memoir, “Little Giant from Little Dixie” or whatever the name of it is, and he was including a picture, because I have the book and in the book is a picture of him with Velma with two giant loving cups in front, and I think he was working on that and he really, literally couldn't call up her name.

They're both dead, of course. Long time now. But Velma's son, Roger, said that Velma said there were several women who could have easily been chosen the Outstanding Woman, but she was the only one of that group who was shorter than Carl Albert and that's the reason she was chosen. Of course, that's a good joke, but –

JE: The Democrat Party is so strong in the state of Oklahoma. Henry Bellmon comes along, becomes the first Republican governor –

GK: Yes, yes.

JE: – in January of 1963. Bellmon ran against Bill Atkinson. Is that a campaign that you got heavily involved in, or?

GK: No, I was so busy working and I was young enough that I was not active in that, at all.

JE: Bellmon runs against Bill Atkinson and he defeats, and so we have our first Republican governor.

GK: Yes.

JE: I don't know what kind of consternation that caused you or the Democratic Party-

GK: I was not active enough in the party at that time. Well, actually, we democrats – I think at least those of us who were interested in the state's welfare rather than just the welfare of the Democratic Party – recognized a one-party state, generally speaking, is run inefficiently.

If one party dominates it, you have too much infighting, you have too much “self” involved in it rather than good policies. Our legislature could have been approved by having Republicans have a voice powerful enough that they had to pay attention. Just as now, I will say that the Republican control over the legislature and all the party officers is going to be a problem for them in the future because they, likewise, will suffer from the weaknesses of having one party rule.

JE: Because we can say – I have, as of November of 2012 elections – Republicans have a two-thirds majority in both the Oklahoma Senate and Oklahoma House of Representatives.

They hold all statewide offices, all congressional seats. As of January 15th, 2013, there are 897-some-thousand Republican voters compared to 962,000. So we're getting close to being almost even, because then there are 256,000 voters registered as independent – but the Republicans do obviously hold sway as the Democrats did back in the '60s.

GK: They are veto-proof in the legislature now. Which again, as I say, will cause them problems because it's unhealthy. Just as it did us when Bellmon revitalized – vitalized. Vitalized the Republican party, which was a healthy thing to do.

JE: Right. Al Snipes, you know him. Al Snipes is known as the godfather of the Republican Party and he's the one who registered Republicans and did that for many, many, many years leading up to the campaign of Henry Bellmon and all that. But you didn't know of him?

GK: No, I did not know. I knew Henry Bellmon. He came to Bristow and spoke to the rotary club, did an excellent job, had his feet on the ground. I admire Henry Bellmon a great deal.

JE: Where were you when John Kennedy was assassinated at 12:30 on Friday, November 22, 1963 in Dallas?

GK: We ate with my father at our house. I'm speaking of my brother, Harlan, and me and my father ate at his home because our office in Bristow – still is, matter of fact – and I remember that I had just finished and left in the

car and was by our house in the car driving down the street when I heard it on the radio.

JE: What were your feelings?

GK: Devastation. It really was a loss for this country. Terrible event.

JE: The treatment of blacks in Oklahoma prior to '64 Civil Rights Act. Did you see how blacks were treated?

GK: In my experience, blacks knew their place. We knew their place. There was no problem at all in Bristow or Tuskegee. You realized I was at Tuskegee and there were black farmers there. I will say that I saw discrimination per se, it just was that they had separate schools. The schools were not financed as well as the white schools. There was discrimination but it wasn't overt, in my experience.

JE: – and it was just accepted.

GK: It was just accepted. That's the way things were. I do remember this: my two boys were six and eight at the time and had a black playmate – maybe they were five and seven, I don't remember it.

Anyhow, they were quite young – and they recognized and asked my wife and me, “Why can't he join us regularly?”, “Why can't he go into our school?”, et cetera. So I know kids are more sensitive to things sometimes than adults, and we adults just sort of accepted as that's the way it has always been, but there definitely was discrimination

JE: And then Henry Bellmon made sure the '64 Civil Rights Act was implemented in Oklahoma. Do you see a way for democrats to start winning elections? Now we have tea party Republicans, we have moderate Republicans, they are not getting along in most elections held today.

The primary for Republicans are the most interesting races and in some instances, Democrats don't even bother to file. That's where we are now. How do you see that?

GK: The Republicans eventually will do themselves in. I don't think it will be our actions, it'll be their actions. It's an odd situation in this regard. In Oklahoma particularly, it's the social issues, I think, that are the Republican strength and I'm speaking guns, gays, and God, and they've won on that basis.

When it comes to economics, the tea party people, but mainly the poor and the middle class are disadvantaged by the Republicans' actions. They've lowered taxes, they've cut back on education, all kinds of legislation that benefit, well, anybody except the top 1%. That's nationally, as well as here. Economically, people are voting against their own self-interest and, surely, people who don't realize that aren't really paying any attention.

The corporations, the wealth they have dominated nationally, as well as in Oklahoma – and still outside money is coming into Oklahoma for the Republican causes, and they say so. They recognize it, surely, but the social issues have dominated. I'm not sure that the Republicans will continue to be able to rely on that alone, enough to win elections.

It may not be due to our virtues, but due to their failures that allow the Democrats to come back, if nothing else. Also, attitudes change. I never would have thought 10 years ago that the gay movement would have gained the acceptance that it has nationally, even in the South and even here, to some extent, in Oklahoma.

As reluctant as we are to change, there has been a change, people's attitudes can change again. So who knows what in the future? All I do know is nothing is permanent except death and taxes, and surely we'll be able to prevail one of these days here in Oklahoma again.

Chapter 12 – 3:00

A Believing Democrat

John Erling (JE): Well, you've been so involved in the Democratic Party, the Oklahoma Democratic Party's headquarters bears your name.

George Krumme (GK): Yes, but of course, you realize that's not only a recognition of the fact that I've been active – which it does have some influence – it's also due to the fact that I gave enough money that they have honored me with that.

JE: Well, you've given liberally. You've given when there's seemingly no chance for a Democrat to win. You currently reached the federal maximum dollars allowed for candidates to this day and you knock on doors, you make calls for candidates.

GK: Well, it's because I really am a dedicated Democrat. As we – history as we have and as much negative things you can say about the Democratic Party. I am a believing Democrat, I do believe that the people who have less, need more help than those of us who have a lot.

We have too much, they have too little and we're actually getting worse in the last – ever since Reagan essentially – we've gone to taking steps to help those of us who are wealthy – and I have to admit that I'm somewhere in that range, maybe in the low levels, but still, I'm definitely affluent.

We don't need it, and too many people, particularly the middle class – and we're losing the middle class due to numerous factors. It's not only national.

Part of it is the fact that the information technology, we don't have manufacturing requirements that we did before. We really have trouble competing internationally. There's less need for skilled jobs. So it's not completely simple, it's not just one thing, but I do believe that the people who need help, need help, and the government is an appropriate place to get that help – and even on the issues of gun gays and God, I'll have to admit that I'm on the Democratic side there.

I do not think that abortion is evil. I do not think that gays are cursed by God. I do not believe that we need guns to the level that we have them. Obviously guns serve a purpose, but I think we pay a price for not having control on the availability of guns. So the reason I've done all of that is that I

believe that and I'm willing to put my actions and my money in that direction.

JE: As a Democrat, it must make you feel good to know that we have a Democrat as president and that he is at least half African-American.

GK: And I never thought that would happen this soon.

JE: Right. In your lifetime.

GK: In my lifetime, I didn't think it would happen in my lifetime. We may elect a woman in my lifetime. I'm not sure. As – as Yogi Berra said, prophesying is tough, particularly about the future.

Chapter 13 – 7:40

Bristow Historian

John Erling (JE): We should say, since this is a picture of this point in time, speaking about our president, it seems there are many in the land who resent the fact that Obama is our president and is African-American, which is identified in their language as they speak about the president.

George Krumme (GK): We are infinitely better at our racism problem than we were 50 and 60 years ago. We are nowhere near a level where we would be healthier to achieve. There is still resentment against the fact that we have a black president.

JE: You have become the historian of Bristow. You've written many, many stories about that town for the newspapers and have done a wonderful job in preserving the history of that town.

GK: I have not written it exactly, as they say, history per se. I've written articles about interesting facets of particular parts of the history – which of course when you add it all together – is the history of Bristow and I've been interested in. I'm interested in history in general, of course, as so many

people are, but you're always interested in your own family, your own people, and your own hometown. I've enjoyed it.

JE: The town, as you know, is named for Joseph L. Bristow: U.S. Senator from Kansas, actually.

GK: Yes, he was fourth postmaster general and he was the one who gave approval to establishing a post office from Bristow, and they were looking for somebody to name it for and they recognized him.

He also has another little historical point. He was a senator from Kansas, subsequently. He was droning along on the senate floor and said "What this country needs" – and was going into what this country needs – when the presiding officer muttered loudly enough for the whole hall to hear him: "What this country needs is a good five cent cigar."

Now, that phrase has redounded, clear to the present, even though it's no longer appropriate, and Bristow caused it.

JE: Was there a plan to run a train to Slick, Oklahoma? Is there a story there?

GK: Oh yes. Tom Slick had made a great deal of money in the Cushing Pool. He discovered the Cushing Pool and became a millionaire from it and dropped out of the business for a while. The oil business, although later he was active enough to be called the "King of the Wildcatters."

He married Bernice Frates of the Frates family, that we know nowadays from real estate, etcetera – and Joseph Frates, the original Joseph Frates, had been a train master or worked for the Illinois central, I believe it was. When B.B. Jones, a Bristow person – was in Mississippi where he was born – and they knew one another in their railroad, both of them worked for the Illinois central.

When Frates worked for the Frisco and was superintendent for the district through Bristow. He liked to build railroads and actually built towns, which he did several – both. He came to Bristow to organize a group independently to run a spur from Depew into Shamrock.

B.B. Jones was a compatriot of Slick in the discovery of the Cushing Pool. B.B. Jones introduced Tom Slick, his friend, to his friend Joseph Frates' daughter, Bernice, and they got married. Now this meant Frates had a wealthy son-in-law and an opportunity to build the mineral belt railway that carried zinc all through the Northeast, which made a lot of money.

Frates wanted to build a railroad from Bristow to Okmulgee – and whose money did he use? Guess. Tom Slick became president of the Oklahoma Southwest Railway. “Old, slow and wobbly”, we called it. It did build a rails as far as Slick and on to New York. Slick was not in existence, but there was an oil pool there that was developing. So Frates began two ventures at once: he was building the railroad and he founded a town where the railroad crossed the pool and he named it – as he had named president of the railroad – he named the town after his son-in-law, who had furnished the money.

Tom Slick had nothing to do with the discovery of the Slick pool. He didn't own a single lease – least to my knowledge then or ever – but at any rate, indeed, that was a unique event, and the railroad lasted about seven or eight years and was torn up. The rails were torn up.

JE: You see advantages, of course, between the rail service between Tulsa and Oklahoma city. You think that will ever come about?

GK: I'm not a rail expert enough to be justified in opinion, but I do have one then.

JE: And what is it?

GK: My opinion is that if on the present tracks it will not be economically viable.

JE: Because?

GK: Because there will not be enough people use it. It's too slow. It won't make enough money to pay for the trouble. Now for freight, that's a different matter. I'm talking about the passenger part. Freight rail traffic is enough

cheaper than trucks that it probably will, with the passage of time, be justified as to carry freight.

JE: You're very giving to your community. There was a time they wanted to build a performing arts in Bristow. The Freeland Center for the Performing Arts.

GK: Yes.

JE: You gave liberally, over a million dollars to that project.

GK: Well, our family did. My brother and I married sisters, married Freeland sisters and together we've given more than a million, yes a million, and I continued to give – but nevertheless, that's the reason I asked if they would mind naming for the Freeland family. There were really pioneers there. Shall we say, early comers, and they were kind enough to do so – but it's been a real successful venture. That is a nice installation.

JE: That's great.

GK: But I really get more credit than I'm due. It was principally paid for with tax money and numerous others have given. I'm given a little more credit, as I say, than I really earned, but I still take it.

JE: Exactly. The \$6.1-million dollar theater; it was financed with a \$3-million school bond issue. And then you and your brother and others pitched in the rest of it. Is what you basically did.

GK: That's true.

JE: So it couldn't have happened without you.

GK: No, that's what they say. Well, it would have taken much longer. I'll grant that.

JE: Let's not be too humble here. Speaking of marriage, then your wife died in what year?

GK: 2011. She had been ill for a decade.

JE: And then how many children did you have?

GK: Two. Two boys.

JE: And their names are?

GK: David William Krumme and Robert Brian Krumme. Robert lives here and is president of Sooner Southwest Bankshares, which owns three banks. My other son taught at Tufts University, taught computer science and retired to Estes Park and died just last February, a year ago. Heart attack.

JE: Really? How old was he?

GK: He was 65.

JE: Oh my.

GK: Yeah, young by our standards today.

JE: Any known heart disease in the family or anything? It was just –

GK: Well, some, my father and my brother both had heart attacks. In fact, my father died with a heart attack. So --

JE: And how old was he when he died?

GK: Oh, 83.

JE: Okay.

GK: He was old enough. He had a full life.

JE: Right, and then you have grandchildren.

GK: I have four. Two and two on each side. A boy and a girl from Robert, and a boy and a girl from David.

JE: Let me just give credit to Jay.

GK: Oh yes.

JE: Because I reached out to him and he helped me a little bit on this interview.

GK: Jay is a prince. He's a real credit to the family.

Chapter 14 – 6:52

Toughest Part of Growing Old

John Erling (JE): What's the toughest part of growing old?

George Krumme (GK): Losing your facilities. You don't walk as well, for most people. They have serious health problems and you know you're gonna die.

I was sobered when I turned 35. I realized half my life, you know, "the 70," is gone and it really bothered me. I was gonna die someday. By the time I was 70, it didn't bother me at all. I accept the fact, heck yes, I'm gonna die. By the time you're 91 – where I am now – you just hope to put it off as long as you can, but you do regret the fact that I can no longer call up names easily and I never was perfect at it. We all have problems that way.

But I have people that I've known for 70 years and dealt with in the last two weeks that I have a mental block. I'm like, I'm like Carl Albert who couldn't think of his co-awardee, you get mental blocks much more often as you get older.

JE: But as we should say, while you say that, you remarried recently.

GK: Yes. Indeed. Within a few months of my wife's death and as I say, my wife really had failed for years. She, I'm going to say, didn't say a word for the

last three or four years. She was in a transfer chair. She was unable to wheel herself around. She had to be conveyed around probably for the last seven or eight years she lived and by the time she died, she weighed less than 70 pounds. She wasted away.

That was difficult to live with, difficult to accept that that's gonna be so common with different kinds of dementia and health problems as we grow older. It's gonna be in every family and we're gonna have to live with it whether we like it or not.

But nevertheless, I had known – and known – of Aldean Thompson since we moved to Bristow in 1930 because she lived two doors down, but she was hardly two years old at that time and I didn't pay any attention to her even through high school because she would have been 10 years old by the time I graduated from high school. I did know her husband.

He and I took a graduate course at TU, in, I'm gonna guess about 1970. I learned then when he told me that he'd married Aldean Thompson before that I'd lost complete track of her. I knew nothing about it whatsoever – but Joe Newcomb died in '03 of a long illness, too. He had Parkinson's and she had nursed him through that period.

We reacquainted ourselves, oh, years later and ran across one another at a meeting of the Tulsa Committee on Foreign Relations when I'd visited as a guest and got along well and gradually worked things up between the two of us until we decided that we were serious enough that we ought to get married.

JE: And when did you get married?

GK: On July the 6th, I proposed to her. I'm gonna say about 3-and-a-half weeks before that. She's only six years younger than I, and we decided that if we were going to get together, we'd better do it quick because we might not last very long.

JE: And what year?

GK: Just last year.

JE: So, 2013

GK: 2013, July 6th. We haven't been married a year yet and we're still married. I must satisfy her that far.

JE: Well, that's amazing, at 90. You were?

GK: 84 and 90 at the time.

JE: At the time. Right. Now, you're 91. Is this the luck of the draw that you've lived to this age? Are you the longest living in your family?

GK: I am – the older of my two sisters, who was also the oldest of all of us – and we were five, as I say – lived to be 89 and I considered to be a victory to have surpassed her 89. She was healthy too. She had not been to a hospital for decades. I'm not sure she had ever been to a hospital, and the evening that she died, she began to feel bad about 3 o'clock.

One of her grandsons was with her at the time, and she complained of not feeling well and he fortunately took her to the hospital. She died less than six hours later. You know, on a rapid flight to Tulsa, but she had the same kind of genes, obviously that I do, for similar enough, and she had good health all through that period.

I've had minimal trouble with health until I fell recently and broke my hip. That's not the same as bad health – but nevertheless it's certainly a sign that I'm not as agile as I used to be, but I've recovered.

JE: But you walked in here, and then you seemed fine and then you –

GK: Yeah, knees, you know – trouble with these knees are the first thing to go, for most people and mine are not in good shape – but I may do something about that even at the age of 91.

JE: It's remarkable during this interview, I know you haven't been able to recall some names, but the details that you remember and the clear thinking that you are at 91 years old. Do you realize how blessed you are?

GK: I have a good memory. I can remember things that didn't even happen (laughs). No, I do have a good memory. I've always had a good memory.

JE: Regrets, we've had a few. Any regrets?

GK: Oh yeah. Surely no one alive hadn't had many regrets. Looking back on things that I should have done or done better or made a different decision on something. You live with those regrets – but fortunately most of us are mature enough to realize that that's universal. You have to live with the mistakes you've made and if you worry about it too much, you're just going to shorten your life.

JE: But overall, just think about your life and what you've lived and the good that you've had and contribute to our community. You must feel blessed.

GK: I have been blessed. I have been very lucky at so many points in my life. Unlucky enough to fall and break my hip, but just in general I've been lucky all my life.

JE: Students listen to our conversation. What kind of advice do you give to students whether they're interested in politics or whatever, what do you say to them?

GK: Well actually the greatest benefit is to be born to caring, loving parents. You don't have any choice over that. I do think that if I'd give advice to young people, I would say the common virtues that we all know that we learned in kindergarten, benefit you the rest of your life – to the extent you follow them. Hard work, caring for others, being kind one to another – it all pays dividends.

JE: And as simple as they sound, it still is the basic, isn't it?

GK: It's still the basic.

JE: Yeah. Well this has been a journey that's been very interesting, George. I thank you very much for presenting this. You've got a lot of fans out there, particularly in the Democratic Party. I appreciate you spending this time.

GK: Well thank you very much. I've been honored to be asked.

JE: Yes sir.

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