

**EI-865**

**TRACEY D. KETCHAM, JR.**

**BIRTHDATE: MARCH 27, 1919**

**INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 27, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 78**

**RUNNING TIME: 25:07**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CHARLES HOLLANDER**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Ketcham was in the Coast Guard, stationed at Ellis Island in 1941-2.**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, March 27, 1997. I am here at Ellis Island, at the recording studio, and I'm here with Mr. Tracey D. Ketcham, Jr. Mr. Ketcham was here at Ellis Island kind of off and on in the Coast Guard, beginning in 1941, and then again in 1942.

KETCHAM: Well, I continued right through from '41 to '42.

SIGRIST: Right, continuously. Today is also Mr. Ketcham's birthday. So, Mr. Ketcham, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

KETCHAM: March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

SIGRIST: Thank you. And where were you born?

KETCHAM: I was – I was born in Amityville, New York.

SIGRIST: In Amityville, New York, so on Long Island. Can you just give me a little bit of information about your family background and where your parents came from?

KETCHAM: Well, my – my parents were--were born in Amityville. My grandfather, I think, was born in Huntington. He was in the life-saver—the old life-saving service on the beaches of Long Island and retired from there; my father served in that also, and my uncles too. And my father, he wasn't in World War I; he volunteered for it, but it ended too soon.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

KETCHAM: Same as mine.

SIGRIST: Same as yours, Senior, obviously. And can you just tell me what his nationality was? What was his -- what's your ethnic makeup?

KETCHAM: American.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

KETCHAM: I would say -- I really don't know, they go, they go way back; Ketchams go way, way back.

SIGRIST: Do you know where they came from originally, like way, way back?

KETCHAM: I don't. I've tried looking it up and so forth, and I haven't had any success. I believe they came from maybe England or somewhere like that.

SIGRIST: I see. And what was your mom's name?

KETCHAM: My mom's name? Stine, S-T-I-N-E.

SIGRIST: That would have been her maiden name. What was her first name?

KETCHAM: Edna

SIGRIST: Edna. And do you know anything about where her family had come from years ago?

KETCHAM: They came from Pennsylvania -- I'm trying to think of the name of the town.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

KETCHAM: I can't think of it offhand -- a small town.

SIGRIST: So the whole family sort of lived on Long Island, and you said that your grandfather and your uncles had all been part of the life-saving service?

KETCHAM: He came from Huntington originally.

SIGRIST: Your grandfather. Is that your father's father?

KETCHAM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And was he also a Tracey Ketcham?

KETCHAM: No, his name was Albert.

SIGRIST: Albert. Tell me a little bit about how you got involved in the Coast Guard.

KETCHAM: Well, it was the (pause) time to be drafted into service, because I was upstate with the -- I had been sent up there by the Dodgers to try out with this team up there, because I had been to Ebbets Field.

SIGRIST: Wait, let's back up. So you were a baseball player.

KETCHAM: Right.

SIGRIST: Can you talk just a little bit about that then before we get into the Coast Guard?

KETCHAM: Well, I had been playing amateur baseball here on the island, with various teams. And I tried out with the Dodgers, and they sent me up in the, in 1941, in April, I think, of '41, to Rome, New York, where the Rome Colonels of the -- the New York -- what the hell was the team was it there -  
- Oh God --

SIGRIST: That's all right; maybe it'll come back to you.

KETCHAM: The Rome Colonels of the Canadian-American League. Okay, it was a Class C ball club. And I was trying out there with them, and I had been told that I had made the club. But then, just a few days before I was to be signed, I got a call from my father that I was going to be drafted. So I couldn't -- there was no sense in me turning, so I returned to Long Island, and I went in and volunteered with the Coast Guard. Well, in the first place, he took me into was the Coast Guard Reserve office.

SIGRIST: This was your father [inaudible].

KETCHAM: Right. And I had been a clerk in previous life, you know, before, and they gave me, made me type the stuff out, and I was a pretty good typist. And they offered me a Yeoman Third Class, or Yeoman Second, I forget which, but one or the other. And with that, my father said, "Well, let's talk about this." And with that, we went outside, and the next thing I ended up in the Coast Guard Regulars, as an Apprentice Seaman. And I was an Apprentice seaman for three months at Ellis Island, and I went to Seaman Second, and then Seaman First.

SIGRIST: Did your father have an objection of some sort to the clerical work, or –

KETCHAM: Not objection to the clerical work, but –

SIGRIST: Yes.

KETCHAM: He thought that I should start in the regular Coast Guard as opposed to the Reserves.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that?

KETCHAM: Well, I didn't feel bad about it in the beginning, but I didn't feel bad about it later on, actually, either, except for the money you lost for the difference between Apprentice Seaman and Second Class pay. But other than that, I--eventually I got up there anyway.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much time had elapsed from that day till when you first reported for duty out here, at Ellis?

KETCHAM: At Ellis Island? (Pause) Well, I -- it was a very short time, I don't know how many, what's -- not too long. I think a few weeks, a couple of weeks.

SIGRIST: It happened all very fast.

KETCHAM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

KETCHAM: You had to report to State Street, where they gave you the [inaudible], the physicals, and that stuff, you know.

SIGRIST: What did you have to go through--you said the physicals and stuff -- what did that entail? What –

KETCHAM: Well, a normal physical examination, and so forth and so on, and that was it, I guess, and then of course they shipped us on the ferry and over to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Did they issue a uniform at that time?

KETCHAM: Well, we got most of our uniforms and so forth at the Island.

SIGRIST: Here at Ellis Island.

KETCHAM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, all right. What do you remember about that first day that you were brought out here to Ellis Island? What sticks out in your mind about that?

KETCHAM: The first day I was here? (Pause) I don't know, I think it was the second day that I reported, that I had to report over to Clove Lake in Staten Island for the ball team. So I was there, but that season only lasted like a month, because it was in August, we were right near the end of the season.

SIGRIST: So you -- so once you got into the Coast Guard you played baseball—

KETCHAM: At Ellis Island, for the Coast Guard.

SIGRIST: For the Coast Guard.

KETCHAM: For about a month, a month and a half.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about -- about what it was like to play baseball in the Coast Guard -- what, how that might have been different than what you had experienced before you joined the Coast Guard?

KETCHAM: Well, it's hard to say. Some of the fellows on the club were -- had minor-league experience, and others had been playing with amateur teams, some of them on Long Island, and so forth. And that about tells the tale of it, you know.

SIGRIST: How often did you practice?

KETCHAM: Well, once the season started, we didn't work out too much, because you had duties in the Coast Guard, and we usually played at least one game a week.

SIGRIST: And whom would you play against?

KETCHAM: Oh, God, it's a long time ago. We played against various teams; I don't even know the name of them.

SIGRIST: But where, but where did they come from? Were they --

KETCHAM: Well they came from Staten Island, they came from Queens, Long Island; some were from the Bronx.

SIGRIST: So they weren't necessarily Coast Guard teams.

KETCHAM: No, they were not Coast Guard.

SEGRIST: They were not Coast Guard teams.

KETCHAM: No. Then came, then came the winter time, and they put in the call for the basketball team, so I played basketball there until -- through the end of the season, which would be in the spring sometime. And I was there for a short time longer, and then I got transferred to State St.

SIGRIST: You played basketball here at Ellis Island?

KETCHAM: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Where did you play basketball? Where was there a place to do that?

KETCHAM: Well, one place was on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, or on 32<sup>nd</sup> Street—it was a YMCA place up there.

SIGRIST: So they didn't actually have a facility --

KETCHAM: And we played in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and like that. And then some other place had a gym, but I don't remember the name of that place.

SIGRIST: Was there a gym here on the Island?

KETCHAM: No.

SIGRIST: How did you –

KETCHAM: There was a basket here, in a small area, and various people used to play, and so forth. We had to go to -- where the heck did we go to to practice? (Pause) Well, we went to various gyms to practice, up to the ones I told you about, we went to 33<sup>rd</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street or whatever. It's a long time ago.

SIGRIST: What about for the baseball -- did you practice here on the Island, or did you go somewhere else?

KETCHAM: We practiced at Clove Lake.

SIGRIST: Clove?

KETCHAM: Clove Lake, yes, on Staten Island.

SIGRIST: So you never actually practiced here, that you can remember?

KETCHAM: No, well, we used to throw the ball around here, but nothing, no, there were no practice fields here. The immigrants used to have their area in the back of the building.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the immigrants being here at that time, if anything?

KETCHAM: They were all upstairs; I mean, I never hardly seen them very much. Once in a while they would have a little riot or something, and they'd have to send the people up to quell them, and so forth, but I actually never went up there, I never did, because I wasn't here at the time, or something, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what your barracks looked like here on the Island, where they held them –

KETCHAM: Well, it was just a series of beds, beds, beds, beds, beds. Then there was in back, in the back of the Island, facing New Jersey, was a small area where they could have a little recreation out there. And then the field -- there was a fence and there was a field to the right of it, would – would be where the immigrants had a – they could walk around.

SIGRIST: That's where you saw --

KETCHAM: That's where I saw them. There was a barrier; you couldn't -- there was a chain-link fence; you couldn't get over to them.

SIGRIST: I see. Aside from playing baseball, what were your Coast Guard duties here?

KETCHAM: Well, I was with the office force

SIGRIST: Can you explain what that is?

KETCHAM: Oh, well, I had office duties, whatever it was, you know. They were varied. I had to – once, one time I had quite a few months with the log with one of the officers here, and I had to sit with him every night and tell him all this stuff and read it out from the -- I guess you'd call it the -- I don't know what it was, the sublogs or something, and he would record it in a big book. I think his name was Lieutenant Miller, or some Commander Miller, or something like that. And that was my job, and that was a very boring job.

SIGRIST: (Laughs) What about --

KETCHAM: You'd fall asleep -- I'd be reading everything; every guy's name, every serial number, everything. And then they would have it published, you know, and that's how they kept a daily log.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me, like, what a typical day would be, like, what time did you have to get up?

KETCHAM: Well, you normally got up around 6, 6:30, somewhere in there.

SIGRIST: And how did they get you up?

KETCHAM: And then when you -- well, if you had played ball, for instance, and basketball, if you had played the night before, with the people who were in the athletic group, you got a little, shall I say, luxury time where you could sleep a little later. There was no definite time, because at that time the people who were on the athletic teams enjoyed a little bit of looser stuff than the other people. So -- not that they gave us leeway to do anything we wanted, but so forth.

SIGRIST: But you got that little bit of pampering, I guess, that little extra time to sleep. Once they woke you up, then what happened?

KETCHAM: Well, then you had various duties. Sometimes you got mess duty, sometimes you swept the place up, and --

SIGRIST: And this is all before you would have eaten?

KETCHAM: No, this would be after we ate.

SIGRIST: Yeah. I guess that's what I'm trying to get from you is the actual schedule -- you woke up, and then what did you do?

KETCHAM: I worked in the kitchen for a while, you know, washing dishes and all that sort of stuff; you worked until late at night sometimes, after the dinner hour. And otherwise, we didn't do any pick-and-shovel labor or anything like that.

SIGRIST: What about, you mentioned the mess -- what sticks out in your mind about the process of being fed here or working in the kitchen?

KETCHAM: Well, I didn't actually serve any meals or anything, but if you had the duty, then you went in the kitchen and you scrubbed the pots and pans and washed the dishes, and you'd be up from suppertime, maybe up till 10 or 11 o'clock.

SIGRIST: How often would they feed you during the day?

KETCHAM: Well, you're supposed to get fed three times.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And who else was eating in the dining room at that time? Was it just Coast Guard, or were there—

KETCHAM: The bugs.

SIGRIST: The bugs! What do you remember about the bugs?

KETCHAM: Well, you'd get various bugs in your milk and stuff like that, you know, I don't want to say anything about that. (Laughs)

SIGRIST: (Laughs) All right. What about Coast Guard drilling of some sort? Did you have to do any kind of drills on the Island?

KETCHAM: Well, they did have drills, yes. At that time I didn't get involved too much through basketball. You were more or less allowed a little laxity, you know. So I didn't really get involved in any heavy-duty stuff; we did have sometimes to unload some of the ships that came in from New York and like that, and so forth. But otherwise, not too much in that sense.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other sports that were available to Coast-Guardsmen here on the Island? You've mentioned basketball and baseball; what did other –

KETCHAM: Well, you had boxing.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What do you remember about that?

KETCHAM: Well, they had a lot of professional boxers here, you know, all really professional -- what the heck was his name, he became lightweight champion of the world? Oh, God, I'd have to think about that.

SIGRIST: Did they have a boxing ring here on the Island somewhere?

KETCHAM: Oh yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where that was, in your mind?

KETCHAM: Yes, it was right in back of the mess hall.

SIGRIST: And where was that, do you remember?

KETCHAM: Well, it was right next to the bunk area, where you slept. It was a big, long building there, right in back of it, and the kitchens were in back of that, the galley, and the ring was there, and there was one basket, for basketball, you know, for recreation, it wasn't for teams. And that was about the size of it. But the boxing was a big thing here then. You had a couple of champions here, and –

SIGRIST: Did you ever box while you were here?

KETCHAM: No, I didn't box; no, that wasn't my game.

SIGRIST: When you played baseball, did you have your own separate Coast Guard baseball uniforms of some sort, or –

KETCHAM: Oh, yeah, we had baseball uniforms.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

KETCHAM: I don't have one now so I -- it's been a long time, I don't even remember what they -- I think it just said USCG on it.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember -- can you describe it a little bit for me, what it looked like?

KETCHAM: It was just a regular -- if I'm not mistaken, it was a white flannel suit; the color was like light flannel, you know, if that's -- it's really a long time –

SIGRIST: It's a long time ago --

KETCHAM: Tough to remember.

SIGRIST: Is there one game that you played, a baseball game, that really sticks out in your mind? For some reason?

KETCHAM: No, it -- I can't really think of any that stood out. We played various teams; it wasn't professional basket -- baseball, because, you know, there were not that many professionals on the team at that time.

SIGRIST: And you said that all the games that you played were actually not on the Island -- you played in other --

KETCHAM: Oh, yeah, there was no ball field here.

SIGRIST: You never played here on the Island?

KETCHAM: No.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember your officers at all, any that stick out in your mind, someone that --

KETCHAM: Well, I --

SIGRIST: Maybe not their names, but I mean they did something that you remember, or they looked a certain way -- you mentioned Mr. or Officer Miller, with whom you were doing a lot.

KETCHAM: Oh, yeah, he was an older man. (Pause) I'm trying to think—there was one officer here who ran the basketball team; I'm trying to think what his name was -- Italian fellow, gentleman --

SIGRIST: For the Coast Guardsmen to watch, which sport did they support to watch, which sport did they support the most, do you think?

KETCHAM: None of them.

SIGRIST: None of them!

KETCHAM: Not really, because you never played here on the Island.

SIGRIST: Right.

KETCHAM: We played away.

SIGRIST: Except the boxing that took place here, I guess.

KETCHAM: The boxing -- well, they didn't really have a lot of boxing here, as far as regular bouts. They had a great crew of boxers here. Some of them were champions, ex-champions, and so forth. They had quite a good crowd over here.

SIGRIST: What else did they offer to you for entertainment when you were on the Island? What was available to you?

KETCHAM: Well, once in a while they'd have a dance. (Pause) That's about it, I mean, you know. We used to go into New York.

SIGRIST: What would you do if you went into New York?

KETCHAM: Well, you'd do whatever you feel like it. You had liberty, and you didn't have to be back till the next morning.

SIGRIST: How long did liberty last?

KETCHAM: Well, liberty was all night -- until 8 o'clock in the morning, anyway. If you missed the last ferry, I think that was the 11 o'clock ferry, or 10:30, if you missed that, you slept in the barge office, on the bench. That's where you got the ferry, at the barge, in New York.

SIGRIST: What was the procedure to obtain liberty? What did you have to do to actually get permission to leave?

KETCHAM: Well you had to -- you had your regular liberty and the athletes always managed to get free passes or something, and so forth.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

KETCHAM: I can't remember a lot of it because it's so long ago --

SIGRIST: Yes, well, you're doing a great job. Tell me about medical facilities. Did you ever have need for the medical facilities here on the Island, or do you remember somebody who had need?

KETCHAM: I never had an occasion to use them; I never got hurt, as far as I know.

SIGRIST: Maybe some of the boxers did -- (laughs)

KETCHAM: Well, they may have, but I -- you know, they were a separate group.

SIGRIST: Right.

KETCHAM: Most of them were professionals, and they were kind of chummy with themselves.

SIGRIST: Sort of kept to themselves?

KETCHAM: Yes.

SIGRIST: So you were on the Island for almost a year, '41 to '42?

KETCHAM: Well, I was -- from '41 to, somewhere around April, I think, when I was transferred to New York -- to the -- 1 State Street, I think it was. And I was there for a couple of months, and then I got transferred to a ship.

SIGRIST: So did you ever come back here for any reason, to Ellis Island?

KETCHAM: This is my first trip since I got away.

SIGRIST: (Laughs) Well, like you say, it was a long time ago.

KETCHAM: And that's why I say, I forget a lot of stuff, because time -- I'm 78 and time marches on.

SIGRIST: Tonight it will all come back to you as you're going to sleep.

KETCHAM: Well, tonight -- today I'm 78.

SIGRIST: When you look back at your time -- how long were you in the Coast Guard altogether?

KETCHAM: Five years and five days.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. When you look back on that time now, how do you think about the time that you spent in the Coast Guard?

KETCHAM: It wasn't bad. I was there, I got transferred to the ship, ran up to Boston; we ran out of Boston for -- I was on that for a little over a year. I transferred off of that into the First Coast Guard District; I was there working in the Hotel Brunswick, which was the Coast Guard station there, and I had various assignments, and then I was running the transportation out of there for all the people who were getting transferred around the country. And I did that until myself and this other fellow, a friend of ours who had gone overseas, and he had been writing that he was on an LST that was due for the invasion, and so the fellow's name was Steve Yuhase, Y-U-H-A-S-E. We volunteered for that, and they sent us to Norfolk, Virginia -- well, they didn't want to let us go because we were running the transportation; it was hard to train other people -- but they finally did let us go.

SIGRIST: Did you continue being athletic at all? Obviously, they didn't have a baseball team probably, on a ship, but --

KETCHAM: No. Well, we went to Norfolk; we were there for about two or three weeks. They shipped us back to New York. But inadvertently somehow they -- I don't know whether they misinterpreted the orders or what, but we ended up in a -- in a Navy base on the Hudson River, instead of a Coast Guard base which was on Long Island. Where they gave us -- there were sixteen of us, and they gave us -- that were due to go to England -- and they gave us every rotten detail there was, these Navy guys. So one day when they had a call for baseball players, this other fellow and myself raced for the baseball line. They took us up to Macombs Dam Park up at Yankee Stadium, and we had a tryout with them; we both of us made the club. A couple of days later, they shipped the other fourteen guys over to Long Island to the -- to the base there, and I don't know where they ever ended up.

SIGRIST: (Laughs)

KETCHAM: Well, I -- we lasted out--it was only a couple of months till the end of the baseball season. And then they shipped us over there, and then Steve Yuhase, my buddy there, he was shipped to the West Coast. And I ended up with a little escapade of my own there, and I finally was transferred up to Alaska.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you this, because we need to end in just a moment. How do you think that being in the Coast Guard influenced the rest of your life?

KETCHAM: Well, I liked the Coast Guard -- at that time. I don't know if I would have liked it after that, you know, when everybody was getting discharged and everything.

SIGRIST: You enjoyed your time.

KETCHAM: I enjoyed it

SIGRIST: You enjoyed your time in the Coast Guard.

KETCHAM: I served on three ships and in Alaska -- two of them were in Alaska.

SIGRIST: You certainly got around, from place to place. Well, Mr. Ketcham, I want to thank you very much.

KETCHAM: Thank you.

SIGRIST: As I say, we find Coast Guardsmen who were here so rarely, and we've never found one that played baseball --

KETCHAM: Is that right?

SIGRIST: So this has been a real treat. I interviewed once a man who played the trumpet for the Coast Guard, but never a –

KETCHAM: Really? What was his name? Do you remember?

SIGRIST: Well, yeah, I'll tell you afterwards, I'll remember after we're done. Let me just sign off. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Tracey D. Ketcham, Jr. on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Mr. Ketcham's 78<sup>th</sup> birthday, and this is Paul Sigrist signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW