

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

ERIC BRUNT ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEWEE: John Crncich

INTERVIEWER: Eric Brunt

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REVIEWED BY: A. Cuthbert

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John Crncich

Interviewed 30 August 2018

Eric Brunt (00:00):

Well this looks, I'm all ready. So just to start us all off from the beginning, what's your name and where were you born?

John Crncich (00:08):

John Crncich. I was actually born in Croatia and came over as a little toddler, four years old and lived in Montreal for all through until well through the Navy and university and then took employment out of town and I've been out of town since, but I still haven't that there. Most pictures are my homes in Montreal and Montreal. Yeah, the neighborhood that's very unique. Montreal's outsourced galleries in that.

Eric Brunt (00:41):

What neighborhood?

John Crncich (00:42):

Ville Emard.

Eric Brunt (00:43):

Okay.

John Crncich (00:45):

French, 50% French. Yet I was the only one of our, they call it a gang of 10, 12. Our age in that spoke French. I only spoke it because I found out that in the dance halls, they were 50%, they didn't get the dance hall of dance I could. That was my incentive to learn, and I enjoyed it.

Eric Brunt (01:09):

Could you speak Croatian as well?

John Crncich (01:10):

Not really. Not really. Not really, no.

Eric Brunt (01:13):

Did your parents speak it or?

John Crncich (01:14):

Oh yeah, they did, but they're both dead now and my brother is dead too.

Eric Brunt (01:19):

What did your dad do for work?

John Crncich (01:21):

He was in machinist, or I think is what you would call it in the depression days. What people don't realize, like today you could be working for a company in east end of Toronto or East End Victoria and live in the West end. In those days the populations drifted to where the work was. So if my father worked in Montreal, light heat and power, there were Montreal, they were natural gas, not natural gas manufactured gas formation and those kinds of things. So we lived right on the right where the plant was. We were right in the very last few streets of the city, and it was 50% French, 50% English, another sector of very close to ours. It was completely French. That was Imperial Tobacco. They had a plant there and they're all French. Just go a few steps further. A couple of miles in dead center of the city, all blacks.

John Crncich (02:27):

But the blacks were not numerous, but they're concentrated there. Why? Because the railroad station was there and they all worked on the railroad porters, cooks and everything else. Then there was the wealthy would be in the West Mount and they were in the bankers, and they could go to work in the car or whatever way, but I could draw a map of Montreal and point out sectors and different languages there, and that's the origin of it. Vard was a very, very mixed, very mixed group in there. All Europe, half of it was French, the other half was all Europeans of various sectors, maybe a little more Italian than anything else, but the rest were from all other countries in Europe.

Eric Brunt (03:23):

Did they all get along?

John Crncich (03:24):

Oh yeah, sure, yes, until the war came along. Then I saw, left an impression on my mind that kind of a cruel, the Italians were more social. They loved to drink their wine, and they had one storefront, an empty store that they made into like a community, little home. They would meet there, play cards and just sing along or whatever it is on, I can remember sitting and it was just across the, well, just nearly across the street from it. I was sitting on the curb 1939. I would've been 14 years old when a couple of three, four black cars pulled out, about six guys and civilian closed jumped out of them and they didn't even try to open the door. They busted the door down to this Italian group and that happened, I guess throughout Canada, over in Europe was the Japanese. That kind of thing happened in the east with the Italian and the Germans. They were persecuted and I would looked at what the hell's going on here. It didn't seem right, and it didn't make any sense. They were just peace-loving guys and half, not half, but a third of my friends were of Italian descent and the others could have been Lithuanians, could have been Polish, could have been anything else, and a few British.

Eric Brunt (04:57):

So were any of your friends taken away?

John Crncich (04:59):

No. No, not that, no. We were all young, so none of those, I don't know about their parents, but I remember one story reading when I was in the Navy that they raided the place in New Brunswick, and I'm not going to make sound because I'm not sure of it, but there was one Italian in that thing. He was a barber and then naturally, whoa Italian. They rated him, put him aside Montreal, the mayor of Montreal was put into a concentration camp up in Mont Tremblant, which must have been a nice place, and it was an internment camp because he was French, but because of he was preaching, anti-volunteering. So he was on the side of the zombies as we call them then. And the government took 'em aside, threw 'em out there, and when they released him at the end of the war, just like McCain, a massive population all came out to visit him.

John Crncich (06:07):

And he was quite a character. He stood about five-foot, two height, five foot three wide and always wore a top hat and he had a little cane with a little glass or whatever ball, and he seemed to wear that chain and a top hat everywhere he went. It was really something that you'll never see again. And well, I'll tell you a story, not that you've been published it, but he would naturally, the mayor, I played for Montreal, CFL after the war, but it wasn't that year, but he came out to officially opening kickoff or the opening of the season. So he came up and was a big pot belly, missed the ball and kicked the holder. And then he turned up and I brought a microphone and in French he aiming it to the east side of the stands where all the French were very few.

John Crncich (07:12):

Then he turned in English. Ladies and gentlemen had give me the great pleasure to be here to officially kick off. You had the opening kickoff in the future I would like to kick off all your balls. And he did the same thing when the king and queen were there and they went to a park and he get up and he infringed name and so, and then he goes in English, ladies and gentlemen he said, he says the king, he says he wants to thank you from the bottom of his heart and the queen, she wants to thank you from her bottom two. He was always forever. And that was just two examples, but he was always in that kind of thing. So they put him away for a couple of years.

Eric Brunt (08:00):

Was he still the mayor?

John Crncich (08:02):

He was the mayor. When they put him away young, then he came back, and I think he ran again because the guy he was running against had that stand. And I can remember they used to do these same as they, well same as Trump right now. And he's up the thing he says, the opponent got up and he says, mayor of hood, he says he steals from you. He stole in the eye, and he steals here, and he steals there and Mayor hood's looking at, so his turn at the microphone, ladies and gentlemen, he says, my opponent, he says, I am going to steal from you. He says, I will tell you if you elect me, I will steal less than he would. That was his answer. No, that was in those old days. But

Eric Brunt (08:48):

He sounds like he was quite the character. Oh yes, he did. So

Eric Brunt (08:51):

He was preaching, don't volunteer,

John Crncich (08:54):

Don't to go as a, but they all went. Now people get the wrong idea, especially Westerners. But those who went in, they were still drafted. Everybody got their drafting, and they went in some of them because they had a mother's widowed mother or so, some very good reason than that. But anyway, those who went in, they were not sent to a particular platoon or particular regiment. They had no choice. Well, anybody joined the army? No, no, you could join, you go to the barracks of thing. For instance, last year in high school we were attached to the Hassar, which are a tank core, and we had the full uniform with the little black beret in that, but they would be assigned to a thing, but they would post it up in the Arctic or somewhere like that. They were not a tall, it was much easier to go over and dance with the wives of the britishers whose husbands were overseas than these guys had.

John Crncich (10:03):

They had a tough time of it, so it wasn't, didn't go easy. Then they got up and they got, oh, you can search it out yourself. Some documents that the Navy had, and you got to read between the lines. Well, for instance, I know of no sailor that was French in, there's one of my friends on the football team was French origin. He was an officer, but he was told very, very bilingual. They were young, but the others, they were not accepted. They were like the Japanese and they would just, I don't know if any, I mean out of on the east coast there'd be 4,000 sailors. So I don't know of one Frenchman. And it's not that they didn't want to go in there, they would not accept it really. I think I shouldn't say that. Sure. But I know there weren't any that I know none of one.

John Crncich (11:02):

And I could also tell you the, well, okay, this is public. You go on your computer and look up recruitment of the Navy and that services in the war and in there you'll see documents written by professionals and that for the government. And they describe recruitment policies during the war, and this was written after the war. And let's say blacks were not in the Navy, this was just the Navy and others were the limitation because of this, because of that. And no Germans, Italians and Russians, they said, I didn't even know the Russians won the war in a sense. But these were very clear cut there. The one that I got that struck me is there was a French, we call them ships, the training ships like Donna Kona was Montreal St or something. There was one in Quebec City and Quebec City was mostly French, so it was a French thing.

John Crncich (12:10):

So I guess somebody in the admiralty got a little fed up and said, well no, we don't want them. We don't want 'em on board ship because they're going to start a war on onboard ship and that. So they moved the Prevo was the name of the ship. They moved that ship to of all places where

what I would consider the most conservative right-wing city in Canada, London, Ontario. And they started to pray over there and I, what the hell they did there? I don't know because nobody in the London, I know a lot of people who we used to play against Western and I played with a lot of the boys in football after the war and there are no French at all that I know of in there, but they moved the ship there. So that was just a way of get out of here.

John Crncich (13:03):

And the blacks, well, okay, this is public knowledge, but it's not, I don't want to sound, don't want to come on record of sounding. A friend of mine, he was one of the toughest guys I knew. He was on the football team, and he was tough. He came from a tough area in town, and he was really, I knew him and his wife was in Loren, she was in the entertainment part of Lorenz and that they were both, and we visited with them many, many times after we moved out of Montreal. And he told me once they were in the band room, in the practice, we had a big, bands were tremendous and a big band. And this band, I think I know a couple of the fellows that were in the band, but the leader I believe was an American. See that was before the states got in the war.

John Crncich (14:05):

They got in and he was the band leader. He was a real professional musician, a young chap my age because I know we were in the same grades. I was in a Catholic school; he was in the Protestant school high school. And he went into apply, says I'd like to join the Navy, I'd like to go in the band. And the band leader said, okay, we're here. Go to the piano here and play eight bars of God Save the King. And he went and played them, and he says, no, you're not good enough. Send him out. That guy became universal international best pianist in the world, Oscar Peterson, but don't cut that name out. But we knew him in high school. He used to have his own little band where we would go to different dance halls. He would rent a big hoop, and he had a little dance group of his own and very popular and very nice guy, not like a musician. He was a real honest to goodness type of a guy at that time. I don't know what he turned out later on, but that was apparently a true story. Mean it was told to me, not by an outsider who just sort of making that up. This is a friend of mine who knew. I knew that he wouldn't lie to me.

Eric Brunt (15:23):

Interesting. I guess being from Montreal, you're sort of in the middle of this political climate of conscription, I guess when war was declared, was there really tension there or what?

John Crncich (15:38):

No, not there was amongst the English who lived in an English population, and they would naturally be fed the English thing. But those of us who lived in the French English community, even though as I said earlier, none of my French speak one word of French, and they were right in that block there. They would probably be two English speaking and six all French families and all those side by side, but yet we never, I dunno where the kids were. Oh yeah, well yeah. Another thing that how, give you an example today when your children are, so go to school and the school gets a little overpopulated and that they put a little out in the yard, they build a, what do you call those?

Eric Brunt (16:32):

Not a trailer, but a portable.

John Crncich (16:35):

Yeah, the portable thing and build those. And when I went there, I was in one grade, must've been about the fifth grade or so when suddenly we were overcrowded there, but they had built a brand-new school, the French did. And so they moved our class over to the French school. So we had the whole classroom there. But at four 30 or four o'clock when the bell rang, the teacher was kind enough to let us go about a minute. We would go, all the French would be chain us out down, they would be running down, we would run down the alleys, and we didn't run towards home, we ran towards the Protestant school. They would be let out, then we'd boat turn, chased them back. And this every day it was just fun. Nobody got hurt. We threw stones at one another and that, but then we would all walk after we got tired, we'd all walk, and they'd go in their house, we'd go in ours.

John Crncich (17:27):

It was that kind of a feeling and certainly, but the Navy took it seriously and, in my opinion, erroneously, and I don't know who was behind it, but you can look up the documentation yourself. It's all, it's printed. And I read it, and I say bullshit. I said I was there within the one dance hall, it was invert dun, which was all English, and they described the zoot suit. You know what zoot suits are? Yeah, the big hat and the baggy pants and the belt and all that. And they describe how they went. Most of those fights were the English navy somehow got misinformed that the French were anti English, anti that. And so they came into Montreal for repairs of their ship or something and they would come out and leave it. And we could always tell them even though, well, you can see my uniform in.

John Crncich (18:30):

I got a picture out there. Everything we could tell them because their pants had a hole in the back of their pants and that they were badly, they were not looked after, they were, they got lower pay them, we got 'em, we got the lowest pay of the services. But then they would be walking down the street looking for Frenchman to fight. And you'd say, what the hell is that? So the one day came, and this is a true story and well not too many people knowing, but that rumor got out through these things that there was going to be an organized attack on our base, which was right in center of downtown Drummond Street, if you know right in Peel and St. Cats there. And that they were going to come up there and attack us to get our guns. There were guns, not many, but there were guns.

John Crncich (19:20):

So in a hell of a hurry, one of the officers was appointed, one of the shore patrolman officers was appointed to organize defense. And the defense was easy. Our base was a big curling club, and one end was just a big steel door. No, just close that door. But the front end was big wide windows and that was the officers quarter deck and that the officers' quarter with big doors and that, so that's where they were going to attack come in. So in a manner of a one day or less than that, they picked out eight men. I was one of the eight. There was eight of us that we were for, I

think it was, I say 24, I couldn't have been because we wouldn't last but 24 hours straight, I'll say. But it was a long time of learning this step one thing, it was an eight maneuver with a bait and up to the chin and then back down in a little jab with the ba and it was like an eight-step boom.

John Crncich (20:27):

And we did that thousands and thousands of times all and I thinking that on the Friday they were going to attack, and nothing happened. So we we're all okay, but that same exercise we did, it had to be 25 years later, I watching TV and there was an uprising in, not the Middle East but near Thailand. I was at the location anyway near Singapore, one of those long islands where one of the emperors are willing and they were attacking the thing and there were these guards, and they were doing the same thing that very same. I said, Hey, I can do that. I got the job there. But they were, and you only had to have to get a gate 10 feet wide or so. You just needed four or five men because they all had to converge, and you could just keep doing that with your rifle in your banet all day. But it was exactly the same. I said, yeah, I bet you one of our guys got a part-time job over there.

Eric Brunt (21:26):

And sorry, who were you trying to defend

John Crncich (21:28):

Against? French. The French, the zoot suitors. The zoot suitors. That's what the rumor was. But they never showed up. And some of them were in my class at school, so I'm going to stick a bait into him. It was guys like me were sort of over hurt more than anybody else because I knew them better than most because I lived in a French neighborhood and some of them were French and where some of the other guys were not even from the country. They were coming over from overseas on their boats. And they just heard about the rumors about how there's all these dissidents in the French dissidents and they, a lot of them are honest. They come from big families and maybe the father had died and there was somebody had to bring in 35 cents. They all worked and with bicycles and delivering cases of beer from grocery stores or something for a quarter and providing for the family. And it wasn't political at all, except some parts were made political. The politicians made an issue of it. They would ride on one side or the other, but not a serious, I can't think of any serious politician or serious these are, I'm talking about alderman not federal.

John Crncich (23:01):

It was way overblown by the newspapers and by authorities on the side that wanted to be on one side or the other.

Eric Brunt (23:12):

I find it very interesting because I haven't interviewed very many veterans who grew up in Montreal. So it's a perspective I haven't heard before.

John Crncich (23:20):

And everybody will say there are no veterans in Montreal. There are no soldiers in Montreal is what they'll tell you.

Eric Brunt (23:27):

So I guess when and why did you join the Navy?

John Crncich (23:31):

My father was getting lung problem at his work, and he had bought arranged for that. He had bought a farm out in Eastern Township, 500 acres at the time, four 70, around a little lake. And so they decided he's going to retire there. And then my brother and I, my brother joined a year earlier, and then I was going in, there was a case of going to university, so I was technically doing my first-year university and I said, oh hell. And so I could have been exempted from all of that, like our friend Trump. But I decided, oh God, the Navy and well, I guess I could, I got them somewhere. I go out on that memory project. You were in touch with them, and they call on me to go and talk to about five 10 schools every year. And there's some kids, they were from that to old seniors who were asleep as I'm talking.

John Crncich (24:36):

But the little kids, one of the teachers thought a good idea if they all sent me a thank you note. And so she told me, is it alright that they're going to send you, they want my address. I said, oh God, no, don't, the last thing in the world that I want is my address. I could see every parent say, who is this guy? You know how parents are with little kids? So I said, no, no, no. I said, if they want us to write letters, that's okay with me, but letters to you and you send me the bundle. So I got this bundle, and I've got 'em somewhere in a basement or somewhere and I'm reading through them all night. We enjoyed talk about this, enjoy this and that. And three or four of them said, oh, we know why you joined the Navy because the girls liked this. I only got out of the mouth of babes, which was probably true.

Eric Brunt (25:29):

The girls liked the

John Crncich (25:30):

Navy boys. Yeah,

Eric Brunt (25:33):

Yeah. And I guess what year was that when you joined?

John Crncich (25:38):

44. 44? Yeah, just towards the end. Yeah, I could have gone into officer, I was qualified at the qualification Officer Canada, but then that would mean another eight months of training or so I wanted to get out to see as fast as I could. So this was good. And we had won the Great Cup. There's the great cup ringing it. And so I thought that was fine. I don't need anymore. And well as it was, it just worked out the opposite because I decided to join. I was living in a rooming

house. Maybe my brother had already joined. He was, yeah, what happened? I'll tell you that story. What happens and that is, oh, okay, this is when you join the Navy, you're going to go ahead and put yo hoho in a bottle of rum kind of thing. God, all of a sudden, like these two cooks I mentioned, they're roughly, I'll show you a picture though, and you can pick them out.

John Crncich (26:41):

They've got beaten up, broken noses and they're cooking. They cooked all the time. I was there. They were my cooks. But where was, oh yeah, I was, what was I leading up to here? Getting a little brother? Yeah, no. Oh yeah, that's right. He joined and he like myself, he was wanting to be a sailor, sorry, a sailor. But then one day the guy came in from, they were all in a row ready for marching or something like that. And then he came with a message, said, anybody here know anything about typewriter? What do you do when you get such and such thing? That's a little simple question about typewriter. And so somebody then says, well, anybody here know how to type? And boom, five guys put up their hand, including my brother. He said, okay, go upstairs with you and go talk to them upstairs.

John Crncich (27:37):

He get upstairs, he says, okay, they gave him a ticket, go to Vancouver. And he says, you're now a writer. You're no longer a seaman. You're a writer. So he spent his career until the end of the war as a writer. He didn't ever saw a ship and he said it, but it was one of the things that was funny is, I don't know if you know the difference in his suits, like a sailor suit was nice. When I see these American suits like, oh god, they're a horrible looking thing, but writers and petty officers and certain trades and then wore straight with a cap. They look like to the Americans; they look like officers. So they'd be walking down Granville Street and every guy, he'd be saluting everyone like that and have to return the salute. And they did that. They said they sent the guys up because they needed Raiders out west.

John Crncich (28:31):

So they sent them all out west. So they never did get any more further training that happened. That's the same thing. We got wise to it. After a while, the guy would come in with a piece of paper and stuff, anybody here have a driver's license and handcuff and said, okay, you four guys here with driver. I said, go down to the boat and sing. He'll give you a couple of brooms and a mop. I want all this place mopped up. And that's the way they used to do it all the time too. You just shut up. You didn't say anything. And that was through all the way through the training. You wisened up the guys who weren't wise where they got suckered into time and time again. It was a lot of fun.

Eric Brunt (29:17):

Suckers.

John Crncich (29:19):

Yeah. But those things, oh yeah. What I think that you probably, maybe you did, if you have heard from other sailors, I dunno if you, I'd

Eric Brunt (29:31):

Love to hear all about it.

John Crncich (29:32):

Yeah, okay. They'll tell you about, oh, the depth charges that you rule. When they got the convoy, we were the convoy navy. We a little core veteran run around with the destroyer up front and they would tell you all kinds of stories like that. But the stories that which was leading into their, oh yeah, all these, we were all down the Cornwall, the base was the largest base in the British Empire. And the British were noted for their navy's going back to 1200 or so. And so they were, and they'd line us all, they would march us all in on the parade square for evening quarters or a special thing in that. And some visiting captain or our own captain would get up there on the mic and he would say, he give you a blast and think I'll stand there like that. And once he said, I remember him trying to got me excited, he said, there only four of you were guys over here that had an amark over a hundred and Abar was the intelligent quotient and it was a different thing.

John Crncich (30:51):

And I said, wait a minute. I had, because when I got in there, when I was sent in, you see pictures of especially Army, the whole platoon comes up to the railway station and they all march on. In our case, they would say, here John, here's the ticket to go to the east coast. You're going tomorrow. There's an opening there tomorrow and 2, 3, 4 at a time. And even in Montreal, I don't know of anybody in my whole section of a couple of hundred or so, that was from Montreal. They're all from all over the place. And some of the farm boys from Saskatchewan couldn't. They would have to have a leading semen march 'em around by the hour to try to get 'em to left, right, left. It was not that you feel that's just a fact of life that they walking over the troughs in the fields, they're not marching and you see that, but you had no choice of any of those things. They decided what you're going to do, like the cooks and everybody else. So you just kept your thing open. And the same thing when during training the Cornwallis, I loved Cornwallis. Cornwallis was the biggest base in the British empire, and they were a lot of things to talk about there. But they had the two sides. The guys who were there to discipline you, they were mean sons of bitches.

John Crncich (32:30):

You just hated them. And as a matter of fact, it was V-Day that I was back there, and we didn't know what the was happening. It was one of those D-Day or V-Day one of those, and they didn't know. So then we rushed up from the barracks from our dormitories to the front gates and not to find out whether, so everybody lined up about half a mile long and they were lined up to the petty officer's mess because it was free. Beer was being given that because it was one of those holidays and they were lined up. You went in and you went in, and we were lined up in fours, just roughly. And you go in as you went in, they had a room full of glasses. It would stacked. It was stacked like this. You'd pick up two glasses and go right by a hose and the hose would fill, everybody would film, then you'd get outside, then you'd try to sneak back in line, but you couldn't get back in line.

John Crncich (33:30):

And some of the other odd things, they'd have a dance. Well, a dance was, there was thousands of us and only hundred of them and the officers and the leading semen or the trainers, they had all girlfriends and that. So we were there all alone. So what the hell. So we used to make our own liquor, and I could tell you two ways of making that you can go home now and make your own liquor that we used to do with just shoe polish is one. And the other one, what's the other thing we used to use Anyway, the trick is the one of 'em, you get a loaf of bread like Italian loaf and cut the top and bottom 'em up and you pour it through there. As it filters through, the liquor comes out the other end, all the other stuff's absorbed. Then we used to drink that.

John Crnich (34:18):

The other way was the shoe polish. You get it in handkerchiefs and twist and twist and twists and drip, drip, drip. That was alcohol and you drink that, then you'd be happy as hell. But then we'd talk about, or you hear the stories about some guy who was lucky or a petty officer maybe, or leading semen. Not never one of the guys, we were locked in all the time, but they would find themselves a girlfriend in the rents. And they decided when, oh man, I'm going to get lucky. Make love. So what do you think they did? Where do you think they would go? Would you take a yes sir. I don't know. The middle of the parade square. You know why in those days my son ist know what's going on. He come from, and I was there, and I've gone back to Cornwall many a time and I said, well, where the hell's the fog?

John Crnich (35:16):

The fog used to roll in every night. And so this parade square is like half a mile by quarter a mile or something like that. And when the shore patrol came in with their boots, climb, climb, climb, you could hear 'em with 30 yards away. So you finished and get up and ran away. But that's the way they used to play around with that. Another kind of thing. There's all kinds of little stories like that we, I love it. Used to wish I enjoyed the navy, not the, well, alright, I'll tell you another, there was one, you're two young to remember players cigarettes today. They had on the package sailor with a big, big beard. It was four inches like that. The rule was in the air force. They all had nice pin strip, nice pin stripe, mustache that not in the navy. The Navy, if you decided to not shave, you weren't allowed to shave.

John Crnich (36:16):

You had to let it grow and grow and grow. Then you got a big beard. So then you look like a real old-time sailor. And some of the, what'd you call it guys were old time sailors, but there was one old time sailor, his job was to teach us pulling a whaler, A whaler is one of those ships come up like a lifeboat and there'd be 10, I guess 10 or 12, I know four on he'd five on each side. And he'd go like this, and he'd be walking along the shore, and we'd go along the shore fire sls, he's yelling orders, and he'd heard yell at him. So we'd go into the end of the backside and be mad as hell at that guy, fix him. So we'd get on the floor, and we'd practice going and go fast and we were really fast. So then we'd go the next day, and we'd get out and he'd have to run, and he couldn't keep up with us. So we used to fix them that way. There was always some little stunts like that that were always good. Were you

Eric Brunt (37:19):

Guys ever playing pranks on each other?

John Crncich (37:20):

No, it was, no, not on. This is the amazing thing I show you a picture of. Well, okay, I'll get into that too. It was suicide squad, but no, the group, we were into these H barracks. The center was the two arms and the joined in the middle and the middle were the toilets and the washing, the laundry and whatever he did. You went in there. Wait, what in terms of pranks. Pranks, okay. There one prank that it was really good, and nobody ever knew, but nobody ever told anybody. But when a squad would come in, they would come in from mixed from a three from, maybe not Victoria. Victoria had their own up there, but from Winnipeg and three from Montreal and five from Toronto, and we'd all meet there then, and they would all be assigned to a barracks. And in that barrack then you had a hundred guys or so, let me see, there would be maybe 50 and 50 about that double bunk beds.

John Crncich (38:36):

And you all had a locker and the, yeah, that was about the size. But then on the first couple of days, they gave you March and you'd come back and so you'd get up at six 30 bugle, they had a rib bugle going and then you would go on, get into your uniform and just move out there. But you had a 10-minute break to go for washroom and that. So everybody would run in the washroom and 10 guys would go into 10 urinals there and 10 guys would go into the 10 sit downs. And the sit downs were like three feet apart. There'd be like 10 of them, but the walls but no doors. And so had everybody sitting down. But the guy in number one, you never saw him because he was reading a newspaper so you couldn't see him. But then all of a sudden you hear the Yelp's going on when he was one of the teachers or something like, and after everybody seated, he rolled up the thing and put it down.

John Crncich (39:42):

It wasn't flush toilet; it was a river running through along path. So this ball of fire would go down, each guy would be jumping up the thing. And this was a city and every laugh, they can only do it once, but when a new crew came in, they were right for that. That was one of the things that was quite a thing. But they trained you well in that. But no matter how hard you were training, and they were sweating and dirty and everything else, when it came to evening quarters or so, you'd go down the 90-piece band would sit the place themselves in the middle of the parade square and they would start there, boom, boom, boom. And you could hear them all over and everybody meaning to wash themselves up. And we ran out and lined up in our outside in a platoon and then all, some lead hand would pick us up and march us in and would take us around into the quarters, into the parade square.

John Crncich (40:48):

Then he would go into, they would just line up like that. And they had, you didn't know, you didn't have an officer per se. There would be officers there, officers in training mostly. And some guy would say, it looks like we got a PhD and everybody, oh yeah, here he comes. And there would be some young guy who got his commission or getting his commission. His hat wouldn't fit. And he was not a sailor. He never had an ounce of training or an ounce of anything. But he would come running and PhD sanded not for doctors. Papa has dough.

John Crncich (41:29):

So immediately we'd all go there. Then we would laugh because then he would have to report like squad 32 or Fing Effingham, block reporting serially. He'd have to report that to the front, not the desk but a stage. So he'd have to run all the way up there and on the double run on the way back and somehow other, I don't know why, but gunnery officers were, that's the toughest job on board a ship because you're in charge of the guns. And they wore pantaloons, white pantaloons dressed pan were never on parade in that and looked ridiculous and they looked ridiculous. So we always got to laugh. So you were never tired, you were always laughing at something or other. There were many things like that. The one then, oh yeah, then they would take 10, 15 of us in a thing in the room, put us in a classroom and in come officer with a briefcase.

John Crncich (42:34):

And you knew the officer was not going to see, never been to sea, never saw the ocean probably. But he was public relations guy. So we'd open up his briefcase and then he'd starts saying, well gentleman, he said, we are doing well on the continent, Hitler's troops or so and so. And we moved here and there, and guys are all sitting around. Then he'd say, alright, any questions? He'd stop the Chrysler. Any question, the guy stand up. Yes sir, or yes, he'd stand up. He'd say, well, when we get over there and we'd land in the port, the German port and that the German girls were thinking, are they going to like us? And the guy slammed over, shut down. And the other guy and the other guy would say, I understand that they drink beer over there. And he said, and we drink pusa rum. He said, okay, I think it's a good idea to stuff a couple of bottles or rum in our hammock to take over there with us so we can have our own drinks over. And he'd slam his briefcase and just march out and we'd all look at what, gee, what's the matter with him? It was perfectly normal question as far as we were concerned. But he couldn't see that. And it wasn't, they weren't not playing a joke. I knew they were serious. They were serious questions.

John Crncich (43:52):

But the other thing I should mention, if the warrant lasted 30 more days, I wouldn't be here talking to you today. No question in my mind, I've done a lot of research on what I had volunteered for and see when D-Day came along, that was then the riots and Halifax. And that's a story in itself that I could tell you a different version from what you read about or heard about that the Navy, there was only one person that was killed in that whole ride. He was a naval discipline officer, RPM. And the rest were just justified. They'd come on shore from the convoys, were all pulled in or the convoy, the Corvettes, and that pulled in the hell high. So the people, all the sailors come out and there'd be a thousand sailors on the street, and they would go, well, let's go to have a beer or something.

John Crncich (44:55):

And they'd go to the beer parlor closed, they'd liquor stores closed. The restaurant would be closed if they served liquor. And they're going around and saying, well, what the hell do we do? Then they started smashing the odd window. It was just cruel as hell. Had been on sea for months and months and maybe lost their best friends on the next Corvette to them. And then some mayor of the city decided, well, we don't want to have any problem. Well God, he created it his fault. And I've never discussed that with Alleg and the girls were all there with them, so they were not charged, but they're all pictures in the newspapers. Every sailor had a couple of

girls on his arms, and they were a glass of beer or bottle or so it was a nice, it was. Well like Vancouver had when you had the Stanley Cup there, I guess.

John Crncich (45:53):

Oh yeah, the riot. But they're now turning almost professional because they're breaking in the skit stuff. These were just breaking in upset with, I think. And one old lady owned a shop there and she got out in front of, oh, please, please, that's my only thing. Everybody just bypassed her and just went on, left her alone. But any other that shut their doors or ba, they crashed the door open. That's a piece of history though. But after VE day, we were, no, not all sort of from university with university acceptance and that I was one of the ones called in individually and said, okay, John said we could let you go immediately. You're free to go back to school right next month or something like that. Or else, if you want to volunteer for the Pacific, we'll give you 30 days more leave. Wow, 30 days leave.

John Crncich (46:53):

Wow, 30 days leave. I could have had rest of my life on leave, but 30 days sound, that's stupid me. He said, yeah, I'll take 30 days. So I signed with it. But we were on definitely a suicide squad then again, because I'll give you an idea. The first day of about 20 of us in this group, and we had to sort of form, and we formed a big circle, and these two trainers came in and the trainers were not Canadian. They were British and they were, why I found out later, they call 'em rangers, they call 'em seals, I think in the states, but they're a little more than seals. I found out some of the history of what these guys did, but they had a stupid arrangement license. They could wear half a uniform, one half the other. So one day a guy would show up with a hoo sailor suit on a little cap and army pants. Next day he would have bell bottom trousers on his army tops. And one was an officer, and one was a sergeant. And you say, what the hell is going on? But you didn't there, they were really tough. I give you an idea, the very first meeting they were introduced, nobody, I'd never heard of them before. They'd come over from England. And so there was really something special. They came over and the officer got in the middle of a big circle on the sides of the sort of house here.

John Crncich (48:35):

I don't mean the house, the unit. We were standing there, they said, are these clowns? It looked like clowns. And then he reached in, and he pulled out a knife for this long and he threw it to one guy. Said, alright, so you attacked me. And the guy said he picked the, they go, what the hell attacked you? Come on, come on. Said I teased him, coward. Hey, you checking. And he was starting to really tease him, and he was getting the guy and we're all wondering what the hell's going on. He said, all right. He said, give me that knife. And he threw 'em back, the knife. And he picked up, they must have placed it there before. So he knew, picked up a big stick, it was a branch or with a couple of things notch in it. And he said, here, alright, now attack me now by this time, this piece of steak, he was going to get 'em.

John Crncich (49:26):

So he came running at him, he ran right at him, he landed right in my feet at the end of the circle, and we said, holy geez, that was a jiu-jitsu at the time. And so he says, that's what we're going to teach you then and say you want to try some more. And everybody from that boy, they just

clammed up and we listened, and they put us through, I dunno how many days it was, but going through and they said, what's this got to do with the Navy? We were climbing. Oh yeah. They're like, every time I hear Trump in this damn wall and that carries out, get over that wall. No problem to they had a wall like that. We used to get over and we had to throw up the throat over. We'd run up the wall, you actually run up and yank to the top and then you have to jump down.

John Crnich (50:13):

So you look down. It was harder to jump down than they get up there. And in my particular case, I know I got up to the top, I looked down and sure as hell, I got a spot that was muddied the water and there's rocks sticking out. I said, I'm going to go and break a leg at that. So I'm standing there. So I said, fine, I'm going to jump. So I decided to jump, and I took my rifle and to break the fall, I slammed the rifle down with the rifle in first and the sergeant got a hold of me, said they're doing. And he showed me I had about this much of mud in the barrel. He said, who are you going to kill with that and stuff like it was another one teach you like, well you don't see it now, but you might understand in the world war there was barbed wire used to be round thing and it was rolls like rolls.

John Crnich (51:05):

Not just fences rolls. Well, we were taught how to run through those things and it's very simple, but it's tough on the guy who's the best athlete or the worst athlete. Those two guys were the toughest because the way they do it, and we did it, you go running out there 50 yards and then the guy who's up front, he has to jump across his arms, jump across, and he flattens that piece. Then the other eight guys jump on his back and over. He becomes a bridge. And the last guy, the one guy still down there with a sore back and he has to put his leg up and the last guy puts his rifle in and gets the lacing over and pulls him over, head over, heel over. Then they both catch up to the group. So he used to do that and there were all kinds of things.

John Crnich (51:56):

And the old thing about going across a river in the 10, 20 feet wide or so, but all rocks and everything else. And I don't know how they had that fixed, but you'd have a vine or something like that. You'd grab it and you get there and just enough that you could reach and fall and land on the other side. But some guy waited a little too long or something. The rope would don't go halfway. He had to drop in the water and get himself out. And some other exercise that we had, oh, and the last one was vicious. One was I almost killed a whole bunch of them.

John Crnich (52:39):

We had to climb a steep mountain, and I swear that mountain was the property that my son bought, and I kept looking for this. We had to climb steep mountain. On the top of the mountain was an oran gun. Orkin is a 90 aircraft gun. It was on a concrete pad, A concrete pad about, well no, six, five feet by five feet or so. But really it sort of stuck out and the gun was placed in there and in that arctic and gun has a kind of seat that you jump on it, and you could twirl around, do everything. And the guy, the first guy goes in, and he starts to get the gun ready. When there were two ships were going across the Bay of Fundy, they were going across and the one should go. And he said down, the one guy got totally upset, the sergeant got totally upset and they both

crossed, and they crossed and as they crossed, boom, another smaller little boat coming right in between them, right towards us.

John Crncich (53:42):

And he got so damn mad. And I was lucky for those guys. He said, get off of that. And he kicked the guy, belted guy off the thing. He got on the seat himself and he a little circle around that boat. And these were had the aircraft bullets, so that wasn't pleasant. But all those kinds of exercises we had, the ones where I say I elm almost killed a bunch of them is after we finished that exercise, oh nevermind, they'll forget that. I said, and we were all lined up waiting our turn to get up on this thing. And I was on that end, and he said, alright, get down. We got to get down as fast as you can down the top of the mountain and get onto our landing bars. We had come on a landing bar and the water was up to here.

John Crncich (54:32):

You're holding a rifle up here. The short guys, I don't know how they managed it, but I guess there weren't too many shortcuts. But I was at the end. So immediately when he yells you run, I ran. I turned around and then the crowd were right behind me. And so I ran until found an opening in the bush and then boom down the opening. And the opening was creek, a creek bed. And so it was little inch of water, but all stones. And I'm running down there and once you started running down a hill, you can't stop. And I'm running to beat hell down there. And I'd say how, luckily, I didn't lose my footing and I look over just glanced on my shoulder and right behind me was a First Nations guy from Branford. And boy, he was right in his glory. He was a big man.

John Crncich (55:26):

And I thought, oh my god, if I know him either going to kill there or he's going to kill me from behind me here. But we all got down, apparently, we established a kind of record for the speed on the thing, but we learned all the kinds of things, little things of how to say, you're the enemy, I got you an that, but I got no ropes. I going to tie you up or anything. So with your shoelaces, I could put you in a little small sapling tree or that I could tie you up in a way that you're immobile. Just a very, very simple thing. I never ever dared teach my children that because they would go ahead and do the same thing. Very simple way of doing it. But all these little things like that. And one thing I always watch when you see a movie, when you see, I think EP was one of those where you see these groups, 10 commandos, they're running into a village fire and you wonder, well how are they running?

John Crncich (56:30):

The one guy up there, they're not following him. And the way to do it is, and there's a system, you're looking, you're not looking there. You're looking at the guy in front of you when he moves, you move. So you move to his spot, he moves to the other guy's thing and it's just go like that and you go right through it. A whole bunch of exercise like that. It was thing. So I went, what the hell am I? Why are you teaching outside? We're up in the high seas. What are we going to do? Jump down to the bottom. And it turned out, I figured out what it was then. I was from a Corvette, which is you run around in a convoy thing, but I was assigned to go to a destroyer, an

HMCS MikMak. And boy, I was a good and tribal class destroyer. And I was all happy waiting and I'm waiting in Halifax for it to come in and that it was coming in from somewhere.

John Crncich (57:31):

I remember the job you always had. We used to have an old saying, they give you a can of paint and a brush and the great paint and the navy great paint the paint and the brush. And they said, the old saying was, if it doesn't move painted, if it moves saluted. And that used to be the thing. And it was basically true. So I had one of those jobs, all of us, anybody that was waiting for the assignments. But then one job I had was polishing the brass and the static Kona had a two story building and the offices on the second floor in the first floor, I know what it was in that. So I had to polish all the brass in the elevator. I got a good idea. So I'm polishing the brass. And then out of town officer would come in to report to the admiral, not admiral, but the captain up above and after assignment something like, and I would go second floor.

John Crncich (58:33):

And so just like they used to do in the department stores when they had a guy run the elevator and I was there for a whole day or two days until they caught me and then assigned me to, but then they suddenly they said, no. Now John, we got you. You're going to sign to new kind of ship that's being revamped in England now for the Pacific. You know, what the hell is the water? Different Pacific shouldn't be any different. And I've been trying to find out for 50 years, what is it if crescent class destroy? And I finally got on the computer, and I found out by piece by piece, I think I've got the right answer because I've asked every officer, I knew everybody that was ever in the Navy, nobody heard of them. There was a ship, five ships that were assigned to become crescent class destroyers because they all have different classes, different sort.

John Crncich (59:33):

And this that was over in England being readied and I, what the hell can be so hard? But then I saw that movie, ye and I suddenly realized what it was. And I dunno if you saw that picture ye, but you can read in between the lines. It's not good, not pleasant. And so we were going to had volunteered for the Pacific. I had volunteered to get those 30 days and volunteered. So I was taking them the next month I think it was. But then they, or no, I had come back. That's what I had already taken them. I was waiting for the ship. It was being done for something to handle the Pacific. Well, I think I know what they were doing. But when I looked up the ships, I found out that these damn ships were built in 1905. They were built in the USA and the USA gave them to the British Navy in 1914 for that war.

John Crncich (01:00:39):

And they, in turn, it was just sitting in what they call a naval cemetery. You see all these ships are just in Greece. You see all the oil tankers are just side by side sitting there. They were rusted and everything else. So they were trying to refurbishing and this was going to be a landing ship. And that's why all this training was, and the Japanese, and not too many people knew this now, but we were told about they were bombing Hawaii and they're coming, but they were going to go even further. Now, have you ever been to Hawaii? I have. Okay. And the little ones. And the little, small ones, are like needle points. Yeah, well those needle points are volcano things, and they go pretty high, some of them, well the Japanese got the idea that if they put an antenna up

there and guard the antenna, they could communicate with all their planes anywhere halfway across.

John Crncich (01:01:41):

So they had built those things all over and that's where they would put four or five men up there and there would be enough food or gardening or, I dunno how the canned food or whatever it was, they could last for a long, long time. And that's where you must have read that some Japanese were just coming out of the winter years later. For those guys, they were there to guard that thing. They had no, they were not communicating. They were just there to stand there because nobody was giving them orders or they were just there, and we were supposed to go up there and knock off. That's why all this training, it seemed that every piece of the training we had seemed to fit that very kind of a thing. And I saw a documentary, an American documentary, once of some destroyer, an American destroyer got there and they unloaded, I forget hundreds of marines and they wiped out 90%.

John Crncich (01:02:42):

They were wiped. It was just like shooting ducks in just banging the barrel. Just they were just no chance. So if you got time, I tell you how I got to that point. So when I got my leave took my 30-day leave, what I did is immediately I decided I've got to travel. So I aimed at Mexico to go in that. Anyway, that direction southward. And another buddy of mine, he had to leave, but he only had a week or so. And so he joined us. So we went to New York first. How we got there, I don't know. But then in New York the major US O Bill USOs are well USOs were domiciled, and people would donate a big mansion or an office building or so. And we had tremendous ones here, Sally Ann, the Knights, Columbus and four or five of them were very good in that.

John Crncich (01:03:44):

And we used to go there dancing and everything else. But in the U SSOs there I went. My buddy had to go back. He only had seven or eight day leave and he had to hitchhike back to Halifax. But I had another three, four weeks. So I was trying to decide what to do next. And I sat on, I was at a USO one block away from the Empire State Building in clear sight of, because this was a mansion that was, I gathered, it was donated for use of the army as a USO for the duration by the Polish cardinal. And I think it became the embassy for the Cardinal for the Polish Embassy. And that embassy had, I was wall ceiling, a big, big mansion, nice ceiling to floor windows. And I was in an upper bunk. And so I got up this morning and I decided, well, what the hell am I going to do now?

John Crncich (01:04:42):

Where do I go next? I'm all alone now. I'm not going to hang around. New York had enough of this and I'm looking at it and all of a sudden a plane comes out of the cloud and into the Empire State Building. You heard about that, didn't you? Oh, I could show you pictures. Went into the Empire State Panel on the 78th floor, 79th floor and out the other side, no one motor, that's one motor slid along the corridor and punched the hole on the other side and popped down. And this is where I had a letter written. I was going to write the two very prominent guys after the nine 11, they were on, one was the English, what was his name? Pierce Morgan. Him and the other one

was the governor of Minnesota, former Governor Minnesota, who was his whole life from there on in was on the theory of, what's the term they used?

John Crncich (01:05:45):

Conspiracy? Conspiracy, yeah. He had a program week week. And he was on the conspiracy side. He says that thing, he says, that was brought down by mankind. And the other governor said, no, no, he says they wouldn't do it. He says, remember there was a plane went into the Empire State Building and it didn't come down. Pierce Morgan said, oh well that was just a little piper cub or something like that. And they were saying, oh yeah, I guess you're right. And it was a B 25 bomber. That's the largest bomber that was in there was a B 26. But B 26 was just being developed and B 25 was the big bomber that US had. And it's the one that Doolittle flew over Tokyo. And it was that, and I saw coming out of it because I was looking out the window and it came out of a thick billowy cloud and there was about a hundred yards of nothing.

John Crncich (01:06:38):

But boom, the EM Empire State went through there. So the next day I'm trying to get out and somebody suggested, oh yeah. And they said the only people that were killed there was a pilot and there was an hitchhiker and I was a hitchhiker. Oh, what the hell is that? So I said, that's a good idea. So I went to LaGuardia Field or I don't know what it was called then or something, one of the fields anywhere. And I said, I'd like to get a lift somewhere going south. And I would hang out right next door to the operating room where the pilots checked in their things and they'd come out and I'd talked to them. And that was the first one I did. And he says, well, yeah, I mind. But he said, you better get yourself a flight fast because they're going to close this place down, which they did after. But so he said, well, can I come with you? He said, well, you can come. But he said, I'd have to get permission from my officer. Well I'm only going to Newark. And Newark was like 15 miles away or something. And this officer came out and he was a general or near general and the plane was the closest thing to a limousine. Beautiful, like Air Force one, a nice plane. And it was just the pilot and his boss, the general or whatever he was.

John Crncich (01:07:56):

So he asked as we were on Ubers walking towards the plane and he asked, he says, it's alright if we take this guy. He wants a lift to with us, to Newark. And he looked at me, he said, oh yeah, it's okay. So I went in. So I listen them, they were doing all the talking and even when they went in their seats, I went stood or sat right behind them to listen to them. And the general wonder what the hell happened, there's something happened today. And the guy explained to him that a plane went through the Empire State Building, and he said, well geez, what's that? I said, well, let's go have a look at that. So he said he had the guy flying the plane and we flew around the Empire State Building at that level. So that was totally illegal. And the round and round while we looked in and you could see the hole going in and where one thing had shot through and dropped to the next parapet and to a condominium apartment or something down below.

John Crncich (01:08:55):

And there was only nine people, eight people killed. There were eight children's aid, Catholic children's aid were on the 78th floor and they were Saturday morning, they were at work and nobody else was in the building except one. And then one telephone, one elevator operator and

she got one of the shrapnel cut the wire and the thing went down. She got her legs and some broke. 'em didn't get killed. No, she was alive. But the nine were all in the other one. Anyway, that happened. I was going to write them a letter only, I couldn't get an address for them and say, listen, you know what you're talking about. I was there. I was from here to the next building from the thing, looking right at when it happened, it was like everybody thinks always, I could show you pictures. I've got pictures of it that were reported in the papers.

John Crncich (01:09:49):

And that picture was taken from about a hundred yards behind where I was standing. So I was much closer, and it was on a kind of a level I was looking unobstructed view of it. So anyway, I got to up to there, got to Newark and are you interested in the rest of that? That was my highlight of my Val career. Yeah, keep going. All right, well then it got to Newark then what am I doing in Newark? And so again, I went to the same routine and go through, can I get a lift to when I'd saw, I wouldn't go to the office, get a pilot coming out of the operations group and they said, oh sure, okay. And the next trip was to going to Washington. And in it, as I was there, I'm in the plane, and this was I guessing B 17, most of 'em were old fighter bombers and that old bombers with aluminum seats and aluminum benches.

John Crncich (01:10:44):

And I saw this group of about 15 soldiers marching towards the plane. I looked at him, I said, what the hell army is that? He said, that can't be the US Army. And they were because they looked anything like anything but a marching army. And it turned out that they were all in the payroll department or so of the army. And so they had never seen a gun or anything, but they were marching left feet and everything like that and going across. And they came on and they sat down. So there was myself and 15 of them, and they were led by second Officer Lefthand down.

John Crncich (01:11:30):

Anyway, lefthand and Colonel or something. He was the boss and these 10 other 15 guys were the bookkeepers and they looked like bookkeepers. And that's not a good thing to say because I might've been one myself. But then as they plane in those days, unlike, I don't know when the first time you flew an airplane, one of the big airplanes, but the fire used to come out the back of the motor, great flames it to shoot out. And this flame was shooting out just as we were running down, going down the runway, just about takeout point. And the guy saw left hand, saw the flames coming, he's a firefighter, and he ran up and to the cockpit, knocked on, got in the door, said it's a fire. And so they scrambled like hell to stop the plane, and we got down, we hadn't left, might've been a foot or two off the ground, but still enough that they got down and we skidded back and forth off the runway into with the grass and we stopped no more than from here to that wall from a school fence, like a wire fence, steel fence.

John Crncich (01:12:40):

And they said, what? Tell that? I said, well, fire and Jesus, the guy captain with the pilots were going crazy, so mad walk back or they send a truck after us wondering what the hell happened. Went back and got another flight to Washington, Washington highlight of my Washington trip. I was just getting no special interest or anything just to go as far as I can and see as much as I can in Washington. The highlight was I went to see the capitol building naturally and everything and

then watching a debate or something. Then I'm walking back to where my USO, where I was going to sleep for the night and I saw a Canadian flag out on the lawn like, oh dear, it was a Canadian embassy. So I said, oh, I'm going to go say hello. So I went in, and I said, could I talk to somebody about a problem?

John Crncich (01:13:35):

And the girl said, well, let me find out. She came back, said, okay, you can see must've been the ambassador. I don't know. But he had a nice big private office. Took me in there and this guy was a real nice gentleman. He said, oh, and where are you going? And I'm telling, I'm in bar case leaving, but I'm running out of money and I'm not going to have to go back and I won't have enough money to fly back, so I'm going to be in trouble. He said, okay, well I wonder if I could get an advance on my pay, is the way I put it to him. He said, sure you can. And he opened up his drawer, second drawer, and he pulled out a one he showed, and he started doing this When he sing, I thought they were \$5 bills. So I put 'em in my pocket then have a good time, and I walked out, and I then looked counted.

John Crncich (01:14:32):

I didn't know how many, they're all \$20 bills. I said, wow, I'm not going there. I'm going that way. So I kept going. The next stop was Dallas, Texas and Dallas, Texas was, again, I was sitting, I had planned to stay well. So I was asking somebody where the, well before I went downtown, I was sitting watching this big, this was the B 26 now, which was the newest plane, 25 was the one that went in the Empire State. Then by they come out and the 26 was going doing one or two laps and then come in the land just before landing, just come through and take off again and doing a couple of laps and down again and up and kept doing this. And I was sitting on the bench just outside the pilots, the operations office. And then the pilot came out and I said, what the hell's he doing?

John Crncich (01:15:30):

He said, is he having trouble with the landing game or something? He said, oh no. He says we've been having problems with that plane. We're losing a plane a day or some statistic anyway. And so we're asking him to go up and see if he could find out what it is and radio it in as to what the problem was before he crashed. I look at him, we're nice guys. But anyway, he kept doing that. And then I found out where the US side was and I went down to the, just outside the airport and stood at the bus stop there and there was just one gentleman there at the bus stop, a little gentleman and he had a nice little straw hat and nice little gabardine suit. He only stood about. So I, and I was talking to him and asking him what he was, he told me, and I'm talking and he's very nice talking beautifully to me and that, and gee, the guy enjoying me, I guess because I got a strange uniform or something.

John Crncich (01:16:34):

He was really a nice little guy. And so the bus, we waited quite a while, and the bus finally came and stopped, and we were one two. I said, okay, go ahead. No, he said, you go ahead. So I went in, and I grabbed the seat and there was a seat next to my sort of holding that one open for him. But then about 30 guys came in with lunch buckets and all rugged guys, the whistle had blown, it had been time to quit, and they'd come in and this guy, and he was the last guy in and they were

giving the elbow, he was black. And I said, oh, for Christ's sake, I felt like I couldn't take 30 of them on. I was just so damn disappointed with myself for not seeing this thing.

John Crncich (01:17:24):

But the guy with the gold man, he might say, oh man, for all I know, he was 30 years younger than I am today. But he looked old. He was a little neat little kid, neat little guy. But they were given the elbow now. So that was my first introduction to south of the Mason Dixon line. It was then from there, then the war with Japan. And the good news was starting to come out and geez, I might close. I said, geez, wait a minute. I better not go to Mexico because I was waiting there to get the last leg. I better start hanging backward. So I headed back to Oklahoma City, just wherever they were going in that direction I would go. So at Oklahoma City and stopped at Oklahoma City. And there I am asking someone, they said, well, you could stay here.

John Crncich (01:18:18):

I said, okay, well I got to have something to eat. Oh, well just go down the dining room down that way. Somebody at the desk was telling me that. So I walked through and believe it or not, I walked through, I thought I was in the casino in Monte Carlo. They had a craps table; they had all these tables for cards and all that. And I said, what in the hell is this? And I walked through, and a nice dining room and I go, and it was the end of the mealtime or so. So I was almost alone there. So I had a big table all by myself and I go through and I went through the servers and that got myself a nice big meal and I almost finished. So then when I'm finished, I go to stand up, pick my thing up, and a big, tall fellow with a jumpsuit on, he's waving to me, he's going to do it.

John Crncich (01:19:06):

So I'm saying, geez, what the hell? I'm looking in my uniform. Are there some new stripes on there or something? So he comes over and he picks it up and he walks away, and I suddenly come the light as he turns around and he's had a bullseye on his back. He was a prisoner of war, and he was only about 20 years old. He was a few years older than me at the time, but they were war jumpsuits with the big bullseye on them. And that was just as a reminder to them that it was psychologically, and he was happy as Allie, he took the thing and took it to the place. A good looking, I think he would be a six foot two, three blonde as can be and a real Germanic look about him. And then so I guess they ship 'em rather than keep 'em on the coast where they could, that means they ship them.

John Crncich (01:20:01):

That's the furthest. But anyway, from there I got talking, something said, you better get going. He said they're going to close everything. So I said, well, where are you going? He said, well, we're just going to a Kansas City. Kansas City is just one state over, so can I come with you? And the guy says, well, yeah, sure. Okay. And so the pilot and the copilot, and I was going to be the passenger, but we go up to the site, it was a flying fortress, which a B 17 and the B 17 had holes in it, like there's all shell holes, boom, boom, all over the place. And I said, what in the hell is this? Where are they taking this thing? They're not going to fight with this thing. And then years later I suddenly found out, I think on the computer that they have a major avionics museum in Kansas City, so that's probably, they were bringing this thing there and they were going around and inspecting the ship, looking at these holes in them, but then kicking the thing, I

remember him kicking one time, he, it's going to be good for at least another one or two landings and that.

John Crncich (01:21:11):

So they said, all right, let's go. So we went and went in and took off and where we landed, we started to go down and well, it was a blow up. No, no, not before we took off. It blew up. The tire blew. So screeching stop and that and then we had to then try to get out the plane, but the shock of the stop and that had jammed. Then there's, on the B seventeens, they had a long bar, a pipe that runs just along over your head, just along six inches from the wall and that's where the parachute is. You put your clip on there, then dumping it, you'd go out the door. And so we were hanging on that couldn't open the door, so three of us had to swing on it and kick at the same time. We finally kicked the door open and got out, but had we got a little fire, we wouldn't have been able to get out at all.

John Crncich (01:22:10):

So that was then now how by then they had closed up all the flying and I couldn't get out of Kansas City and one of the pilots said, well, you drive with me if you want. I'm going up north and I don't know where he was going to Chicago anyway, in that direction. I said, it's the right direction, I'll go. So we went up that way and how I got back to Halifax, I don't know, but when I got to Halifax, that's it. That's the end. Except then I had to go through my medical for getting out and they give you so that you can get treated after. And the medical was a long lineup of sailors and we all up and I got in and you go, and you sit in the chair, and I look over and there's a shopping cart next and it was, the basket was full of Hypodermics looking at all this. Well, oh god, thank God, I could stand it, but anybody else would've fainted at that. But they let me go and got to Montreal and I said that's it.

John Crncich (01:23:14):

But I learned a lot on it. I learned a lot about the service, but I learned a lot also about, I came back with a kind, I shouldn't say, but a hatred for south of the Mason-Dixon line. I don't know how much you know about the black problems out there and that you do. Yes, but this was 1944, this was like 35 years or 40 year before Martin Luther King and I had a foot, I had four of us from Montreal, from the Montreal football team, had a scholarship offer at North Carolina State and we were, well, there's a picture there I think of the article. We were in the paper said we were the first Canadians to be offered a football scholarship there. But we went there, and we all came back and we came back and went to different teams. Two of us came to Argos, one went to stayed with Ella. Wes in Montreal and the other one, he was from the Air force and he Vancouver and I don't know whether he played, but I know when I was in Vancouver on another deal once he was on the microphone, the old loudspeaker guy, guy by the name of Bill Surplus, I don't know whether he got on the team or not because we were not the connection. We weren't interplaying with them at that time.

Eric Brunt (01:24:41):

Speaking of football, you haven't told me the Great Cup story yet.

John Crncich (01:24:45):

The Great Cup story, you could see the picture I have, yes. Okay, well on that picture, I think I'm the only one alive of that picture. I think there are probably only three or maybe four of us that were semen. All the rest were because of their size shore patrol, or they were in the physical PTIs, physical training instructors. And there's a radar which just started, the radar had just started. So they were all at St. HIAs and I was one of the lone guy. I was the last guy out of Montreal, and I was all by myself and the Montreal Sudden bitches there they were everybody saying, oh boy, the Navy's behind them and hired me to play football. Well, they did not the Navy. Well, they'll start with the end. We won the Great Cup, and the Great Cup was sent to Montreal to be put in this play or something there and the Navy said, send it back.

John Crncich (01:25:49):

We're not taking it. And they said, why not? They didn't want all of the people to think that we got ringers in there to win the Great Cup. And then that's how we won it and the hall of and where the Great Cup was kept in Hamilton said, send it back to him and they send it back and it went back three times and finally it's there, but then they got the last bit, I think the last laugh in the sense all the names are, all of the trophies are on the players that played in the Great Cup and our names are on there too, but in our particular thing, the bitches, they send the bitches, they put your rank on there too. So here I am, I was ranked for the most valuable player, and I was all-star on my position and everything, even though I was the youngest player, so I was the lowest strength, so I was, what's the term they used Anyway, it's the lowest C leading, not leading sea, but below able seamen.

John Crncich (01:27:00):

I was at Able seamen. Yeah. So all the other guys were, they were in their jobs, they were different things. They were PTI and lower left tenants and they were officers and a lot of officers and that I was the lowest ranking thing, and I was the guy played more than anybody else on the team and I was playing more than anybody else. I'm not bragging this because it was a fluke. First of all, I don't know how they ever knew that I was in the Navy because I joined the Navy and within three days, I got my name called to come down to report down to the officers, to the gate there, and I went down, I said, what the hell is this for? I just got my uniform in there and they said two sharp patrolmen were there and they said, come on, hurry up.

John Crncich (01:27:51):

We haven't got much time. And they put me in, and they said up front, they put me in the paddy wagon in the back and I can go down there for 40 miles. I'm trying to think what in the hell have I done this? Then I get there, and I see coming to meet the little, the shore patrol paddy wagon was this fellow, I recognize them as teacher in the Protestant school system and he was a football coach. He says, welcome John. He says, come on, we got to get you suited up. And I said, suited up. I just got my suit the day before. I said, so he took me and he meant the football suit and they had already started on field on the scrimmage, practicing to make the team. And so right away I got on the team, and I was to share.

John Crncich (01:28:37):

We had the reason we won, not the reason we won, we were a good team, but one of the contributors was we used what's called the audible system. The audible system. Anything about

football is only used about last two minutes to play where they want to beat up time and they don't want huddles. So they shoot out a bunch of numbers and the center in the back, you'll know what it is, and the guys know we're who to block. And so it saw Audible system. So they couldn't replace me with somebody else, but I was sharing the job with another fellow who the day, not the day before, about three days before or five days before, but it was since the last weekday, the first game of the year. Anyway, he got thrown in the BRI because he overjoyed some girls I guess on the weekend or something.

John Crncich (01:29:35):

And so two of the guys of the other players had to go find them, put 'em in, they threw 'em in the, and the officers and now both St. Hys and then Dun, where there's no way just because you're an athlete. They did in the Air Force. I know for a fact they catered to some of the players, and they had some good players. They were brought in, gave 'em a nice ranking and stuff. In our case, they wanted to do everything to make sure that nobody thinks that we're favored in that. So he got thrown in the Bri and he was in the BRI up until the last week, the last game after the last game. I think they let him out and then they couldn't, he didn't know the signals, he didn't know anything, but he was a good player. He and I were supposed to share 50 50.

John Crncich (01:30:23):

And in those days, you played both offense and defense. I was too lightweight. I was light for center linebacker. He used to gorilla on the team. He used the guy that always knows the news and bang, I wasn't that I was right, A left linebacker. Left Linebacker gets most of the tackles because most players in those days. Now today it's the game today is I don't enjoy it. I don't go to see it. And even though I can get some passes, it's two passes in a kick. In our days there was two bucks in a kick. They used to call and then the plays were really nice plays, and everybody had all the back feelers had something to do and any one of 'em could carry the ball. And there was a passer and there was a kicker, and they call it signals. So you had to know who to pass it to and at what count and that, and you have to remember, and the quarterback, he didn't hand it to the quarterback.

John Crncich (01:31:24):

He was over on that about a yard away, way on the side. But he was the strategist, and he called the signals as he could see them. And so then the guy goes, so you had to know who's, and the guy was usually in motion, so you had to lead the pass. It was a skilled position, but most of all best as that left linebacker, you had more opportunities to hit guys there than anywhere else as opposed to a center linebacker, which I wouldn't blast a day in there. I would've been killed in there. So I played the whole season, 60 minutes, I would practice some other guys and practices and that, but the coach was always scared that what if something happened? What if they goofed on it? If you goof on a bad throat to the wrong guy or so or goes or in the wrong direction, then you may lose the game.

John Crncich (01:32:14):

So as long as I was healthy and I was healthy, I was the youngest guy on, and I was healthy as hell, and I was the only guy at the end. I was the only guy still in training in Montreal. All the others were, as I said, in different positions. And that even the ratings who were sailors, they had

gone on by then. And so it was a tough position and well, I got my kudos for, I thank God I came out of it live. But the way I got into it was, again, as I think I said, I had had no idea they were having a football team. Nobody knew they had just started to decide to have a football team, and they had recruited the name of practice in St Is. And so then when I came in the coach, he was coaching of the Protestant school there, but we had played them in the playoffs and that, so he knew me by reputation.

John Crncich (01:33:20):

So when he heard somebody had told him that I had joined the Navy and right away he said, get him down here, we need them. So when he said, when he came up to meet the van that brought us over, that brought me over there, he came over and said, come on John, I'd like to see. He says, come on in, we'll put you in uniform. I said, I in uniform, I just got it yesterday. And he meant the football uniform behind gym was the football field. So I was there, and I played the rest of the thing and then I, then I would transferred to Toronto, or I think I told before that I had joined the Navy on a dream and I was very much into the outer spaces thing and all the ESPs and all that stuff. And even after the war, I accepted that I wasn't interested in going North Carolina, south Mason Dixon line then.

John Crncich (01:34:22):

But I was only interested because Duke University, which was 20 miles away from Raleigh where North Carolina State is, and Dr. I forget his name now, had just not invented, but he had just started seriously looking into ESP and I said, wow, I'm going to volunteer and I'm going to go there and be one of the characters that pick out. He used to have a screen, a blank aboard, and he had a deck of cards with five signal insignias, and he'd pull one out, put it down, and the guy together and behind the door had to put down what he thought it was and if you had the ESP, because he was thinking star, star, star. And if you got that, you put star, then that was a good candidate, and I wanted to be one of those guys. So that's why I went down there. But what I learned about the south in those days, the lynchings and that just had no use for them at all and haven't recovered from it. Terrible.

John Crncich (01:35:29):

It was terrible. Oh, just okay, just to leave for buffer Bank, go back to, well, it is part of football to go there. We were professionals in football, Montreal, I was one of two guys who had a job with the Greyhound bus company, and we were supposed to be inspectors, or I don't know what you'd call them, auditors or something. And we can go anywhere we want to and we'd just go onto a bus and then it was all, we'd get free table or expense account or something and get paid on top of that. And then report goes out. Is a driver, good driver, how many ERs they were? That's for the audit department. And so when the North Carolina came up, I went to them, I said, fine, I want a ticket to Raleigh, North Carolina. So I went down there and, on my trip, there, now this is not the same trip that I was in with the Navy when I told you about, but we got into Washington, and they had to change buses there and the next bus we changed and was going down to North Carolina and further south.

John Crncich (01:36:37):

And I didn't know, I'm not sure where the Mason Dix line goes, but I know I got on there and there were a couple of businessmen were on their briefcase home doing this, a young couple that probably in the honeymoon there, another old couple there. And I looking around, well, where the hell am I? It was going to be a boring trip except I saw a young fellow, my size, my age, and that sitting there, so I whoa, I'm going to go over and sit with him, talk to him. So I went over and talked to him, started talking, and he kept yelling one word, syllable, just one word at a time. And we went for hundreds of miles. I said, what the hell's the matter with this guy? He's not opening up at all. Then finally he said, oh, here's my stop. And then just as he got up, he says, by the way, he says, where are you from? And I said, Montreal. And he said, Jackie Robinson.

John Crncich (01:37:27):

And with that, and jeez, he got all excited. He ran out the bus and went in and the bus stops were like, if you picture a McDonald's big white building with big windows, see people sitting down and whatnot. And the ticket office in there and attached to it is a lean to Barnboard, no windows, a window, no panes of glass, a doorway with no doors. And all you could see was eyes in there, us, the blacks, we were south of the base. And Dixon line, once he got it there, stop. And he went, ran in there and told him, there's a guy from Montreal on the bus. And they all came to the door, and I stared, I was like, Jesus Christ coming down the mountain. And I was scared. I said, what in the hell's going on? Then I realized that what it was, it had just been after, it was the first season that Jackie Robinson in Montreal was known around America for taking them in.

John Crncich (01:38:31):

So that was quite a little experience. And when we got there and we roomed, they had a dormitory. It was in top of the gym, I think it was. And the guys, there were people coming in from all states being offered scholarships from one place to another. And the local guys who might've been on team the year before, they weren't going to make the team this year for sure. And though they would come in, they were still practicing in that, and they'd come in and say, Hey, say whatcha going to do? It was Saturday, maybe it was a Saturday night, said, I got my pickup outside and I got a couple of shotguns. Why didn't we go shoot up some blacks? And you say, oh, Christ's sake, what in the hell is this? Because the blacks used to have the little, every time, anytime I've gone down south many times since, and you go past a thing, you see a palatial big looks like the White House, big mansion there.

John Crncich (01:39:29):

And if you look to the right and about a hundred yards back, I imagine what I saw, what was there, a hundred, well, 50 years ago was a little 5, 6, 7 little shacks. They were shacks, just barnboard shacks and a white, there was always have a whitewashing machine outside on the porch that was like their Cadillac I guess in a sense. Anyway, they couldn't stand that stuff the way they're treated and the way they talked about the thing, and especially coming from Montreal seeing, well, the critic in there of the French compared nothing to what they were in the blacks. It was horrific. They couldn't, if you talk to somebody, they're suspicious of what you mean by that kind of thing.

Eric Brunt (01:40:27):

I guess. Were there any blacks on the Navy

John Crncich (01:40:29):

Team or I guess no, because there's not allowed in the Navy. No blacks in the navy, no blacks. There were no blacks in the CFL. There were no Americans in the CFL right now. I was at a Argo reunion a month ago. They had a reunion here and there were, oh, maybe a hundred people going back. I was by far the oldest. I played for Argos for 19. In 1946. I played according, gets me upset. The computer says I played one game with Argos. Yeah, I played one game with Argos because I decided I wanted to go back to university. And so I read in the paper, we played this one game against Hamilton and then in the newspaper said the next day was going to be the last day of registration into McGill University. So geez, I just ran into my room, didn't even tell my roommate who was also a teammate and just went down to the station, got down there and registered the next day.

John Crncich (01:41:31):

And then there I wasn't allowed to play for Ettes, I had to play for McGill. So I had to play my three more years at McGill and then an opportunity came to, then when I graduated, I had an offer from a couple of teams to play, and the one Sarnia Imperials came to mind that I had as a nine-year-old kid. Somehow I dreamt I was going to play football from Sarnia and I never knew what the hell, where Sarnia was or maybe where Ontario was. And so I said, geez, there's a message there. So I took it and from there I also went into a lot of my hobbies of going into the afterworld and everybody jokes about the, if you want to read something good, there's all kinds of skeptics. They say, oh, that's a balloon that look in your computer and put Google operation high, jump put that in and read that.

John Crncich (01:42:32):

You'll see it. It's about Antarctica and what's going on up there. What was going on and was it the, what do you call the minister of state or the United States, his name. He was, well-known name of that era, but sort in the forties and that supposedly committed suicide by jumping out of a hospital four story window. And he was trying to explain to the general public to Washington so that there is UFOs and they're there, they're stationary, and the Germans are also there in another part of the Antarctica, and they've got these little men working with them. And so there we were ready for an attack. Now if that's where the attack would come from, that in Argentina and on the way up, everybody thinks you can in Japan that way and German down north Syria was going to come. But read that and you'll see that guy, he was thrown out the window and naturally one of the articles are going to say that, but they kind of hint at that. There's a lot of people think that because why would a man in his position, he was next to the vice president, he would be next. What do they call, I forget his name now, if I could think of his name. He a well-known name. He committed suicide, they say, but other people say that they threw 'em out.

Eric Brunt (01:44:12):

So just to go back, what was it like being, I guess having a lower rank than a lot of the people you

John Crncich (01:44:21):

Played football on the field and if they ever said anything, I mean, they would get an elbow in the mouth on the next play. So even though I was smaller than him, I could run faster. But I think no, never. Well, as I said though, I don't know what it was in the other thing, but at Montreal there was just at the end, it turned at the end of the season, I was the only player that was still there. I was the latest addition to thing. The other guy ahead of me, he was an acting physical training instructor, and he was my roommate when we were with IGOs and one of the officers, a sports officer, he had just come back from a tremendous experience fighting in the channel. He was on the boats, on the landing barges. There were two of them. Two of the officers were head of landing barges.

John Crncich (01:45:22):

So they were there. The others were Signalmen, Peaky eyes who were all based in ST and shore patrolmen who were in Montreal but were on another street where they had a jailhouse and everything else. And there's stories there. And so between those, as far as normal sailors, I was the last one. And at the beginning there were only, well in the thing, there were only three of us on the team I think that you would consider sailors. The other guy, well, the others were here. The officers were the one guy, an officer that played the quarterback. He had an interesting story to tell. He was on a ship, I know that name, but it doesn't matter. But he was at Western University in Western University, I guess we're one of the first universities who were getting into radar. And so he was into radar training and all of a sudden nine of them were pulled out and put into, or they volunteered, but he went into the British Navy and into, so he got onto a big battleship with maybe 500 sailors on and that the captain was of the old school captain.

John Crncich (01:46:45):

Oh yeah, yeah. Radar a, yeah, yeah, sure. So okay, we'll give you room, empty the broom closet, put your equipment in there. You could sort open, leave the door open and work from there, something like that. Then one day they're out at sea or in the Mediterranean, I forget which it was. And he comes running out and he says, captain, captain, he says, there are 11 Meshers Smiths on their way in this way. They're about 20 minutes away. And he looked, the captain Bear looks over there, I don't see any mushroom. What the hell are you talking about? And sort of run the guy down. And the fella had to go back to his base and all of a sudden, the planes come in and knocked the hell out of the ship. And from that day on, they said the captain, captain came up, the ordered, the guy said, open, get that left, or one of the officers or get him moved out of there and banked that his office, that he was now a hero, but he became from an outside disbeliever, a real old time sailor into a now a, whoa, they do know what they're talking about.

John Crncich (01:47:46):

Then the other, as far as, oh, I tell you another story being only at the end, being the only guy that was in training, still in basic training, and I had to be up, they practiced six o'clock every night, I think it was six. And we would let out go, I think at five 30 or so, or maybe they started at five 30 and they would all come by Vans and that from St. Heights or from their own bases and they had jobs. They were like factory workers and some of them and that they would all be there, and they were on the field extras and drew their pushups and that. And I would have to run up, I dunno if you know Montreal at all from St. Katlin Street up to McGill University, there's slight incline all the way and the stadium is halfway up on top of them, halfway up to the

mountain and I have to go up there, run up there and get up there and get up and look outside and they're all doing their side.

John Crncich (01:48:43):

I'm the only guy not out there yet. And so I'd slow down a bit and keep, I had no interest in getting out there and I'd go out there for the practice and that was every day. Every day. So that meant that I've missed every supper. And that was because they would, as I would start running up at five 30 or whatever, five or five 30, forget what time it was, and they would all go to the mess hall and eat supper. But the two cooks, I said they felt sorry for me. And so they said, John, come on down. He said, will fix up. And they would open the door to the kitchen, and they would make a little meal and they themselves would have a little thing in that until one day, our third string quarterback, he was a little jerk, and he had that little, what I call little man's disease.

John Crncich (01:49:34):

Well, and he had a temper with it, goes with it. And he said one day he said, John, he said, you're going back to the base. I was the only guy going back there. He said, yep. He says, you mind if I go with you? I said, well, not at all. We walked down and walked down the base and then I go up into the kitchen and these two cooks sort of appear with us. They didn't walk down with us, but they appeared sort of on the scene the same. And they opened the door to the kitchen and to the mess hall and we went in and sat down, and they ordered up and he came up with four plates and two of them and two of us. And all of a sudden, the officer's brain started going. He says, what the hell is you guys?

John Crncich (01:50:21):

This is not kosher. The word they used. They went, I'm going to put you on it, John, get back there, go over to your bunk or not bunk the hammock. And the thing said, you two guys are on charge. You broke it into the kitchen, and we all looked at, you wonder what the hell's going on. I went to my thing the next day. I was naturally the last guy there and the scrimmages started. And so I got into the scrimmages and the plays and the coaches had this new play, and the new play was this, halfback goes this way. I sent it to him in motion user and he cuts into these guys' block ferman. And so, okay, now second-string halfback, you try that. So the same thing, same place. Root group goes in that, and there's the defense team there, but they know what's coming, but the offense is good enough to the guy can make some yards.

John Crncich (01:51:19):

And the guy said, that's good play. And this guy was third string. So I said, okay, ginger, you take it now, you take the ball. He goes in and there were the 12 and 1123 guys except me, 22 guys say piled up on them and beaten the hell out of 'em. They just, the word had got, the word had got around what they did to me. And the two cooks, what he did. And so I don't know who, I guess the two cooks went up and got there and told their story and they did a job on him that, I don't know if what he did after that, but it was quite a thing.

Eric Brunt (01:51:59):

You guys play in the Great Cup,

John Crnich (01:52:01):

Hamilton. Hamilton was supposed to play Winnipeg. There were no teams in Alberta. And at that time, Winnipeg had a team, a good team, and then all of a sudden Edmonton, they got some guys from the east here. They went up there and coached, and Edmonton had a team. Then Calgary and Regina Winnipeg already, already had a team. So they were, but during the war, the big four as it was known then was in the east was Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, and Montreal. But they suspended during the war. They fell out. There was a second league, which was equally, and I would say equally as good, but it was just a little notch below. But a lot of the players shifted one to the other. It was in a second theme was the same teams like Toronto was balmy beach, Ottawa was Trojans, Hamilton was the Wildcats, Wildcats, one team, tigers or the other team.

John Crnich (01:53:16):

And then to make up that fourth team, Sarnia was put in there and they were in there since the thirties instead of Montreal, because it was Ontario rugby, football, and we played in Quebec, rugby football team. And we played against Maritimes and Montreal, Quebec and that. So that's how it got to that way. And we played Hamilton. They were the good teams. They were, but there were no Americans. It was totally Canadian plays. And I played in both systems and three systems I would think, and I prefer the first one because, and even the Americans played the way we did too. It was, I'm not saying it was a Canadian game, the Americans, you knew a ball carrier made 10 yards, but you knew who did the blocking for 'em. And there was pulling guards. They would pull out and be a guard. Everybody you knew, every position had a job.

John Crnich (01:54:16):

And nowadays you see a pile up, a bunch of guys all in the middle and the pastor's looking around and he throws the, and you say, oh, for Christ's sake. And he's getting the order to 'em thing from the upstairs to the coach to him. So I lose interest in it. They're good athletes, I shouldn't knock them. But there's also another factor that's come into the game that is wrong, there is the equipment. The equipment. Now, I swear you're going to see it in your lifetime. There's going to be a broken neck, and that neck is going to be because of the equipment, because we played without the bird cages now. And I had a broken nose twice because of the, well, I'll tell you how, but if a guy grabs your bird cage, he can do practically anything with you. It's just like having chicken.

John Crnich (01:55:15):

And then that's going to happen. And the other is the helmet is so good and so strong that you just charge in. But now I was watching a championship Rugar game a few weeks ago, and now they play the same damn tackle. They come hearted one another on the side and everything, but no pads at all. And that's the way I played as a kid until I went to high school, never had a pair of shoulder pads or anything. We played that way. We knew how to, and we didn't sneak away from anything we'd done. We didn't go head-to-head. We had used leverage. And you went to the side. I was one of the lightest, not the small, but one of the lighter airmen on the team. I was 170 pounds I think were those positions on the linebackers are, well, they're 10, 20 pounds more anyway, but still I could get more than my share of tackles and that because the angles and everything else, and I didn't have to stop.

John Crncich (01:56:17):

But now it's a case of collision, that's all bang, bang. And the guys in the middle, they get no credit whatsoever. You don't know who they are. They could change when everybody, we all had to introduce ourselves at the game and the guys were introducing themselves and there's team to team to team. I'd never heard of them. And they had played for almost every team in the city, in the country, but it's not the same. We were kids. We used to climb the fences to get in to see the game. We knew everybody or we wait at the bus station because the players used to have to take their laundry home and have it washed at home. Then they'd get off the bus. Can we carry a, we'd carry, one guy would carry the kit back, another kid would carry the helmet and the player, he was happy, and we'd march. And the Gatesman, they didn't carry that way. They wouldn't let you come in by yourself, but they'd let us go in that way. And if they didn't let you go in, then you went around the corner and you climbed the fence. One guy out on top of the other guy's shoulders over a 10-foot fence and jump in. The guy that was at the bottom, I don't know how, he don't remember how we ever got in or if he ever did.

John Crncich (01:57:34):

Then the other thing on the players, as I say, they were then the navy in the Navy thing. This is where, yeah, I think it's worth telling that people wouldn't believe this, but they think, oh, like they hired you to play. I was just a high school player. I wasn't an outstanding high school player, but the coach thought I was in my position. I wanted to be a quarterback. I could throw a ball. But he saw me, and I was on the sideline one and the captain was the center, and he played almost the whole game. And he saw me with just, my brother was on the other, and I was centering a ball to him and the ball was zipping them, getting them right in the chest, five, 10 yards away. And the coach saw that. So in the fourth quarter, this game, my second, the last year high school, the coach saw me playing that.

John Crncich (01:58:28):

He said, you guys get over here with that. And he made us go there. But he remembered in the last quarter, our center got his leg broken and there was third down, I think it was a championship game, and third down, it was one difference of one thing. So one bad snap and the game is over because they would get the ball in your area and score, and they'd win the championship. So I was told, go in there and center the ball. It was third down and well, we used to play four downs there. And so I went in and zipped. So he said, wow, you're my center. Because the other guy couldn't play anymore, and he was the captain, and all time played all the game all the time. So I played and the other coach from the other league saw that. And so he immediately put me at center.

John Crncich (01:59:21):

I didn't want to be a center, but I played center that year. But from there on, and then a tremendous all Canadian centers came in from Halifax the next year for the Montreal team. And I said, thank God. So he would center. They moved me to pass catching. And in those days we used to play both the offense defense, the offensive team. First team played 75% of the game. The second team played a three-minute break, breather here, five minutes here, five minutes there. They played 15 minutes maybe, and then you had a third, then four extra guys. There were

really extra guys. And I had one guy in Montreal who happened to be also a sportswriter for one of the papers. So I'd come off for my four minutes breathing out. He'd said, now John, what you got to do is that this? And I'd look at him and say, Christ's sake, you're sitting here. I'm out there. You go out there and do that. But he used to annoy me. He never got on the field, but he always wanted the coach.

Eric Brunt (02:00:38):

Do you have a photo of yourself in your Navy uniform?

John Crncich (02:00:41):

Well, there's one right here. Yeah. Oops.

Eric Brunt (02:00:45):

You Okay?

John Crncich (02:00:46):

Is that okay?

Eric Brunt (02:00:46):

It's all plugged in. Oh, no worries. Oh shoot. It is isn't actually here, right? I'll just put this right here and it'll be good. There we go.

John Crncich (02:00:58):

Yeah. Here's the,

Eric Brunt (02:01:00):

Oh, that's a great one.

John Crncich (02:01:02):

A good-looking guy. Yeah. The girls loved it. They love the uniform now. You know, look at that uniform. No pockets. And yet we had to carry money. We had to carry our identification. That was the biggest thing. And where do you think we at it?

Eric Brunt (02:01:22):

Where would you put it?

John Crncich (02:01:24):

The cap had liner, had a liner inside, and there was a hole that that was on elastic, that sort of stretch. And you put the wallet, oh no, you put your wallet in your armpit because that was this here that would call the tiddly. I wouldn't have a picture of the uniform they gave you was a wool and heavy wool in that. But then the first pay you got the first month, you went out to a tailor and bought yourself what's called the tiddly. And that was a nice blue surge suit. And it

was form fitting. It came right tight as can be in here. So you could put your wallet in your armpit. There's no more chance of it dropping out. You had to reach in for it. That

Eric Brunt (02:02:04):

And this is the team?

John Crncich (02:02:06):

Yeah, that's the team. That's you. Yeah, that's me there. Yeah. I could name all the players. He was a bandsmen. He was. He was a signaler. Steve Lavan was the captain. Four years of four Great Cups in Toronto here. Jack Whitley had seven great cups. He was Argo Hurley was that guy. That was the radar man I was talking about. Pat Santui was, he played for number two, including Saskatchewan West. He was a bandsmen. Then these three, these two were also sharp patrol officer sports. He had tremendous history of sports. And there's another guy who was his partner, this guy here. Those two were all had, each had a landing boat in mind. Some of the stories they had there had somet, short patrol, signalman, radar, air, I think it was air, whatever we called it. Air. He trained for coming out of the airplanes. There're the cooks.

John Crncich (02:03:10):

See, there's one cook. Yeah. Looks like. And there's the other host. They looked like tough characters. Yeah. Oh yeah. Oh, they got beaten up and their nose broken a hundred times, I think. And then you get guys like this guy is Christopher Ellis. He was the leading actor in Canada. He was A-C-B-C-C-B-C. Never went to a game or anything. But he said, oh, there a picture taken. He's down there for a picture there. Of course he was. Yeah, Christopher Ellis was all on the radio was a big thing with the mysteries and everything else. And the doctor, he was a doctor. These guys are coaches. This guy also warned us. He just came. But he's a nice guy though. And this guy was a sponsor, like the Navy didn't pay for that. He was Porter Construction. And he paid for our uniforms and that we didn't get paid naturally, but well, we had to go to Halifax to play once.

John Crncich (02:04:07):

That cost a lot of money. Whose little kid? I don't know. He just appeared out of the blue. And the only thing is his name is, then I saw his name. I never ever saw him in my life until that day. Mascot. Yeah. Ken Clark. But Ken Clark, there was a Ken Clark in about the right age that would play kicker for one of the Los Angeles teams like years later. And I wondered if it was him. Probably. It could have been him. Him, yeah. Oh, there's our curling thing. My wife was an Ontario champ. Oh, this, we got the Hall of Fame thing. And this is the Montreal team, the Argo team. There's the four guys down. Went to North Carolina.

Eric Brunt (02:04:50):

Right. That's you.

John Crncich (02:04:54):

Yep. And this is the other guy that took my place at center. And I was happy to see him come. And that's McGill teams.

Eric Brunt (02:05:02):

Did you coach basketball?

John Crncich (02:05:03):

Oh yeah. A little of everything. Baseball. I had an offer to play for in the Chicago White Sox chain. And they wanted me to go down to Richmond, Virginia. And I said, wait a minute. That's kind of closer to Mason Dickon. And secondly, I was a shortstop there and they wanted me to go as a catcher. Like hell, A catcher is the hardest working guy. Is that your wife?

John Crncich (02:05:27):

Yeah.

Eric Brunt (02:05:28):

When did you two get married?

John Crncich (02:05:30):

When I graduated, because I was going out of town. So we got married. 40 49.

Eric Brunt (02:05:36):

49? Yeah. Interesting. I want to grab your photo with this picture. Lemme take a picture of the two of you. Let me grab my camera.

TRANSCRIPTION ENDS