

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FREDERICK ALMERINO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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BRICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Matthew Mikiewicz: This begins an interview with Frederick Almerino in Brick, New Jersey, on April 21, 2009, with Matthew Mikiewicz and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you very much, Mr. Almerino, for having us here today. To begin the interview, I would like to ask you where and when you were born.

Frederick Almerino: I was born in New York, the Bronx. I was born in the home and I was born May 31, 1923.

MM: What were your parents' names?

FA: My mother's name was Dominica, called Minnie, and my father's name was Salvatore Almerino. My mother's name, first [maiden] name, was Squillante, S-Q-U-I-L-L-A-N-T-E.

MM: When and where were they born?

FA: They were born in Manhattan. My father, I believe, was born [in] 1900 or 1899 and my mother was born either 1900 or 1901.

MM: Both your parents were natives of Manhattan. Do you know anything about their family histories, how they came to the United States?

FA: Well, they came to the United States as most Italians at that time had done. They came by boat and they became [New Yorkers]; they lived in Manhattan. My grandfather was married to a woman named Celeste. I don't know her background. She died. He had a store, a vegetable store, where the Holland Tunnel is now, and my grandmother [and he], they were married at ... an early age. No, after, no, my grandfather was never married again.

SH: Is this your maternal or paternal grandfather?

FA: Paternal. He went back to Italy and he remained there for the rest of his life. My grandmother on my mother's side; my grandfather died. He used to own an undertaking establishment, but he had a bad flaw. He drank and he gambled, and he lost the business. So, my grandmother, who was a matriarch of a family of eleven--two died, that's thirteen, so, two died--she, ... somehow, got the money together to buy an apartment house, and the apartment house was [at] 119th Street and First Avenue. She was the "*Comare*," they call it "*Comare*," in Italian, of the area. ... No, she used to read fortunes and she was very good at it and she earned money that way. What else? ...

SH: She was still living there when you were growing up, as a young man.

FA: Yes. ... As a matter-of-fact, she was still living [then]. I have an uncle, or I had an uncle, who was nine months younger than I; nine months older than I, that's different. ... I have an aunt now who is three years older than I. So, she [his grandmother] was living in Manhattan at the time. My grandfather got drunk one night, walked out [a window]; they used to have windows

down to the floor. He walked out of a second-story window, broke his hip, went to a hospital and ... died there. They had to give him alcohol every day, that you should do that. That's my background as far as my grandparents are concerned. I was the first grandchild in that family and I was the first one to go to college and, subsequent to that, my cousins went to college at various times, and that ... brings you up-to-date. Now, my grandmother and I were very close, because I was the first. I'll give you a little anecdote; doesn't mean a thing, that's not going in any book or anything. ... I came home from the war and ... I went to visit, because everybody visited Grandma. She was the head of the family, and I sat down there with her at night, just her and I, and she says, "You want a drink?" I said, "All right, Grandma." So, you know a water glass, you know the tumblers? Well, she filled it halfway up. She proceeded, during the course of that evening, to put me to bed, because she could hold her liquor like a champion. [laughter]

MM: Even at that age.

FA: Yes, and, in that house, there were two rituals. One, there was always a seat at the table for a stranger to come in, and the other one was, there was a lot of Mafia guys running around, which Grandma knew them all. ... She said [that] they used to come in with their hats on and they would take their hats off, tip it, take their hat off, and she said, "Bums, you want to eat?" but that was that background. So, it was a whole different scene.

SH: Very interesting, though.

FA: Well, there ... are many anecdotes I could tell you about that. ... I'll give you one that's not going to go in any paper. My father used to drive a truck. He owned a truck and he drove a truck. So, his cousins called him up [one] day and said, "Patsy, you want to take this [job], do me a favor and pick [up] this truck?" He said, "All right." So, they were in a car in back of his truck. He had to go out to Corona, Long Island, and he's driving the truck and they finally get there to this address. They jump out of the car, open the door fast and he drives in. The truck was stolen and my father had to drive it. He says, "[If] you ever do that again, I'll kill you;" little anecdotes, family stories. [laughter]

SH: That is a great story.

FA: But, that's how it went in those days. Now, subsequent to that, ... one of the guys moved to Pennsylvania. I think he became a chief of police in Pennsylvania, and it's a strewn out family. They used to have boats out in the islands [around] Long Island. Anyway, that's a long story and it's just a part of history that will never be learned by anybody else.

SH: Did your father have any other extended family?

FA: Yes. ... He had two sisters. Naturally, both are deceased. The family was split up when his mother died. My father went to live with his grandmother and my Aunt Louise went to live someplace else, as did my Aunt; ... I forget her name now, but I'll remember it in a minute or two. [It is] just that I'm getting old and I forget things. [laughter]

SH: Do you know how your parents met?

FA: Well, they lived in the same area. ... My mother used to make seventy-five dollars a week working heavy machines, sewing machines, and my father insisted she quit the job when they got married, and he was only making seven dollars a week, and, you know, ... she quit. That was the rule. That was the law, my father's law. Nowadays, of course, she would own the business, because she had the skills to do it. She could make anything in the house.

SH: Really?

FA: Really; she could make drapes, slipcovers, dresses, pants, you know, didn't make any difference. She was very talented, but that's it. ...

SH: You grew up in the Bronx.

FA: Yes.

SH: What was the area like? What are your first memories?

FA: Well, the area, ... when I was able to see it, because, don't forget, I was a child, ... was predominantly Jewish. It was an apartment. We lived on the fifth floor.

SH: This was not the apartment building that your grandmother owned.

FA: No. This was one ... we rented. ... They lived there for well over thirty-five years.

SH: Did they really?

FA: Yes, and, you know, my family is tainted with good luck, but I think it's more the Lord looking down on them, and I'll tell you why. During the Depression, my father lost his job and the landlord was a Jewish man, (Levitt?), very nice. ... They'd let us live there for a year with no rent, or more, until they got a job and ... my mother started to pay him back, and my father, for the year that had gone by, because, in those days, you don't know this and you don't know it, they used to evict you. All your furniture'll be outside in front of the house, because the landlord evicted you from that apartment, so that the luck we had was with this gentleman, who will ever remain in my mind as a very, very nice old man. He allowed us to live there, because he says, ... "Mrs. Almerino, where am I going to put you? Where are you going to go if I throw you out?" He lost the house as a result of all of those transactions.

SH: Oh, no.

FA: Yes, that was during [the Great Depression]. See, you're talking about, you [younger generations], you're talking about how bad it is now, [in the recession of the late 2000s]. You don't know how bad it was, because I remember when they closed the banks.

SH: Do you really?

FA: ... Yes, I do, and the people were outside trying to get in to get their money out of the bank, but the banks were closed. I remember them selling apples for a nickel. You see pictures of a guy with an apple stand and he's selling apples; I remember it.

SH: How did the rest of your family fare? Your mother had this really large family. How did they all manage?

FA: Well, my grandmother's family was large. My mother had three brothers and eight sisters. Only one is alive now, and she's the one who's three years younger than I. ... I mean, I'm reminiscing with you to give you a flavor.

SH: That is what we want.

FA: And so, then, when the war came and I enlisted, my mother wouldn't sign the papers; my father signed the papers.

SH: If you would, please, back up and tell us about going to school in the Bronx and where you went to school. Also, do you have brothers and sisters?

FA: ... I'm sorry?

SH: Did you have brothers or sisters?

FA: Brothers? No, I was the only child. I went to school at PS 50 in the Bronx, it was an elementary school, and I went to, [for] junior high school, [PS] 198. That was in the Bronx. That was a new school at that time, very progressive, and then, I went to DeWitt Clinton High School.

SH: How far was the commute to DeWitt?

FA: Oh, I had to take the train down to 149th Street and take the other train up to where the school was. ...

SH: How did you get into DeWitt Clinton? I understand it was very tough to get into.

FA: I don't know. I got in, and my father said to me, my father was a nice guy but tough, he said, "I got kicked out of DeWitt Clinton High School," and he says, "You're going to go through it and there's no question that you're going to go through it," because, in those days, a high school education was important, especially to Italians, who didn't attend school that often.

MM: Did your parents continue to push you? Did they want you to go on to further schooling or college after that?

FA: Well, I went to CCNY [City College of New York] at night, for night school, and I went to work. I went to work. I was sixteen when I went to work. I had gotten ... out of high school at

sixteen. As a matter-of-fact, ... I turned sixteen in May and I graduated in June. So, that's the end of that story.

SH: What was your favorite subject in high school?

FA: ... I guess history, to some extent. I don't have too many favorites and, being that young, don't forget that other students around me were eighteen, nineteen, so, being that young, I was at a loss, because I couldn't participate with my fellow students, because they were older. You know, when you were that age and they were that age, you were a kid and they were a man, you understand what I'm saying? Now, this may sound funny to you people, but that's the way it was. That's what they don't have today. ... Today, ... everything is different. It's something I never made. I still can't believe what's going on today, because we had rules and we had regulations, and the cops didn't fool with you. I mean, they would throw you in a squad car, give you a couple of shots and throw you out. This way, you weren't arrested, but you learned, "Don't fool around," and you were afraid of cops.

SH: Really?

FA: Yes, really; at least ... from where I sat, okay.

SH: Were most of your close friends part of the neighborhood?

FA: Yes.

SH: Rather than those at school.

FA: Yes, I did. I used to go to school, to high school, for [a half day]. I'd be home by twelve.

SH: Really?

FA: Half days, yes, and I would end up in a pool room, shooting pool. So, that's that. That's a long time ago. ...

SH: You did not have to have an afterschool job.

FA: No, I didn't have an afterschool job. You know how hard it was getting a job? ... Well, I realized when I graduated from high school. I became a busboy in Walgreen's; not my job that I liked, I'll tell you that now.

SH: Was it a soda fountain?

FA: Well, they had a [luncheonette]. I was down on Wall Street. They had a Walgreen's down there and they had a restaurant in there and they had tables. So, people would come in from work and [have a] sit-down lunch, ... and so, I was a busboy. No, I didn't like it.

SH: What did you and your friends do during the summer or after school? You talked about the pool room; were there other activities?

FA: Oh, sure. We had the largest saltwater pool in the world at that time, in the Bronx, [the Miramar Swimming Pool], and I think for eight dollars, which was a lot of money, you were able to get a season pass, with your own locker. ... It was about, oh, I guess it was; ... see, I talk block-wise, but I guess, mile-wise, it's about a mile to walk down there, and we did walking. We didn't ride anything, and so, we did that for the summer. Now, ... there were two apartments close by and they shared an airway, which was, like, two sides of the buildings. ... The fellows used to go down there, we used to go down there, because it was cool in the summertime, and we would play cards or all kinds of games. So, that was entertainment, and then, at night, or during the day, if it was cool enough, you'd come out and you'd play any kind of game you could think of, which you kids don't have. I say "you kids" because I look at you as like a young fellow; my son didn't have them, either. We played stoopball. You won't know this.

SH: How was stoopball played?

FA: Well, you would have [kids] lined up. ... You have a guy here and he would throw the [ball], hit the ball against the stoop, you took it at various angles, and you had to catch it and put him out.

SH: How did you put him out? Did you have to run to the stoop?

FA: ... No, I forget how we put him out, but I think it was mostly tagging, and then, we played football on the sidewalk, which is one of the contributing factors to bad knees. You never should do that, and what else? We played any game you could think of. We played marbles. See, [in] those days, there weren't many cars, so, we were able to play marbles against the curb. ... You had the girls' games, which you participated in. You [Sandra] may have played them, I don't know. They used to draw something on the sidewalk, and then, various steps you had to make.

SH: Hopscotch.

FA: Hopscotch, you had that. ... They'd have the girls with rope.

SH: Jump rope?

FA: Yes, and so, as a guy, you would sometimes jump in, because it was something to do. [laughter] Then, you played ring-a-levio. Then, you played Johnny-on-the-pony. I don't think you know this one.

SH: I think you need to tell us.

FA: Well, Johnny-on-the-pony was simply [where] you had a guy backed up against the wall and you had maybe two guys bending over, holding on, and then, they would jump. The guys would come running down and jump on you and the trick was to try to break the chain. So, if

you collapsed, then, your turn was up, because ... you collapsed, and then, anyway, it was bad on the back, and you played hide-and-seek. You'd play all kinds of things.

SH: What is ring-a-levio?

FA: Ring-a-levio, it's a game that you all went hiding on a guy--it's a form of tag or something--and the guys would come running out. If you could run to the can, there was a can there, and bang the can, "Ring-a-levio, one, two, three," then, you relieved him. The guys that were caught were free, you see. ... Well, these were games you made. You understand what I'm going to say, but you made them. If you had an old skate, you took the skate apart and you had to get a piece of wood, like a two-by-four, and you attach one skate to the front and one skate to the back, and then, you would put a box, a wood crate that you would get from ... somebody who owned a drugstore, and put it up here, and then, ... that's your scooter. You made a scooter, and there were a lot of things [like that], you know. To tell you the truth, it was good for your mind, because you had to be inventive, which you don't have. Now, you have [premade things]. We played baseball. ... I went to Crotona Park. They had built a playground in there, but the playground consisted of handball courts, basketball courts, ping-pong tables, swings, you could play chess, checkers. These were all there for your entertainment, because we didn't have anything else. Who had money? If you had a glove, you were a big-time operator. [laughter] You were, because we had a man in the green store. It used to be an open [store]. ... You had pinball machines in there. Here, we say a "green store" because the window was painted green, and he would sell you football helmets for a quarter. You know the football helmets I'm talking about? If you see them, [from the] old days, they're all leather and they're like this, and we thought we were big-time. We had football helmets; oh, yes, you could hit the sidewalk and it wouldn't hurt you. [laughter] Now, that's part of life, but that's my life and it's not to be seen again. It will never pass again. It's gone, it's gone, and the fun and the enjoyment that the kids were able to have will never be the same, because, now, everybody's transported by car. You've got to join the Little League; what Little League? ... We used to pick up sides to play ball, and you knew when you were getting better and I'll tell you how. The guy on this team and the guy on this team, the captains, would select their members. You get a choice, one, who goes first, who goes [second], and, when you were "tail-end Charlie," you knew you weren't too good, [laughter] but, when you started to grow and you started to improve, they would select you. Rather than be last, you would move up the line. So, you knew you were getting better. Then, we had box ball; I don't know if you ever played box ball. In the streets, there are sidewalks and they're squared off, and you'll see them all over; you see them around here, I guess. Well, you stood on one side of ... this box and the guy would ... [stand] two down and they would hit the ball to you on the ground. ... You had to be fast enough to move in either direction to get him, to hit it back. That was box ball, and you had wall ball, same type of stuff, against the wall, you line up. Anyway, that's all gone. I can't even remember half of them.

SH: How involved was your family in the church?

FA: I went to Sunday school. ... My father, during the Depression, went to church for aid. He was Italian, it was an Irish church, and they turned him down. So, he got very angry and he never went back to church. My mother wasn't a churchgoer to that extent, but she was very devout. ... I went to Sunday school, where the nuns were teaching, and they have a habit, if you

were bad, ... "Hold out your hand." You hold out your hand like that and they have a ruler and they come with the ruler, [Mr. Almerino whacks the table], and they whack you with that. So, you learned; you learned the hard way. There's two ways to learn; one's the easy way and one is the hard way, and that's the hard way. ... I went to Sunday school. Then, I went to public school, ... and then, I went to Fordham University, which is a Jesuit college. So, it was a little different in the crossover. The crossover came after the war, because I was fortunate enough to get the GI Bill of Rights, and you all heard of that, I presume. So, they paid for my college and they gave me money--paid for books and gave me money to live on--while I was attending college, which is something they should have done here years ago. Now, if you're talking economics, I'll tell you this, the government didn't lose money on that, and I'll tell you why. You probably know already. You got a job and you made money at it and you paid taxes on it, and you paid back the money they paid out four times over, if you were lucky enough, maybe more. So, the government didn't lose any money, but the politicians, being politicians, which I don't particularly like, they want for themselves. What the hell do they care about you, me or the lamppost?

SH: What job was your father able to find after the Depression?

FA: Oh, he was a food purveyor, for fruits and vegetables. It was very good. He had that job for many years, didn't pay much, but he had that job.

SH: When you were graduating from high school in 1939, you were very young, as we established before, but what kind of a worldview did a sixteen-year-old have at that point? Were you aware of what was going on in Europe or in Asia?

FA: I had a very good history teacher. He predicted the war starting in Poland, okay. He predicted it. He said, "This is where the war is going to break out," and he was absolutely correct. So, I was intrigued by his ability, but, as far as taking part in politics or anything like that, the answer is no. ... I was interested in eating and in getting a job. The world was big.

SH: You talked about how strict the rules were; what were some of the rules that your family had for you that perhaps you did not see apply to some of your friends or classmates?

FA: Well, I'll give you one incident, to give you an idea. ... I had bought peashooters. You know what a peashooter is? ... My father came home from work and we were hanging around in the lounge, down in the lobby, and he saw me with the peashooter. He looked, came right over, broke the piece. He said, "I put a kid's eye out with that. You're not to have that," and there was ... no argument, no argument at all. So, he was, in many ways, tough and, in many ways, he was rotten, because ... he was a *bon vivant* [a person with sophisticated tastes] and he didn't tell people he had ... a son, not for many years. It's only when we went to war. ... Then, he became [willing to tell people], I was important to him, but it's a whole different story.

SH: Had he served in the military during World War I?

FA: No, no, and they called him up for [World War II]. Selective Service called him up. He was in his, I don't know, forties. ... It was quick, and they didn't take him because he was too

old, which was good for him. No, so, my background is varied, I mean, and, [when] I say varied, you have no idea how varied. I lived in a Jewish neighborhood, I used to hang around with an Irish crowd, ... because I was in some organization, and then, I ...

SH: What was the organization?

FA: Like Sea Cadets, and then, I hung around with the Italians when I visited my grandmother, because she's Italian, and I knew the kids down there. So, I had the experience of three different nationalities, which are different; believe me, they were different. ...

SH: In your Italian family, did anyone ever talk about Mussolini and what they thought of him?

FA: Oh, sure. I had an uncle, ... he was up on Mussolini ... and he was also up on [opera singer Enrico] Caruso.

SH: Really?

FA: Yes, used to go down to the opera house.

MM: Your uncles served in the military, correct?

FA: My uncle served in the military? ... My one that's younger than I served in the Army. The one that's ... nine months younger served in the Army, yes. I met him in England.

SH: Did you really?

FA: Yes, and that's the only one in the family ... who was in the war.

MM: What branch was he in?

FA: What branch was who in?

MM: Your uncle.

FA: I think he was with the Air Force, but I think he was with the ... Eighth Air Force. That's the bombing one. Now, look, I took up a lump of your time just telling you these little [stories].

SH: No, this is wonderful. We need to know more about you.

FA: Well, you don't know enough about me.

SH: When you were at CCNY, going to school at night, what was the makeup of the classroom? Were they mostly people much older than you, as it had been in high school?

FA: Well, I started going to CCNY when I think I was seventeen, and the answer to that is, yes, they were very varied. You know, you talk about diversity; I mean, I want to spit in your eye

when you say diversity, because you don't know what the hell diversity was. You had people ... who came from all kinds of nationalities and they were in CCNY, and, remember, CCNY, while it was a free college, was a very important college. They had good instructors. ... Am I right or wrong? ...

SH: You are right.

FA: So, diversity, now, is a political term used because they want to gather votes.

SH: Tell us about some of that diversity that you saw in the night school.

FA: Different, you know, you had guys coming in who [came from different backgrounds], and girls.

SH: There were women as well.

FA: Oh, sure, and they were interested in getting ahead and they were learning and they were really learning. So, they had all different nationalities, Italian, Irish, German, French. That's, you know, [diversity], ... and, remember, and you won't hear this anymore, ... we were called; I'm trying to think of the word now. It's escaping me. What the hell was I going to tell you? When you were in school; no, I've got to pass that. I'll remember it in a little while, but I don't remember it now.

SH: That is okay. In your neighborhood, you said it was predominantly a Jewish neighborhood, were they talking about what was going on in Europe at that point?

FA: Oh, yes.

SH: What did they know was going on?

FA: They knew that the Jews were getting killed.

SH: Did they?

FA: Yes. I watched the *Hindenburg* come over.

SH: Did you?

FA: Oh, yes, and a friend of mine said, he said it in Jewish, "(A firebuck?)," means, "Burn," and it burned, but the next trip. So, anyway, yes, they knew. [Editor's Note: On May 6, 1937, the German airship *Hindenburg* (LZ-129) caught fire and crashed, killing and/or injuring many aboard, while attempting to moor at Lakehurst Naval Air Station.] ...

SH: Were there any families moving in that had escaped from Europe?

FA: Oh, I wouldn't know that.

SH: You did not see any.

FA: No, that's in the family, their families, and I wouldn't know that.

SH: Please tell us about your decision to go into the military. You said your mother refused to sign the papers.

FA: Well, you know ...

SH: To back up, what do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you?

FA: Oh, I remember Pearl Harbor very well. ... My cousins came in from New Jersey and we were sitting in the apartment--my father, and then, cousins--talking, and I ... called a friend of mine, Murray. ... He said, "You hear the news?" I said, "No, what's the news?" He says, "Pearl Harbor was bombed." "Oh, Pearl Harbor was bombed?" "Yes." So, I go in, tell my father, "Pearl Harbor was bombed," I said, "by the Japanese." "Oh, don't worry about that. They live in grass huts. We'll burn them down. Don't worry, that's over. Don't worry about that." That was the thought at that time, incorrect, I might add, but that was the thought. Yes, ... I remember it very distinctly.

SH: Did any of your friends, at that point, decide to enlist?

FA: ... I was the only one who enlisted, and I did it for a reason. Freddie's reasoning didn't quite abide by everybody else. They had a law at that time that you could enlist in the Army or Navy, or whatever, where you pick your own service, and I picked the Air Force and I'll explain why. I'm not a hero. I didn't like the infantry. You could get shot too fast and blow up. Air Force, what do I know about an air force? ... So, I became a mechanic in the Air Force, ... and then, two weeks after I enlisted, the law was cancelled. You're now indoctrinated, ... you were called up, and so, my friends were called up, and most of them, [like], Murray was in the infantry. ... The story there [is], but it's a long one, he got wounded and he was taken prisoner by the Germans. He was Jewish. He threw his dog tags away, and they were taking him to the hospital, the Germans taking him to the hospital. They had two other German soldiers in there. They wanted to kill him, and the one guy said, "Don't. He's only a soldier, like us." So, he lived. He's still alive today, and he got a hundred percent disability. Anyway, another one was a member of the ROTC, Reserve Officers Training Corps, but it ended before he could graduate. So, he became a frontline observer for artillery. In other words, he went ahead of the line to check when the bombs were dropping, and he had twenty-six hundred eyes, and he came out of the Army. Another guy was with the paratroopers; he's still alive. Let's see, ... oh, another guy was in India, the brothers. ... One was Louie, the other was Norman. One was in India and one was in the ETO. So, most of the guys that I knew at that time went into the Army, and why I went into the Army, I told you why, I enlisted. I said, "I'm not a nut. I'm not going to be going around carrying a rifle." That's why I say I have nothing [bad] to say, I have admiration for all of those guys that did, I'm serious about this, and so, my little two cents doesn't mean beans. I was very lucky in the Army.

SH: How did you convince your mother to sign for you?

FA: She didn't sign; my father signed. She wouldn't sign.

MM: Did your father support you in joining the military?

FA: ... He said that, just to my mother, "After all, it's his decision." Did he support me? I don't know if he supported me to that extent. Yes, he had a son in the Army, whatever. Anyway, that's it.

SH: Where did you first report to in New York?

FA: They had, in Downtown Manhattan, ... I forgot what they called it. It was something, and I went down there to enlist.

SH: It was not in the Armory or something like that.

FA: No armory.

SH: Where did they send you? When you enlisted, did they send you out that day or did you have some time?

FA: You had a choice. You could go today or you could go a week from now. I said, "A week from now's fine," and they sent me out to "Yip Yip Yaphank," which is, now, I think they've got a college out there now. Name the colleges out there, if you recall them, because I don't remember them too well. [Editor's Note: "Yip Yip Yaphank" is a reference to a World War I-era Irving Berlin musical of the same name set in Camp Upton in Yaphank, New York]

SH: I would really be at a loss to even guess.

FA: That's where I went and I stayed there until they shipped me out, which wasn't too long. That's where you took all your shots. The first time in the Army, you took a lot of shots, and then, you did KP and you did other things around the camp, but, you know, ... you went through them in days, you understand. People, you don't know it, you didn't spend a hell of a lot of time there. They wanted you to get in the Army and get the hell down someplace they needed you.

SH: Where did they send you after Long Island?

FA: Oh, that's when I went back to New York, to a school.

SH: Did you go to New York first or did you go to Atlantic City?

FA: Atlantic City came after.

SH: Okay. This is when you went to Stewart Technical School.

FA: I went for the engine mechanic [course], in New York. ... You know, everything went [smoothly].

SH: Where did they house you when you were going to the school?

FA: I told you, in a hotel.

SH: Okay, but we need to put it on the recording. You told me before. [laughter]

FA: Well, I went to a hotel, all right, and it was a fine hotel. I didn't know what the hell the Army was, because I had my own maid. The maids cleaned up the room, ... and that was it.

SH: That must have been a unique story, for a newly enlisted man to have a maid. [laughter]

FA: Yes, I thought that was it. I didn't know anything about the Army. I didn't know a thing.

SH: How long was the school?

FA: Three months.

SH: Then, from there, where did they send you?

FA: I think I went to Warner Robins Air Depot Base, Air Depot, [then Wellston Army Air Corps Air Depot]. That's in Georgia. That was a twenty-four-hour ride on the train, and not a city train, and then, I stayed there for about; ... from there, I got friendly with the warrant officer who was cutting orders for most of the troops on that base for the Colonel. I got friendly with him, I think his name was (Fuchs?), and he said, "Where do you want to go, [to a] school?" I said, "Yes." "Where?" "I don't know where. I don't want to go to the West Coast, because ... that takes me into different territory. There's Japanese that way and the weather wasn't that good that way." He said, "You want to go to New York?" I said, "Just came back from there; I don't want to go there." So, I had a choice. I could have gone to Key West, Florida, which my friend, (Holly, Edwin Holly?), had volunteered me for, and I said, "Are you crazy?" So, then, he said, "I've got a school in Chicago, instrument school; want to go there?" I said, "Sure," I'd never been to Chicago, "I'll go there," and that's where I went.

MM: Was this your first time traveling?

FA: ... The first time traveling around the country, you mean [when] I went to Chicago? That was the first time for Chicago. No, I had gone to Bethlehem, New Hampshire, when I was single, ... before all of this, for summers. So, I went up there by train. All of it was a learning experience, because, in those days, I didn't know anything about a Pullman car and I didn't know anything about [where] you eat. I didn't even know how to sign the goddamn menu. I'm just telling you the truth; I was just a naïve kid.

SH: That is what I want to hear.

FA: I was a kid.

SH: Was there any culture shock, since you said you really understood the term diversity, when you got down to Georgia, to Warner Robins?

FA: It was always different. Every time was different, you know. So, you're learning all the time as you go. You go down South, you go down, you know, in those days, ... I'll tell you, Coca-Cola is a big plant, right? I sat across the street, on a sidewalk, a dirt road across the way from Coca-Cola. That's what Atlanta was in those days, nothing. Now, my daughter's being transferred to Atlanta; all things change.

MM: Did you see any segregation while you were down there?

FA: Of course. Any? It was all segregation. ... You don't know how much segregation was down there. There was plenty, and they were hanging them then, too.

SH: Did you see any incidents?

FA: No, I did not see anybody hanging.

SH: No, the segregation.

FA: It was always segregated. I don't understand.

SH: We understand that it was, but we also understand that, for people who grew up in New York City, sometimes, it was a real culture shock to see how the Jim Crow South was.

FA: Not for me, not for me, because, you know, ... you took everything as it came. What am I going to change? You know, this is what they did down here. Look, I went to Massachusetts to open a business; there, you had a German, a French section, a Jewish section, an American section and an Irish section. Those were the literal sections. In New York, you had a German section, you had an Italian section. You still have it, to some degree, but lesser now. You had an Irish section. These were people who knew each other, congregated. So, it's rare--that's why I said it was rare--that I was able to get out and hang with an Irish crowd, an Italian crowd and a Jewish crowd. To me, it was all German. That's just it. ... When I was in Massachusetts, they thought I was "a Jew from New York," I'll tell you, just the way I said it, and I happen to be Italian. So, you talk about segregation, see, everything now is color different, political (both?). It's good for the black people to triumph. They got out from under, which I could understand and appreciate their anger, but don't give me that crap [that] I brought you here to this country as a slave. I wasn't around then, ... and, half the time, I didn't see you, because you weren't in New York to a large extent. You got there later, because you were down South, where they needed you for plantation [work], to [be] picking cotton. So, please, don't tell me that I'm responsible for them. I'm not, and, if you look around now, you tell me which ones are native, native Africans, who came to this country. They come from all over now. You can't tell one [from another]; they're black or dark. You could come from Dominican Republic, they come from all kinds of countries now. So, they talk about reparations; I don't know about [if] you know that.

They talk about reparations for the black people. What are you talking about? Who would be black? How would you distinguish who to give the reparations to, and for what? If we left you in Africa, you'd be walking around on the balls of your heels or your fanny.

SH: Can you talk about Chicago and where you went to school there? Was it in the city?

FA: Yes, outside the city, but Chicago, to me, was; I came from New York. New York was a dynamic place. Chicago was a nice place, but it was slower than New York. In many ways, it had things New York didn't have. You had a lot of places to go drink and, you know, it was slower. That's the feeling I got from Chicago at that time. I seem to be ... wasting a lot of your time with this nonsense.

MM: No.

SH: Tell me about the school; was it taught by the Army at this point?

FA: They were civilian taught.

SH: Were they?

FA: Yes, but they were for the Army, and the school was basically learning about instruments, aircraft instruments.

SH: Was there a specific aircraft that you were learning about?

FA: No, the instruments for all [types].

SH: You were there for about fifteen weeks in Chicago.

FA: Yes, about three months, fifteen weeks, maybe some more.

SH: Then, where were you sent?

FA: Then, I picked up my outfit. They sent me to an outfit. ... I went down to, again, went back to Georgia, and I was supposed to go overseas, but they lost us. A whole contingent of fellows were lost on the field. Oh, yes, I told you, I'm lucky. So, then, they transferred others to take our place. They went to North Africa and they got shot up, because Rommel came with his tanks and he ran over the Americans. ... What the hell was the pass?

SH: Kasserine Pass? [Editor's Note: In February 1943, the US Army suffered a major defeat in Tunisia at the Battle of Kasserine Pass.]

FA: That's right. So, I was out of that. Then, they sent me to a place. I picked up a unit in, I think, Congaree, South Carolina, [near Fort Jackson]. I think I started my outfit there, anyway.

SH: You were assigned from Warner Robins to South Carolina, to Congaree.

FA: ... From Warner Robins, I went to school, and then, from the school, they put me down into a holding area ... in Macon, Georgia, and they lost us on that field. ... The only way they found us [was] because (Hollywood?), like a damned fool, went in, asked for a class A pass to get out, and they said, "Oh, where are you [from]?" That's how it was.

SH: When were you in Atlantic City?

FA: I was in Atlantic City for basic training, ten days, walking up and down the boardwalk. I don't know exactly anymore.

SH: Okay. I just know from your form that you put that you were there.

FA: Yes, I was there, for ten days.

SH: From South Carolina, where did you embark for?

FA: We went to Taunton, Massachusetts. We picked up the *Goethals* there, ... [USAT] *George W. Goethals*. That's the boat we went on. We picked it up there and they shipped us out. For ten days, we were on the sea.

SH: Were you traveling in a convoy or did the *Goethals* travel alone?

FA: Basically, some form of convoy, and, at one point, [we] went down south, because ... the submarines were active. ... So, they diverted us to there. That's it.

SH: What was traveling with all these men like?

FA: Terrible.

SH: What happened?

FA: Well, you know, you [have] got to realize, it's true, this ship is loaded with troops and they have to sleep. So, they put, ... I think it was four or six high bunks, down below the water line, all over the ship. ... Some was down below, I was down below, others were a little higher, and that's where you stayed. ... Remember, the ship is closed in and, remember, people got seasick.

SH: Did you get seasick?

FA: I sure did. ... Yes, I did, but not as bad as some of them, because they would put their head over the side of the bunk, and then, spew it out, and you traveled with that for ten days. ... One guy was carried off because he lost so much [weight]. He was dehydrated. ...

SH: Where was your first port of call?

FA: My first port of call was Scotland.

SH: Prestwick, Glasgow?

FA: Oh, I don't remember anymore; oh, Greenock, Scotland. Danny had it down.

SH: Just for the record, we are looking at a record that was kept by your friend. What was his name?

FA: (Daniel Webster?) wrote this. He kept a record and, ... when I came back, I couldn't remember half of it. I said, "Danny, you [had] better send me part of the record," and he did. That's why it's good.

SH: This is the diary of where you went.

FA: Yes. ...

SH: When did you first meet Daniel Webster?

FA: When I went into the outfit I picked up.

SH: Okay, in South Carolina.

FA: Yes.

SH: What was the outfit you were assigned to there?

FA: Again, here we go, I said the 462nd Air Squadron Group, but I don't think I'm right. I don't want to give you a wrong impression. I don't remember, okay.

SH: You became part of the Ninth Air Force.

FA: Started out as the Eighth, then, they transferred us to the Ninth. The Ninth Air Force was a fighter squadron air force and, ... finally, after staying in England, preparing and all that jazz, getting together, then, ... we shipped then to Normandy.

SH: Before you went to Normandy, you came into Greenock. They transported you by train.

FA: Yes, all by train.

SH: Where did they send you from Greenock? Do you remember where in England?

FA: To England. I went to about three places in England, Ipswich was one, and I don't know the sequence of them anymore. Ipswich, Danny had put it down, I guess. ... Greenville, South Carolina, and then, we went to Congaree, South Carolina, then, I went to Walterboro, South Carolina, then, Camp Myles Standish; that was the sequence, all right, thanks to Danny. Then, we ... went to Bath, England, to an Air Force base. Then, we went to Ravenswood Air Force

Base, that was Ipswich, England, then, Wattisham, High Halden, and then, Cretteville, that was France. So, I really ... jumped around. Remember, they opened a field and they send a group in there. When I went to Normandy, which is the first time, we couldn't have the planes in, because the Germans were all around, and we were in hedgerow country at that time. Now, you may not know what hedgerow country is, but the farmers in France, when they built their fields, built up the rows, hedgerows, with the stones and whatnot they took out. ... It's overgrown now, to such an extent that it became a barrier against the American troops. So, if you visualize, we landed, I went to this field, this field extended like that, and the Germans were here and you were here. ... If you sent the planes off, they would be shot down. So, you had to wait until they [the Germans] moved, until the [Allied] troops moved in. That's why I say I honor those guys there. I'm no hero at all.

SH: You were part of the ground crew for this group.

FA: Yes.

SH: Fighter squadron.

FA: Fighter squadron. So, anyway, that's it. Go ahead, you have questions.

MM: Yes. Before the Normandy landing, was this squadron involved in any tactical support?

SH: Before D-Day in June of 1944.

FA: I didn't go D-Day.

SH: No, but your squadron.

FA: ... Oh, yes, oh, yes, that's why they were called the "Orange Tails," because their tails were painted orange, so [that] they'd be known [as] to who they were. They went in. In fact, they strafed, they bombed, yes. ...

SH: You must have gotten to England in early 1944.

FA: I would say so.

SH: What was it like for an American GI in England? Did you get off the base? Did you interact with the troops?

FA: Oh, sure, and the English had a name for us, "You're overpaid, you're oversexed and you're over here." That describes it to a "T;" any more?

SH: Were they welcoming?

FA: Yes, but you've got to remember, England was, you know, ... still under attack. When I was there, ... the V-1s went over, went over me, and, you know, you could hear them and you

could see them and you said, prayed, ... "Don't drop here." One did and left a hole. We all went down to inspect the hole. ... It was a big hole in the ground.

MM: You are talking about the V-1 rockets.

FA: Yes. The V-2, I didn't know, because we had left by that time.

SH: What was a typical day like for a ground crew with a fighter squadron? What time did you get up? Where did you go?

FA: You got up early in the morning and you went to work and you worked until [dark]. You worked, in many cases, seven days a week, preparing for the invasion.

SH: Did you work with just one plane or did you work with several planes?

FA: Look, there were many planes. You were part of that squadron.

SH: Okay. You worked on several different planes.

FA: Well, generally, you worked on those that were damaged. You replaced the parts that [were] shot away, part of the ship, the plane. So, you were repairing them, get them to fly again.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the pilots that flew the planes?

FA: Did I have any what?

SH: Interaction with the pilots?

FA: Interaction? not really. Yes, they wanted you to do a good job, but they were kids. You were a kid, they were kids. They treated their plane like it was a car, even came out to wax it. [laughter] You're laughing; that gave you more speed. Whatever they did, they didn't do it for show. They did it because they wanted more speed out of the plane. See, they came in to help, but, basically, we're separated. They were officers and you were enlisted men.

SH: Did you have an enlisted club?

FA: ... Yes, we had an enlisted man's club, and, later on, ... things got more [involved]. When we were in England and France, we'd send them down to get champagne and bring the champagne back, and you'd pick up scotch that way, too. ... Then, you were in the club and you drink it, and then, you had parties, at times, with girls.

SH: Did you have a USO when you were in England?

FA: There was always a USO, but it was always in the big city, big like Paris and [the cities in] England, you understand?

SH: How often did you get a pass to go into London?

FA: Not too often. As a matter-of-fact, the last time, I went into England and went to go to sleep, because we'd just got in, ... they woke us up at two o'clock in the morning to say, "Everybody [has] got to go back to their base." That meant the invasion was coming. So, I had to fight my way to get back to the base, because the trains weren't running that well. ... I was awake for thirty-six or forty hours, I forget which, trying to get back home, and then, we've got to go to work again.

SH: Did you have a good relationship with the officers in charge?

FA: Oh, yes, I did. I had a pretty good relationship, not with my major, but with the other officers, fine.

SH: What was the problem with the major?

FA: He was a jerk. He came from McAlester, Oklahoma. I'm short and he was shorter. Oh, there's too much to tell; come on.

SH: Where were the men in your group from?

FA: ... All over.

SH: You said (Daniel Webster?) was from Washington State.

FA: Yes, (Pahokski) was from Pennsylvania, another guy was from the South. I made a mistake with him, and I'll show you the segregation you were talking about. We were talking. I said, "Well, some of the black people aren't bad. ... You know, if they get [an education], some of them are smart, if they go to school." Well, he almost tore my head off. He was a tech sergeant, I was only a staff. He wanted to fight me and he was a big guy--I wasn't going to fight him--but ... he was adamant [that] no black man was equal to him.

SH: What about dancing? Were you a good dancer, coming from New York?

FA: Yes, yes.

SH: Did you have to teach them some good moves?

FA: What?

SH: Did you have to teach them some smooth moves?

FA: No, they were dancers, too, the girls. I mean, you're talking like they're strange people. They're people. They danced like you danced.

SH: I was thinking more of your American buddies, coming from all over like that.

FA: Some couldn't dance well, some could dance better.

SH: Did you ever see any of the Big Bands?

FA: I saw Kay Kyser. He came over, and the last time I saw him, I saw him down in, I think it was Radio City. So, I saw that, and we had USO shows come around. So, it wasn't that bad.

SH: How aware of the impending invasion were you, being part of an air crew?

FA: Very involved, very aware of it.

SH: What made you aware? Was it the amount of traffic?

FA: Well, we had to fix the planes, so [that] they were ready to fly, and everything was push, push, push. I'll tell you, we worked seven days a week, you know, and we didn't work, like, two hours a day, not like you professors. ... How many people you have teaching your classes?

SH: I have no idea how many professors are at Rutgers. [laughter]

FA: Ha, ha, ha, ha. You know, you listen to this jazz from [them]. I'm not in favor of all kinds of education, I want you to know, [laughter] because I think they're overpaid. Like the Americans were "overpaid, oversexed and over there," well, you people are overpaid and over here.

MM: What kind of hours would you maintain?

FA: ... Whatever you need, until it got dark. You'd work from early morning until it got dark, you couldn't see anymore.

SH: That was what I was going to ask; you could not light your work area because of the ...

FA: That's right, because of the bombing.

SH: Did you have the supplies that you needed to fix the planes?

FA: Sure.

SH: You had everything you needed.

FA: Yes.

SH: How did they transport you from England to France, by plane or by ship?

FA: By ship.

SH: Where did you sail from in England?

FA: ... We left England from Southampton. We left for France from Southampton, all right. ...

SH: Did Daniel put a date on there for when you left from Southampton?

FA: Yes, July 6th; no, that's wrong, because that was D-Day.

SH: No, June 6th.

FA: June 6th, yes; so, July, earlier July.

SH: Because your "Orange Tails" were flying support for the invasion, how badly damaged were some of them during the invasion?

FA: They were lost.

SH: You lost entire crews.

FA: ... The pilot is only one man, so, when you say entire crew, it's just one. Sure, there's some of them [who] were lost.

MM: What type of damage would the planes come back with?

FA: Well, the wings were shot up, their back was shot up, the tails were shot up.

SH: Were there training accidents before this invasion?

FA: There's always an accident, I mean ...

SH: How did that affect the morale of your crew when you would lose a plane?

FA: You didn't want to lose a plane, you didn't want to lose a pilot. You lost a plane, you felt bad, whatever, but this is war. This isn't fun and games.

SH: Did they have memorial services for the pilots that were lost?

FA: No.

SH: Were there chaplains available?

FA: Yes.

SH: Did you ever talk to a chaplain?

FA: Yes, once. Look, I'm going back in history. I'm not sure I'm clear on some of the items and

you'll have to excuse me for that.

SH: That is okay. You talked about going by ship from Southampton. Do you remember the name of the base that you were sent to?

FA: It wasn't a base. ... We just opened it.

SH: A field. Where was the field?

FA: It was in Normandy.

MM: When you were in Normandy, did you have the same access to supplies as you had back in England?

FA: Yes. ... You'd carry the stuff. We'd have a lot of stuff we'd take, a lot of stuff, and, see, ... you were holding a field. You don't know whether you're going to be overrun, because, [if] the Germans broke through, you're overrun and you're dead. That's the way it worked. ... I was a staff sergeant. They got me on guard duty, twelve to four, twelve at night to four in the morning. That's a hell of a night.

MM: Were you ever on a field that came under attack?

FA: Luckily, no. That's part of my luck; I'm telling you something. That's why I say I'm not a big-time operator, I'm a little boy, at heart, and I was extremely lucky and the good Lord was watching over me; at least my mother made it so.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the French people in Normandy?

FA: Of course, yes.

SH: How did they treat American GIs?

FA: How'd they treat you? I'll give you an example; ... we set up a slit trench. That's for urine and all that, and they put something over it, ... but it wasn't encased. In other words, you sat on this and we didn't have any screening around it and we're there one Sunday. I'm there with two other guys and we're sitting there, doing our duty, whatever you want to do, and here come these ... two girls, across the fields. They're walking towards you. ... Remember, we're Americans, we didn't know from beans, and these two girls come across. ... The guy said, "What should we do?" I said, "What the hell are you going to do? Sit here, what else? Where am I going to go?" and they came up, the two girls came up to each guy sitting there; give me your hand. [Editor's Note: Mr. Almerino shakes the interviewer's hand.] "*Ca va? Ca va?*" which means, "How are you?" and then, they walked on. They were going to church. [laughter] ... Yes, we interacted.

SH: You talked about having champagne.

FA: Well, that's when we had the club.

SH: When you had the club, okay. I was going to ask if there was any French food or liquor.

FA: Yes, there was; always, the guys were always looking for calvados. I don't know if you know calvados, but ... it's made from apples, and some of the stuff is very potent and some of it's wood alcohol that could kill you. So, if you're lucky enough to get calvados from the farmer and he was a nice guy, he gave you good stuff. ... If he was a crook, you got bad stuff.

SH: Did you have plenty of food and everything that you needed when you were in France as you traveled? How often would you move forward?

FA: Well, every time, see, we were here, and then, we were transferred to here, and then, we were transferred to here. Did we have everything? We had what we needed. I mean, I don't know what "everything" means anymore.

SH: What about medical attention?

FA: We had a surgeon with us, a doctor.

SH: How big was this unit as it would move, how many people?

FA: We had 272 men in the outfit and we carried our own stuff. We had six-by-sixes. They were loaded, built like, what the hell? whatever you got here [that] looks like a truck with a top on it. ... In there were all kinds of tools and equipment, and you drove to the next location or they flew them in, drove the other stuff later.

SH: Did you ever fly?

FA: Yes, when they transferred me.

SH: To the different bases?

FA: Yes.

SH: Okay; in France?

FA: Yes, ma'am.

SH: Was that something special?

FA: No, that's how you got there.

SH: Okay. Do you remember any nearby towns?

FA: Sure. I was on the River ... Rhine, that's where World War I was fought a lot, when the Rhine flooded, that we had to get out of that. [I] went to town there. They asked of me, and I

used to speak some French, ... "What made the Americans go there? Don't they know it's going to flood?" I said, "I don't know why." Sure enough, it flooded. We lost eighty thousand gallons of gas and we lost a plane that was flooded.

SH: Oh, no, really?

FA: Yes, really. Now, what else? because I'm getting tired.

SH: [laughter] As the war was winding down, were you aware that the war was coming to an end in 1945?

FA: Look, we were still [there]. ... Yes, there was always hope [that] it's going to be over by Christmas, but, then, you had the breakthrough, the Bulge, so, things changed somewhat, quite a bit, I might add.

SH: How did that affect your unit?

FA: We just flew more missions, if you could.

SH: How badly impacted were you by the weather? That was one of the worst winters in Europe.

FA: Yes. Well, where they were, it was the worst; where I was, it was bad, but not as bad as where those guys were. They took hell and, yes, the weather always bothered [me]. You know, you'd drive trucks out of a mud hole and you have to winch them out, because ... the wheels wouldn't grab. So, the weather always impacted [us], ... but that's where you were living. [laughter]

SH: Did you get a lot of mail from home?

FA: I got mail. My mother sent me mail a lot and I was very remiss in not responding as soon as I should have. So, I feel bad about that, but, anyway, I didn't get a lot, I mean.

SH: Did she send care packages?

FA: No, I didn't need them, like she'd send money; [laughter] go ahead.

MM: Are there any incidents that stand out about the war that you want to talk about?

FA: ... Yes, I got a few, but, ... I mean, with respect to the guys who really were on the line, these are minor to trivial junk.

SH: They are part of your story, if you would like to share.

FA: Yes. Well, I watched a pilot come in one day. I see him coming, so do all the other guys, and he's trailing black smoke, which means he's shooting oil. It's a P-47. He's coming in for a

landing. When he's about thirty feet ... off the runway, just at the end of the runway, not on the runway, his motor cut out. The engine seized up and the plane came down like that. Now, the guy, ... pilot, was getting out, was his last mission, was getting out. He opened the hatch to get out and the goddamned plane blew up. He burned alive. Yes, that stays with you.

SH: I am sure it does.

FA: ... Actually, you know, ... some things happened, but ... I'm going to tell you something, you get immune to a lot of this. Not the guys on the frontline; they don't get immune. They're always afraid and they're always getting chopped up, not those guys. That's why I have the greatest admiration for what they did. I was the luckiest guy in the world. Another guy I met yesterday, he said to me, "I was all right, Freddie. I went into the Vietnam War and they sent me to Korea." ... He says, "I was very fortunate, very fortunate. You take your chances." So, that's it. I really have nothing to say that's important.

MM: When did you return to the States?

FA: When did I return to the States? I'll tell you exactly when. [laughter] I returned to the States ...

SH: In November of 1945.

FA: That's right, and where did I go? Camp Kilmer, right.

SH: That was what you said. When the war ended in Europe in May of 1945, that meant that you stayed there.

FA: Yes.

SH: What did they do with you?

FA: Well, we became part of, like, an occupation force. We were in a camp to come home, [Camp New York?].

SH: Like Camp Lucky Strike or Camp Chesterfield?

FA: Yes, one of those, and we were there, and then, we were pulled out and sent to another field, ... where we're supposed to be going home, and then, they said, "No, no, you're not going home, change of plans." So, we went to one of those, we went to Creil, I think it was, I don't remember, Creil. Oh, Danny, he remembers.

SH: At this point, you were still a mechanic. You were working on the planes.

FA: Yes, I was always a mechanic.

SH: Okay. They did not change your duty.

FA: No, no. I got my rating as a staff sergeant. So, that's what I was. ... See, Danny's got it all. He's got the Pontorson airstrip, I remember, Vitry-en-Artois, Camp Mourmelon. That's Mourmelon-le-Grand. That's where the paratroopers came back to recuperate after getting ... the hell kicked out of them out of Holland. So, they came there. We had to leave because of that.

MM: You are talking about MARKET-GARDEN.

SH: MARKET-GARDEN?

FA: ... No, MARKET-GARDEN, no, I don't think it was MARKET-GARDEN. They were up trying to get through Holland and the Germans flooded the fields and they caught them. ... These guys got out, but they were shot up, shot bad, and they had to recuperate and get new recruits. That's what I'm talking about. [Editor's Note: Mr. Almerino may be thinking of the 101st Airborne Division, which went into Mourmelon-le-Grand for rest-and-recuperation on November 26, 1944, after returning from Operation MARKET-GARDEN in Holland. The 358th Fighter Group was stationed there from mid-October 1944 to the beginning of November 1944.] That was in Reims. I went to Toul, Toul, France. [Editor's Note: The 358th Fighter Group was stationed at Toul-Croix De Metz Airfield from November 1944 to April 1945.] So, then, on the way back, Camp New York, Creil, France, Creil Airstrip. That's when they pulled us out and put her there. See, I don't remember anymore. I'm ashamed that I don't remember. Then, we came to Camp Kilmer.

SH: What were your plans for when you were coming home? Did you know what you were going to do?

FA: No.

SH: Did you take advantage of the 52/20 Club?

FA: Absolutely.

SH: What did you do during that time, for that year?

FA: Nothing, for a year, and then, I went to college. That's when I went to Fordham University and I spent four years there.

SH: Were you living at home and going to school?

FA: Yes, basically, I was living at home.

MM: What degree were you trying to attain there?

FA: I got a bachelor's, in accounting.

MM: What made you decide to make the switch from mechanics to accounting?

FA: Simple, I didn't know what I wanted to do. So, I said to my friends, who were all Jewish boys, I said, "What's a good thing to get into?" So, one guy says to me, "Hey, Freddie, take accounting, because you can always transfer to anything else in business." I said, "That's a good idea." So, I took accounting.

SH: Do you want to briefly talk about your career before we end the tape?

FA: ... Oh, I'll tell you. I went to work for Anchin, Block & Anchin, which was a certified accounting firm. I worked there for about three years. Then, I left there and worked for the New York State harness racing (investigation?), and then, I left there and looked for a job and I ended up at the Port Authority. I didn't know who the Port Authority was and they didn't know who I was. In those days, how I got the job was walking along the street, see a sign says, "Employment Agency," went upstairs and a guy says, "I may have something. Can you take a test?" I said, "Sure, I could take a test. What test?" "Take a test in accounting and take a test, general test." I said, "All right." So, I went up the stairs. The guy sent me to [the] Port Authority. I took the test and I was walking out, because I had a tough question that I botched up towards the end. So, I was getting my hat and coat, the guy says, "Where are you going?" "I'm leaving. I did lousy on that last part." [He] says, "Sit down," and he said, ... "If you want a job, you could ... come next week." I said, "Yes, I'll come next week," and I found out later that that test, ... I'm not bragging, I'm stating a fact, I thought I bombed out, but he had written me up as exceptional.

SH: Wonderful.

FA: Yes, it was, but I didn't know about it until maybe two years later. I didn't get any big head over that, but that's it. You know, you've got to understand, it was the times that were different. It's hard for you people, and I believe you'll be one of them; you, you're young. So, you're a little more [older], so, you have a better idea. It was living to live, trying to live. So, you think you're in a bad time now? It's going to get worse, in my opinion. ... I'm not God and I'm not sure I'm always right, but it's going to get worse. They're going to have more unemployment, and what the hell are you going to do when you've got to pay back all this money? What are you going to do when you can't pay the interest on the money you're putting out? Nobody talks about that now, very little, and ... certainly not Obama people, and I am prejudiced, not because he's black, because his ideas are nowhere. It's "pie in the sky." There used to be a President running for office [who promised], "Chicken in every pot." Do you remember that? There's a chicken in every pot. "What do you want [now]? Oh, you want more money for this? Okay; how much do you want, four hundred billion? All right, that's no problem, and we can just print more money." Where is the backing? You don't have any gold standard. You have fiat money, for Christ's sakes; am I right or wrong?

SH: You are right.

FA: You know what fiat money is? It's got no backing, my son, none. They can pull the rug out from under you tomorrow and the money won't be worth doodley squat.

SH: How do you think the war impacted you as the man you became?

FA: War impacted me because I was able to go to school and get an education. ... I went to the war, yes, but ... everybody was doing the same thing. You've got to remember, sixteen million people were in the Army, or in the Armed Forces. There's only three million left, or less.

SH: Thank you very much for taking time to speak with us.

FA: Well, I hope I didn't bore you. ...

SH: Not at all; again, my thanks to you and to Daniel Webster.

FA: Danny Webster's the one [who] gets all the credit, [laughter] wonderful Danny. ...

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Jonathan Conlin 12/1/10

Reviewed by Brian Shemesh 12/1/10

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/14/10

Reviewed by Frederick Almerino 1/7/11