

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RALPH BURATTI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

JUNE 8, 1999

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins and interview on June 8, 1999 with Mr. Ralph Buratti at Bishop House on the campus of Rutgers University. Mr. Buratti, I'd like to start the interview by thanking you very much for coming all the way from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to be interviewed this morning. To begin the interview, I would like to ask you to tell me about your family. Start with when your parents were born, and where, and we'll go from there.

Ralph Buratti: I don't know the exact birth [dates]. All I know is my that father came from a small mountain town right below Florence, Italy. It was called Monte Fortino. ...My mom came from a fairly large city in Northern Italy right below Florence, which is called Senigallia, along the Adriatic Sea. ... My mother passed away when she was eighty-five. That was about ten years ago, so she must have been born, oh, the late 1880s sometime and my father was born, say about the same time, late 1880s. ...They came here to the USA with their mother and father and five children, small children. It's unbelievable to me how they handled such a situation like that.

SH: Did your parents immigrate together? Had they already married when they came?

RB: No. They were married here in the USA. They came separately.

SH: Okay. Now your father's family that were in the mountain area south of Florence, your father's family also came?

RB: Yes, they all came all from Monte Fortino on my father's side, and on my mother's side, as far back as I can go, the city was Senigallia. That's maybe about fifty miles north of Monte Fortino. I guess in those days, when they came here ... it's funny, that my mother was from Senigallia and he was from a mountain town, how they ever got together, you know, but it seems to me that during that period, where foreigners immigrated to this country, they kind of clustered together people of their own nationality. [They] spoke the same language and had the same customs and they felt comfortable. ... They came here and they stayed in a boarding house, because in those days, you couldn't afford the ... housing was pretty difficult, so they stayed in boarding houses.

SH: Can I ask you where they settled when they first came to the country?

RB: They settled in South Philadelphia.

SH: Now, did they come into Philadelphia?

RB: No, they went through Ellis Island. I've had the intention to go up Ellis Island sometime and trace some of my roots there.

SH: Now when your family came, your father's family came, were there already members of his family here in the United States?

RB: No. No.

SH: Do you remember about what year they came to this country?

RB: I would say 1915, 1916, in that period, because, see, my father was a stonemason and did a lot of church building in the Philadelphia area, and my grandfather, he came with him. ... They both came here.

SH: Was your grandfather a stonemason, too?

RB: He was a stonemason and taught my father the stonemason trade. My father taught other young men the trade. Finally, my father became a general foreman.

SH: They must follow, generation after generation.

RB: My grandfather left his wife there, which I thought was pretty tough. Maybe he didn't have enough money to pay for [her]. So they settled in South Philadelphia and they boarded, they stayed in a boarding house with my grandmother on my mother's side. So you see now, the picture here. You got my grandmother and grandfather and her five children lived in this house

SH: Now this is your mother's family?

RB: Right, Mother's family and along came my grandfather and father to board in the same house in South Philadelphia. ... My maternal grandmother had four daughters and one son, and my mother was a very beautiful woman, very attractive woman. ... In the same house, there were other boarders, males, and they were all after my mother, and I don't know whether he gave my mother lots of attention or she was after him, I don't know, but they got married. And the funny thing about it, I found out last year [when] I met one of my cousins who was a son of one of my mother's sisters. This woman was also in love with my father, very strongly, you know, and, when I was two years old, my father had an appendix that burst and the poor guy passed away. I was two years old. This woman I am talking about, my mother's sister, she took it worse than my mother. She named her first child, his name, his name is Guilio. That to me, he admitted it, too, because she told him that.

[TAPE PAUSED]

So here my mother lost her husband when I was two and that my father had bought a house on Girard Avenue in West Philadelphia. I was born there and we lived there till my father passed away. So she had no income whatsoever, hardly, you know. In those days we didn't have sources of income like we have today so she went back to live with her mother, and eventually, I grew up.

SH: Did your mother remarry?

RB: Yes. She remarried and she married a gentleman by the name of Edward Liberati. [She] married him, but I often wondered why he never adopted me. I was a two year old child. ... I kind of think that he didn't want to take on the financial responsibilities to that kind of thing, you know. So I went along. Well, I'm happy because at least I carried my born name. I thought that

was pretty good. I liked that because his personality was a lot different than mine, so I kept my grandfather's and father's personality.

SH: Was your grandfather ever able to bring your grandmother from Italy?

RB: No.

SH: Did he stay here?

RB: He stayed here, got enough money to gather a little purse and he went back to Italy. It's funny how ... my maternal grandmother always said that she would love to go back to Monte Fortino, because she loved it so much and those thoughts stayed within you and they're never completely erased. You always had that deep feeling that "I got to go there." So we went there about five years ago and I was really pleasantly surprised. Beautiful mountain town, where the church is on top of the mountain, and people are so warm and nice. ... We went to the homestead. My grandfather had built this homestead, it was really beautiful. All stone. Beautiful, beautiful place. In fact, when my grandfather passed away, it became my father's place and when my father passed away, my grandfather had five children, so I inherited one fifth of the property, and a day came when my mother said, "I can't afford to pay the taxes on this property." We went to sell it and at that time, I had no idea what kind of a place it was ... and things were pretty bad during the World War II in Italy so I signed off. It was the worst thing I [have] ever done.

SH: Were your father's brothers and sisters able to hang on to it? They bought your mother out?

RB: Yes, and I could kick myself, but ... being young you don't know what's going on.

SH: After your father passed away, did your mother remarry soon after that?

RB: Maybe a couple of years after that.

SH: Did you stay in the Philadelphia area then, after your mother remarried?

RB: Yes. Stayed there until I was sixteen. We bought a house in Camden, New Jersey. I must have been about sixteen, which would have been 1936, I guess. [In] 1936 we moved over to Camden, New Jersey.

SH: You had gone to grade school then in Philly?

RB: Grade school in Philadelphia, then high school at Camden High School. I was an academic student. I was a springboard diver. That's when I started my springboard diving and became quite good. I was National Interscholastic Champion one year and then I was chosen as Camden's Outstanding Young Citizen.

SH: Wonderful. Now with Italian spoken in your home, did you learn to speak it as well?

RB: Oh, yes, Oh, yes. I took four years of Italian in high school. Well, I'm not proficient, but if somebody has a conversation with me, I can understand him and I have a little difficulty coming back to him, because, you know, practice.

SH: Were you raised within a big family then, your cousins, that sort of thing?

RB: Well, yes. The house in Camden, we had three families living in the same house, my grandmother and grandfather and her children, let's see, four children.

SH: So your mother was the oldest of your grandmother and grandfather's children?

RB: I think she was the oldest. Yes. I never kept figures, but I think she was the oldest.

SH: Now did you have other brothers and sisters then after your mother had remarried?

RB: Yes, I had a half brother and a half sister. My half brother was an excellent football player. [He] went to North Carolina. He graduated, worked with JC Penny, and he's retired now. My half sister, she married a lab technician and she graduated from high school, Frankford High School in Philadelphia, and she became a housewife.

SH: You were saying that you had started your interest in diving when you were in high school in Camden. What were your favorite academic subjects? What kept you interested?

RB: I didn't do very well in school. My mother didn't care too much for academics. She had to work for a living, and my stepfather, he was way off somewhere. He had no interest. So I had a little trouble academically in school.

SH: What was your mother doing? Was she working outside of the home at that time?

RB: She worked in a factory, sewing, you know. That's where most of the women went for positions in those days. ... She worked in a clothing factory and my stepfather, he was a manager of a restaurant. He managed a restaurant. And so I had little problems academically.

SH: Was politics a big thing in your home at that point?

RB: Yes. Democrats.

SH: What did they think of Roosevelt?

RB: Oh, they loved him. I thought he was great, too.

SH: You graduated from Camden in 1940.

RB: I got out of high school in 1940. I should have graduated in '38, but, like I said, I had trouble academically, but the last half of my junior and senior year, I studied like a son of a gun. Right then and there, I made up my mind: "Hey, I've got to get good grades because I'll never

get into this college. If I don't get good grades, and make an effort to put my life in order." Okay.

SH: Now were you working at all during high school?

RB: I was a lifeguard two summers during my high school years.

SH: Right in the town?

RB: Yes, local pool, lifeguard, and also one summer I worked at Campbell Soup in Camden, New Jersey.

SH: Did your family discuss what was going on in Europe, during the late '30s?

RB: Yes, ... they would get letters from their families in Italy during the war, "things are really terrible." My mother used to pack boxes and send clothes and little gifts, to help them out, and that's when she decided to sell the property.

SH: Did they discuss Mussolini or were any of them in politics back in Italy?

RB: No. It's funny. My side of the family, they were strictly Democrats, believed in Roosevelt. But anything in Italy, they weren't discussed. Never. No, I think my stepfather thought Mussolini was a great person, but I never did, really.

SH: Now can you tell me about your decision to come to Rutgers. You graduated in 1940. Why did you pick Rutgers?

RB: Scholarship. State Scholarship. I had no money. How would I ever get to school? I did pretty well in my entrance exams, but I had trouble handling English grammar. Okay. ... But I got a State Scholarship which really helped me. Oh, man, if I hadn't gotten that State Scholarship, I would never have come here. I applied to Bowdoin up in Maine and I was entered, but I got a partial scholarship there but still not enough. Then Ohio State, I applied [there]. I was entered in Ohio State, but [received] no scholarship. So Rutgers was the only school that gave me help so that I could get an education. The swim coach at West Point tried to get me an appointment, but was unsuccessful.

SH: Did you think that it was your reputation as a diver that these other schools were interested?

RB: I would think so. I would think so.

SH: Now, when you came on campus, were you prepared to go to work academically, or did you ...

RB: There were three things that I did while I was here at Rutgers. Stuck with my springboard diving, I studied, and I worked. Socially, I was blah. Absolutely blah. I couldn't afford it.

SH: Where did you live when you came on campus?

RB: This is interesting. When I came here, Dean Metzger was Dean of Men and somebody must have spoke to him that ... this guy Ralph Buratti needs a place to stay. So he called me in his office one day for a personal interview. ... "Ralph," he said, "I have a nice place for you to stay, but you got to shovel snow, cut the grass, get rid of the garbage and keep your room clean." I said, "Okay," and "It's a freebie," he said. "Okay, sure, great." So in my freshman year ... God bless him. It brings tears to my eyes when I think about it, really. He was a great man. I really liked him, like a father, really.

SH: He took you right into his own home?

RB: Yes.

SH: Did he have a wife and children living at home then?

RB: Yes, she was a delightful person, very good. Their grown children lived in other parts of the country.

SH: Were you able to take your meals with them or did you have to eat on campus?

RB: No, I ate at the cafeteria.

SH: In Winants?

RB: Right, Winants.

SH: Did you have any other jobs?

RB: Yes, I was working at the swimming pool. The old (Barnes?) swimming pool, the old one, on College Avenue. This new complex wasn't built then. So I was a lifeguard there and I was a lifeguard in the summer at Deal Casino along the Jersey Shore, okay, for two summers, 1940 and 1941. ... Then one year, in ... the summer of '42, I worked at RCA as a lab technician.

SH: Now when you first came to Rutgers, were you already in the Ceramics program? Why did you pick Ceramics?

RB: Why? I wanted to study engineering and I said to myself, "Gee, I don't know if I could handle such a program," and Ceramics at that time, oh, I kind of liked that. It's not too mathematical, so I majored in that. Then what happened, though, between my Sophomore and Junior year, that summer I worked for RCA, and I got caught up with a guy, a young guy, who gave a real line about majoring in Physics. Here I couldn't handle math and he gave me a good pep talk about majoring in Physics, so I switched to Physics and I really couldn't handle it, and I came back to Ceramics. You know, my daughters often tell me that ... [when] you go to college, you never know you want to major in. My daughters, one started out in pre-legal, but switched

to communications, graduating from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. My other daughter majored in physics/astronomy at MIT and Cornell. She is a PhD and a well-known astronomer.

SH: But you were still moving along and you had showed me the different competitions that you've been involved in. So, you were still competing in springboard. Is there is season for that? Is that in the Spring or Fall?

RB: ... Swimming and diving starts in, well, I started practicing soon as I came up to school here. Practiced all the time, but the meets start in December. From December to March is when the strong activity and meets and championships occur.

SH: Now, were there any professors that stood out in your mind here at Rutgers?

RB: Lamont, Professor Lamont, who was the English teacher. Very warm and caring. [He] taught English and Literature.

SH: You had said that English grammar was your most difficult, or lowest score when you came in, that was good, he was the mentor?

RB: Yes, exactly. I liked him. He was very genuine. No phony, you know. I liked him very much. Jim Riley was my coach. He was not a diving ... I had no diving coach. No. No diving coach.

SH: So this was just something natural that came to you?

RB: You taught yourself. You learned from others.

SH: You said you were very busy with the studying and the diving and the working. What did you see going on, on campus? What were some of the activities? Did you get to go to any of the dances or anything like that?

RB: No. No. I worked at the dances. I used to, what did I do? I know I was busy all the time. Oh, handling refreshments, that's what I did, handling refreshments, collecting money and turning the money in.

SH: Did you ever join a fraternity?

RB: Kappa Sig, but socially, I was not active. They really drew me in, really.

SH: Did you live in the frat house at any point?

RB: No. Two years at Dean Metzger's and then he called me in for my Junior year and said, "we got a preceptorship for you" ... right across from the gym, I forget, it's one of those dorms across College Avenue and I was a preceptor there for my Junior year. And then, that was in

1943, my Junior year ... I was Advanced ROTC and we were called to active duty and they became [the] Army Specialized Training Program, ASTP.

SH: As a student here at Rutgers, a lot of our other interviewees have talked about mandatory chapel.

RB: Oh, yes. Every Sunday you had to go to the Chapel and if you didn't go, Dean Metzger would call you and say, "Ralph, you weren't in the chapel this Sunday," and I didn't want to disappoint him, so I went every Sunday. [Except] for weekends if I went home. I'd call him ... or go see him and say, "Dean, I can't be in, I got to go home for the weekend." Wonderful man, absolutely wonderful. God bless him. I loved him as a father. He was a strong influence on me. I never wanted to disappoint him.

SH: Do you remember some of the speakers that you were exposed to at Chapel?

RB: No, I don't remember. Well, we had service and there was a lecture, [a] sermon, but who can remember? I can't remember the sermons I had attended on Sunday now. I don't remember, but it was a strong influence on behavior, I would say. I liked that. I really did like that.

SH: Did you have to go through Freshman initiation? What was it like when you went?

RB: Hazing? Not too bad.

SH: Could you remember some of the experiences that you had?

RB: Well, they put soft bananas in a pot of water and you had to put your hand in there and they said it was something else. No bodily harm. They didn't get involved in that.

SH: Now did you have to wear a dink on your ...

RB: Yes, I still have my Freshman dink.

SH: Do you really?

RB: Oh, I'll never part with that. This school was very good to me. It's amazing.

SH: Did you have to wear your pants inside your socks?

RB: No. None of that. No, of course, you know at that time, there were only 4000 people here. It was a private school at that time and, hey, people were working and not interested in hazing anybody.

SH: You were saying you were in Advanced ROTC and you were called up. Where did you go when you were called up?

RB: Okay. We stayed here in '43, I got my Junior year in, and then I was in the Signal Corps. ... I was shipped to Joplin, Missouri for code school. Code school, handling radio equipment, setting up a radio station for communication, pigeons. Handling pigeons and putting messages in them, you know, all that. That was interesting, really. We stayed there for about six months and then in the summer of '44, I went to Officers' Candidate School. I hadn't finished all my Advanced ROTC, so they shipped us to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey for OCS, Officers' Candidate School. ... I was commissioned in July of 44. Okay, and then from there, I was shipped to Washington, DC, OSS, Office of Strategic Services. Why they chose me, I'll never know. Worked in a school ... it was a radio intelligence work, where they intercept foreign messages, foreign codes and break the codes down and learn what was going on. In fact, my unit, I'm not taking any credit for [this], my unit broke the Japanese code for the Battle of Midway.

SH: Oh, really?

RB: Yes, and that was interesting.

SH: Where were most of the people from that were in your unit? Were they gathered from all over the country?

RB: They were all over the country. Most of them from Georgia. ... They were terrific soldiers really, because they had taken ROTC in high school back in Georgia Electrical engineers and mechanical engineers.

SH: Where were you housed in Washington during the war?

RB: I stayed in an apartment in Alexandria, Virginia, right across the river. They had an apartment there. ... I was there for about a year in Washington and then I was shipped overseas, the occupation forces.

SH: The war had ended when you were shipped overseas?

RB: I got over there in '45. Yes, December of '44, I think I was shipped over. I was there from December '44, [and served] to the Spring of '46 and I accumulated enough points to be discharged. I came out as a First Lieutenant, and I came back home to Philadelphia. Right after the war, my folks bought a house in Mayfair, ... northeast part of Philadelphia, and I went to live with them for a short time.

SH: Can you go back a little bit to your time in Washington. What was the mood like for a soldier stationed in Washington at that point, knowing that the war was going on in the Pacific?

RB: Well, I had been going with a girl. I had met a girl in Fort Dix, [a] beautiful woman. I met her at Fort Dix and we kept seeing each other. I was really involved with her, so I used to come to her place on weekends and stay with her. ... We were going to get married, but we had a religious problem. I was a Catholic and she was a Lutheran and we had a problem, so we broke up. That made me very sad, but I met somebody later.

SH: We'll talk about that in a second. When you were in Washington, were there a lot ...

RB: In Washington, all I did was travel. I went to all the museums and I got involved in museums, [the] Smithsonian. I did a lot of that because I was deeply interested in that.

SH: Had you done any traveling outside of the Philly/Camden area as a young man before the war at all? Had you done any traveling or had you been pretty well ...

RB: My diving took me to various places, but you just dove and came back home. I went all over the country diving. In fact, in 1940 I went to Detroit to try out for the Olympic team. I was a finalist, but I never made it. We dove at the Detroit Boat Club, a three-meter springboard, and that was interesting.

SH: How was Detroit? At that point they're starting to develop Lend-Lease, they must have been in full ...

RB: During that time, no cars were built. ... There was a shift to war [materials]. ... I went there, dove, came back home again. I couldn't really experience what was happening in Detroit.

SH: As an Olympic hopeful, had you discussed with anyone what had happened in Berlin at the Olympics? Had there been any discussion?

RB: I always remember Jesse Owens. I always remember him. He was in the '36 Games. I always remembered him. ... When I went to Detroit, I dove against guys from Michigan, Ohio State, Southern California, and I don't remember [what] divers made the team up. Then in 1942, I was working for RCA as a lab technician, and I went to New London, Connecticut for the National AAUs. Both, no, just three-meter, and I made the finals. ... Out of the eight qualifiers, I was eighth. Making the finals is something in those days. In this twenty-year period, diving has really changed. There has been so many participants that you have to qualify to participate in a meet. ... All I did was just drive up and sign my name. "Hey, good, you're in." But now, there are divers all over the place, and that's because coaching has come into the picture. Plus the fact [that] they changed springboards. When I was diving, I dove from a wood springboard. Wood, absolutely wood. I don't know what kind of wood it was, but it was a stiff board, really. Then when I went to Yale for the Eastern Collegiates, they had a fiberglass springboard. They went from wood to fiberglass, and, boy, I loved that fiberglass. I could sink into it and it would throw me up really beautifully. I like that. In fact, I won it. But now, they have springboard called Duraflex which is a kind of a springboard, I don't know what it is made of, probably aluminum. The kind of a springboard that you go out and make your hurdle and you settle down on the springboard and wait for it to whip you out, like a shot of mortar. ... Kids can do twisting dives, somersault twisting dives. It's unbelievable what they do today. Three-and-a-half's, two-and-a-half's, unbelievable. That's been the major change.

SH: When you were diving, I noticed on your survey that you had gone to George Washington University, was that when you were in Washington as ...

RB: That was in '44, yes, I went to George Washington University. I was trying to take credits towards my diploma. I took a chemistry course, qualitative analysis there. That was tough because I had Freshman chemistry and I had forgotten most of my Freshman chemistry, but I got a C or B or something like that and they transferred that to Rutgers.

SH: So you stayed busy going to school and working for the Army.

RB: Yes.

SH: When you were sent overseas to the occupation, where were you stationed, where were you first sent, and how did you go?

RB: I ended up in a small German town, about thirty miles from Hamburg, Germany. I set up a school to take code, Morse code. We always had to have people trained and able to handle Morse code. So I set up a school there. Also, before that time, I was assigned to an army occupation unit and I helped set up communications for them, for that unit. Right in the same place. The unit was located a little further away from it.

SH: Now, did you go over to Germany by ship?

RB: Yes, a transport ship.

SH: What was it like to go into Germany after the war?

RB: The only thing I can remember [is that] one weekend, we went down to [a] castle and it was completely devastated, completely wiped off the map. Unbelievable. People were living in cellars and scrounging for food, just terrible, and then out on my little town, it was called Bad (Filbell?) maybe, it is the name I can remember. ... That hadn't been destroyed. We had taken the mayor's home and made this place our abode while we were there. Of course, we turned it over to him after we had left. We lived there and they cooked food for us.

SH: How well were you supplied for what you needed there to rebuild and take care of the occupational forces?

RB: Adequate, very adequate. Material came in by boat, in seaport towns in the upper part of Germany there, and then loaded on trucks and taken to our units, army trucks, mostly.

SH: Did you do any traveling other than the castle?

RB: Did I do any traveling? No. I tried to learn German. I took a course with a German professor who could speak both English and German. I took a course in German. I had no desire to [travel]. Of course. I was not there that long. My work kept me very busy, to set up this communications school.

SH: With the schooling you set up, was that just for American personnel?

RB: Yes. We had troops there in this unit.

SH: Were there any other Allied forces right around where you were or just strictly all Americans?

RB: No. Occupied by Americans.

SH: In your picking up and deciphering code and things like that, what did you find the most interesting or challenging for you, personally?

RB: I didn't do any of that. I was just there to help them. A "gopher guy," as you would call it, because I knew nothing about any coding, but I was there just to sort of guide them along. If they had a problem, some sort of a problem, "I need this, I need that," I took care of them.

SH: What was a typical day like?

RB: Just walking around and talking to the guys and making sure that the equipment [was working]. [Taking] care of the equipment, mostly. I had German electronics people who were really experts working with us.

SH: Oh, really?

RB: Yes. They were quite good, and they did most of the bull work and they received compensation.

SH: Did you have any contact with any of the prisoners of war or anything like that?

RB: One time, I went to a prisoner of war camp to set up communications and I met some German officers. ... I'll never forget. They were all blond, blue eyed, six foot tall and straight as an arrow.

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE-----

RB: Germany was being attacked by the Russians on the East, and on the West you had British, American, French, all the different countries trying to wrap around Germany. For instance, [at] the Battle of the Bulge, they broke through and you know, did a lot of damage. A lot of casualties happened at the Battle of the Bulge. They were well trained. German soldiers are well, well trained as compared with the Russians.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the Russian?

RB: No. Never had. I read about the things they did. I can remember one story that I read in the Army paper The Russian troops were advancing and they were in an area where there's a lot of mud, yards and yards. They took dead bodies and put the bodies right on the mud and walked right over them. Things like that you can't forget. And they always wanted watches. If you had a watch, they'll say, "I want that." You had to take it off and give it to them.

SH: What did you hear about what was going on in the Pacific Theater at this point? How well informed ...

RB: Well, I got an interesting story. I came back in the spring of '45, early '45, and they boarded me on a train heading for California. Pittsburgh, California for embarkment to Japan.

SH: This was in '46, or '45?

RB: '45. Okay. So we were out at sea and they dropped the bomb. We turned right around, came back to California. Didn't go over. Now isn't that a stroke of luck? Amazing.

SH: When the people on board the ship were notified that the bomb has been dropped, what were some of the reactions you saw? And then tell me your personal reaction.

RB: Well, they were relieved. Hey, you are going into a country that you may never come back from. Absolutely relieved. Unbelievably relieved.

SH: Did they make like an announcement over the loud speaker for everybody?

RB: Yes, they made an announcement, and everybody just rip-roared. Just roared like crazy. They were happy. ... Of course, little did we know that the devastation was so bad there. Of course, they did bomb Pearl Harbor. I guess we wanted to get back at them.

SH: Do you remember where you were when they bombed Pearl Harbor? You were here on campus, I assume.

RB: Yes, '41, I was a Sophomore. Yes, December, I was a Sophomore. I can remember I was in my room and I was studying, Sunday afternoon, I remember that, when they bombed Pearl Harbor.

SH: Did Dean Metzger tell you, or did you have your radio on?

RB: [I] had the radio on.

SH: Were you in Washington when the war ended in Europe?

RB: Yes, ... I was in Washington.

SH: Was there a public display of celebration at that point, in Washington?

RB: No, because ... a few weeks later I was shipped over so I didn't see it. I didn't get involved in the celebration because I was shipped over to Germany.

SH: Did you go straight to Germany or did you stop in England at all on your way?

RB: I don't quite remember. I must have taken a train from ... we came in to a town along the Baltic, I guess. We came by boat into the Baltic and took the train into Hamburg.

SH: You said that you came back by transport to the States. Where did you land on the East Coast, before you were sent to California to embark for Japan?

RB: New York.

SH: Did you have leave here to go see your family?

RB: [There was] no leave, because I had to get ready to go to Japan. I took my gear off the boat, they took us to Fort Monmouth again and got our stuff together on the train, and, boom, off we went.

SH: When you turned around and came back then to the States, you came back to San Francisco?

RB: Yep. Well, it was called Pittsburgh, a little small town close to San Francisco.

SH: Did you come straight back to Jersey then, or did you have to stay?

RB: Let's see, that was '45, late '45. I came back by train again and I got to Fort Dix.

SH: Did you spend sometime in Fort Dix and then you were discharged?

RB: Discharged, yes, Fort Dix.

SH: Did you come right back to Rutgers then and start school?

RB: No, ... I was discharged late 1945, I don't know the exact date, and I went to summer school, [at the] University of Pennsylvania, [I] picked up Quantitative Analysis. I think the professor there really must have liked me, because he gave me a lot of help.

SH: Were there a lot of returning GIs in your class at the University of Pennsylvania?

RB: No, I was surprised. I met another girl there, who took a liking to me and I saw her quite a bit. She went to Moravian, the college for women. ... She was just a good friend, I guess. I liked her. She was just a good friend but nothing earth shattering.

SH: Then after that summer course in the University of Pennsylvania ...

RB: Well, you know, I'll tell you. She really helped me. She really helped me pull through. If it weren't for her, I think I couldn't have pulled through. Yes, she really helped me a lot. Then that was the summer of '46, then I came back to Rutgers in the fall of '46. I hadn't been springboard diving since '43. Luckily I hadn't gained any weight, so I decided to get in shape and I competed again in the Fall, and went through '46 and '47.

SH: So had that time off helped your diving, or had it taken its toll?

RB: I didn't learn anything new, really. ... In my Freshman and Sophomore years, right here at Rutgers, we used to go to Florida during the Christmas holidays.

SH: Oh, really?

RB: Yes, Coach Riley took us there and that's where I really dove with the divers from Michigan, Yale, Ohio State, and you watch those guys and try to imitate what they do. To me, imitators, trying to imitate somebody is the best way of learning. ... You'd ask the guy questions, "Hey, watch me do this. What am I doing wrong?" and he would correct you. That helped a lot, really. I learned a lot of new dives there and all that. That was good. I really enjoyed that. So we came back in '46 and ... Christmas of '46, we went down to Florida again. Riley used to take us down there all the time, and [the] same thing repeated. You'd be diving against people that were much better than you were, and you'd try to come up to their standards. Dancing is the same thing. You try to dance like Fred Astaire.

SH: Were there a lot of veterans that were diving then? Who had returned to diving like yourself?

RB: Yes. I remember one diver, he was from Ohio State. His name was Miller Anderson. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful guy. He had been a fighter pilot and he was shot down and he got hurt. He broke an ankle and here he was diving with an ankle that was very weak. Amazing, but it didn't hurt him any. Got a strong character, you know. Really strong character. ... I dove with Bruce Harlan, another Olympic champion. Miller Anderson was an Olympic champion. Young Sammy Lee from out the West Coast, little small Chinese boy. Great diver, Sammy Lee. There were two divers at Ohio State. [They were] Earl Clark and Al Patnick, who were terrific divers. So you mix up with those guys and you yourself can feel yourself getting better.

SH: Did you tryout for the Olympics again, then, before you finished your diving career?

RB: The next game was '48 and I decided ... "Hey, I better get going and get my working experience on its way," and I went to work for Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

SH: Before we go in to your working career, can you tell me about the changes that you saw at Rutgers? When the returning veterans had left it, Rutgers was a very small private school. Can you tell me a little bit about the changes that you saw when you came back?

RB: ... When I came here in '46, the change had not occurred yet. I don't know what exact date [it] officially became a State University. I think it was after '47, I kind of think, and it was still a small school then. We still were diving at the barn here across College Ave. Still diving there, it's men's swimming there. And when I came back, the GI Bill of Rights, you heard of the GI Bill of Rights, a lot of fellows I met from [the] New York area and other areas, they came here on the Bill of Rights. That gave them that chance to get an education. Funny thing about it, when I came back for my Senior year, they took away my State Scholarship and they said, "Hey,

you can go into the Bill of Rights." ... They both paid tuition and fees, you know, so they switched me over to the Bill of Rights.

SH: Where did you live then, when you came back?

RB: Preceptor. I got my old preceptor job back, which was great. Rutgers was really very good to me. I tell you.

SH: To come back as a GI and knowing that you wanted to focus on finishing your education and your work experience, how did you look at the incoming Freshman class? Did they seem really young to you or were you just not interacting with them?

RB: I can't comment about that because most of the students in my hall there were Juniors and Seniors. A lot of them had come back to finish up, also. I didn't come across any Freshman or Sophomores there.

SH: Did you think it was a more serious mood, when you came back?

RB: Oh, yes, and they did well. They did very well in their grades. Oh, yes. Sure. They knuckled down, really.

SH: We always ask about the football game attendance. Were you a part ...

RB: Oh, yes. I went to all the games. That's the only recreation I had. Yes, I loved that. Wonderful football team then. Harvey Harman was the coach when I was here. He had come from Penn. Great man, great man. I was here when Frank Burns was a quarterback. In the fall of '46, he was the quarterback. The first time we had beaten Princeton in a long, long time. Great athlete, nice guy. Vinnie Utz was another great football player.

SH: Did you have any of them in your dorm?

RB: No. They were mostly living in fraternity houses.

SH: Do you have anybody that stands out in your mind that was under you as a preceptor in your dorm?

RB: No. I had a roommate one year, when I was living with Dean Metzger. His name was Charles Gantner, wonderful, wonderful person. His mother and father used to come on weekends for a visit and they took loads of food, and he would share it with me. I can't forget that. He was a breastroker, butterfly breastroker. He had the world's record for the 100 yards breaststroke for twenty-four hours. He had broken the world's record for the 100 yards butterfly breaststroke on a Friday night. [The] following Saturday night, [the] next day, a guy from Princeton, name was Dick (Huff?), broke it again. Well, that was so sad, poor guy. Great athlete and a terrific track sprinter. Bernie Wefers was our track coach. Chuck Gantner never ran track in high school so Bernie Wefers looked him over and said, "Hey, Chuck, come out for track."

So he went out and made the team and went on the championships. Terrific sprinter. He was a sprinter and a breastroker. Amazing guy, really, and a lot of fun.

SH: I had seen a chart that you shared with us, about all the different awards that you've won. Is there one that's most memorable for you? I mean, being named All-American must have been a terrific honor, too.

RB: Yes, '43 and '47. Yes, I think, the one I won, the Eastern Collegiates up at Yale, I felt good about that. I got a lot of comments, you know?

SH: Was that your Senior year?

RB: See, we had the Eastern Collegiate League, which included Bucknell, Haverford, Delaware, all the small schools. It was called the Eastern Collegiate and I had won the Easterns '42, '43 and '47, and then there was an Eastern Intercollegiate League which included all the schools along the East Coast, the Big East, that was a big, big affair. Again, I'm saying that you didn't have to qualify for the finals. You just went and you just dove. You dove, maybe there would be fifteen or sixteen guys would be diving and they would pick the first eight to make the finals. That's how they worked it out, but you didn't have to, you had to qualify. Today, you go through various qualifying steps to get into the finals. One year they had the National Intercollegiate at Harvard and we got in and I made the finals in that and Sammy Lee won it. A little guy. Real good diver. I don't think I medalled in that one. No, I didn't medal. The National Intercollegiates, we flew out to ... the State of Washington, Seattle, to compete in the 1947 National Intercollegiates. ... That's the first time I got involved with the Duraflex springboard, and I had a hell of a time. I made the finals, but that's all I did.

SH: Where did Mrs. Buratti fit into this?

RB: Okay. This is interesting. I always tell her that it was a miracle that I met this woman. We were both from Philadelphia, and we lived maybe a mile apart, and we never crossed paths. She went to Girls High in Philadelphia. [Are you] familiar with Girls High? Girls High is an academic high school in Philadelphia. [It] takes the cream of the crop. But it's, what's the word I'm looking for ... if you were black, you could still go. There was no racial discrimination, and they picked the best kids in the area. She went there and she graduated from Girls High in '43. No, I'm sorry, in '39. ... She took pre-med at Madison, Wisconsin and while she was there, she was going with a lot of guys. ... Her brother, [a] seventeen year old boy, ... didn't have to go in the service, and he volunteered for the Navy. His father would not sign the papers, but eventually he did and the poor boy, destroyer, [was] bombed, hit by another German submarine. Very devastating for their family because the family only had a daughter and son. So she graduated from Wisconsin, she got into med school there in Wisconsin. But she could not handle cutting a cadaver, could not handle that, so she left medical school and went into teaching. She taught in Wonewoc. Wonewoc is a very interesting town, Wisconsin town. We went back there to see her high school where she taught. Driving there, "You just passed Wonewoc!" [laughter] "Where was that?" "Go back two miles." That's the kind of place that she taught. ... She taught in Oshkosh for a while, and then her parents were distraught when her brother was killed, [so] she came back East. ... At that time, I was dating another girl and I

asked this girl to go skiing up to Jack Frost in the Poconos. She said, "No, I have a date, but I have another girl friend for you." And this is how I met her. Didn't care for me, at all, in the beginning. But I was after her. I would not give up. That was a miracle. She came back from Wisconsin where she was engaged to a guy out there. I don't know what kind of problem [there was], but she broke it off [and] came back East. ... I had graduated from Rutgers in '47 and I went to work for a refractory company in Phoenixville, PA. The Grinding Wheel Refractory Company in Phoenixville. That's how we met on a blind date. She was working at Elizabeth Arden here in Philadelphia at that time. She was in charge of the beauty salon in Philadelphia, Elizabeth Arden. Beautiful girl, married fifty-one years. Beautiful girl, smart as a whip.

SH: Kept you on your toes?

RB: Oh, yes, and beautiful parents. Beautiful parents.

SH: You worked for the refractory outside of Phoenixville.

RB: Yes, worked there for about a year, eighteen months. ... I saw I wasn't going anywhere there, you know. So I saw an ad in a trade magazine, that Bethlehem Steel was hiring. So I went up for an interview and I went with them.

SH: Now, had you stayed in the Reserves when you were discharged at Fort Dix?

RB: Yes. Interesting. We were married in '48. She said, "I want to get married." "Great!" [I] didn't have the nerve to ask her [laughter] and I didn't want to take on any family responsibilities, also, but, hey, here's my chance, you know. So, I said, "Okay." We were married up here at Rutgers, by the way.

SH: Oh, really?

RB: Yes, right in the Chapel.

SH: Kirkpatrick Chapel?

RB: Yes. Married there. Beautiful occasion, yes.

SH: Did her family all come up?

RB: Oh, yes, the whole family came up. ... I was Roman Catholic, she's Episcopalian, so I said, "I cannot ask this beautiful woman to adopt Roman Catholicism," so I became Episcopalian. That settled the problem. We're devoted to our church. We love our church, we love the service, we love the people. So, no problem.

SH: Now, when you were married, did you have some of your classmates ...

RB: Yes. Chuck Gantner came here. He's my best man. Poor guy.

SH: Who married you?

RB: What was his name? Hey, I forgot, that's fifty-one years ago. [We were married by Dean Abernathy and the reception was held at Woodlawn on the New Jersey College for Women campus.]

SH: I thought maybe Dean Metzger.

RB: No. He had retired. The next guy in line came in. He married us. [Dean Abernathy]

SH: You were still working for the refractory in Phoenixville when you were married. Did you make your move to Bethlehem then, you and your wife both?

RB: Yes. First year we got married, [we] came up to Bethlehem.

SH: How do you like living in Bethlehem compared to Philadelphia?

RB: We were lucky. When we first came up to Bethlehem, we had an apartment, and it was okay. Then we decided to buy a house on top of a mountain. Reminds me of Monte Fortino. [laughter] Going back to my Italian roots, you know. We bought this house up on top of the mountain there, and it was so private. The house was small when we first bought it, 'cause we had no money, you know, [a] small house, and we kept expanding. Did a lot of work on it and today, we're still there and we're not going to move. We love it so much there.

SH: Now you were telling me about being in the Reserves.

RB: Yes, okay. This is interesting. I was working for Bethlehem Steel at that time and I was in the Reserves. I had to sign up for the Reserves after I discharged. Why do I want to do that? I can't answer that. I still felt the feeling that I had to do something to help the country. So in 1950, started the Korean War. I got called up, [to the] Reserves. My wife had borne my first child, son, and she was pregnant with her second child. I was [thinking], "Oh, my God, I cannot leave this woman alone with this situation," so they called me in the office. They said, "You got to go up to the superintendent who was in charge of handling people," you know. He called me in and said, "I see you've been called to active duty." I was ready to leave for active duty, I was supposed to go to ... they called me up as a mess officer, running a mess hall. Holy, what do I know about mess halls, you know? When I talked to the officer who I was supposed to report to, I said, "[Why] the hell did you call me up for a mess hall? I don't know anything about mess halls, I never did that kind of work." He said, "We'll straighten you out." Typical. So they called me up at Bethlehem Steel. The officer, he said, "Mr. Buratti, do you really want to go to Korea?" I said, "No, I don't want to go to Korea." He said, "We'd get an exemption for you." But we were making steel and making a lot of war goods there in the plant, and [I] got an exemption. I made steel for thirty-five years. Became middle manager of steel making there at the steel company. It was one job that I really loved. Very unusual for a person to love his job. Very unusual, and I really loved that job. We had wonderful people working for the company. We had wonderful benefits. We had our own country club, really, and the dues there was miniscule [to] play golf, miniscule. They really spent a lot of money to make their employees

happy. Wonderful, wonderful company to work for. I was there thirty-five years and when I was in my early sixties, they offered a real big, big carrot: Take a lump sum settlement, and the fact that I had a fairly good paying job, I came out with a pretty sizable lump sum ... and I turned it into an IRA. This was good. My wife and I were talking about it. ... She said, "Let's take this IRA and invest it in ..." at that time, we decided to take a Certificate of Deposit, because they were the safest. They were insured, blah, blah, blah, you know, and we put that money in an IRA, and we didn't take any money out of it. We kept it in there because it was tax deferred through all those years, and you'd be surprised about compounding, how that works. It just escalates so fast. What did we live on? She was working. She had a job as Executive Director of the local YWCA. She took that job and my pay, wait a minute, [my] retirement. We spent my money and invested her money and we had a nice little nest egg. [When] her mother and father passed away, she inherited a little money, you know, and with [that] invested money and her invested money, I was able to stash away the IRA and not touch it for ten years. Wonderful.

SH: You were telling me that your wife was pregnant, that you had a son. Can you tell me about the other members of your family?

RB: I had a son and two daughters. The son [was] wonderful, like his mother and his maternal grandparents, spin off on that group. He became a sports columnist. He went to the University of South Dakota. Why he went out there, I'll never know. I think he might have thrown darts or something, you know, really. But he went out there and Tom Brokaw went out there, [for] journalism. [He was] good, not because he is my son, but I can see it comes easy for him, you know. He can get on a typewriter, cover a game ... and type the story out right away. Amazing. I can never do that. Never. And he was born in '50 and my first daughter was born in '52. She was a brain, and she came to me when she was five years old, she says "Dad, I want a telescope." "Okay, you'll get a telescope." That's all she did, look at the telescope. And today, she is one of the top-notch astronomers in the whole world. Amazing. Travels all over the world, and worked for JPL, NASA, JPL in Pasadena, California.

SH: Didn't she study with Carl Sagan?

RB: Yes, she worked with Carl Sagan at Cornell, but he was never there, because he was making that video for PBS. So she dropped him and worked with another guy up there. But she still was on good terms with Carl Sagan, because he would still give her work to do. The thing about my daughter was she [is a] great grant writer. Gets a lot of money. Don't ask me how she does it. I don't know, but she's a great grant writer and she accumulates a lot of money. ... Based on that money, MIT wanted to give her full professorship. She said "No, I don't want to work there," because her husband is also a Physics professor out there. [The] school's out in Southern California, and she didn't want to leave there. She has three boys and they're getting situated so it would be best that they stayed right there. But ... she had all these grants, you know, a lot of money, and they were interested. Personally, she has my mother's physical features, but my wife's brain power and personality. She is very kind, loves cats and children. I love her very much.

SH: Then you had another daughter?

RB: Another daughter, she is different than my first daughter. [My] first daughter matches physically with my mother, my second daughter matches my wife, and I love my second daughter, wonderful child. Between her Junior and Senior year in high school, we went up to Wisconsin, took her out there to get her involved, [to see] if she would like it. My wife always said that. Hildegard was great for analyzing a person, knowing their likes and dislikes. Amazing, you know. "I think she'd be great going to Wisconsin." ... She applied, [it was] the only school she applied in, and was accepted. She went out there and she took pre-law in the beginning and didn't care for it too much. She majored in Communications, and right now she runs a TV station in Portland, Oregon. She's the Manager of that TV station. She knows her stuff. She's a pretty bright girl. She has a child and she's doing well. Health wise and everything, she's doing well.

SH: Now, is your son also on the West Coast?

RB: My son is in Bethlehem, living in our town, Bethlehem. You would think, you know, "why he ever came back," why, I guess he wanted to be with us for a while. He came back and stayed with us for a while to get his startup. Then he met a girl who was a nurse and then they got married.

SG: Do you get to the West Coast to see your grandchildren often?

RB: We go out there [in] November at Thanksgiving. You know, we would like to be with them ... we hate to impose on them. We'd like for them to make the first move. Their schedules are so busy. My first daughter, she is traveling all the time and we hate to interfere with their schedule. ... We're always hoping that they would make the first move. Because we don't want to [impose]. You feel the same way, you know, so ... well, we do manage to see them, [for] Thanksgiving. All the families get together. My daughter, by the way, my daughter adopted Judaism, which I thought was unusual, and we can live with that, and my second daughter, she married a Jewish boy.

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

SH: This is tape two of our interview on June 8, 1999 with Mr. Ralph Buratti at Bishop House at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

SH: You were telling me about your family and the men that the women in your family had married, your daughters.

RB: Yes, my second daughter, Brenda, who went to Wisconsin. You know, I never worried about my daughters. They can make a nickel doing anything. I always had that feeling that they would be able to make a buck and take care of themselves. But my son, all he could do was write. ... We always were afraid that if he ever lost that job.... In fact, I get a subscription to the local newspaper, because I always want to look at the sports section to see if he's still working. [laughter] It's that feeling I have. I love him very much, you know, but I always had that feeling that if he lost that job, what would he do? Come live with me. But as he has become older and

writing about sports, he has established a good reputation and has won many awards. His human interest articles about athletes are excellent and very moving. Isn't that funny about your children? That the daughters, they were self-reliant. It's amazing, self-reliant, and they could do things on their own. Period. So we meet the two daughters and their families at Thanksgiving, in Long Beach, California. That's where the Jewish families meet there, you know, and they're wonderful, caring, kind people. Beautiful people. That's the only time, we stay out there for three or four days and come back East. I was always hoping that maybe in the summer time, they would give us a call and say, "How about coming out here for a couple of days and spend sometime with your granddaughter, grandchildren?" you know. It's up to them to make the move. I have learned a lot from my children.

SH: How was it putting the children through college at the same time?

RB: One went to MIT, one went to Wisconsin and the other one went to the University of South Dakota and I paid it off [at] one time. We used to send them a check every month, two schools at one time. How I ever did it ... I ate cornflakes and water most of my life to pay for their education, you know, tough. [Hildegard] made all the clothes for them. When they went to school, they had to earn their own spending money. I only took care of tuition and room. ... They had to get their own food, and that was it. They managed to do that for some reason, and we snaked through. We didn't have to borrow any money at all, which was lucky, you know, and they got through it all. Graduated and did okay. My son, Bruce, he got a job right away, no problem, and Bonnie, my first daughter, she was on her way right away. JPL hired her right away, no problem there. But [for] Brenda, being a Communications major, [it was] difficult to find a job along the East Coast here so she hooked up with some guy with an old Ford and went across the country. ... They would stop, she would work in a bar, she would work in a grocery store, as a teller or something like that, or a bar, to pick up an odd job somewhere. [She would be] very resourceful, you know. Where there was a job to be had they would go after it. So she ended up there, Brenda ended up there in the West Coast and she got a job in Los Angeles. [She] worked at a TV station in Los Angeles as a beginner, what do you call it, low paying job, minimum wage job in a TV station. There's a word for that. Some sort of an aide, minimum wage job, and then she found out about this job up in Portland, Oregon. She applied for it, sure enough, got the job. So she's been there ever since.

SH: Before we conclude the interview, are there any thoughts that you would like to leave on the tape or with the project?

RB: I hope you get more funding for your program. We don't want this to die out, you know, really. I think what you are doing is a wonderful thing, really.

SH: Oh, thank you. Have you heard anymore about your award here at Rutgers?

RB: I talked to Chuck Warner, he is the swimming and diving coach. ... He said that he has placed my name in nomination for the Hall of Fame here at Rutgers, and I said, "Hey, that's an honor for me to do that," but that's only half of it, because one has to be indoctrinated and there's a lot of waiting involved in it, I would think. So we'll see what happens.

SH: Well, good luck to you and thank you so much for coming out today and doing this interview.

RB: I like you because you put me completely relaxed. You prompted me along on your questions, which make it very easy for me to open up. Okay. And you handle people very well.

SH: Well, thank you, Mr. Buratti, and my vote goes for you in the Hall of Fame.

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

Reviewed by Greg Kupsy 07/24/01

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 07/24/01

Reviewed by Ralph Buratti 11/10/02 & 5/04