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Philip Kassel

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Bridges That Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Philip Kassel

Interviewer:

Unknown

Interview Date:

September 18, 2014

Interview Location:

Unknown

Length:

00:11:14

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

In this interview, Phillip Kassel is the guest. Kassel is asked about Jack Hill, to which he explains how they became lifelong friends through school. Their wives also became friends and all four would develop a wonderful relationship. Both men stated a Mystery Hills Catering Service and Kassel himself considered Hill to be a chef. After explaining the heartbreak Jack had to experience when his wife Jennie died, Kassel discusses how both men traveled down to Mexico on vacation. To him, it felt like a version of the movie "The Bucket List". Then, Kassel brings up Hill's military accomplishments during the war. Hill was a greatly decorated San Bernardino man but was too humble to brag or show off. The interview ends with Kassel saying how he never heard someone say a bad word about Hill or even dislike him.

Subject Topic:

- Jack Hill
- School
- Friendship
- War
- Mystery Hills Catering Service
- Death of a Loved One
- Traveling
- Military Service
- Humbleness

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Old Harding School	San Bernardino, CA (Defunct Location)

Sturgis Junior High	San Bernardino, CA (Defunct Location)
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Temporal Coverage:

2014

Key Events:

- Phillip Kassel meets Jack Hill while in school in San Bernardino.
- They became friends and eventually, their wives became friends, too.
- The death of Jack Hill's wife Jennie.
- Kassel and Hill's version of "The Bucket List".
- Hill's accomplishments in the military as a San Bernardino native.
- Hill was a person that few to no people had a bad word to say about.

Key Organizations:

- Mystery Hills Catering Service

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:00:23 - 00:02:01	Phillip Kassel meeting and becoming lifelong friends with Jack Hill.
Digital Video	00:04:26 - 00:05:50	Kassel and Hill's trip to Mexico and the movie "The Bucket List"
Digital Video	00:05:55 - 00:09:35	Jack Hill's time in the war and his role while in the service.
Digital Video	00:09:37 - 00:11:04	Kassel describes Hill for the video that will be memorialized online.

Related Materials

Additional oral history interviews are available from the Bridges That Carried Us Over Project at CSUSB, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/>

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Q: Okay. Today is September 18th, 2014. And we are interviewing Philip Kassel, first name, P-H-I-L-I-P, last name Kassel, K-A-S-S-E-L. Thank you for interviewing with us today.

PHILIP KASSEL: My pleasure. I thank you.

Q: So can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you met Jack Hill?

PHILIP KASSEL: I was born in San Bernardino. Jack came to San Bernardino when he was just a youngster. And I think we met up at the Old Harding School in grade school over here on, that would be "F" Street between Fifth and Sixth. And we met in, I think it was the sixth grade. And then we went on to Sturgis Junior High, which was the next [00:01:00] step up in schools. And we were there and then together in high school.

Q: And what was your first impression of Jack Hill when you first met?

PHILIP KASSEL: Well, he was an incredible athlete and he was a very humble guy. He never -- he was a great athlete, but he was the last one to know it. But at least he didn't brag about it or show off or nothing and that impressed me.

Q: What do you think sustained relationship over all these years?

PHILIP KASSEL: Well, that's a good question. Good point. Because we bumped into each other as we went along in school, and then we were both separated during the war. He went one way and I went another, and I'll talk to you about that a little later for Jack. And we just kept bumping into each other, became good friends with his wife, Jennie, [00:02:00] wonderful gal. And she and my wife hit it off. So the four of us formed the [Mystery Hills?] catering service, and my wife would go out and get the jobs and line up the menus and Jack would cook up the

food, whatever was wanted. He's an incredible cook. He's more than a cook. He's a chef. And he said, if you had a real important meeting and you wanted to serve a hundred people and you only had three hours to get it together, Jack could do it. I mean, he could just accomplish miracles.

Q: Can you tell us about a time when Jack Hill overcame a difficulty in his life?

PHILIP KASSEL: Well, he certainly, I'd say probably the greatest difficulty he had was a real horrifying experience. He and his wife were on an ocean liner trip in [00:03:00] the Greek Islands over off of Greece and Jennie got very sick. And the ship's doctor, instead of keeping her on the boat and trying to treat her, was very worried about having somebody die in foreign waters and he would have papers to fill out. He was worried about it. So they stopped at this island and they actually put Jack and Jennie in a boat and took them into shore to put her in a hospital there on the island. And of course, they only had a very small hospital. And so here Jack is in the small boat going to shore, and it's a very rocky boat. And water's flying around -- picture of this -- and his wife is deathly ill. And they land there and he couldn't speak Greek and most of them couldn't speak English. And they put Jennie in the hospital and she -- poor thing eventually died there. And then he had to arrange to bring her body home. And that was an awful experience. Probably the worst experience a human being could have [00:04:00] because they were very close.

Q: Him and Jennie?

PHILIP KASSEL: Pardon?

Q: Him and his wife -- were very close.

PHILIP KASSEL: Oh, yes.

Q: Did the four of you guys ever go out together?

PHILIP KASSEL: Oh yes. To dinner or something like that. But we never took a trip to the Greek Islands or anything. But they did like to travel Jack and Jennie.

Q: Oh, that's good. Can you tell about a time, a funny time, a happy memory that you've had with Jack?

PHILIP KASSEL: Well, we took, as I was explaining to you a little bit ago, I took Jack with me. We went on an ocean liner trip. It was just for a week down off of Mexico but it was a lovely trip. And on these boat trips, you meet all kinds of interesting people. And we were -- probably of a thousand passengers on [00:05:00] there -- we were the only two, an older white man and an older black man having a great time together. And we were doing that just about when they made this picture. I'm trying to remember. But they talked about "The Bucket List." These two old fellas were traveling around. I think one of them was a famous actor, black actor. I can't think of his name right now though.

Q: Morgan Freeman.

PHILIP KASSEL: Morgan Freeman. And so this was our bucket list. Yeah, that was a fun time though, because we met so many different people, and a lot of people were just, they're friendly and all, but they couldn't quite understand how these two old geezers were having such a good time together. The one thing that impressed [00:06:00] me about Jack the most -- during the war, we got separated. I went off in one direction and Jack went into another. Jack had been in, I think the National Guard before, but of all the guys I know Jack is very quiet about this. He doesn't even talk about it. But Jack was probably the most highly promoted and decorated non-commissioned officer that San Bernardino ever, ever produced -- Black or white. Jack doesn't talk about this, but in the military, when you have a company, that's normally about 240 men, and they have a sergeant, three stripe sergeant for each company. [00:07:00] And the next step up would be something

called a battalion, which would be, oh, 1,250 to 2,000 men. And then the next step up is a regiment, which has four or 5,000 men. And the final step up is a division which has 27,000 men. Jack Hill was a Division Master Sergeant that's the highest ranking, non-commissioned officer out of 27,000 men. There's no other appointment like that that San Bernardino ever had. Jack never talked about it, never made any big deal about it. And you see some of these fellows that were in the service or in the war, they're always somehow talking about this and talking about that and their accomplishments and this. And I'd always look at Jack because I went in the Marine Corps. [00:08:00] I just had a lowly private first class, and then corporal with one or two stripes, and Jack's got stripes all over the place. He certainly outranked me. But to be a Divisional Sergeant Major is, as I say, the highest step that an enlisted man can take. So he was the top enlisted man of 27,000 men. That's a lot. And that to me was quite an honor.

Q: And you're right, he didn't mention that at all.

PHILIP KASSEL: Yeah, he doesn't talk about it. He doesn't make any big deal out of that at all. And it tells you something because when somebody gets promoted like that, he's obviously doing the right thing. People notice it, and it was well deserved. I was so pleased.

Q: [00:09:00] How would you describe Jack to someone who's never met him?

PHILIP KASSEL: Very unassuming, very quiet, very -- he doesn't try to take the floor to do anything in particular. I mean, he's just a very, very competent, and able guy that doesn't talk about himself.

Q: He's humble.

PHILIP KASSEL: Humble, that's a good word. Yes, that's the right word. Yeah.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say for this video that will be memorialized online?

PHILIP KASSEL: Well, just that he's accomplished a great deal in his life. And of course he's been able to, he's even older than I am, and that takes some -- getting old -- but he's always [00:10:00] had his mind with him. And he has a great sense of, oh, what's the word I want to use? I guess kindness is the word. And anybody that's dealt with him or been around him will always swear by him. If he tells you something, you don't have to put it in writing. If he said it, he'll do it. And I've never, ever, in all the years -- I'm just thinking back -- I don't care who you are, there's always somebody out there that may not like you. Everybody thinks you're just the greatest, but there's one person that says, "No, he ain't," or something. And yet over the years, I can never recall ever anybody speaking an unkind word about Jack Hill. He's lived here long enough that if you get into a group of people and you start talking about him, somebody in that crowd will know him real well always. And they're always there to [00:11:00] say something constructive, something good. And that's what a community is all about.

Q: Thank you. That it very helpful. And we can turn it off now.

End of Interview:

[00:11:14]