

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SIGURD ROBERT CHRISTENSEN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

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CRANFORD, NEW JERSEY

APRIL 20, 1998

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Sigurd Robert Christensen on April 20, 1998, in Cranford, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Joseph Scott: ... Joseph Scott ...

KP: I would like to begin by asking about your parents, first, how your parents met and when did they get married?

Sigurd Robert Christensen: My parents were Norwegian immigrants. My mother came over here when she was sixteen years old. She had relatives here and she worked for a doctor. Took care of the doctor's children; she was a nursemaid for this doctor. My father was a graduate of the Naval Institute in Norway, [*Sjøkrigsskolen*], which would be comparable to maybe two years in our Annapolis. He was an engineer, and two older brothers had preceded him to the United States and they were out on Long Island. So, he came over here and lived in the YMCA, actually, and he got work, engineering work. The two of them went home to Norway, on a visit, and met on the ship, en route. [laughter] Now, which way, I don't know, Kurt, which route, whether they were going or coming, but that's where they met and fell in love and so on. My dad went to sea for many, many years, Luckenbach Line. He was a chief engineer for the Luckenbach Line. So, when I grew up, I didn't see much of him.

KP: He was at sea.

SRC: He was away so many times, yes. It's too bad, but all through World War I and so on, he was gone, of course, and Mother took care of us. ... She had seven children and five of them have predeceased her. Then, a couple of years ago, the sixth one went and I'm the sole survivor now. ...

KP: Your mother lived to be ...

SRC: She was ninety-four. [laughter]

KP: She lived to a ripe age.

SRC: Yes. I take after her side of her family. Gee, I'll be 104, Kurt, I think. [laughter]

KP: What year did your parents get married?

SRC: I don't know, I don't know, [May 5, 1915]. [laughter]

KP: Your father went to the Norwegian Naval Academy. I looked at your survey. It is, in many ways, not surprising why you joined the Navy, because not only was he a merchant seaman, but he had gone through the Naval Academy.

SRC: Yes. Well, in Norway, you're either a farmer, an educator, teacher, or something like that, a minister, or you go to sea, and he was born and raised on a farm and had the wanderlust. He

wanted to go to sea, so, he went to sea, [laughter] but he got a good education. I still have his engineering tools and so on, upstairs. They had them in cases. Yes, a good man, he could do anything. He could make anything from wood or make anything from metal. When he was at sea, he would make whole sets of doll furniture for the girls and, when he came home, you'd [have] chairs and tables and cribs and everything else, [laughter] and the same thing with metal. There's a nameplate on the front door that he made, and he could write in calligraphy, see, just amazing.

KP: What were your father's positions aboard ship?

SRC: Chief engineer.

KP: Chief engineer?

SRC: Yes.

KP: How big were the ships that he served on?

SRC: Liners. He could take boilers apart, I mean, boilers you walk into. [laughter] He could do anything and he was really a very knowledgeable guy.

KP: It sounds like he had fairly steady employment during the 1920s and 1930s.

SRC: He did. He did. ... He came ashore, and he wanted to be ashore, finally, thank goodness, and his brother, his middle brother; his oldest brother had been with ships; he was in the provisioning of ships in the city. His middle brother was a crane operator. I don't know if you're familiar with the cranes? Up on the Harlem River, in New York, there are great, big coal yards and things like that, and there are huge buildings which house cranes, and these cranes go out over the river and drop down into the barges and ships.

KP: They have them in Port Newark.

SRC: ... Yes. There's a guy up there in the housing, like a house, with windows and all of these things, who operates that crane, and that's what my uncle did, so, my dad did [that]. He went and started that when he came ashore, and then, his health started to fail, so, he had to give it up. So, he went into real estate. [laughter]

KP: When did he make the transition from sea to land? How old were you?

SRC: Oh, I was pretty old. I was in high school, I guess.

KP: Oh, he stayed at sea ...

SRC: Oh, yes, a good many years.

KP: How often would you see him in a year? How long would he be in port?

SRC: Well, I might see him three, four times. If he came into New York Harbor, we lived on Staten Island and he would come into New York Harbor, I would see him.

KP: How long would he be in port for?

SRC: Oh, turnaround time, you know. [laughter]

KP: You might only see him for a week.

SRC: Well, maybe not even that, a matter of a few days and he's gone. You have to turn ships around, Kurt, as you know, and get them out. They're not making any money when they're sitting in port. So, he had to get out and I would see him, but he and I, for some reason, were not close, initially. We were later, but, initially, we were not close.

KP: In many ways, he was this familiar stranger.

SRC: Right.

KP: He was your father and he was important to you, but, if you only see someone a few times a year ...

SRC: Right, yes, and he represented discipline, too, remember. [laughter]

KP: Your mother is the one who was at home.

SRC: ... Yes, Mother kept us in line, but I was the youngest of the family. ...

KP: You had brothers and sisters to keep you in line.

SRC: I had only sisters.

KP: You were the only boy.

SRC: Well, Mother, ... she'd had another son who died, and then, she had a set of twins, a boy and a girl, and they both died and they had that blood problem, the Rh Factor, and they didn't know how to handle that, at that time. So, they died, which left four of us, and there were three girls who were older than I. ... The two oldest ones died of pneumonia, and then, there were two. Then, my last sister died of old age, and I'm here. [laughter]

KP: Why did your parents choose Staten Island, and then, Bayonne? You were born in Bayonne, but you grew up in Staten Island.

SRC: Bayonne was near the ships. They lived in Bayonne first, then, bought property on Staten Island and built a house.

KP: Yes.

SRC: That's where it started. I had two very enterprising parents, and, in those days, the big thing was to have a two-family house, so [that] you would have income from the other half of the house. You would live in half and you'd have income, and they lived in a two-family house. So, they wanted to have a home of their own. Well, Long Island, where the brothers were, didn't make it. They didn't want to go there. ... They wanted, [for] some reason, to be in the city, but not in ...

KP: Manhattan.

SRC: Manhattan, so, they gravitated to Staten Island and bought a piece of property over there and built a two-family house, and we lived on the second floor and we had tenants, over the years, on the first floor. When he went into real estate, my father would buy blocks of houses, relatively inexpensive type of houses, but they would be a whole block long he'd buy, just in one fell swoop. Then, he would have work done on them to upgrade them, and then, he would talk the people who were renting in there to buy it, buy them on time, through him. [laughter] So, he was getting the interest and everything. He was a pretty sharp man.

KP: When did your father make the transition from being a crane operator to real estate?

SRC: Well, he was always interested in it, he and Mother. Their Sunday afternoon would be riding around looking at real estate developments. That's just the way they [were], [laughter] and ... he had several friends. I think their name was (Kogan?), two brothers, and he went in with them, not as a partner, but he was in there as a salesman. He used to sell for them, but the interest was there.

KP: Even when he was working the cranes, he started to develop that.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: When did he finally leave the crane operation? How old were you?

SRC: Gee, I don't remember. I might have been in college. He didn't operate the cranes entirely. The yard where he worked had oil, also, and he was sort of the yard manager. Working the cranes required a lot of coordination, and so on, and I think he stopped working the cranes and managed the yard. ... I know he used to take oil dippings on the oil tankers and things like that, to guarantee the deliveries for the yard.

KP: How long did he stay in the real estate business?

SRC: Until he died.

KP: He worked until the end.

SRC: Oh, yes. He had a very unfortunate accident. He lost his retina in one eye and they operated. The retina separated. They operated on the eye and couldn't fix it. In those days, they didn't know how. So, he lost the eye. Now, he had one eye, and then, he lost [the other]. That retina separated, and, just at that time, a young doctor was working at the Manhattan Eye and Ear [and Throat Hospital], the Cornea Bank, [The Eye-Bank]. ... One of Dad's problems [was], he lost the fluid in the eye, too. He [the doctor] came through with a method of saving the fluid. So, he saved the eye, and he had one eye, 20/20 in one eye, but he worked in the real estate business until he died. He died at seventy-two. He wasn't like Mother.

KP: A lot of people retire at sixty-five.

SRC: Sure, oh, sure. ... He had the heart of a forty-year-old man, Kurt. The doctor used to say, he said, "You could live forever." He died of leukemia. His white and red corpuscles got out of whack and his capillaries fell apart. That was it.

KP: Where did he practice real estate?

SRC: Staten Island. He only made one error. He bought a piece of land and it was fine. It was sort of a meadow, but they put a road through and the road must have been twenty feet higher than this meadow, [laughter] and the meadow would fill with water whenever it rained. He said, "You ever hear of a dry sale? That was a dry sale. You'd never sell that in the rain. It would be full of water." [laughter]

KP: What part of Staten Island did you grow up in? Where was your two-family house?

SRC: It was in West [New] Brighton, and then, we moved to Randall Manor. Randall Manor is; do you know where Sailors' Snug Harbor is? It's down on the water, and Randall Manor is just on the hill above that, yes, very nice neighborhood, and they moved there and my sister, Doris, was married from there. The other two girls died there and I had three rooms, up on the third floor, had an apartment, [laughter] which is very nice, but I went to college from there and never really came back after that.

KP: However, your parents stayed in Staten Island.

SRC: Oh, yes. They stayed there. They sold that house and, again, real estate, they bought others and would sell them, and then, when Dad died, Mother came over here and lived four blocks away, for twenty years. She wanted to be near me. [laughter] She used to tell me what to do. [laughter] No, she wasn't that type.

JS: I do not really know much about the history of the Fresh Kills Dump. Were you anywhere near that at all?

SRC: You know where Perth Amboy is?

JS: Yes.

SRC: It's out that way, Joe. They call that the South Shore, and it's way out there. Where I lived; do you have any idea where the Staten Island Ferry is?

JS: Yes.

SRC: You go to New York from here, all right, and you go out this way to Stapleton, another place. If you go this way, you're coming, really, toward New Jersey, along the island. That's where Sailors' Snug Harbor is, and I lived on the hill above that. If you keep going, you get to Kill Van Kull and that body of water, but, if you go out this way and around and out there, you go to New Dorp and that's where the dumps are, way out there.

JS: I was thinking it might have affected the real estate business.

SRC: I don't know. I don't really know much about the real estate. [laughter] My dad did, but I don't.

KP: Staten Island, when you were growing up, was a much smaller place to grow up. I mean, there were not as many people living in Staten Island. There were still farms on Staten Island.

SRC: Oh, sure, still are farms.

KP: Yes, but not the way there used to be.

SRC: No, oh, no, no. ...

KP: I have read accounts of Staten Island in the 1930s. There were unpaved streets and farms. It was very different from today. There are still a few isolated pockets.

SRC: Now, they have the Verrazano Bridge. When I was growing up, I used to go up the hill to school and I would pass a field and that's where the mouth of the tunnel to Brooklyn was going to come out, right. Oh, for ten or fifteen years, there's a big sign there that told you that. [laughter] Well, they never tunneled, of course.

KP: Yes, but you were waiting for that.

SRC: Well, that would have made a big difference, because, ... I don't know if they still run, actually, you had a 39th Street and a 69th Street ferry boat to Brooklyn, and then, you had the New York ferries. ... We pretty much, as I remember, always seemed to have the bridges to New Jersey, but the ferry boats, we had a summer home out on Long Island, way out, and we would take the ferry across, and then, drive out to Long Island, in the summer.

KP: Your parents really liked to be near the water.

SRC: Oh, yes, but they never swam, never swam, and almost never put on a bathing suit, and they had those bathing suits that had the big holes underneath, had straps up here and it'd have holes underneath it. [laughter] They had hats and they had rubber shoes that they put on. [laughter]

KP: What was your immediate neighborhood like? Were there any Norwegians that lived by you?

SRC: Next to us, a couple of doors away, ... where the two-family house was, there were a couple of Norwegian families. There was a family by the name of Wettelsen. I think there was never a Wettelsen that was under six-foot-three, man or woman. They were huge people, huge, and they used to build docks, the docks in New York Harbor. That's what their business was, they would build the docks. There was another Norwegian family and my mother and this lady were good friends, but very competitive, so that my mother's children would never look any worse than her children. ... My mother wanted her children to be the best dressed in the neighborhood and Cary, this other woman, wanted hers to be the best. So, it's one of those things, but, no, there was no "Little Norway" or "Little Italy," no confabs like that at all.

KP: You grew up in the Lutheran Church.

SRC: I did, yes.

KP: What was the congregation? Was it Scandinavian or was it German?

SRC: Oh, Norwegian, Scandinavian. (R.O. Sigmund?) was the minister. He thought I should be a minister. Yes, he really did and he was a single man, used to stand on his head every day, part of yoga, to improve the flow to the brain. He'd do exercises, stand on his head, very vital guy. [laughter] ... My father was treasurer of the church, my mother ran the ladies' aid and all that stuff. They were natural leaders.

KP: They were very active in the Lutheran church.

SRC: Very active, yes, and we all went through the Sunday schools and all that sort of thing, but, when I got married, ... Nancy was a Dutch Reformed, in Newark, and Rutgers has all that Dutch Reformed [connection]. In fact, the old Dutch North Reformed Church by Washington Park in Newark is her church. ... The Ballantines were there and the Clark Thread people, they built and maintained that church. In fact, ... a lot of the money in that church is from them, from those days, because an inner-city church like theirs is tough to maintain now, but we became Presbyterians when we came here, and one reason was, we moved into town and the whole block were Presbyterians. [laughter] Well, I don't know if you remember, across from the town hall, when you came up, if you came that way, there's a huge brown-shingled church. That's the First Presbyterian Church, and behind it are brick buildings. That whole block is the church that we go to. It's a Presbyterian church.

JS: Did you speak the language, Norwegian, growing up?

SRC: No, and it's a narrowness, too. I'm sorry about it. Mother, on Saturday mornings, Joe, would teach the girls. ... I remember, she had a blackboard in the kitchen.

KP: She did literally teach.

SRC: She would teach them, try to teach them Norwegian, yes, and I'd be out playing ball, [laughter] and I said to her, "Why didn't you teach me?" "Robert, you didn't want to." Same thing with piano; all my sisters played and played beautifully. I don't play a note. "Why not, Mother?" "Robert, you never wanted to." [laughter] So, there you are.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed sports a lot growing up.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: What sports did you play?

SRC: Well, baseball, football. In high school, I swam and played basketball. Down at Rutgers, I played some basketball and swam and rowed on the crew. [laughter]

KP: Growing up on Staten Island, what did you do for fun, besides sports?

SRC: Well, we had a lot of young people. I was very young. I went to Rutgers when I was sixteen. I really had nothing much to do with girls, but the guys, I had a lot of boy friends and we would [get] into sports and that sort of thing, ran the whole gamut of Scouting, right up to Eagle Scout.

KP: You were an Eagle Scout.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: Were you a Sea Scout?

SRC: No, no. They didn't have them.

KP: They did not.

SRC: No. I wish they did, because we had seven older boys, we called them, "The Slimy Seven," [laughter] but they were older than the oldest Scouts. They had gone through it all and they would go to camp with us and raise hell. They would tease the poor kids at night and try to scare them and that sort of thing. There wasn't enough for them to do, and that's what the Sea Scouts have done. Over here in Linden, they have a boat, a tugboat, that they run, and one thing

they do is take you on a ride around Manhattan Island. So, you go over at night and they serve supper on the boat, and you go all the way around Manhattan Island. [laughter] ...

KP: Really? It sounds like you have taken this tour.

SRC: Yes, Sea Scouts. It was terrific. We have an auxiliary police Scouting program. Yes, it's terrific. We didn't have any of that. It's come a long way, in that sense.

KP: Who sponsored your Boy Scout troop? Was it the Lutheran church?

SRC: No, it was school.

KP: Ralph Schmidt has a good memory of going to the Washington Jamboree as a Boy Scout. Did you ...

SRC: Never.

KP: You did not go to that jamboree.

SRC: No, my son did, but I never went to a jamboree.

KP: Where would you go camping? Was it just simply on Staten Island, or would you go elsewhere?

SRC: Oh, we had a camp on Staten Island. In fact, when you worked on merit badges, like bird study and things like that, you could go down to the museum and see them in the cases, but you would go out to this camp and stay [for] some days and observe in the field, but New York City, every borough has a camp. Staten Island only had one, Camp Aquehonga, but Queens had four, and each one is larger than the next, and they were all up at Ten Mile River in New York, and I would go there. [Editor's Note: Ten Mile River Scout Camps, located in Sullivan County, New York State, near Monticello, New York, at one time, had camps designated for use by Scouts from each city borough.] When I was in Scouting, I started out working in the kitchen, and I didn't like that much, so, I became the steward and I used to run the kitchen, and I was just a kid.

JS: How old were you?

SRC: Fifteen, I guess, [laughter] and, I remember, a farmer came in one day and he told me, this was the beginning of the season, "Oh, it's going to be a very wet, wet summer and all the potatoes are going to rot and the price of potatoes is going to go sky high and you really should order potatoes. I'm giving you good advice now," and I bought it, and I put on the dishwashing porch more bags of potatoes than you ever saw in your life, and then, I sat all summer and watched the price go down instead of up. It was a dry summer, [laughter] yes, but I did that. I ran that for a couple of years, and then, I went to a Y [YMCA] camp, Brooklyn/Queens Y Camp, and ran that for one year, and then, I went to New York to work in business, ... but it was very interesting.

KP: In many ways, you got a beginning in supply very early, running these kitchens.

SRC: Oh, yes, and pricing. The New York City camps buy the basics. They all buy the basics together, so [that] the price is phenomenally low. ... If you can believe this, I used to feed the boys for seventeen cents a meal, and they ate well, but one of the reasons was that ... the prices I was being charged from the central supply, as I took them out to my camp, was so low. When I went to the Y camp, I didn't have the same advantages, but the Y director in Brooklyn used to buy the staples in the wintertime, himself, and have them shipped up there. So, when I arrived, they were there, and then, I would buy the other things, like meat, fish and so on. I think I fed them for something like twenty-four cents. He couldn't believe it. Nobody ever had been that close, ... done that well, anywhere near it, but I was used to something different, but I'd cheat once in awhile. Mixed nuts, for example, are very expensive, and, on the menu, on Sunday night, we had mixed nuts. Well, Rocky would come out in the kitchen and say, "Hey, Chris, I don't see any mixed nuts on the tables." I said, "Oh, [slams fist on table] I forgot them, I guess." He didn't come every Sunday, [laughter] so, I'd save on the mixed nuts. You had to do something, and I had a couple of boys, ... older guys, who liked cookies. Well, we had a big storeroom full of cookies and somebody came to me one night and said, "You know, these fellows are breaking into the storeroom and you really ought to do something about it, because they're taking cookies." So, I had a meeting with them. Now, you've got to weigh, "Do you mind losing a few cookies, right, than, say, vandalism," all right? [laughter] I mean, they could really have worked me over, if they wanted to. So, we came to an understanding. "When you come back from the movies," they'd go to the movies in town or something, "and you want to [have a cookie], here's a key. Don't break the wood on the window," [laughter] and they wouldn't, and they'd have a few cookies and that was it. So, sometimes, you make out pretty well if you understand how to handle people. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you also learned how to bargain with your vendors.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: Particularly after having that experience with the potatoes.

SRC: Yes, and, up there, well, you have places like Pocono Manor and the farmers that supply them get big prices. They come to see me, "Hey, listen, I'm no Pocono Manor, you know. I'm a very poor YMCA guy from Brooklyn," [laughter] and you have to cry poor. [laughter] He'd say, "We understand, we understand," and I said, "And I don't want ... the poor potatoes, either. I want all good ones," or whatever, [laughter] but you have to get fresh fruits and vegetables and all that from them. It's an art, it's an art. You work hard. I'd be up until three o'clock in the morning, sometimes, working on the papers, on the books.

KP: How many years did you do this? You did this when you were fifteen, sixteen and seventeen.

SRC: [laughter] Yes, then, I wanted to see a little of business. So, I went, one summer, to Globe and Rutgers Insurance Company in New York, down on Williams Street in New York, and I

came across on the ferry and smelled the coffee. If you're in downtown New York, in the early morning, that's all you can smell, is coffee. The whole place reeks of coffee, and I never knew that [laughter] and I go in, I smell all this coffee, but Globe and Rutgers had gone practically through bankruptcy. ... I worked in the mail room and I used to go around and help the underwriters. I would take application forms and go into the books. They have books; I don't know if you're familiar with an insurance place, but they have books on shelving which have every building in your town or my town, and what it's made of and everything else. So, here, you have an application. I would go find that building, in the books, and just leave it hanging out of the book, and so, that would save them that much time. The head of the mail room [laughter] had been the head sales manager in Michigan. He ran the whole State of Michigan, yes, now, he's running a mail room in New York City, ... because the company was going broke and it contracted. "If you want a job, ... you can be my mail room supervisor in New York, and that's the only thing I have to offer you." So, he took it, which never made much sense to me, but that's what he did. He was a good man. I got a little business experience then, yes, fifty dollars a week.

KP: Which actually was ...

SRC: No, it was fifty dollars a month, fifty dollars a month. A month, it was, yes, awful.

KP: Did you go to the movies very much? How often did you go into Manhattan?

SRC: No, rarely, rarely. I was a reader, still am. Mother used to say, "I wish that you'd spend a little more time with us. Every time I look at you, you've got your nose in a book." I'd be reading three or four books at a time, yes, still do, love them.

KP: Did you spend a lot of time at the local library?

SRC: I did, yes. ... We had a wonderful high school and, in New York, they have the Regents, New York State Regents, so, the level of instruction was very high, and we would test ourselves on the Regents of the past, getting ready for the test. We had post-graduate courses that you could take, and I took every one they ever had, ... so that I was way ahead of ... the normal student, and some people would take an extra year, Kurt. They would graduate, but they would stay on for another year, just to take post-graduate work. It was almost like going to a prep school, ... and I would be with them, but they were older. I mean, they were driving cars and the whole thing.

KP: It sounds like you were promoted quickly, one or two of your years. Did you ever skip a grade?

SRC: Oh, yes, early.

KP: Early on.

SRC: Yes. In those days, you went to kindergarten for a year; I spent half a year. You went to first grade for a year; I spent, I don't know, three months or something and moved up. ... Mother was ... a close friend of the principal, but that wasn't it. She would go and talk to the teachers and she'd say, "You know, my Robert is quite advanced and I don't want him to be bored." The worst thing you can be is bored, and they said, "We understand." So, I would go on and, after a couple of tests or something, ... they'd push me ahead, but I picked up at least two years early. I mean, it wasn't in high school or [the] latter part of elementary. It was way down. So, when I was in fourth grade, I was with people who were a couple of years older than I, and the same thing in college. They were always older than I. I think, I wasn't the youngest man in my class, I know; I was third, I think.

KP: Yes, I know, because I interviewed John Melrose.

SRC: Melrose, yes, Melrose was younger.

KP: Stan Klion probably was the youngest, I think.

SRC: Was he? I never knew how old he was, yes. ...

KP: Stan, I think, was sixteen. I just know Stan and John Melrose were. Unfortunately, I never got a chance to interview Stan Klion, but his brother, Bart, says he was the youngest.

SRC: Yes, Stanley Ring [Royal] Klion, see, and his initials were S. R. and my initials were S. R., so, we would greet each other, "Morning, S. R.," [laughter] for four years, Kurt. [laughter] He was a good man, yes, good man.

KP: You mentioned you went to a very good high school. How big was it?

SRC: Big, big, I don't know, thousands, Curtis High School on Staten Island, *the* high school.

KP: What were you involved in?

SRC: Studies and swimming, basically.

KP: You did not join any clubs. You were very active at Rutgers. I was wondering if there was a history of involvement.

SRC: Yes, I was in clubs. What was I in? History, I think, and I was in a Latin club. I took four years of Latin and I had a Latin teacher who looked Latin. She ... wore a toga all the time. She'd come to school in the morning and she would go in the library, and I went in early to work in the library, so, I was there when she came in. She would draw about a half a tumbler of water and squeeze a lemon in it. I don't know whether that was good for her health or what, but, then, she would sit and sip this lemony water, with her toga and her hair up, [laughter] but she was a terrific teacher, and very dedicated, and she would give us assignments to translate at night and so on. ... We came back one day and she happened to walk down an aisle and, Kurt, there was a

girl with the translation written in the book, underneath the Latin, and the teacher cried. She literally cried. She went back to her desk and put her head down and cried, that a student of hers would ever do anything [like that]. You know, really, she was that kind of person. I had crackerjack teachers, marvelous.

KP: Any others stick out?

SRC: Oh, yes. I had a Spanish teacher, Miss (Sabatare?), who was fantastic, and she was a very volatile type. "Blah, blah, blah," [imitates rapid speech], and you'd better talk fast with her, and I never could talk Spanish as fast as she could, of course, but I had an English teacher who was marvelous. She only had one drawback. She'd go home for lunch and she'd have two martinis, right. [laughter] ...

KP: You recognized this even then.

SRC: Well, in the old days, remember, the old schools had these huge radiators with a shield around them. ... The windows were there and the radiators were down underneath. She would come back from her lunch hour and she would lean against this shield. Well, the heat from the radiator would heat her body and the fumes from the martinis [laughter] would come all over the room. She reeked, [laughter] and she never knew that we knew, I guess. Yes, good teachers, all good teachers, and I had good math teachers.

KP: Were you active in student government at all?

SRC: In high school?

KP: In high school.

SRC: No, no.

KP: From your high school, how many went on to college, because you said you had a very good post-graduate system? It sounds like a number of your classmates took the Regents. How many ended up going to college? Particularly, how many ended up going to City College?

SRC: Oh, a high percentage. All of my friends went. They went to good schools, Brown, Yale, Syracuse. ... I don't know if they still have it, Joe, but we had "all-American" types, like you and I, and you, and then, we had the "leather jacket crowd," and the "leather jacket crowd" were from Little Italy, not so much Polish or anything like that, but ... pretty much Italians. We didn't seem to have the other types of Latinos, pretty much Italians, and the same thing in Nancy's high school in Newark, yes, but all of the ... "all-Americans" went to college. It was accepted, yes.

KP: What led you to Rutgers? You were a Staten Islander. Why Rutgers? Why not a New York school?

SRC: Well, it's interesting. I was going to Syracuse. In fact, I swam on the swimming team and the captain of the swimming team, Pete (Borgameister?), was going to Syracuse, and he and I applied there and were accepted and we were going. His father was a broker in New York, stock broker, and suffered severe reverses. So, Pete wasn't going to go to Syracuse, and that shocked me, I guess. So, I started to look around, and Joe Scott, next door, and I told young Joe here, the Scotts lived next door to us and they had seven or eight generations of Rutgers people and he really worked on me to go to Rutgers. So, I went down and looked and I liked it well enough, so, that's where I went.

KP: In many ways, you were destined to go with your friend to Syracuse.

SRC: To Syracuse, yes, and I don't think I'd have been as happy as I was at Rutgers. Syracuse is a different type of school, but that's how I got to Rutgers. So, I had my little book bag and I went down and lived off campus for six months, all by myself. [laughter]

KP: Where did you live? Do you remember what street?

SRC: No, I don't. What's the street, is it Albany Street, goes up from the railroad and up? I think it's Albany Street. It was a block in off Albany Street.

KP: Okay.

SRC: Whatever that is, and I had the front room parlor. I did, I lived in the front room parlor, right on the street, and I had to go out, down the backstairs, to the john, yes, but that's where I lived and it was a wonderful place, really.

KP: Then, did you finally get into Winants?

SRC: Went to Winants, for the next six months, and then, I went to Ford my sophomore year, and then, I was in a fraternity house, Phi Gamma Delta, went to a fraternity.

KP: When you went to college, what did you think you would like to become when you graduated?

SRC: Businessman.

KP: Businessman?

SRC: Oh, yes, I always wanted to be. [laughter]

KP: You actually had experience.

SRC: Oh, sure, yes. I didn't know what business.

KP: However, you knew ...

SRC: Oh, yes, I was going to go with a corporation. I wouldn't do it today.

KP: Why? What would you do today?

SRC: I'd go out on my own.

KP: You would not work for another ...

SRC: No corporation, no, because they fire too many [people]. [laughter] I think it's terrible. Yes, I'd go into business on my own, I think. [laughter]

JS: You did a lot of writing in college. I just wondered if you ever considered, in college, taking up writing for a living.

SRC: Sure. I always wanted to write books, always, and I have. I've written about three novels. I can't get them published, but I've written them, [laughter] and I write poetry, a lot of poetry, and I'm a member of the International Poetry Hall of Fame and all that. So, I write, I have to write, I have to express myself, so, that's one way I do it. I write better than I talk. Yes, I really do.

KP: Although, you are a pretty good talker.

SRC: Well, thank you. [laughter] Yes, but I ... worked on the *Anthologist*. Is there still an *Anthologist*?

JS: No, not anymore.

SRC: No, no; not on *Targum*. I'm not a newspaper type, but we wrote on the literary monthly and all that. I was in debating. Howard Crosby, do you know Howard?

KP: Oh, yes, that is a name I am familiar with. I have never met him, because he passed away before I came back to Rutgers.

SRC: Howard's gone.

KP: I actually directed a dorm called Crosby Hall.

SRC: Okay.

KP: They named a dormitory on Busch Campus after him.

SRC: Great.

KP: People have mentioned him before. You are not the first.

SRC: Well, physically, Howard was about like you, ... Kurt, yes, ... slim and tall, and he was a year ahead of me. He was Class of '41 and he was in debating, and he and I became very close friends. ... He thought I should become a debater, which I did, and I became president of the debating society and I debated for four years and it's one of the best things I ever did, because it teaches you to think on your feet. [laughter]

KP: You had not debated in high school then.

SRC: No, no. I had, but not formally, [laughter] not with judges.

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

KP: One of my research assistants is a member of the women's crew team. She definitely likes to meet crew people from the past. Crew is a difficult sport, partly because, when you practice, you practice early in the morning, and it is very physically demanding. How did you get involved with crew? What led you to join the team?

SRC: I told you I swam, and I earned my numerals as a freshman, but I swam backstroke and I was not that good. My goal was to beat the other team's second man. Usually, it was two against two, and I didn't think I could make it in the varsity. I played basketball and I played JV ball down at Rutgers and I played some on the varsity, but not enough to earn a varsity letter, and I wanted to earn a varsity letter. So, where can I do that? Crew, all right, because most young men haven't rowed before they come to college. Now, some of them, I see you interviewed a Joe Puleo. Joe Puleo came from New York State, up around Buffalo, and he rowed AAU [Amateur Athletic Union], up there. He rowed in AAU crew. So, he was experienced when he came to Rutgers, but most of us weren't, and I said, "I'll go out for crew and see if I can't earn a varsity letter." So, I did and I got my numerals in the freshmen year and four of us went from the freshmen shell [slams table] right into the varsity. Isn't that great? Yes, so, here I was, and I got my letter. [laughter] Yes, that's why I went in crew. Then, my junior year, I got German measles and Wee-Willy [William] Keeler came in and took my seat on the crew, while I was German measling, and I never unseated him. So, my senior year, I didn't even go out. I already had my letter, [laughter] but that's how that evolved, but it is a great crew, a great sport, but you're not right; ... we didn't row in the morning only. We rowed, usually, in the afternoons.

KP: I know the current crew team gets up early. They start their practices at seven o'clock.

SRC: No, we didn't have anything like that, nor did we have [advanced equipment]. They have a tank and so on. We didn't have anything like that. Our coach was Chuck Logg and he had a son who was an Olympic winner, in crew, who went to the Olympics, he and another boy, and they won the Olympics. [Editor's Note: Charles P. Logg, Jr., Rutgers Class of 1952, and Thomas S. Price, Rutgers Class of 1955, earned gold medals in rowing, the coxless pair (2-) Men event, at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki.] Chuck Logg lived over on Princeton Circle and he used to bring us over for parties. He was an insurance man and he approached me, one time,

about selling insurance for him to undergraduates, which I did. I used to sell insurance for him to undergraduates, yes, and it worked out very nicely for him, and for me.

KP: What kind of policies would you sell?

SRC: Small ones, like a thousand to five thousand.

KP: Life insurance?

SRC: Yes, oh, life insurance, yes, and, when you get dividends, like ... Prudential had dividends, when the dividends come, instead of my getting them, I'd turn them over to the fraternity. So, we were setting up a program like that, where you could give the fraternity income without it really costing you anything. So, you paid your premium for the insurance and that was it, so, it worked out. But crew, for us, was, oh, we started out on a barge, in the river, and this is a huge, bulky damn thing, but you can't hurt it. You're not going to ruin a cedar shell. So, you could do almost anything, until you learned, and it's kind of complicated, because your seat moves, your feet are hooked in and you have to bend your knees and your seat goes back and forth on a track and you only have one oar. You've got this oar out there and the guy in front of you is coming back and you're pulling, right. Now, your oar is up there and you want to return; well, he's got to get out of your way, right? So, you all have to swing together, because you're occupying each other's space, and, if he doesn't get out of the way, you're going to jam him right in the back with the butt of your oar. If you don't feather right and so on, they call it "catching a crab," you're ...

KP: Tossed out of the boat.

SRC: Well, you could be, yes. They have been, but that fouls the whole thing up, and then, you have to start all over, and they're all nice, big, rangy guys, all right, and then, there's a little pumpkin head sitting in the back with a megaphone that tells you what to do, right, [laughter] and you get to hate him very quickly. [laughter]

KP: I know the current tradition is to throw the coxswain in the water if you win.

SRC: Always has been.

KP: Oh, it always has been.

SRC: Always has been, yes.

KP: What about exchanging shirts?

SRC: Always exchanged them, yes.

KP: Oh, yes, those are traditions.

SRC: The winning crew gets the shirts of all the others, yes, sure. We used to row Class B. Now, they row Class A, but we would row down on the Navesink, all right, and we'd sweep the river. So, I'd come home with dozens of shirts, yes, and we'd throw the coxswain in, [laughter] but that's a tradition, yes.

KP: Going back to being a freshman living off campus, one of the things many people vividly remember in interviews is freshman hazing, where you had to wear the dinks and carry matches. Do you remember that? There was a little bit of a war between the freshman and the sophomores that year.

SRC: I don't remember that. Joe mentioned that. We had paddles, and you know what a paddle looks like, do you, Joe? Okay, we had those and we suffered the hell of getting whopped with those.

KP: This is when you were inducted into your fraternity.

SRC: Yes, and you'd have "hell week." For an entire week, you'd be hazed and you had to work and all that stuff. I had a senior father, and Pete and his roommate had the worst room you can possibly imagine. I mean, it was absolutely filthy and there were clothes piled that high all over, and I was to clean it up. So, I cleaned it up, right, and I'd find dead mice. Oh, I'd find all kinds of stuff. I got it all cleaned up. Would you believe that, within two weeks, it looked like I'd never touched a thing. [laughter] "Pete" [Richard William] Hartman was my senior father's name. He lived out in Amityville, Long Island. He was the first casualty of the war. He was in Amityville. He was killed.

KP: When was he killed?

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: I mean, when was he killed? You say he was the first.

SRC: First man killed who lived in Amityville, first Amityville boy.

KP: Yes. Was he killed in 1942? [Editor's Note: Richard William Hartman, '39, a civilian worker in the Philippines Air Depot, was killed during an air raid on Nichol Field on December 13, 1941. He was the second Rutgers alumnus to die in World War II.]

SRC: I don't know, and "Mouse" [William] Veenstra became a minister and he believed that you have to sin. If you don't sin, you don't know what sin is and you can't preach against it, right? That was Veenstra, yes. [laughter] They were a pair. [laughter] All I remember is that there always was a feeling about over-hazing, and there were boys that were hurt, not only with the paddles, but you'd take them out on the bank, like across from the Quad there, before they built on the riverside of the Quad. It was only the other side and [there was] this big bank down to the canal and all that, and kids were forced to walk off that blindfolded and they could really hurt themselves, and I was in full agreement with anything. I never would do anything like that to a

boy, but, anyhow, there were a lot of things like that, that should of and were cut out, in later years, yes, but the idea of hell week, I think, was good. I think it basically was good, and you'd develop a closeness in your class, too. It's like the classes at the military academies.

KP: For all of these classes, 1942, 1941, there is a real identity that you have.

SRC: '42 was a good class. '41 was not that strong. '40 was a very strong class.

KP: Yes, because Carleton Dilatush really continues to hold the class in line.

SRC: Oh, yes, and Bruyere was in there. No, Bruyere was '38; he was '38 or '9, [Class of 1939], yes, but Carleton Dilatush, yes.

KP: Yes, he is still active.

SRC: Yes, and '42 is quite strong, quite strong, and they come and go like that. '43 was tough, because, now, you're really into the war, and, even in our case, if you had seven semesters, you would get your degree, which I thought was great, on the part of the University. I wasn't in that situation, but a lot of the guys were, and, if you had completed seven semesters, they'd confer a degree. So, you didn't have to come back and get another semester after the war.

KP: Who was your favorite professor and why? Do you remember?

SRC: At Rutgers?

KP: Yes, at Rutgers.

SRC: Oh, I had a romance language professor, Charlie; it'll come to me, but I took Spanish with him. He was a wonderful man. He had everything. I mean, he had good looks, he dressed beautifully, always a sharp dresser, always cared about his appearance. He was a marvelous teacher and he understood me and he used to say to me, "Chris, you know, I've heard loose translations before, in my time, but you are the loosest translator I have ever had." [laughter] He said, "Sometimes, I wonder what language we're studying together," [laughter] but I'd get A-pluses all the time, and just an amazing man. ... He was marvelous, and my class advisor, whose name doesn't come to me, was another one. I took business courses with him, a number of them, but he ran a business of his own in New York. ... What he would do, he would bring business problems of his to us, to the class, and we would discuss them, right, [laughter] and might or might not come to an agreeable solution. ... The guys in the class could never agree, never unanimous in any way, but we'd fight like (storm petrol?), but we would go [to him]. ... I'll tell you how good he was; he was my class advisor and I went to him, I guess at the end of my sophomore year, and I said, "What should I do for junior year?" and he said, "I'll tell you what I would recommend." He said, "You pretty much have taken math and business courses and things." He said, "I think you should take something else. Take English or take music or take art or things like that." So, I did. What he was saying was that it'll broaden you some, you see, and,

interestingly enough, when I was in business, in later years, we were sending higher-level men out to colleges for a whole summer to study music and art, interesting. [laughter]

KP: Why were you doing this? Was this at AT&T?

SRC: Yes, yes.

KP: Why?

SRC: I never went.

KP: No, but why did the company feel it was so necessary?

SRC: To broaden them.

KP: They felt they were too narrow.

SRC: Too narrow, yes.

KP: It seems like it is an expensive option.

SRC: ... Of course, of course. ... Well, Colgate University has a motto, which I am fully in agreement with, and it says, "Our purpose is to develop the whole man," right, "the whole man," and they do. They work very hard at it. I mean, you're not going to go through there with just business courses, not through Colgate you aren't. [laughter] Yes, they make sure. They have a base curriculum the first two years that is going to broaden you right away, oh, yes, very good, but that gives you an idea of the kind of man he was.

KP: It sounds like you appreciated it. It was good advice that he gave.

SRC: Oh, yes, ... and I had a math teacher, too, an old-timer, a "Mister Chips" type. ... I had taken a fair amount of math in high school and, I told you, it's high-level schooling in New York, and I came in; ... I'd say, within three or four weeks, he went through all the math I ever had and we were on new ground. You know, that surprised me. I was amazed.

KP: That you had had all this background?

SRC: Yes, but he knew Jim Scott, who was Joe's father, and he knew Bill, who was Jim's father, and he had taught them all, see, and he remembered them all. [laughter] He did. You walk in, "Oh." [laughter] Oh, yes, he was a great guy, from that standpoint, but the best teacher I ever had in my life was in Harvard.

KP: At the Business School?

SRC: At the "B" School. There's an accounting professor up there that took us from basic ledgers and journals to the very highest levels of cost accounting in one year. How he did it, I don't know, but it was fantastic, what he taught us in a year, and he loved every minute of it. He was one of the top three men in the country who established accounting principles for CPAs, and so on, to follow. ... If you fell asleep, we had classrooms that banked and, down here, in the front, was a table and it had a brass railing around it, with a curtain, and he would be there, behind the table. ... He'd work on the blackboard or whatever, but most of it, he spent the time calling on us, but, if you nodded, went and got a little sleepy, he could hit you, Joe, mid-center of your forehead, right, in the eighteenth row, up there, with a piece of chalk. I never saw anybody that accurate. He could really move it. He was that kind of a guy and he was the best I ever had. Interesting, isn't it, how you look back on some of them? Yes, and they deserve a lot more credit, I think, than they get in this country. I think professors in this country, and I don't say that because you're here, but I just don't think they're revered the way they should be. They're not; they're just not.

KP: I ask everyone if they had any run-ins with Dean Metzger.

SRC: No, never. He and I got along. Yes, I loved the man. I thought he was great, [laughter] but a lot of people; yes, you're right.

KP: He was also Dean of Students, so, if you got in trouble, you had a run-in with him. It sounds like you avoided trouble.

SRC: Oh, yes, but I spent some time, from time-to-time, with him. We would invite faculty members to [dinner], and the Dean was invited, of course; who succeeded him, Ed Curtin? ...

KP: I think so.

SRC: Yes, and Ed was a fraternity brother of ours, anyway, but we had hard liquor in the house. We had a rathskeller in the basement and you were only supposed to have beer, I think it was, in those days, but ... we served everything. ... We would invite faculty members to come with their wives, if we had a weekend party, come over and dance and whatnot, and they would, but we had people at the door. ... When you arrived, they would make a great deal of taking your coat and your hat and your wife's coat and hat and bringing other people up to introduce them and so on. The more time you could spend, the better, because we were pushing a button in the cloakroom, which alerted the people downstairs. So, they got rid of all the hard liquor and put it out of sight [laughter] and, you know, just the beer. [laughter] So, if the Dean got that far, that's all he would see, [laughter] and that's all we would do. Yes, we had a lot of fun.

JS: What was it like to live in the fraternity house? Was it clean? Who cooked the meals? What do you remember about that?

SRC: Well, in our house, we had a couple, Ralph [and Apple], and Apple was the cook and Ralph cleaned the place. He made our beds and so on. We had a dormitory on the third floor, Joe, so, we didn't have beds in our rooms. Each of us had a room with one or two roommates.

That's where you studied. The common rooms, on the first floor, we had a north and a south room, which were living rooms, and then, we had a big dining room, and one nice thing about a fraternity is that you have your meals together and you have breakfast, lunch and dinner as a group. ... If men eat together, there's a lot of camaraderie. Apple would cook the meals, and then, fraternity brothers would be waiters, for which they were either paid or they got meals, or money off their room costs. The camaraderie of a fraternity is something you just can't [describe], if you've never been through it. There's a whole group of fifty or sixty guys who are close. Now, that doesn't mean that you love every one of them, because you don't, but you mentioned cleanliness. In my day, we were clean. Now, the Hartman [case], don't misunderstand, but that was one room, but, Class of '40, we had a Gene Maupai, who was an engineer, as president of the house, and you didn't drop a piece of paper in one of the common rooms without picking it up [laughter] or Gene'd be on you like [that]. So, yes, ... we were neat and clean. Not today, no, but I spent I can't tell you how many years on the board of trustees of the fraternity, ... after the [war], and then, we have a capital fund group and we raised money for capital fund expenditures and that sort of thing, and I served on that for many years. So, I would get back to the house a lot and I would see what was going on and we would try, with the local officers, and we always had a man, either on the staff or in the area, or faculty, who was called a "purple legionnaire." He was an older man who'd act as an advisor to the undergraduates and you would work through him a lot, on things like scholarship, if the scholarship was slipping or something. We would really work hard at those things, but we never had much success with cleaning up the fraternities, the physical stuff and the way kids dress today, on campus even. We never dressed like that. I mean, they look like a bunch of bums, and we've got a college here in town.

KP: Union [County] College.

SRC: Union College. Now, we went down [to the fraternity]. Every year, in the spring, we have a pig dinner, okay, and it goes back to the time of the cannibals and all and the Island of Fiji, ... the Phi Gams are known as Fijis. We have bones through our noses and all that stuff, the girls wear grass skirts and we have parties. We'll have Fiji Island parties. We'll have the grass huts and the grass skirts, but, every spring, we have a pig dinner. A number of the alumni came down and Don (Creighton?), who was a local attorney, ... I guess Don was on the board of trustees down there for many, many years, and he came this one time for the dinner. He always came early. Bob Stiefel, from Class of '40, who was very close to me, he'd come every spring from Texas and live here for a week with me, and I would go down and we'd go early and look at the house and talk to people; absolutely filthy. ... They would say, "Well, gee, we cleaned it up before you came," right. Well, it was so bad, it was so bad, that we have a formal meeting before the dinner, of the alumni, and some of them rose to speak in heat, and I mean heat. They were not going to give another dime, ever, to this house. "This house is just a pigsty," and so on. Well, Vinnie Kramer, a fraternity brother, he was head of Alumni Affairs for so many years, was there and Vinnie would go to a lot of colleges and a lot universities, a lot of campi [campuses], and I asked him, in the meeting, I said, "Well, Vin, how do we compare? You see a lot of fraternities in other campuses. How do we compare with them?" He said, "They're all the same, [laughter] in the North." He said, "Everybody's gone downhill. It's just miserable," but, in the South, no, and the reason is that help down there is so reasonable, and they hire some of these

blacks to come in and be maids and they take care of it for you. That's what you need. The average boy, he's not clean at home. I've got five grandchildren; I see the way they live at home. [laughter] When they go to college, they're not going to change much. So, that's the way it was, yes, but it's a great, great experience.

KP: Are you still involved with the fraternity?

SRC: Not as much. Most of us, from that era, are out now, and younger men are [in], but the activities are still going forward.

KP: It sounds like you still follow your local fraternity.

SRC: Oh, yes, oh, sure, and we stop in at the house, when we go down, and some of my lifelong friends are fraternity brothers, always have been. ... I think I'm much more loyal to the fraternity than I ever was to the University, sure, and it's logical, I think.

KP: Another question I ask everyone is about memories of chapel, which everyone had to go to. What do you remember about chapel?

SRC: We had to go, so, we went, and I liked it. I think that Kirkpatrick Chapel is a lovely place and, when it's filled with students, it's even nicer, and we used to have some very fine services there. ... I came from a very Christian home and a very Christian background and participated in a great many Christian things. I still run religious groups around here and I've been very active in my church. I have a granddaughter at Colgate. She's a sophomore. Her father went to Colgate, and Suzanne is in a group.

KP: Which group is your granddaughter involved in?

SRC: A religious group enthused about the Jimmy Carter project, where they go to build houses.

KP: Habitat for Humanity?

SRC: Habitat for Humanity. Through the religious thing, they've gotten into that and they went down last year, down South. This year, they couldn't get enough at Colgate. She came home to Long Island, where she lives, and got some of her high school friends who are away now at school and they're all going down with her to Habitat, this time. I don't know, Kurt, they're going to be finished in a couple of [weeks]. They're finished ... before the beginning of May up there. When does Rutgers finish?

KP: We only have about two more weeks left.

SRC: Is that right?

JS: We are about the same thing, yes.

SRC: Wow, that's earlier than I ever remember.

KP: The semesters were much longer.

JS: When did they go to, through June?

KP: Early June was graduation.

SRC: Oh, I graduated on May 10th.

KP: However, your graduation was ...

SRC: Yes, a little earlier.

KP: Your year, they sped things up.

SRC: Yes, yes.

KP: We read the *Targums* where Dick Kleiner talks about being the "Class of Forty-tude."

SRC: Yes. I graduated on my birthday, which was May 10th. It was Mother's Day and my graduation day, all one day. [laughter]

KP: You took ROTC, I assume, like everyone else had to.

SRC: Never.

KP: You did not take the initial two years?

SRC: Never.

KP: How did you get excused?

SRC: I had problems, physical problems, which I don't want to go into, but I didn't.

KP: You were also in school when Norway was invaded.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: You probably had relatives, I am assuming, distant ones, but did you have relatives who were in Norway?

SRC: Never had anything to do with that, no. I don't know anything about it.

KP: You did not have any uncles or aunts there.

SRC: I have relatives over there, but I don't know them.

KP: Your family did not stay in touch.

SRC: No.

KP: How did your family feel about Norway being invaded? Did your father and mother discuss it? Did they feel any tie to that?

SRC: My mother, Kurt, hated Germans all her life. I never knew this until later in life, and I said, "Why?" This was before the invasion of Norway, this time, [in 1940], but the Germans are a very militaristic type. Their make-up is that way and they're a takeover kind of people. They put you under their heel and, if you go back in your history, as you have, the hordes from the north were the horrible people and the Germans were some of the worst. They weren't even identified, I guess, as such, but maybe Attila the Hun was worse, but these people were right up there with him. [laughter] ... She hated them, and any peace-loving person would, because they were so aggressive, but she went through World War I and she hated them before that. [laughter] I guess, when they grow up, it's like the people in the South hate the Yankees. You grow up and you don't know why, but you hate them, and it's like that, but I never hated them. Oh, I disliked a couple of German boys I'd have to bang in the ear once in awhile, but I don't mean as a race. But they showed their true colors, and, yet, you can't blame the race entirely.

KP: Growing up, what did you and your parents think of Franklin Roosevelt? You were Republicans in a very Democratic era.

SRC: Both of my folks were Republicans, and they thought the world of him, yes.

KP: Really, even though they were Republicans?

SRC: Oh, he was the savior of the country, really. He really was.

KP: They did not vote for Alf Landon in 1936 or Wendell Willkie in 1940.

SRC: No, no.

KP: Do you remember the visit of Willkie to campus in 1940?

SRC: I don't, but Nancy does. Yes, we have a Willkie button somewhere. [laughter] We have a thing, at New Year's, where we play a game. We put about twenty-five things around in the living room, all in plain sight, and we tell you what they are and you have to go find them, and you'd be surprised how hard [it can be], but the Alf Landon and Willkie buttons are usually there. No, they thought the world of Roosevelt, and I personally think that the country has not accorded him the honor and glory that he deserves. Now, we have a holiday for Martin Luther King and, if you put Martin Luther King's record against that of Roosevelt, it doesn't stand up, and we don't

have any holiday for Franklin Roosevelt and I think we should. I think he's one of the top three Presidents we ever had, Washington and Lincoln and Roosevelt. I don't know if you've seen it, but the current issue of *Time* Magazine has a number of leaders in there and the write-up on Roosevelt was fantastic.

KP: At the time you were going to school, we have looked back at the *Targum*, the majority of your fellow students were in favor of, for example, in 1940, Willkie.

SRC: Never appealed to me. He was a farmer, [laughter] Midwesterner. Roosevelt was my kind of guy. He was a cosmopolitan-type New Yorker, had been a Governor of New York, and he was something else.

JS: Navy man.

SRC: Navy man, had been [Assistant] Secretary of the Navy, overcame tremendous physical problems, and how he ever did that, I don't know, but he was marvelous, yes.

KP: Before leaving Rutgers, I have interviewed both Ralph Schmidt and, also, Ron Jarvis, before he passed away. There was quite a rivalry between the two.

SRC: Was there?

KP: In the Student Council and student government. Do you remember any of that?

SRC: I don't remember it as a rivalry, no.

KP: Basically, they pooled their forces together and compromised, because I have also interviewed; now, I cannot remember his name, but it begins with an "A." He was very active in the class. They basically brokered control of the Student Council. You do not remember that.

SRC: No, no.

KP: One other point that my students and I have noticed, in reading the *Targums*, was that Rutgers had a very active social life. You mentioned some of the fraternity parties, but there also were the dances.

SRC: Oh, sure. We used to go over to Douglass, the [New Jersey] College for Women over there, and they would have little things going on, and there were a couple of places over there where you could go, take a girl, buy her a beer, and then, dance. You could dance to canned music and that sort of thing, and we used to do a lot of that. I didn't have a car, but some of my fraternity brothers did, and I'd either go with them or I would borrow a car, from time-to-time, and several couples would go. We usually went as little groups, that sort of thing, but I think we did all the things you used to do. We'd go down to the shore, still do that, I'm sure, and we would go to football games or basketball games, swimming meets or whatever. So, I think the normal

social activities went on. I don't know. ... Really, as a freshman, I wasn't into women so much. I was still pretty young. [laughter]

JS: Sixteen, right?

SRC: Yes, still very sports-minded. [laughter]

KP: Your wife is from NJC.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: How did you meet? Do you remember?

SRC: I do. I had a fraternity brother who was dating a girl at Douglass and they thought that, "Nancy Squire and Big Chris would get along very well together, so, we should get them together," and they did. I've forgotten what we did. We went to a concert or something, yes, and so, that's what started it. It was broken off a number of times. I mean, it wasn't a straight shot.

KP: It was not a straight ...

SRC: Oh, no. [laughter] Now, I was beginning to notice women, I think I was a junior. Nancy was a freshman, I was a junior. Then, I was a Navy man, you know, too. [laughter]

KP: You obviously stayed in touch.

SRC: I was her real true love, and this girl was very popular. I don't know how many offers of marriage she has had, but she was a very popular girl, and unusually popular with the women. She was president of her freshmen class, and then, again, ... in her senior class. She was president twice of her class at Douglass, and I looked at that and I said, "That's a good thing, because, if a woman can get along with other women, you've really got something," Joe. You really have. I mean, most women get along with men, but to get along with other women is something else and Nancy does that beautifully, and has all her life. It's just one of those things and I think, as the years went by, I began to realize that this was the girl.

KP: When did you get married?

SRC: May 18, 1946, right after the war.

KP: It sounds like there was some correspondence, back and forth, during the war.

SRC: There was, there was. I don't know what happened. John Huntley, she was dating John Huntley, who was a fraternity brother of mine and a classmate of mine, and John was killed, an only son, too. His parents were devastated. I don't know if they ever got over it. ...

KP: Did he die in battle?

SRC: Yes, he was an Army officer in Europe and was killed, but I don't know exactly how. ... Nancy and I had been corresponding off and on, but she wrote to me to tell me that John had been killed. ... From then on, we used to correspond more frequently, and, of course, you think a lot when you're at sea, and you think a lot of pure thoughts, too, that you don't maybe think about in the busy busyness of life here, right. [laughter]

KP: People who have been at sea have told me that the days are very long and the seas are calm and there is not much to do, except for your routine duties.

SRC: Well, it's a starlit night and you're out in the middle of the Pacific somewhere, chugging away, and you go up on deck, with or without a buddy, and you think. ... If you go up there with another man and start to talk, particularly a man that you're close to, and I was very close to my cabin mate, we would talk about life and, if you talk with people, too, under circumstances like that, they're more honest and direct than they might be otherwise. Their veneers are gone and they talk about what they really, really feel. So, it's a wonderful experience, particularly if you're young, to examine your entire life and your goals and why you're here and what you expect to do and, if you survive the war, what will you do, where will you go, and how will you do it and what are you after, that kind of thing. This one cabin mate of mine was very musical. He's the kind of fellow, we'd be sitting here, talking, and, if there was some music out over there, he'd say, "Oh, did you hear that?" It might be something from Mozart, or something. [laughter] ... He'd pick that up. He played a trumpet beautifully, a big man, and I guess Mack was six-[foot]-four, something like that. ... I guess, if a man is sweet, he was a sweet man; he was a very naive kind of a guy, in some ways. His father ... headed up the Geology Department at the University of Kentucky and Mack became a geologist himself. He survived the war, but he was out in the Black Hills of South Dakota and he was standing up in a jeep and he was tossed out and he landed on his neck and it killed him. So, I met his folks in New York. I'd never met them before and, when they came to New York, they called me and I went in and had dinner with them one night, and we commiserated with each other, but he was a wonderful man. ...

KP: How old was he when he died? It sounds like he was very young.

SRC: Yes, he was. Well, he graduated from Kentucky, he was in Navy, so, he must have been, what, twenty-three? Whatever he was, [he died] right after the war.

KP: Yes. It was literally a few months after the war.

SRC: Oh, yes, right after the war, terrific man. I taught him to box; well, what little boxing he could pick up. I boxed all my life and I'm very clever with my hands and he wanted ... me to teach him. So, I taught him, but he was not really a fighting man, and he'd get frustrated, because we didn't punch each other, we'd tap. ... I'd tap him five times on the jaw and he wouldn't hit me at all, and he'd reach out and he'd grab me, and then, try to throw me over his hip. He was so frustrated. [laughter] One day, ... Commander White, who was the executive officer of the ship, was watching us and he says, "Hey, Mack, that's not the way to fight." [laughter] He said, "Kick him, kick him." [laughter]

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

KP: This continues an interview with Sigurd Robert Christensen, on April 20, 1998, in Cranford, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JS: ... Joseph Scott.

KP: Do you remember where you were when you learned the news of Pearl Harbor?

SRC: I do. I was in a car on Albany Street, down by the railroad station, with some fraternity brothers of mine, and we heard the news on the radio. Yes, that's where we were.

JS: Did it surprise you? Was it from left field or did you kind of see it coming?

SRC: [laughter] Terrible. Nobody expected anything like that, no, total and complete surprise, yes, and absolutely unnecessary, as you know. We just weren't prepared for it. [laughter] We should have been.

KP: Had you followed world events at all? Had you read the paper regularly when you were going to Rutgers?

SRC: Some, some. ... We had draft numbers.

KP: For the peacetime draft?

SRC: Yes, and, because of that, we followed some. ...

KP: You were saying that you had draft numbers for the peacetime draft. You followed that.

SRC: Yes, ... that gave us a little interest, because that was it, but ... we weren't that close and there wasn't that much going on that involved the United States. So, we were students first, really, yes. Of course, we followed some of the international news and whatnot.

KP: You saw the war as very distant.

SRC: Yes, I think so.

KP: What did you think would happen to you after Pearl Harbor? You ultimately did finish up the semester, but did you think you would be in the military soon? What did you think would happen to you?

SRC: I didn't. I've forgotten what my number was, Kurt, but it wasn't anything that was that imminent. There were men going all around me, but I wasn't that concerned, apparently, at that time. ... I graduated, I went to work for General Electric, up in Bridgeport, Connecticut, as an

accountant, and was there and it was lovely. We had a house up there. We had five engineers and five accountants, and a Mrs. Murphy was our lady who came in. ... She would cook dinner for us and she would clean the house. I was treasurer, again. So, I would work with her on the monies and she would say, "Gee, Mr. Christensen, I spent every dollar you gave me. I mean, I just didn't take it home or anything," and I'd say, "Well, I don't intend to convey to you that you did, Mrs. Murphy. I just wondered where the three dollars went, that's all," [laughter] or whatever. She was very, very upset about keeping any books. Any books got her all upset. ... One weekend, I figured, "Gee, I'd better do something and I want to be in the Navy. I don't want to be in the Army." So, I went down to Pine Street, in New York, this one weekend, and enlisted in the Navy and I came back to the house, up in Bridgeport, and the guys said, "Oh, it's good you weren't here. The Army came looking for you," [laughter] and they had, that weekend. They were looking for me. They came to the house. So, I just made it.

KP: How did you get the job at GE? How did that come about?

SRC: Oh, just applications. They came on campus, and General Electric was a good company, so, I went up there.

KP: Some people said it was hard to get a job, because they expected you would go into service.

SRC: Yes, yes, that's true, but I was a very desirable guy, I guess, and they looked beyond the years, the war years, too. One of the avenues up with General Electric, at that time, was through auditing, and you had to put in a certain amount of time as an accountant, and then, they would make you a junior auditor and you would go around to different plant locations and audit the books. ... After a certain number of years, you'd become a senior auditor, and then, you would go into top management. The other main way up was through manufacturing. So, I started on my road with GE at that time. [laughter]

KP: What was a typical day like when you were working there? What kind of work were you doing?

SRC: Accounting work.

KP: Accounting.

SRC: We had calculators. We didn't have computers or anything.

KP: And you had big ledger books.

SRC: [laughter] Yes, but we would get up in the morning and, I guess she was there, Mrs. Murphy would be there to get breakfast for us, and then, we would all drive out together to the plant and the engineers would go engineer and we would go do our accounting. ... We'd have lunch, of course, at the plant, and then, we'd come back at night and have dinner, usually at the house, and, if you wanted to go out on a date or whatever, why, you did that, and, if you wanted to study or work, ... well, you did that. There was nothing; we really didn't watch television or

anything like that. I mean, there was really nothing like that that we did. ... One of us would put on a cocktail party every Friday night, and for not only all the others, but there were a number of "alumni" who had lived there and had gotten married. If you got married, you had to leave, and so, they all came back with their wives, and all the tradesmen would come. In other words, you had your suit cleaned. Well, the cleaner would bring your suit back at that time on Friday night, to make sure he made the party, [laughter] and you could serve anything. I used to serve a variety of things. One fellow only served Alexanders, [a brandy-based cocktail], and I never liked that night that much, because I didn't like Alexanders, [laughter] but it was a good time, good times, yes, and we had a big house. We had fires in the fireplaces. Saturday afternoon, another fellow, a Michigan boy, and I would go, we dated two models, New York models, and they were beautiful girls, but one of them's father lived in Westport. He had about eighteen acres and he was a Frenchman. He ran or owned the largest florist in the city, in Manhattan, but Bill and I would go out on Saturday afternoon and we would chop wood for the fireplace and listen to the football game on the car radio. [laughter] ... Then, we'd come back to the house, usually around dusk, after the game was over, and this one girl's father couldn't wait for us. He just couldn't wait until we got back. All over the house, he had these huge paintings of battles of Napoleon's, like Lodi, and we had to take bourbon and drink a toast in front of every one of the battles. [laughter] Well, you can imagine, we'd get pretty well swacked after you made the rounds, and so was he. You know, we just loved that. So, then, we'd sit down and chat for awhile and sober up, and then, we'd go home, [laughter] or go out with the girls, I don't remember, but it was a very, very nice life. General Electric had this place, and then, they had another one down at the seashore. A friend of mine from town here lived there and that's really nice. ... It's like a small fraternity, Joe, and their location was even nicer than ours. Ours was in the city, but ours was handier, yes.

KP: The house was owned by GE.

SRC: No, no. We rented it.

KP: You rented it.

SRC: Yes, but GE provided the facility, through the personnel department, to keep it going. We didn't have to go get new men or anything like that. That was done [for us].

KP: They would send new people over to fill in when people left. When you left, someone took your place.

SRC: ... Sure. You would come in and you want to do accounting work and you're looking for housing and, if there was an opening here, they would say, "Well, there's an opening here, if it's ... of interest to you," and you'd say, "Gee, that sounds great. I'd like to do that." So, then, you're in.

JS: Did you have a car at that point?

SRC: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We had everything.

JS: What kind?

SRC: Oh, an old Ford, "Bullet-Backed" Ford. [laughter]

KP: Did you sell it before you went into the service?

SRC: Yes, they dumped it, but they were getting [scarce]. The prices were going up. They were hard to get.

KP: You enlisted in September 1942. You would finally actually enter service December 7, 1942, which is a memorable day.

SRC: Right, a year later, a year after Pearl Harbor.

KP: Where did you report to? Did you report to Columbia University?

SRC: Columbia University, yes, Line Officers' School.

KP: What do you remember about Line Officers' School?

SRC: It was terrific. It was terrific.

KP: In the notes that you prepared for this interview, one of the things you remember is that you had very little free time.

SRC: Yes. We were very structured and, well, it's like the Academy, I guess, we went through that kind of thing every day. We would get up at a certain hour and we would report for breakfast, but we didn't just report. You had to go out and get in line and march. You would march to breakfast, [laughter] ... you marched to classes and you did everything by the numbers. We didn't have bands or anything. It was just a, "Hup-hup-hup-ho." We had our own officers that were appointed by the officers in charge there. They would appoint certain of us midshipmen as officers, and then, we would follow what they told us to do. All of the courses that you took were structured. You took ordnance, gunnery, you took communications and navigation, and they'd been doing it this way for a hundred years, I guess. ... We were just another group and they had three months, ninety days, to turn us out in some kind of naval officer form. We had to get enough so [that] we could go out and at least command a group of men and not look totally lost, but, understand, you walk in, you don't know that a hall is really a passageway and you don't really know that a stairway is a ladder, right. So, you've got all of those terms and things that you have to learn and you have to start thinking Navy. I've been around the water a lot, all my life, having been at the seashores for so many years is helpful. It's very helpful, because a lot of the phraseology in a private ship, a private boat, is used in the regular Navy. Maybe it came from there, I don't know, but, so, I wasn't totally at a loss, but you take some boy from Iowa, you put him in Columbia Line Officers' School for ninety days and, [if] you're going to turn out a naval officer, you've got some turning out to do. [laughter] ...

Fortunately, you're working with college graduates, so, you've got some smarts. Fortunately, the classes and the courses have been tried and tried and tried and you know what works, for the great majority, not everybody, but the great majority.

JS: You were pretty confident in the education you received in those ninety days.

SRC: Oh, yes. If I had gone the line officer way, I would have been all right. The only problem I would have had, Joe, was communication. ... You can learn the "dits" and "dots" and all that, and I was okay with the key, but, when I got to the blinker, this is a "dit" and that's a "dot," [laughter] when it got to blinking, ... I had a lot of trouble with that. So, I would go home. For example, I could go home Saturday afternoon. I'd go to Staten Island, because I was in the city, and I'd be sitting on the Staten Island Ferry boat, "dit-dot," and then, "dit-dot," and flashing. Everywhere you went, you brought this damn thing with you, to practice. You didn't have any other time, but it was nice. I liked the naval uniform, first of all. I think it's the most beautiful uniform of them all and, immediately, [when] you go in as a midshipmen, you get a naval officer's uniform. No stripes, but midshipmen officers get a naval officers uniform. The great coat is the same as an officer's great coat, the cap is the same. So, you immediately feel like an officer, and I liked that, and I liked to walk down a street and have people look at me and think, "That's a pretty good-looking officer." So, I was very proud of that. When we got together, I'd go home, say, Saturday, we had to be back at eight o'clock Sunday night, in formation, eight o'clock, and you'd better not miss it. So, you'd get there, and then, we would march over to the Riverside Church for a service, and that was gorgeous. I just loved that. Some nights, it would be snowing [laughter] and, up that way, the brights, there are no neon lights, dull streetlights there. It's sort of half light, and we would be swinging along in the cadence, maybe there was snow on the ground, and you'd go into that church and we filled the church, up in the balconies, too. So, there, you had all these naval men up there and we'd sing and you hear them sing *The Navy Hymn*. I mean, you really know that you've got something going. Yes, it was very good. So, those were very happy days.

KP: You mentioned people from Iowa who were not familiar with Navy terms. I take it that your class had people from all over the country.

SRC: Oh, sure.

KP: Many of them had probably never been to New York.

SRC: No. [laughter] That's some adjustment, when you think of it, yes, the adjustment just to New York City, let alone from civilian [life].

KP: For you, you were a New Yorker, this was your backyard.

SRC: Oh, I'm a New Yorker. I'm a city boy, yes, oh, yes. I needed no adjustment at all. [laughter]

KP: Did anyone wash out from Line Officers' School?

SRC: Oh, sure.

KP: How would people get cut? What would be the reasons?

SRC: Well, they couldn't pass tests.

KP: You mentioned that you had a problem with the Morse code and the lights.

SRC: Yes. If you can't pass that; well, ... they might slide you by on something like that, the blinker, they might slide you by, because you're not going to blink anyhow. You've got signalmen that do that. They're just trying to make you familiar, really, but, in gunnery, you'd better know what you're doing, ... because you're giving the orders in gunnery, right, and you'd better know, and, if you don't pass gunnery, you don't pass and you don't graduate; you don't become an officer. So, it's that kind of thing. We had, well, it was up at Harvard, but we had a guy that couldn't swim. I mean, he really couldn't swim and, in the Navy, you've got to be able to swim, ... if your ship goes [down], [laughter] but they passed him. It was a terrible thing, and he was a roommate of mine for six months up there, too, Marv Bierman. His ship was sunk off Iwo [Jima] and he couldn't swim, Kurt, and he drowned.

KP: Oh, he ...

SRC: He drowned, yes, and I didn't know about it. I got back to Pearl one time and I'd asked about him and his ship and they said that he had drowned. So, you have things like that. He was a wonderful guy, from Georgia, but things like that would wash you out, or insubordination.

KP: Did you have some ...

SRC: "Hey, yes, I don't need to take that from you or anybody else. What do you mean?" [pretends to spit on the floor], [laughter] you know, yes, and there were guys that could get like that, sure, or you're a drunk. They don't know you're a drunk when you're taking tests and all. The medic'll always pass on you, and you come in and you go out and, gee, every time you report to formation, you're reeling, things like that. You'd get the hook real fast. [laughter]

KP: You also mentioned, in creating your talking points, that you took the malaria shots and you dreamed of earthquakes all the time.

SRC: [laughter] Yes. There's a physical reaction from malaria shots that makes you shake, and we were in tiered cots, we had one over the other, see. ... I had malaria shots this one time, my bunkmate ... had not, and I was in the upper bunk and the bunk went like this [shook] all night. It just shook all night long, [laughter] and he, in his sleep, kept dreaming of earthquakes. [laughter] They're tough shots, malaria.

KP: You remember them after fifty years.

SRC: Oh, yes, and I've had some since, because I've been around the world a couple of times. ... We'd go up to Newark Airport, if you're going to India. We'll call them up there and say, "We're going to India. What shots do we need?" and they will tell us, and then, we can go into a clinic up there, and no appointment, and they'd give us the shots. Now, it may take two or three series. It doesn't always have to be. ... We'd get the proper shots, but they handle flight personnel around the world and I was in there one time and there were workers going over to Cairo to do some work, and construction men, and they were getting shots.

KP: Did you hope to be a line officer? Was that what you expected?

SRC: I expected to be, yes.

KP: What type of ship did you hope to be on?

SRC: A battleship. [laughter]

KP: What you expected often did not match what you got.

SRC: Yes, or a carrier, yes, one or the other.

KP: You wanted a big ship.

SRC: I wanted a big ship, yes.

KP: When did you learn that you were not going to get a line officer's position, but, then, you would be sent to Harvard, or did you apply to Harvard, to the supply school?

SRC: No, no. The Supply Corps has existed for a great many years. It goes back to, well, the formation of the Navy. You have to get [into] what pursers did for ships, but there never was any kind of a decent school for a Supply Corps officer and he had to do a lot of things. So, they would bring in people who had been in transportation or they'd bring in people who had been in food, marketing or something like that, and teach them a few Navy things, and then, say, "Here you are. You're on your own." Well, they got all kinds of strange results from that. So, they started schools, but they weren't very good, and they weren't very good up until, I'll say, the '50s, at least. They went down to Philadelphia Navy Yard in the early '30s and they went there for a couple of months. It's like the Army Quartermaster [School]. It's about a four-month school and the Supply Corps was about a three-month school, at that time. Well, this one captain was a terrific man, and I had his name here, [he] decided, in his great wisdom, and he was very wise, that, ... "We need a school that's longer than three months and a school that is going to produce broader people." His name was [K. C.] McIntosh. He was a captain in the Navy and, when I knew him, he was retired up there, but he worked on the Navy for, I don't know how many years, maybe fifteen or twenty years, to bring this about and, finally, because of the war and because of some things that Harvard agreed to do, he was able to effect this and started a year-long course. That course encompassed all of the Supply Corps teaching, all of the courses of the Supply Corps, and all of the first- and second-year Graduate School of Business courses, finance,

transportation, all kinds of stuff, and they squeezed it into one year. ... They got approval along about June of this one year and we were the first class, but they got approval and they set up the curricula, professors were assigned and all that. The Navy assigned people and they went to Columbia and interviewed men in the Line Officers' School and they wanted ninety of us, and they went to Northwestern and they wanted ninety out of Northwestern. Well, there were hundreds of guys who interviewed and I was fortunate to be one of the ninety who was chosen from Columbia. So, we then transferred up to Harvard and the boys came in from Northwestern and there were 180 of us, approximately, that formed that first class, and we were midshipmen still. Some of the guys were lawyers, a number of them were professional people. One fellow had run, I remember, a bicycle factory for Sears Roebuck. [laughter] One fellow was a customs inspector on the US-Canadian border. As a matter-of-fact, he turned out to be number one in our class, that guy. ... (Jensen?) was his name. I never would have believed it, because we had some very bright guys. So, we arrived and we went into our dormitories and we started into our classes and the professors up there didn't know what they had. They'd never seen anything like us before. So, they threw everything [at us]. It really was brutal. [laughter] They threw everything at us that they possibly could and we fielded everything that we possibly [could]. They couldn't believe, sometimes, that we could do it, but we did it. We didn't know any better. [laughter]

KP: How many hours would you have class a week?

SRC: All day.

KP: You would go from nine to five, or did you start earlier?

SRC: Oh, yes, all day, and we'd study at night.

KP: What about Saturday? Did you have Saturday classes?

SRC: Saturday, we did. About the only time we had off was Sunday, but that wasn't off, because we were studying then, too, but we used the Harvard Case [Study] system. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but it's like law school. When you go to law school, you don't really study by yourself. You have to get a cadre of people, a group, and we had about eight or ten in my dormitory and we would work together. You'd get a case and the question is, "Do you buy the machine or don't you buy the machine?" So, what we would do, half of us would say, "Yes," and half of us would say, "No," and we would make all the arguments for it, and then, we'd get together and we'd argue it out. So, now, you're familiar with both sides. Then, you get to the classroom and the professor would say, "Scott, tell me about your side," and you would go over it, and then, they'd say, "Christensen, do you agree?" "Hell no," [laughter] or whatever you said, and that's the way they teach. It's a great way to teach, it really is, but it's tough and we had guys that didn't make it, but, by and large, almost all of us did. It was wonderful.

KP: What was the hardest course for you?

SRC: I think finance, but not because the material was difficult, Kurt. I'll tell you what was hard for me. We had the most boring professor you can imagine, a tall man, sort of a Victorian-type, a stentorian-type of voice, and he lectured, never asked anybody a question. In most classes, we were answering questions, and all that; he lectured, and then, he would snap his notes together and leave the room. But we got together at four o'clock in the afternoon for fifty minutes. I sat, I remember, in the front row. The row curved around, I sat right about there. The sun came through a window, through the drapes, right in my face, right in my eyes, and, usually, I'd been working hard the night before and the night before that, studying or whatever, and I'd get sleepy and that is the worst thing. You're sitting there with the sun and your head is nodding up and down, right, and this voice is going on and you really can't keep your head up, and you're in the front row. [laughter] ... He'd go along, and then, he'd glare at me; oh, terrible. I got a "B," I think, or something, in that course. It was the lowest mark, and I deserved it, yes. It wasn't that I didn't know the material, but he was fed up with me, I think. [laughter] ...

KP: You remember that there were a number of gamblers in the group you were with.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: That is one of my images of World War II, I have to confess, from a lot of old movies. You bring some military people together and the cards come out, dice come out. In fact, you saw that, it sounds like more at Harvard than at Columbia.

SRC: Yes, and the game, most often, was craps. Some guys would play poker, but it was a quickie. You got together for a half an hour or something, and you finished studying, you're going to bed, "But let's have a game," that kind of thing, and pretty big money, too, yes. I remember a boy from Texas who bet pretty heavily, and they had had experience before. ... This wasn't a new thing. They were gamblers from the word "go." They'd bet everything, horses and cars and everything. So, it was fun. It was a relaxation for them.

KP: Did you gamble at all?

SRC: Very little, very little. I might put a couple of bucks in a crap game, but I didn't really understand the odds, and poker was really not one of my games at all and I hated to lose money. I really did. [laughter] I didn't have that much. [laughter]

KP: Boston is a great town.

SRC: Oh, terrific.

KP: Bob McCloughan was in a similar program up at Harvard for the Army.

SRC: Bob who?

KP: Bob McCloughan, from your class.

SRC: Oh, yes, I know him.

KP: He has fond memories of happy hours and some of the hotels.

SRC: Yes. He was in Quartermasters' School up there. That was four months, I think.

KP: Yes. That was not as long as your program.

SRC: Oh, no. He was up there when I was up there, as a matter-of-fact.

KP: Could you maybe talk a little bit about some of the social life, because you occasionally would get a night off or a Sunday afternoon off? What were some of the things that you would do while you were in Boston?

SRC: Well, ... some of our men were married, so, they just went with their wives, wherever they went, and the first six months, we lived on campus, on the "B" School [campus]. The second six months, we could go anywhere we wanted to, and I went across the river into a dormitory which was over the Hasty Pudding Club, which was part of Harvard, but not the "B" School, and it was like a BOQ over there, bachelor officers' quarters. We met some very fine people who were Boston elite. There, as you know, are debutantes in New York, Boston, and they were coming out and there weren't many men around. So, we were welcome, not only welcome, but they really wanted us badly, and the overtures from them were just marvelous. ... So, we spent a great deal of time, some of my buddies and I, with this kind of person, both at their homes and the parties. They still had some socials called *soirees*, and the *soirees* are held in the drawing room of a beautiful complex apartment in Beacon Hill and you go and you meet people, a cross-section of society that runs from financiers to the arts. You know, you'll find professors, you'll find writers, you'll find all kinds of people, fascinating scene. I happened to date, a lot, a girl by the name of Sally (West?), whose father was into investments. He was in the investment field in Boston. Her uncle was the treasurer of Harvard University and we would make the rounds with her friends and, sometimes, there'd be a non-naval type, but a lot of times, there'd be other naval officers. So, we had a ball, I mean, a very heavy social schedule. When the weather was good, like in summer, some of these people had homes down toward Cape Cod, not on Cape Cod, but toward Cape Cod. There were wetlands and fens in that particular area, and they would have these gorgeous, big homes, and then, they'd have walkways down to the water and you could go out and swim in the fens and they would have boats, sailboats or whatever. ... We'd spend weekends down there. One of Sally's friends' fathers was the executive vice-president of RCA and, I remember, he came down to breakfast one Sunday morning, his wife was there, and it was the kind of breakfast where they had sideboards and help to serve at the sideboards. [laughter] ... She was there at the table and we were seated at that point and he came in and walked up to her, gave her a, "Good morning," waved to us and said, "That gift I was talking about, I haven't been able to decide which stone to give you," and so, he flips open this jewelry case. There are three diamonds and two opals and a couple of rubies. Then, he said, "You may pick two," [laughter] which she did, and then, he came out with settings. ... That kind of stuff I didn't see normally. [laughter] We came in one evening, I remember, to that house, Sally and I and her friend and another guy, another Mack, and we came in the house and the father was up in the study, in his

study, which was lined with books from the floor to the ceiling. He's sitting there, reading Shakespeare and listening to classical music, all by himself. [laughter] I mean, that's the kind of people they were, just terrific. So, that was a cross-section of life that I had never been exposed to, some in New York, but ... nothing like that quite.

KP: It sounds like for very unique reasons, because, in fact, there was an absence of men.

SRC: Sure, a unique reason, yes, and Sally and I actually became engaged. We had a big engagement party and all that, and then, after a few weeks, decided that, really, we had been a little too hasty, but a lovely, lovely girl. I mean, we were still friends.

KP: Was it mutual? Did you both decide that, "This is unique, why we are engaged?"

SRC: Yes. Just as we'd decided we should, we kind of mutually decided we shouldn't. I think she had everything a woman [could], beauty, and ... she was just a lovely girl, but, from my standpoint, she was not as cosmopolitan as I wanted a girl to be. She ... still had some growing to do, and whether she would grow as much as I wanted, I didn't know, and that was an underneath kind of thing. You can't say that to a girl, but I think I had seen more in her, initially, than actually was there. She ... didn't go to college. Up there, they have private finishing schools and she had gone to a finishing school, was still going, but a lovely girl and a lot of friends, and we had a marvelous time.

KP: Yes, it sounds like it.

SRC: I mean, it doesn't sound like wartime, does it?

KP: Your experiences are not that different. Other people have had similar stories.

SRC: Amazing, yes.

KP: You also have fond memories of the Boston Pops and the Commons.

SRC: Oh, yes, sure. We still watch it on TV. They have Boston Pops on TV. We watch that, Nan and I.

KP: You also mentioned in your talking points, "First salute by an enlisted man, Gil, after I made ensign, cost me a dollar." What does that mean?

SRC: Yes. Oh, ... you go into the auditorium, all right, and you're all made ensign, okay. ... [laughter] Then, you come out and, here, see Gil there, [in a photograph], saluting us? We're coming out of the auditorium; he salutes every one of us. That's the first salute we've had, "Cost you a dollar." [laughter] Yes, very enterprising, these fellows, [laughter] and you're glad to give it to him, sure.

KP: In many ways, you were fortunate, because people pay good money for a traditional Harvard Business School curriculum, but you also had the Navy training, and you did a lot in a year. What did you learn in terms of the traditional Navy?

SRC: The whole thing.

KP: What specific things did you learn, as someone who has never been in the Navy?

SRC: Oh, you're not familiar with the Supply Corps officers' training?

KP: It is more for the people who are reading the transcripts, who will definitely not be, for the most part.

SRC: Okay. I told you the Supply Corps goes back over many, many years and the responsibilities of the Supply Corps have increased as the Navy had increased. ... During World War II, most of the fighting was in the Pacific, by the Navy. Sure, they took part some in the Atlantic and [in] some of the landings in Europe, but the big sweeps were in the Pacific. The sweep of distances was so great that it's almost inconceivable that they were able to supply the islands and the ships as they did. Remember, everything, pretty much, was coming from the United States and had to go out to New Caledonia, or wherever it would be. [laughter] ... We were progressing. ... The line of supply was getting longer and longer and longer. At the start of the war, there were some supply officers. At the end of the war, there were 17,500, which shows you the growth that was necessary because of the growth of the Navy. ...

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

SRC: The movement of the Navy was such that, when, back in the early years, it was all defensive. We were attacked at Pearl Harbor, then, we lost down in the Coral Sea and we were on the defensive. Our ships were gone, except for a few, like the *Mississippi*. The *Mississippi* happened to be up in Iceland at the time, so, she wasn't involved, and we were all defensive. Then, slowly, we went from ... defensive [to] offensive and, when I came aboard and started out, it was all offensive. It was all one way and we were moving. So, I really came in at the right time, but we were moving from island to island, point to point, and the ships were growing and growing in size. Now, we had these huge, huge troopships and all, because we're bringing troops now, to land and take over these places. The logistics problems were just cataclysmic, and we were warned, when we were in school, they said, "You're going out and you're going to assume responsibility beyond anything you have ever begun to imagine, and far beyond your years, but you're going to do it and you're going to do it well and, if you don't, you're going to hurt the reputation of this school. So, get out there and do it." [laughter] "Whoa."

KP: Since you are responsible for supplies, how did the Navy do supply? How does it work? How did they teach you how it was supposed to work?

SRC: Well, they already have a lot of supply depots and so on, but you have to learn all about ordering, you have to learn all about what is available, and, later, we went to computers, so that

we knew where there was stuff anywhere in the Pacific. In other words, if I couldn't get it at Pearl or I couldn't get it at Iwo or Guam, I knew I could get it down in Caledonia or someplace. So, they teach you that, but it's out of order. They teach you how to disperse and they teach you how to handle requests from different groups, and then, fill the requests, and all of this, Kurt, has to be done in advance. You've got to have the stuff there when they need it, not afterward. You've got to have it before they need it, really. So, there's a lot of anticipation that you have to do. Then, in addition to that, I was dispersing officer, which meant I handled the money, paid everybody on the ship. So, we had 3,500 people whom I paid, including the Skipper, and then, I paid a lot of other ships. In other words, I'd go over to them and run a pay line for them, and we would also provision other ships. We'd give them food and we'd give them material, we would give them fuel. We would refuel at sea. There were ships that never came back, they never went anywhere, because we re-provisioned them, we refueled them, and, like, destroyers were out on the point, on guard duty and so on, they never saw a port, never saw a supply depot. They saw us. That was all. [laughter] Yes, so, it's that kind of thing, but you learned that in school, but, then, when you go out, you're not alone.

KP: How did the theory in school match up with the actual things you did? It did.

SRC: Well, you've got forms for how you do it and all this, and then, you go out and people are doing it. So, you're not re-inventing the wheel. I went out and relieved an officer and he had his organization. The supply organization existed already, so, it wasn't that I had to set it up or anything, and they were working and you just fill in and do what he was doing.

KP: Is there anything that you had to learn, as they say, on-the-job, that they did not teach you in school?

SRC: Oh, sure.

KP: What were the things that they did not teach you? When you thought back, there were certain things in life that you figured out that no one taught you, but you learned the lesson.

SRC: Well, like anything else, you don't do things by rote. It may be in the book that you do it that way, but you don't. I need something and it says, "Well, you send it through to an NAVCOM [naval communication] here or there and they'll provide it," and you get a thing back and it says, "Six weeks delay," or something. No good, you're leaving in two days. [laughter]

KP: Six weeks will not do.

SRC: No, no. So, then, you put your boys to work [laughter] and they'll come up with something in three hours. [laughter]

KP: I have interviewed a number of people and found that there was quite a bit of trading. You would have things that other ships and other branches want. In fact, you engaged in similar deal making.

SRC: Sure, yes, and, ... somehow, I don't know why, but we always had a superior position. I mean, a battleship does. Why? I don't know. The only ones that were better than we were the depots themselves, yes.

KP: However, you were better than even an aircraft carrier, in terms of trading.

SRC: Yes, yes. [laughter]

KP: Paul Rork told me about one deal he had done, in trading with the Army, and it was amazing what a few eggs could buy you in some other supplies.

SRC: Sure, oh, sure, yes. [laughter] ...

KP: They do not tell you any of that in school.

SRC: Oh, no. You learned all that, and I'd been in business, I'd been in plants, I'd been around.

KP: Also, on a very basic level, you had run a kitchen. You picked that up.

SRC: Sure, [laughter] like storekeepers, gee, they would [whisper], "Hey, Mr. C." "Yes?" "We made some pies today. Would you like a piece of apple pie, the special piece?" I said, "Yes, sure." So, they'd take me back and give me a piece of apple pie that was laced with whiskey. Now, where the hell did he get whiskey? You know, they're not supposed to have whiskey onboard a ship, right, but they had whiskey, [laughter] and I'm the division officer and they're giving me pie laced with whiskey. Yes, so, they don't teach you that in school. [laughter]

KP: Before leaving supply school, one of the memories you have is of Winston Churchill coming to Boston, hearing his address. Do you remember that?

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: You were in uniform.

SRC: Oh, sure, we were there. It was summer. We all gathered in Harvard Yard and he spoke. He was; well, you have to know that, to me, he's the "man of the century," no question. I just think he's the man of the century, and there he was, a moving person and just as spitting an image as he could be. I mean, he was Winston Churchill all throughout. He was marvelous, and not a [missed] note. He just spoke beautifully, and we were all there and he left. It was just a stop he made, but he was visiting the United States. Why he was in Boston, I don't know, but somebody was able to get him out to the oldest university in the country [laughter] and I was there, so, I lucked out,. There's a picture of him in here.

KP: Do you remember what he talked about?

SRC: No, no, but it was "V for Victory" stuff. He was always [laughter] showing you the "V for Victory," [laughter] and, "We have to muddle through." [laughter]

KP: In terms of supply school, is there anything else we forgot to ask you about?

SRC: No, I don't think so. I put down here a lot of my things. Did we cover these? The quality, I think the quality of the Harvard faculty, Kurt, ... stood out, no question.

KP: As I said, you got an MBA education and got paid to do it. Admittedly, you had to wear a uniform and salute.

SRC: Oh, yes. You could go back. After the war, I re-contacted Harvard and said, "Should I come back for the second year?" and they said, "No, there's no need. You've already had everything we can give you." So, that was great. So, I have an MBA, which was free, which only took a year, [laughter] and we had the best faculty I've ever seen. They were really great.

KP: In business, not so much the Navy, but in business, what was the most useful thing you learned at Harvard?

SRC: Accounting, I think the accounting, yes, (Tom Saunders?) and his class.

KP: That really kept you in good shape.

SRC: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, he was terrific and he was not a dreamer. He was a very pragmatic man and right down to Earth.

KP: You graduated from Harvard and you were commissioned June 1, 1943.

SRC: Right.

KP: On January 25th, you graduated from Supply Corps School and you reported to the USS *Mississippi*, "For duty as assistant for dispersing and assistant to the supply officers and relief for Lieutenant, JG, Wallace E. Woods, US Naval Reserve," and you then traveled by troop train across the United States from New York to San Francisco and reported to the 12th Naval District. You stayed in a suite in the Clift Hotel until March 19th. Before talking about sailing across the Pacific, had you traveled across the country before?

SRC: No.

KP: You mentioned that your parents had a vacation home in Long Island, but did you take any long-distance vacations growing up?

SRC: No. I traveled the East Coast, oh, maybe as far south as Georgia and as far north as Maine, but, no, not much else interior.

KP: What was your trip out West like?

SRC: It was awful. It was on a troop train and I thought, "We must be halfway there. What state are we in?" "Well, you're still in Pennsylvania." [laughter] "Pennsylvania must be the longest state in the Union," I said. [laughter] "We're still here, like, two days or so. We're still in Pennsylvania," but it seemed to take forever, and we would stop at these little stations, once in awhile, and, bless their hearts, there'd be these ladies there, with sandwiches or coffee or something like that.

KP: You did not have a berth. You had the hardback seats.

SRC: I think that's all we had, as I recall, and I remember, at one stop, a lady gave me an olive, wool, sleeveless sweater that she had knitted. I still have it.

KP: Really, after all these years?

SRC: Yes, I still have it. It's got some moth holes in it, but I still have it, and I just thought that was great, and we got out to Provo, Utah. It was night and we were allowed off the train and I looked around and there was one sign, one neon sign, said, "Diner." So, we all headed for that, and we got there. Well, it was more of a gambling house than it was a diner. About three-quarters of it was tables of one sort or another and some of the guys bet and so on. I had something to eat, I think, but everything, ... all the money, was silver dollars, and I never encountered that. They didn't have any dollar bills or anything. Everything was done in silver dollars and I came out of there with about six or seven silver dollars in my pocket. I thought I was going to lose my shoulder, it weighed so much. How they could handle that stuff, I don't know, terribly clumsy, but that's where it was. Then, we got to San Francisco. That's a city. I really like San Francisco. It's a little New York, to me, and we had a wonderful time.

KP: You spent a little time there, because you got there on the 12th and you were staying in the Clift Hotel until March 19th. [laughter] What would you do? You were basically waiting for transport.

SRC: [laughter] Just waiting for transport, yes.

KP: You would report in in the morning.

SRC: Didn't even have to do that.

KP: Really?

SRC: They knew where I was. [laughter] "You're on your own," and getting paid. It was wonderful. So, we spent a lot of time in gyms. We did a lot of basketball and that sort of thing, volleyball, and wandering around, and then, at night, we'd go to the bars and look at the ladies and all that, have a few drinks, but it's a wonderful town. I like San Francisco. I've been back many, many times, yes, and stayed at the old hotel, [laughter] but it's nice, and then, the Navy's

responsibility is to get you transportation, and they came up with this troopship. ... That was something, loaded with troops. There were a few naval officers on it and this one officer and I played backgammon every day, all day, half the night, sitting out on the deck. What else are you going to do? You read every magazine there was, and this one ship, she had a five-inch gun on the bow, no other armament at all, no other escort at all. We were alone in the Pacific and she would have a path where, like a snake across the ocean, she'd keep turning to change the wake. Well, you could see the wake from horizon to horizon. [laughter] In other words, you weren't hiding anything, and we said, "Oh, my God, if a submarine or any kind of an enemy ship comes along, we're gone." Well, we did go very far south and we did go to New Caledonia, which is just north of Australia, and it was a very lonely ocean. There aren't any islands down in there, either. So, it's not a normal shipping lane and that saved us, in that sense. So, we got to New Caledonia and they dropped me off, [laughter] no *Mississippi*.

KP: What had happened?

SRC: Well, I didn't know. What you do is, you go report to the local people and it's their responsibility to find out where the *Mississippi* is and arrange to get you there. Well, she was nearby. I didn't know that until later. She was near Noumea and she took off. She was under orders to provide what they called "call power." If troops landing, or troops on the ground, need firepower, understand, there are no cannons, so, you're not on the ground, you're in the ocean, so, if they need cannon fire to pound at the enemy, they have to call up the Navy to provide the cannonry, and that's what we did. ... She was on call at a couple of places at that time and she had left. So, I missed her and I went back to San Francisco, from whence I had left. [laughter]

KP: You had gone all the way to New Caledonia just to go all the way back.

SRC: Yes, all the way back. It took several months. I went back on a destroyer, and the destroyer, all the names are down here, Joe, if you want to pick all those off, but the destroyer had only one propeller; they call them a screw. She went back with one screw, one propeller. ...

KP: You went back on the USS *Bush*.

SRC: Yes. So, let's see, where am I? Well, I talk about Noumea there and the fruit stands. ...

KP: Yes, before we talk about your leaving to go all the way back to where you came, New Caledonia, it strikes me that this was very exotic for you.

SRC: Yes. It was terrific. You know, it's native villagers, and I hadn't seen any native villagers in my whole life. I'd seen them in [*National Geographic*] or whatever, but here I was with native villagers ... wandering around and a lot of redheaded men. They rub lime in their hair and that makes their hair red, and they hold hands when they walk around, the men do, and I wasn't used to that. I thought they were fruity, but they're not. That's just [a sign that] they're good friends and, every once in awhile, somebody'd be going up a tree for a coconut. [laughter] So, it's different, but you were warned, "Don't eat anything. Don't eat any of that fruit or whatever," and,

of course, the reason is, you get dysentery from that stuff. The natives defecate and urinate and everything in the bays, in the fields, and all of their produce is loaded with ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SRC: So, we're warned about that and we don't. Well, if you did, you'd get sick, and then, you'd be in sick bay. So, you don't want to do that, but it was very interesting, very colonial, I thought, and I've seen many of those villages since, ... both during the war and after the war, and they're very interesting. The natives are marvelous. They really are very friendly, to us, they were.

KP: You went back to San Francisco.

SRC: Yes. I didn't stay there, this time, very long. I just checked through and they knew that she was up in Bremerton Navy Yard.

KP: You took the train up.

SRC: So, I took the train up ... through Oregon and to Seattle, and then, across Puget Sound to Bremerton Navy Yard and, "Reported aboard, Sir." [laughter] Captain [Heman J.] Redfield was the Skipper and the ship was a living mess. Oh, it was awful, because they had workmen, and, in every space, they were drilling and chopping, and they redid a large portion of her, topside, at least. They put in new guns. She was re-gunned. Even the big guns were re-bored, but they also did some changes as far as the superstructure itself was concerned, and the reason was, they wanted to improve their antiaircraft abilities, and they did, they did. We were better after that.

KP: Yours was one of the older battleships.

SRC: Yes.

KP: It was because of fate that it was out in the Atlantic instead of being in Pearl Harbor.

SRC: Right, right, yes. She's *Pennsylvania*-class and ... I guess she was launched in 1917, '18, yes, and they don't upgrade them. Now, the *New Jersey*, for example, has sixteen-inch guns, she's a newer ship, and we had fourteen-inch, the big ones were fourteen-inch guns, and they're big still, but they don't take the fourteens out and put sixteens in. I don't know why. I guess the hull won't take it or something, ... but we were very effective. We were one of the best ships in the Navy at shooting, on these calls, and many, many times, the Marines and the Army would specifically ask for the *Mississippi*. They would, yes. We'll come to it later, but, when we get to Shuri Castle, I'll tell you what she did. ...

KP: You were in Bremerton for three months.

SRC: Yes.

KP: What were your duties while the ship was being refitted?

SRC: Well, all of the supply stuff that we did. ... We still have to feed everybody and clothe them and so on.

KP: That was your responsibility in port.

SRC: Oh, sure, and pay them. So, we have all the normal stuff that we did, and then, you have to get ready for sea, right, and, I told you, we carry an awful lot more stuff than that ship itself needs, because we're supplying so many others. So, all of that is going forward and we expect that we're not going to get back to Bremerton again, maybe for a long time. So, we have to do everything we possibly can now, and we had planned this for some months coming. As a matter-of-fact, the Skipper himself had designed some of the antiaircraft guns and told them what he wanted, because the turnaround time was fairly brief. It doesn't seem so, but, for the work involved, it was quite brief, and they weren't sure they could do it, ... do what he was asking for. There was an area toward the bow that we couldn't cover at all. In other words, if you came in at us from the bow, and they would come in from the bow because they were after the bridge, they wanted to hit the bridge, you know, these suicide bombers, we couldn't shoot them. There was an area there we could not cover, and he said, "This is stupid. We should be able to cover that." Well, we covered it, later, [laughter] after the refitting, yes, that kind of thing, but, sure, we were busy, but I'd get off the ship as much as I possibly could, because ... the noise and the dirt and the dust and everything was terrible. A lot of people wore ear muffs and things to cut out the sound. So, I'd get over to Seattle, and I had some girlfriends over there and it was nice.

KP: It sounds like getting a date with a naval officer's uniform was not a hard thing to do. [laughter]

SRC: Well, it's interesting. I always felt that the better-looking girls were with the enlisted men, and I just had a granddaughter of mine that had the lead, the Nurse Forbush [role] in *South Pacific*, and we just came back from being out in Pennsylvania for four days, looking at the three performances they put on, but, in there, one of the ... enlisted men said, "The officers always have the prettiest girls." [laughter]

JS: The grass is always greener.

SRC: Yes, but, yes, you're right, except, in an area like Seattle and Bremerton, there are men galore. Men, there was no shortage of.

KP: Yes, because there was a port

SRC: Big naval concentration, sure. This roommate of mine, at Harvard, that I was telling you about, who was killed off Iwo, lived in Georgia and there was an Army base in his town and his sisters were not permitted to walk on the street after three o'clock in the afternoon. In fact, it was preferable if they didn't walk on the street at all, because of the number of Army men around, and they're not shy. They're going to say something. Even if they don't touch the girl, they may say something. This one girl whom I went with in Seattle was a model and she was a beautiful

blonde, blue-eyed girl. Her father distrusted servicemen of any kind. He just didn't know that his daughter ought to be dating a serviceman. ... There were so many of us around, you see, and he hadn't had that much experience, but she would bring me home and ... he and I finally got along very, very well. He was a Scandinavian. That helped, [laughter] but one of the things you're concerned about is the sheer numbers. You go on the street in Seattle, man, it's a port city and it's loaded with servicemen and all of the servicemen support things, you know. The shops and the bawdy places and all that are all there, and the bars.

KP: Navy towns have a reputation for being often quite raucous.

SRC: Right. You got it. [laughter]

KP: That reputation is partly deserved.

SRC: Sure.

KP: Also, in some of your notes, you indicated that that relationship with the girl you dated proved important for liquor, your liquor supply.

SRC: No, that was another girl. That was a brunette. Her father was a manager of the Forty-and-Eight Club, which is an Army club, and the "Forty" refers to forty men and the "Eight" refers to eight mules, and it goes back, I guess, to World War I or before, but forty-and-eight is a very normal Army term, and that's what it refers to. So, they called this the Forty-and-Eight Club. So, I would go there with her and the liquor, well, quite often, would be on the house, [laughter] which didn't hurt, but, yes, they're very convivial up there in Seattle, let me say. [laughter]

KP: Robert Strauss, from your class, was stationed in Seattle.

SRC: Who?

KP: Robert Strauss. Did you know him at the time?

SRC: Doesn't ring a bell.

KP: Yes, he was a member of your class. I know he did spend part of the war in supply, for the Army, in Seattle. I was just wondering if you met him.

SRC: Yes. It doesn't ring a bell, and I must say, ... gee, in my class, I must have known three-quarters of them. You asked about that, Joe. ... In my time, Rutgers was small. I don't know what we had, maybe, what?

KP: I think you had a class of about four hundred.

SRC: We only had about maybe two thousand men, all totaled, in the men's college, [Rutgers College], and I must have known fifteen hundred of them. So, it was an entirely different place

than it is now, and it's interesting, when my son went to Colgate, it was about the same. Colgate had about two thousand men. He was Class of '70 up there. It's double now, ... and it's a very nice situation when a campus is [small]. You get to know people a lot more easily.

KP: Battleships, they are the "old Navy." For the first part of this century, before the aircraft carrier clearly became dominant, they were the big ship.

SRC: Right.

KP: A colleague of mine once joked that admirals brought back the battleships because they really liked battleships. They are imposing and full of tradition and, also, from what I have read, very formal places. The Navy is a pretty formal service.

SRC: Oh, absolutely.

KP: Some of the smaller ships, particularly the LSTs and LCTs, could be rather informal, relative to the battleships.

SRC: Right. Well, you've got a discipline problem. You have a problem if you go to general quarters, for example. General quarters is when there's a danger of some sort. Every man has a battle station of some place. All of the hatches, all of the doorways, have to be battened down. ... They have big, big toggle things that they turn to lock all these things, and it must be done quickly. So, once the alarm goes, "Rahr, Rahr, Rahr," general quarters, everybody drops whatever they're doing and they go, and they've got people who lock the toggles and so on and you'd better get through that doorway before it gets locked, because you're not going to get through it [after]. [laughter] So, all of that is dreadfully necessary, even when you're underway. A lot of things require discipline, it isn't only combat, but a lot of things, and then, the sheer size means that you just have to have that authority, period, and you're also, in many cases, working in limited space, so that you've got to have that understanding, ... but it's amazing how they get along and how well they get along.

KP: I have been on some World War II ships, museums, and one of the things that I am struck by is how small they are. Even an aircraft carrier, the decks are fairly long, but you start looking into officers' quarters and enlisted men's quarters and some of the work spaces in there are just really tiny. Even the officers' quarters; I thought, "Is this all the Captain gets?" and he is the captain.

SRC: ... Have you been to the *Enterprise* over here?

KP: I have been to the *Intrepid*, yes.

SRC: The *Intrepid*, I mean.

KP: I have also been on the cruiser and submarine.

SRC: Have you been to Battleship Cove, up in Massachusetts?

KP: Not yet.

SRC: Go up there some time, and that's a good chance to get on a battleship, the *Massachusetts*.

KP: I have wanted to see the *Massachusetts* or the *North Carolina*.

SRC: Yes. The aircraft carrier is an entirely different kind of ship. There are so many open spaces that you don't have on a battleship.

KP: No, but I have been on a World War II destroyer, which were very small.

SRC: Yes.

KP: I mean, even the big ships are relatively small.

SRC: Well, we were thirty-five thousand tons. That's a big ship.

KP: It is a big ship, but a lot of that is taken up by stuff. It does not go into living quarters.

SRC: Oh, no, oh, no, no.

KP: It is not a very comfortable place, in some ways.

SRC: Well, Mack and I had a cabin the size of this room. It's not bad.

KP: No, that is not bad.

SRC: No, and we were on a deck that had cabins off it and we had Marine orderlies outside, guarding our cabins. [laughter]

KP: How many Marines did you have aboard the ship?

SRC: I'll say seventy-five, yes, and the head of the Marines was a heavily-decorated veteran of Guadalcanal. He had been through it all and he came aboard and the young Marines in his group practically genuflected every time he walked by. They just adored him. They just thought he was the greatest thing and they wanted to get off the ship and they wanted to go to Guadalcanal and fight, and he didn't want to do that. [laughter] He had been there, you know. [laughter]

KP: He was happy he had gotten this rotation.

SRC: Yes, but they pretty much were orderly duty people.

KP: Did they man any of the deck guns, the Marines?

SRC: Yes, antiaircraft. ... Like, I'd go ashore for money in Pearl Harbor or someplace, I'd take a couple of them along with me, submachine guns. [laughter]

KP: My understanding is that you were personally responsible for this money.

SRC: Oh, yes.

KP: Is it true that you paid people with two-dollar bills?

SRC: Yes, sure.

KP: That Navy tradition.

SRC: Yes, sure. As a matter-of-fact, over and above the Navy itself, you're under the aegis of the General Accounting Office and they issue authority to you to draw money and to draw checks and it doesn't sound like much, but I had a hundred thousand dollars, and that was a lot in those times.

KP: No, that was. [laughter]

SRC: And I had fifteen hundred checks. That was my initial supply, and then, I would just refill as I needed it, but, after I left the Navy, I had been formally separated from the Navy, it was two years before the General Accounting Office, [now the Government Accountability Office], cleared me. Then, I was all clear, [laughter] but I'm talking about the accounting stuff. As a Supply Corps officer, they still had their hooks on me for two years after I had left the Navy. So, you have that kind of thing, but that was good, because that's the audit, that's the control.

KP: One of my favorite stories, an Army veteran, I cannot remember who told me this, in one of the interviews, said he was paymaster, it was not a permanent position, but he had paid everyone in cash and he was short. Finally, the Sergeant said, "Okay, guys, the Captain is short. Pony up the money. Let's do this over again," because he was personally responsible for this.

SRC: [laughter] Sure.

KP: Not that he had been careless, but he had not been as careful as he should have.

SRC: Right, right.

KP: Did you ever have any problems?

SRC: I did. I was in Pearl and I went in and I got additional monies, I don't know what it was, fifty thousand or something, got back to the ship and recounted the money and I was a thousand dollars short. So, I called the bank and I said, "Oh, ho, ho," and they said, "Oh, ho, ho, we have a

thousand of your dollars still here." [laughter] You know, that would have really ruined my budget, more than the poker games or the crap games. [laughter]

KP: Yes, because you do not make that much money.

SRC: [laughter] No, but that's the only time I had trouble.

KP: That you did not come out right.

SRC: Yes. They went to a form. It was a great thing. It used to be just a hell of a mess to pay somebody, but they went to a single sheet and the men carried that with them. So, if you wanted to get paid, you brought this sheet, had your name and all that stuff on it, and then, down here, it had places where you could sign, and I would set up a pay line. I'd have storekeepers and my chief warrant would run this and the men would come with their sheets and they would start at that end and they would just sign it, go through and get paid and [be] gone. ... I mean, it was marvelous, no delay, and many of them took their money, they didn't have a use for money much, then, they'd go to the post office and buy a money order and ship it home. That's what they did with most of it, or gamble with it, [laughter] but a good many of them shipped it home.

JS: What did you do with most of your money?

SRC: Saved it. I had about five thousand dollars when I came out of the Navy and a lot of that was saving. I got some good advice early on from a married man, and he did that. He saved all his money for when he could get to go home, and I thought that made a lot more sense than all this crazy gambling, [laughter] but I didn't have the gambling blood, either. I didn't have any problems. Some guys just couldn't resist it. You get three people together, right, you have to decide which is the odd man out, yes. [laughter]

KP: What were your duties on a day-to-day basis, in terms of supply, for the ship? You talked earlier about how a lot of this is anticipating needs and logistics.

SRC: Yes. Well, a lot of it, once you're underway, a lot of it is just issuing, on the basis of requisitions and so on and, when you put in your needs, then, we have to control that, so [that] you don't overdraw your needs. You could say, "Well, I need so many shirts," and then, you double your order for shirts. "Well, we don't do that." [laughter] So, a lot of that is checking when you're underway, but, ... as dispersing officer, I had an office, a regular office, with storekeepers and so on in it and a warrant officer who ran it and that was normal, ongoing stuff. There was always paperwork to do. Then, there was a supply office and, technically, we were assistants to the supply officer, and it was a ... Lieutenant Commander (Trenholm?), who was the supply officer of the ship, and he was a drunkard and he really was worthless. He was a former line officer and he couldn't cut it, so, they put him in supply. He almost never left his bunk. He just read in his bunk all day long and all night long. How he did it, I don't know.

KP: He must have had watches, though.

SRC: No. He would come down, half the time, to the officers' mess for meals. The rest of the time, he'd have something delivered to his cabin and he'd eat in his cabin, and that was it. He had a gorgeous wife. I never met her, but I've seen pictures of her. She was wonderful. How he ever got her as a girl, I don't know, but he was hopeless and he was supposed to audit us and he'd come around and say, "Where's the papers?" We'd already filled out the audit papers and he'd just sign them and leave. [laughter] He never checked anything.

KP: Had he been an Annapolis grad?

SRC: Yes, Annapolis.

KP: He had been at Annapolis.

SRC: Yes, regular Navy, yes.

KP: It almost sounds like the regular Navy people took care of him.

SRC: Sure. They got him out of the line, so [that] he couldn't foul up a gunnery drill or something, and put him over there and that was it. They did a lot of that. They protect each other.

KP: I have been told that the Annapolis people are thick.

SRC: We had an Annapolis officer punch a Reservist. I mean, he really punched him, and the Reservist took him apart, but the Annapolis man started it. He was the one that started it. ... One of the Marine orderlies had to break it up. It was that bad. Two days later, an Annapolis man, one of his classmates, came to the Reservist and apologized, and the Reservist said, "Well, thanks very much, that's nice, but how about him? What are you apologizing for him for?" "Well, he's a classmate." "I don't care whose classmate he is. Get him here and have him apologize." Well, he never did, never did, but that kind of thing goes on. They are very thick, and they go by class. That's the way they get promoted, too, so much in service, up to a certain point. Then, you're passed over.

KP: It sounds like, although there is a common bond as officers, the Naval Reserve people realize there is Reserve and the regular Navy people.

SRC: I never had any trouble with regular Navy. No, as a matter-of-fact, I got along very well with them. Even the Skipper and I had a lot in common. ... He talked to me a lot. ... I'm sure he talked to me about stuff he never talked with his immediate subordinates about. He was a family man and so on and he had a lot of things he liked to talk about, and I paid him. [laughter]

KP: What would he talk about?

SRC: Personal things, and he was a great guy, a very brave man. He took that ship of ours in very close on some of this "call fire" stuff, in mined waters. You know, the waters are mined. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Sigurd Robert Christensen on April 20, 1998, in Cranford, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JS: ... Joseph Scott.

KP: You were talking about the Captain being very brave. In fact, he would take you in, on fire support, very close to shore.

SRC: Very close to shore. He'd take us into waters that were amazing. They were mined, for example, by the Japs, there were reefs and all of that, and he would take this big capital ship in close. At one time, we were within nine hundred feet of the shore. It was awful and even the navigation people counseled against it, but he said, "Take her in," because he wanted to give the maximum firepower possible. ... When you're firing the big guns on a ship, it's not like cannon, because cannon are sitting on the ground and they're not rising and falling with the swell of the water, but, on a ship, the ship is rocking and rolling and the cannon's going in all kinds of directions. To be accurate under conditions like that is nothing short of phenomenal, I think, and our guys were among the best. We had one lieutenant whose father was an admiral and he was fantastic. He was very, very good. In fact, we passed his father's ship at sea one time and, during wartime, one bridge doesn't salute another, but, because his father was aboard the other ship, our skipper had our bridge salute his, which was really great. We all cheered for that, yes. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned, in your talking points, that the warrant officers and the petty officers have a certain control aboard ship that they asserted. You noted that some of your oranges started disappearing from storerooms and you did not necessarily get the best cuts of meats, which you would actually pay for, because you have to pay for your food as an officer.

SRC: [laughter] No, you don't pay for your food.

KP: I have been told that you had to pay in the mess.

SRC: We never did.

KP: You never did.

SRC: No, that's part of being aboard ship. [laughter] No, ... you take aboard stores and you bring things aboard ship in great quantities in cargo nets. ... The cargo nets come in on a crane and they're dangling at the end of this thing and they're going down in a hold and there's a big space there. Well, at each deck level in the hold is a working party and you may be dropping one item at this deck and another lower down, or whatever. So, the cargo net either comes to a stop or it swings or whatever and, in an instance where you have, we'll say, crates of oranges, [laughter] now, the cargo net will swing, either by itself or somebody's going to make it swing, but, oddly enough, a crate of oranges can open. Obviously, it's just wood and it'll open up and,

oddly enough, too, the oranges never come out of the cargo net, they never hit the deck, ... they just disappear. They just disappear, in midair, [laughter] and, if you were then to go to the locker of one of these [workmen], or all of the working party, you'd see oranges in their lockers, [laughter] because they were highly prized. They were highly prized and they didn't get that many. You bring meat, cuts of beef and so on, aboard, the better cuts would tend to go to the warrant officers' mess or the chief petty officers' mess and the officers' mess wouldn't necessarily get the best. So, we might get a few filet mignon, but not all of them. [laughter] ... As a matter-of-fact, one of the best meals you can ever have, if you're invited, and I was invited, from time-to-time, is to go to the warrant officers' mess. They had a better mess than the officers did.

KP: Why did they have a better mess?

SRC: Well, they had arranged things that way, [laughter] let's say. They're old Navy hands, you know.

KP: You served aboard a ship that, while it had been substantially refitted, my initial impression is that there was a lot of continuity, that, in fact, there would have been people aboard that ship who had been with the *Mississippi* for a number of years.

SRC: Oh, sure.

KP: Particularly the petty officers and some of the enlisted men, had been up in the North Atlantic.

SRC: Absolutely, right, a long time, right.

KP: How much of the crew was, in fact, old-timers?

SRC: Oh, I don't know, but I had a number of my cooks and bakers in my division who had been there a long time, yes, sure, ... no reason for them to leave. ... They could be used anywhere, but they found people for other [ships] and they needed them here and they had experience. There is a degree of expertise that they developed which is peculiar to that type of ship. A "battlegon sailor" maybe isn't quite as good on a destroyer or a smaller attack vessel, something of that sort. There's a skill to doing certain things, and numbers, just sheer numbers, handling numbers of men, like, we had four gunnery divisions, four. I mean, that's a lot of men. We had 3,500 men on that ship.

KP: That is a small town.

SRC: Yes. I mean, ... it's an operation, a big, big operation, and Captain Redfield was an engineering officer, basically. He came [to] battlegon duty ... [because] he was bucking for admiral. You have to have a capital ship, an aircraft carrier or a battlegon or something, to make admiral, and that's why he was there. Boy, he was good. I mean, for an engineering officer, he really was a fantastic seaman, [laughter] very devoted to that ship and to the Navy, yes, tremendous.

KP: It sounds like he was well-liked and respected.

SRC: Oh, yes, tough man.

KP: Officers, particularly commanders, are responsible, but, in the Navy, it is fairly unique when they are at sea, because they are totally responsible out there.

SRC: Oh, absolutely. He's it, yes.

KP: In a way, you can diffuse that in the Army; ultimately, it is someone else up the line.

SRC: No way.

KP: Whereas at sea ...

SRC: No, he's the boss, he's the word. ... If you stray, you get put on report, you're up on captain's mast and he hears your case and he assigns demerits. [laughter] He'll put you in the brig, the whole thing. Oh, yes, you go through a lot of that, because men will be men. I had a man that was accused of stealing a watch from a shipmate, and he was one of mine. ... He came to me and he wanted me to defend him in the court-martial, and I said, "Well, I will, if you insist, but I recommend that you get one of these other officers who have had legal training," but he wanted me. He insisted on me. So, I did the best I could and we went through the full court-martial and he was found guilty. The case really revolved around a storekeeper's, a pawnbroker, testimony, who said, "Yes, this guy pawned this watch in my shop." That's tough to get around, "Where did he get the watch?" [laughter] He claimed he found it and he didn't know it was in somebody's locker. It didn't fly, but I did ask a couple of legal types, later, about the case and they reviewed the case and they said I did everything I could, except, they said, the defensive structure just was weak, just too weak.

KP: To mount a good defense.

SRC: Yes. So, he got an unsatisfactory discharge, nice boy, too. It was a shame, but I'm sure he had stolen the watch, [laughter] but you try to defend him anyhow.

KP: Did you take part in any other court-martials while you were onboard?

SRC: No, that's the only one.

KP: You never sat on any courts or had to defend or prosecute someone.

SRC: No. ... The only time I was a judge, we used to put on smokers. A smoker is a series of bouts, boxing bouts, and it's for the entertainment of the troops. ... They come and they hang in all the superstructure and all and we set up a ring and we have them fight by weight class and so on, and I did a lot of boxing in those days and I would be a referee. I'd referee a lot of these

fighters or I'd act as a judge in a lot of these fights. So, that was good, that was good stuff, and, sometimes, we'd have some music, some musical things, woven in between the bouts. ... One time, we had Gus Lesnevich come. He was the light heavyweight champion of the world, and he came and who are we going to put in against him? Well, there was a heavyweight from Boston, South Boston, an Irishman, who was pretty good. In fact, he was the Seventh Fleet champion. So, we said, "We'll put him in." So, we put him in. Well, I refereed it. It was no contest. Lesnevich made him look sick. He'd run around behind him and tap him on the backside and things like that, and the guy was looking for him, he couldn't find him, [laughter] but they had a group called the "Tunney Fish," [pronounced like "tuna fish"]. Gene Tunney was a heavyweight champion of the world and he came into the Navy and he developed this group of people, athletes, that went around and entertained the troops, like us, and they called them "Tunney Fish," yes. [laughter] That's what their job was. They didn't have to fight, that they'd go and entertain, like Bob Hope did later, in later years. We didn't have anything like Bob Hope. [laughter]

KP: Did you go to any USO shows at all?

SRC: Not that I recall. I don't even remember any coming on our ship.

KP: What about movies? Did you have any movies aboard?

SRC: Yes, we did have some movies. I never went to them, but the guys did. They would sit and watch it, but you had to be careful, because we were in advanced waters. There wasn't any kidding around, because we went right from Pearl to the Western Carolines. I mean, you were really there, and then, we went right into the Philippines.

KP: Your duties, besides disbursement and supply, you also stood watches.

SRC: Yes.

KP: How often would you do a watch on a given day?

SRC: Every day. I'd have communications watch.

KP: How many hours a day?

SRC: Usually about four, sometimes eight, but usually four, and my job was a decoder. We had a communications office room, with a lot of the signalmen and so on in there, and we had coding books that were the naval codes. So, if a ship was trying to get us, they would encode a message and send it to us in code, and then, I would decode it and send it on to the Skipper, or whoever it pertained to. So, I did that, ... and then, I also maintained the coding books. The enlisted men were not permitted to touch those. That was officer's work, rightly so, and you had to have a special clearance to do that, but, yes, communications. So, even though I left Line Officers' School and even though I was going to have trouble with the "walkie-blinkie," [laughter] I got into communications.

KP: When you were called to general quarters, in your talking points, you mentioned you had an interesting duty. Could you talk about that, what you would do during battle stations?

SRC: Yes, I was an observer and, when we had general quarters, didn't have to be combat, because you can have general quarters without having combat, my battle station was at the top of the foremast, the mainmast, rather, in the open, out in the open. ... My job was to observe what went on around the ship and record it, record everything I thought worth recording. So, I would take a storekeeper with me and he wrote down whatever I told him to write down. So, that material then would become part of the ship's log later, and, also, part of the ship's history. So, it was extremely important that we do a good job, and there were other observers, but I was one of them. We had another Supply Corps officer who was up there with me, ... named Hathaway, and Hathaway ran the officers' mess. He made up the menus and all that. Hathaway had had experience with a restaurant chain up in New England, before he came in the Navy, and Hathaway was yellow to the core, [laughter] scared to death. I mean, if you want to see a scared puppy, that was the guy, and he would get up there in the open and guns would be firing and *kamikazes* would be coming around and, wherever anything happened, he'd get on the other side of the mainmast. [laughter] He'd never be there to observe. He'd be hiding, [laughter] and I'd say, "Come on, get out here." "Oh, no, not me." [laughter] He was something, but, yes, it was good duty. ... I tried to turn the storekeepers over, from time-to-time, because they were down below, in the ammunition handling rooms and in the passageways, and they were bringing up stuff and they never saw anything. I mean, you can see bags of powder or shells going up and that's all you ever saw, and you've gone through a battle or you've been pounding a beach and you never saw any of that. ... I brought up a kid named Anderson, he was from Portland, Oregon, and he was kind of a wild kid and he had been down below in the ammunition handling room for over two years, never had seen anything. ... As I told you, here we are, going forward now and we're pounding everything we can pound and, oh, man, he just couldn't get over that. He would hang on and over the railings, "Wow, look at that, oh, man, yes, sir." [laughter] He would watch this stuff, he just couldn't get enough. It was amazing. I was so glad I brought him up, because he deserved it, and he was a good recorder. He'd write the stuff down, but ...

KP: He was enjoying it, too.

SRC: He was observing, too. [laughter] He really was.

JS: How different were the living conditions, as a whole, between officers and enlisted men, from what you could see?

SRC: Oh, no comparison. An officer would have a cabin; an enlisted man would have a locker and a hammock. So, envisage, you had a little locker, maybe half of that, just that little side there, and then, between ... here and there, you would have two hooks and you would sling a hammock, and that was your bed. You'd sleep in a hammock. That's all you had.

JS: How many up?

SRC: Yes, well, it varied by the height of the space. [laughter] They were all over the place.

JS: Did you go down and see where they lived at all, or did you just steer clear of that?

SRC: Oh, sure, they were my division. I went to my division. I didn't go to the other divisions, and you have inspection. You have to go inspect, but my division was, without question, no question, the worst division there was, I mean, the sloppiest. I mean, they were cooks and bakers and candlestick makers, right, and, when we lined up for general inspection on the quarter deck, guess what group we lined up next to; the Marines. [laughter] We have the worst division on the ship next to the spit-and-polish Marines. They not only were spit-and-polish, they had their own tailor shop, the Marines did, on the ship, yes, and I tell you, ... every time you saw one, he'd look like a million dollars. Every time you saw my guys, their shoes weren't shined, their hats were falling off, [laughter] they had gravy on their shirt. I mean, they [were] really, really something, and what could you do? You tried, but ... I never caught any flak from anybody, the Skipper or the Executive Officer, about the looks of my division. I never did. I tried to shape them up a little bit, but they really never made it. [laughter]

KP: If you were in a gunnery unit, you worked hard, but cooks work harder, I mean, feeding a ship at sea.

SRC: Yes, yes. Well, you know, you're baking bread and pies in the heat of the kitchen, and, now, you've got to get out there and line up for general inspection. So, you take off your soaking wet apron and you throw a shirt over your t-shirt, or whatever, and out you go. [laughter]

KP: They did not have air conditioning.

SRC: Oh, no.

KP: Some people have said that the tropics were ...

SRC: They were tropical, yes.

KP: Yes, I mean, it gets pretty warm on a ship.

SRC: Terrible, yes. Well, 110 degrees would be nothing, and it's metal. Remember, your quarterdeck and all, everything is metal, and you could steam, just from the heat. It would be rising, oh, terrible, [laughter] but the normal, average seaman would look fairly presentable. There was something about a cook or a baker that sagged. [laughter] They just ... weren't sharp. Some of my storekeepers were pretty good, but even some of them weren't so great. [laughter]

KP: Did you have responsibility for the stewards?

SRC: Oh, yes, part of my division. Interestingly enough, the steward's mates, ... they were in the officers' mess and they wore white jackets and they served meals in the mess, they set the tables and all that. We had white table clothes, we had sterling silver, we had top-quality china

and we had steward's mates serving us. When you think of wartime and the poor guys slogging around out in the mud in Guadalcanal, we didn't have anything like that. So, if you ever have to go, go in the Navy, [laughter] but, anyhow, I used to censor all the mail. Every enlisted man's mail had to be censored, and I would censor their mail and I was astounded, really. The most developed, the most advanced writers, particularly romantically, were the steward's mates. Now, these are colored men, with somewhat limited schooling, and the people who spent the most time in the ship's library were the steward's mates, which tells you something else about them, but, when one of them wrote home to his loved one, to his wife or his sweetheart, ... it was absolute poetry, really, really amazing. Whereas the normal guy would write in normal, sometimes very coarse, language, to this girl; no, not them, they were really special. I couldn't get over it. I was just amazed, and I don't know what brings that about. Maybe you do, Kurt; I just didn't know why that happened, but that was true. They really were great.

KP: It is an interesting observation. Did it feel strange to read other people's mail, particularly, I mean, you got used to it, but at first?

SRC: Sure, oh, yes. Oh, it's an invasion, obviously, and I tried to pass as much as I could, but, if it wasn't very good, you would speak to the man, and then, he himself would censor it. You weren't supposed to say where you were, for example, or what was happening on the ship, things like that, and they were very careful with everything, but, as long as you kept it on a personal note, and how much you missed her and all that stuff, it wasn't too bad. In the first summer that I was there, I had a thought. ... We happened to be talking Christmas and I said, "Gee, what do these guys get? I mean, what kind of Christmas do they have out here in the Pacific?" So, I had a thought that what I would do [was] write to all of the parents, all of the families, of the men in my office. I couldn't do it for the whole division, but the men in my office, and ask them to send a round-robin letter to me for this fellow and, by golly, they all did. You know, they had Aunt Millie and Uncle John and everybody write a round-robin letter and they would go round and round, too. So, I got these wonderful letters and several of them wrote to me, personally, also, to thank me, as did some of the men, after they'd gotten it. So, Christmas, I had something for every one of them and gave them [out]. I had a special mail call and some of them cried. It was great, just great. So, it was a wonderful, wonderful experience for them. So, it shows you that you can do some things that are human and helpful, because Christmas is a pretty tough time. [laughter] There's nothing that even looks like Christmas. There are no trees or anything like that.

KP: What about chapel? Did you have chaplains aboard your ship?

SRC: Not really. The chaplain would have a short service, nonsectarian service, on Sunday morning. That would be about it and it would be on the quarterdeck and there'd be a few benches around and it was not necessary to attend, so, very few attended, [laughter] including me. ... Yes, there was a chaplain.

KP: Do you remember what denomination?

SRC: That he was?

KP: Yes.

SRC: Yes, he was a Methodist, this fellow.

KP: No Catholic priest. There was not a Catholic priest aboard.

SRC: No, it was one chaplain.

KP: One chaplain for the ship.

SRC: Right. Another ship might have a priest, but he was there to counsel, if you needed somebody to talk to, and he went around and tried to help a little with the morale and, if you had any problems that your immediate superiors weren't listening to you or something, you could talk to the chaplain, and part of the old Navy approach was, "Well, I don't hear you. Tell it to the chaplain," [laughter] yes, and we did. ... I don't know if you've ever seen V-mail. Have you ever seen V-mail? This is V-mail. This is what we used to write on.

KP: I have seen V-mail. In fact, some people have even donated V-mail to us.

SRC: Yes, and this is light in weight, the whole thing. This was one of the letters that, I guess, a family had written me.

KP: "November 21, 1944; Dear Lieutenant Christensen, we believe that you deserve a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, also. I am writing this on behalf of myself and family, Howard's other sister, Mrs. Miller and family, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Anderson. We all live here in (Lebanon?), so, we didn't waste any time getting together on this grand idea of a round-robin letter for Howard. Words can't express how wonderful it made us feel to know someone takes such an interest in the boy's happiness. Thank you so very, very much for helping us make Howard's Christmas a little bit better. Sincerely yours, Mrs. Wilbur Parish."

SRC: [laughter] So, yes, you get a little of everything. What are these? Well, these are officers' club cards.

KP: You would spend some time in the officers' club in your sojourns through the Pacific.

SRC: Oh, yes, we did. ... There were officers' clubs all over the place and on these islands, and you would have little chits, see, and you would pay a central person, and then, they would issue chits and we would ...

KP: These are chits that survived from the Iron Bottom Day Club, (Fort Jarvis?), and the Fleet Officers' Club of the Admiralty Islands. These are chits that you never cashed in.

SRC: I guess that's right, I guess that's right. ... What we would do, if we got to an island and we were able to go ashore and there was an installation on the island, this cabin mate and I would

try to go ashore early and we would walk through the native villages. ... It was great to be off a ship now and you could walk on dry land, and then, we would go around and the officers' clubs would open, usually, about three o'clock, from three to five, and they would serve beer. So, then, from five to seven, they would serve hard liquor, anything you wanted, and then, at seven-thirty, the first launch would leave at the end of the dock for the ship, and you'd better be on one of those launches or else you're in bad shape. [laughter] So, I was young and active, so, we would play basketball and things like that, baseball. We played baseball, we'd have a keg of beer on every base, that kind of [thing], [laughter] but, anyhow, we did all that, and then, we'd go to the officers' club. ... I drank some, but I didn't drink that much, but some of these guys would spend the whole four hours [drinking] or whatever. ... As you came up to seven o'clock, they'd line up eight or ten drinks and, when the bar closed at seven, they'd still have eight or ten drinks to go down. They never made the first launch, but they tried to make the last one. ... By that time, they were really swacked, yes, [laughter] but that's what we would do ... when we went ashore, and the officers' clubs were fun. They were fun. My buddy drank beer. A lot of the guys that I played ball with drank beer, but I ... drank a little, but, then, I found that rum, Myers's Rum, the dark rum, was the best for me in the tropics, and so, I stayed with that, because that did me a world of good. ... It's interesting, the men you meet. I played ball with a Gene Englund. Gene was a Wisconsin man and he had played basketball at Wisconsin. He was All-Big Ten out there. He was a center on the basketball team and he would be at the officers' clubs with us and play ball with us. He had hammer toes and they could have been straightened out when he was a young boy. If they'd splinted them, they could've straightened them out, but nobody did and he had them all his life. Before he could go out on a basketball court, he had to tape his feet, his toes, and no trainer alive could tape them the way he wanted them taped, so, he taped them himself. ... He'd go out and play a beautiful game of ball, really wonderful. ... When his first son was born, he never looked at his face, he looked at his toes first, [laughter] to see if he had the hammer toes. He didn't, but he looked at the toes first, interesting, isn't it? ... The officers' clubs were really, considering the situation out in the islands, quite plush, and the enlisted men had almost nothing. We would take a group of enlisted men who wanted to go ashore to some beach, and on the ship's launches, and we'd drop them off at some beach and we would have these big trashcans loaded with ice, with beer, and they'd get two or three beers issued per man. They could swim if they wanted to, and that was it. I mean, they couldn't play baseball. ... They could throw a ball or something, that's about all they could do, and then, back to the ship, and compared to what the officers had, it was really, really almost unkind. I used to feel so badly for them, [laughter] but what are you going to do? That's the way it is; that's the way the Navy is. So, it's like the old Indian days, the Raj; [laughter] the officers were the Raj, the enlisted men were the Indians. Oh, boy, but it's still that way. There's a big difference between the officers and enlisted, and it's true in the Army, too.

KP: Oh, yes, and you are not the first to say that. I have interviewed people on the other side, who were enlisted personnel, and they have not forgotten either. [laughter]

SRC: Yes.

KP: You talked a bit about your captain; what about your executive officer, Commander White?

SRC: We had an executive officer, his name was Commander White. He was a Jewish man and he had no chance to go higher in the Navy, because he was.

KP: Was he an Annapolis man?

SRC: Yes, but he was Jewish, and not many Jewish men are in the Navy, that is, the higher echelons of the Navy, but he was commander of the battlewagon. He was responsible for everything, under the Skipper. He was good, he was competent, he had been there longer than the Skipper. He was there before the Skipper came and he was there after the Skipper left. The skipper came aboard just before I did and left just before I did. So, I served under only two skippers, [Heman J.] Redfield, for all of it, practically, and then, a couple of months under a Captain [John F.] Crowe, but Commander White was a good man, but he had some failures. He liked food and he ran the officers' mess. He had to approve all of the menus and so on that Hathaway prepared and he liked curry and he loved Welsh rabbit. He loved Welsh rabbit. So, we had a lot of curry and we had a lot of Welsh rabbit. [laughter] Now, I don't know what you think of Welsh rabbit, but you'd come off watch and you're hungry and you really want something you can sink your teeth into, and a lot of the guys would be cold, if they were outside and so on, and you come down and you're going to have Welsh rabbit. So, the Skipper, or not the Skipper, but Commander White, was in the wardroom. He was in the mess with you, so, you couldn't speak too loudly about him. You had to be careful, [laughter] but, on other occasions, they would let each other know what they thought of him and his curry, [laughter] but he was not an unpopular man.

KP: This was one of his more odd quirks, it sounds like.

SRC: Yes, that's right, and it's interesting what people do. [laughter]

KP: Your ship saw action. What was the most frightening thing that happened to you personally aboard ship, or in the Navy, if it happened off ship? Was there any moment where you had a close call?

SRC: Yes, there was. ... People ask me, "Well, you were out there and the *kamikazes* were dive-bombing and everything, these suicide bombers," and we had gone up, well, we went up to Luzon, well, before that, at Leyte Gulf, we had a lot of *kamikazes* come after us, and one hit and wiped out the anti-aircraft batteries on the starboard side. I guess, maybe, forty or fifty men were killed and we were shoveling bodies and arms and legs overboard and washing the blood down the scuppers and out. There wasn't anything to save, but of all the *kamikazes* that came, we were hit only that one time. We went up to Luzon and they had many of them dive at us and either miss or we blew them away, but, one night, I don't know if I mentioned to you that the large guns that we have were guided by airplane spotters, as much as we could. ... We had two airplanes onboard and we would eject those from the stern, and then, they would go up and fly over the target area and they would call back and tell the guns what adjustments and so on to make. Well, this one evening, it was maybe about this time of day, maybe a little later, but I know there was setting sun, it was [in] the sunshine, these planes had been brought back aboard. They were seaplanes and we would make a big swing in the ocean and, as that ship swung, it would level off

part of the ocean, so that there were no longer waves and so on, and the plane then would come in and land in that flatter area. Then, she would taxi over to a landing that we had floating in the water next to the ship, and then, we would lift them, by crane, up to the deck. Then, we would defuel them. We had to take the gasoline, the aviation gasoline, out of them and run that down these pipes into the storage tanks. That was the process that was going on. We were defueling this one evening. We were not at general quarters or anything, and a *kamikaze* came sneaking in across the water. We didn't see him until the very last minute and he hit the ship on that starboard side, and that's where my cabin was. [laughter] So, it hit the ship. I was here and outside this wall was where she hit. So, I was covered with broken glass, from light bulbs and stuff, and all kinds of debris from the overheads, [laughter] but nothing happened. He didn't come through that thing, although they have bombs [aboard the planes], and we survived it. Damage control was able to fix things up. My buddy, [Arthur] MacFarland, was up in navigation at the time and he knew I was back in the cabin and he was really upset, took him awhile to find out that I was still alive.

KP: He thought that was it.

SRC: He did, yes. One man was killed. When this fellow hit, there's a tremendous blast of air down the passageways and in one of those passageways was the chaplain of the ship. Blast of air hit him, drove him against the bulkhead and on the bulkhead was a big journal box, which is an electrical connection box, and drove his head right against that journal box and ripped the back of his head off. ... He was dead instantly, one man, and it was the chaplain. I had to inventory his affects and write to his family and all that. He had a rain jacket, a short rain jacket, olive green, that I kept, for memory's sake. I still have it, [laughter] along with the moldy, sleeveless sweater, yes, and it's pretty old now. It's got broken wrinkles now and all, but it makes me think of him. He was a good man. He really was.

KP: What was his name? Do you remember?

SRC: No. He had been up at Portsmouth Navy Yard, ... as chaplain, and he said, "Battleship duty is worse than the prison," yes.

KP: Why would he say that?

SRC: Well, so confining. Up there, at least he could leave the prison and go out into Portsmouth, but, here, he couldn't leave for anything. [laughter] Yes, he was locked in.

KP: What was the most time you were at sea without visiting a port, that you remember, the longest length?

SRC: ... I'd say no more than three or four months. We were around Leyte Gulf, I know we were there for, say, twenty-five or thirty days, which would have been, say, a month in there. You see, ... there were landing areas, I don't mean that you landed, but there were passages where we could moor. It wasn't necessarily an island. We didn't have a port, as such. There's no place for a ship that size to be. There's no pier you go to or anything, so, you moor out, what they

call "moor in the road." You go out in the "road" and moor ... and we opened a couple of those. We established a couple of those, but there wasn't much rest. The ships were underway practically all the time, going somewhere.

KP: Being at Bremerton, in some ways, was very unusual for this type of ship, when it was being refitted.

SRC: Yes, I would say. One of the reasons that we had gone back was for re-gunning.

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

KP: What were your impressions of the landings, particularly because you could observe everything?

SRC: Absolutely outstanding, astonishing, really. We were, I told you, a "call fire" ship, but, when we were going to free the Philippines and allow MacArthur to return, right, [laughter] we went to Leyte Gulf, which was typical. We had already hit a number of islands, but, four days or so before a landing, we would start to bombard the shore and it was constant, just practically all the time. We were just shelling the shore and you have to understand that on shore were a lot of pillboxes and defenses of all sorts, and our job was to try to knock those out and help the troops that were coming in. On D-Day, we would go to general quarters in the middle of the night and we're there and, as dawn came and it started to get light, the harbor that you had looked at before that only had a few ships in it now had hundreds and hundreds of ships, and from those ships were landing craft, thousands, literally, of them, going toward that shore. It was just, "Where did they come from?" They just sort of came out of the ocean and there they were and they hit the beaches. Now, there may or may not be resistance. In most cases, there wasn't, particularly early on, and we would be in touch with those troops. They would let us know what they were encountering, what they were not encountering, and it was just phenomenal. At Leyte Gulf, then, the *kamikazes* started to come in. MacArthur had promised us air cover, Army air cover, which never materialized, and didn't materialize for about a week-and-a-half. We were absolutely without air defense and the *kamikazes* had a field day. I mean, they really did. In fact, there were a couple of times where the Admiral said, "If we don't get air cover, we can't stay here any longer," he said to MacArthur, and MacArthur finally sent some airplanes, but it was terrible on his part, "No way, no way." So, we lost some ships, we lost some men, not my ship, but other ships, and it was a very bad disaster, in that sense.

KP: You could see this, too. You had the best seat.

SRC: Oh, sure, oh, yes. Then, the Japanese got wind of our landing and they decided that, "They're getting too close to the homeland and we've got to do something and do something major to knock them out of the box." So, they gathered their fleet, with some of their newest battleships, and started toward us. Now, I don't how much you know about the area. I can show you maps and things, but, at any rate, there are two straits. There's one southern strait and there's one that's a northern strait, and coming ... up and through the southern strait, Surigao Strait, into Leyte Gulf, was the largest portion of their fleet and their newest battleships and they were going

to really do a job, not only on us, but all those transports that were sitting there in the Gulf. Our admiral got word of this and he sent down the strait, first, PT boats, then, destroyers, then, cruisers, and across the mouth of the strait, he had eight battleships, and they kept coming and they were dropping, our guys were dropping, torpedoes and everything else, and it was night. It got to be nighttime. We performed what is a classic naval maneuver. ... It's a book maneuver, but it's almost never done. It's called "Crossing the 'T.'" When they come down, their guns are brought to bear out here, but we're here. All of our guns are brought to bear on them, but they're not bringing any guns to bear on us and [Admiral Jesse B.] Oldendorf, our admiral, told us to open fire and we opened fire. We blew that fleet sky high. ... [laughter] The greatest naval battle that's ever been held, we blew them right out of the water. We sank ... the newest battleship they had, and, in that battle, the *Mississippi*, as you said, fired the last shell at the last enemy battleship that has ever been fired. There will never be another battleship firing at another battleship. [laughter] Meantime, they had aircraft carriers coming up in the northern area and they were going to come down the shore then, to Leyte Gulf. Admiral Nimitz had pulled our aircraft carriers away from Leyte Gulf and, finally, some smart aircraft, some flier on our part, spotted these fellows coming. We never knew they were there. He spotted them and he alerted "Halsey and company" and we went after them. That was a running sea fight, though. That wasn't a, "Boom, you're dead." So, that is, without question, the greatest naval battle that has ever been fought, and I'm proud I was there, you know. It was really great.

KP: As this battle was unfolding, how much did you realize, at the time, what was going on?

SRC: Very little. It's nighttime; you don't see anything. All you see are flashes and the only thing they can do is shoot flares in the air. So, that lights some of the area. They'll shoot flares up, but we don't know. I'm up on the mainmast. ... I'm not in communication with anybody.

KP: You were just observing what you see, between flashes.

SRC: And I'm not seeing much up there. It's dark.

KP: You were seeing occasional flashes, an occasional flare.

SRC: Sure, sure, yes, and you hear the guns and all that, and they're trying to fire at us, but they're not effective. ...

KP: The sound must have been deafening when the guns all were firing.

SRC: Oh, it was fantastic. When those guns go, if you fire a broadside from one turret, that's three guns, it is an awful sound. It's fantastic. You never fired two turrets together, for several reasons. Well, one is the recoil. You know, the ship can rock and roll. [laughter] Then, we went up, I told you, to Luzon and, on the way, that's when that *kamikaze* came in and hit us and killed the ...

KP: The chaplain.

SRC: Killed the chaplain, yes.

KP: What about off of Okinawa? Your ship was also hit there.

SRC: Well, we went to Okinawa and, again, ... we had landed. We bombarded the shore for quite awhile, we landed troops, both Army and Marines. They advanced quite a ways, and then, we received word that they had reached Shuri Castle, S-H-U-R-I Castle. ... Shuri Castle was interesting, historically, because, in 1853, Commodore [Matthew C.] Perry had been the commodore of the first *Mississippi* and he had gone to Japan, if you recall. ... On the way, he had stopped at Okinawa and had visited Shuri Castle, which had been built back in the 1100s, and it had thirty-foot thick walls and it had everything you could imagine, and he toured that, and then, he got back on his ship and he went up to Tokyo Bay and moored there. When we got to Okinawa, several ships, battleships, had been trying to knock it down, Shuri Castle, because our troops couldn't advance any farther and they hadn't had any success. So, there was a request that went out for the *Mississippi* and we tried and our gunnery guys, I'll tell you, they were dropping shells through rifle slits in the walls. [laughter] Within a day-and-a-half, that castle no longer existed, yes, and they said, "Well, we're going through now. You can stop." [laughter] So, we followed them as far as our guns would reach. In other words, they went, we went ahead of them. ...

KP: Did you land troops in the Philippines operation at all?

SRC: Sure, at Leyte Gulf.

KP: Leyte Gulf, you did.

SRC: Yes.

KP: How many troops did you carry, and what was it like to have troops aboard?

SRC: Oh, we never landed any troops, no; from our ship?

KP: No, you did not have any.

SRC: Oh, no, no, no.

KP: That is why I was confused.

SRC: No. We had transports do that. No, we were strictly a fighting ship, no transport. No, the only thing I can say is that, ... well, again, up to Luzon, there were ships, the *Princeton* was one, where the *kamikazes* hit them. One of them dropped a bomb down the main stack of the *Princeton* and it went down and it hit the ammunition hold. ... She started to explode and she exploded in all directions and, finally, there was no ship above water. Everything above water was gone and she sank, of course. Well, there were 142 survivors and we picked up maybe fifty

of them. So, in that sense, we had extra people, but, no, we weren't transporting; we were just saving survivors.

KP: Your ship also took part in the great assemblage of the fleets in the surrender at Tokyo Bay.

SRC: That's right, yes, and nobody knew what was going to happen, so that they were all prepared to provide a defense for our forces that were ashore. The Japs weren't to be trusted and they could have done anything. They could have killed our parties or whatever. So, we were ready to provide defense, but they didn't do anything. So, our people gathered. The *Mississippi* went into Tokyo Bay and moored in the very spot where Commodore Perry's *Mississippi* had moored, which I think is great, and the Navy has long memories. [laughter] That was one of them, I guess. So, she was there during the signing of the cessation of arms, and then, she went back, eventually, to New Orleans and she was visited and all, in New Orleans, and then, she became this rocket ship. [laughter] There are no more battleships. [laughter] That was it, no, no more battleships, aircraft carriers though, but maybe not even them. There's going to be intercontinental missiles and all that, if they ever have another war.

KP: After Tokyo Bay, I have read that your ship took people back to the States. How many people, extra hands, did you take on to take back? Who were they?

SRC: I don't know. I wasn't on her. I wasn't on the *Mississippi*.

KP: When did you get off the ship?

SRC: Just before she went to Tokyo.

KP: Really? You did not see what took place in Tokyo.

SRC: No. I didn't go. My ship did, but I didn't. I wish I had, but I didn't. I was relieved by then. First, my skipper was relieved, then, I was relieved.

KP: When were you relieved? What month was it?

SRC: The time?

KP: Yes.

SRC: Let's see, I had it in here somewhere; I guess I didn't put it down.

KP: It sounds like you were relieved; oh, on August 18th, you were detached.

SRC: Where's that?

KP: On the last page.

SRC: Seven?

KP: On the 18th, and sent from the *Mississippi* and reported to the USS *Tryon* [APH-1] for transportation to San Francisco.

SRC: What's this, the last page?

KP: Yes. You had some dysentery, you wrote.

SRC: Yes, we did. We all did. About three thousand of us did.

KP: What caused it? [laughter]

SRC: Well, I don't know how much you know about those islands, but ... I told you about the natives? The natives are born and raised in this stuff and they are immune. It's true all over. You go to Thailand and in the canals and all, they wash and the animals wash and they defecate and urinate and everything else, and the same thing here. All of the harbors are polluted. ... The way they feed their plants, with manure, that's all infected. It rains and the water washes this stuff down into the harbors. So, every place you go, it's infected. It's not "white man's country." The second you get back to ship, you wash your hands and dry them, and then, you wash them again, clean your nails as best you can. It's terrible, because people are affected all the time. This happened in a case where many of us had been across a harbor and water had splashed on us and a lot of people came down [sick]. As I said, there must have been three thousand of us.

KP: Which harbor was this?

SRC: I don't remember now, but we went to a hospital ship and I was there for a few days, but I was on a cot or a carrier or a stretcher on the main deck and there was a young enlisted man next to me that I talked with. He was really one sick boy and, after we'd been on the hospital ship for a day or so, I inquired about him and he was dead. ... I asked, "Why? Why did he die?" Well, all they knew, at that time, to give you was sulfa. They gave him sulfa and he was allergic to sulfa and it killed him. ... He [the medical personnel] didn't ask you whether you were allergic and, if he did, you might not even know whether you were or not, but they gave him sulfa and his capillaries and all just fell apart and he died. There must have been five hundred guys in one ward who couldn't lie on their backsides and they had big carbuncles. I don't know where they came from. We called it "the sore butt ward." [laughter] They couldn't sit down, they couldn't lie down on their backs, they had to lie down on their sides. They could get up and walk, but that was about it. Yes, "the sore butt ward," [laughter] but it was a common thing and I still am affected. I have to be a little careful about things, because of that dysentery, and any number of people [still are]. I have a little bit of it, but not much, but I have a friend whose fingernails are all moldy, and his toenails, all from swimming in that water out there. It was so infectious, and he's lost his nails and ... they can't do anything about it. [There has] been a lot of people who have suffered that way. So, if you ever go to the islands, and I have many times since, be very careful what you do, [laughter] and what you eat and what you don't eat and where you do.

KP: When you were sent back to the States, did you expect to be reassigned to another duty?

SRC: No. I was on my way out. I was relieved, yes, just a matter of time. So, I called Nancy. Here, you mentioned that port. Here, on page six, this is Kossol Passage. That's one of the places where they would moor. "She left Leyte Gulf for Manus and spent the remainder of the month of November and the first part of December training, and then, after a brief period," see, "at Kossol Passage." Now, that's nothing but a place where she would moor out in the road, but you could pick up some of the names here that I haven't specifically mentioned and put in anything I may have failed to, because I've added some stuff, too, Joe, that isn't in here, but anything that's in here, feel free to include, because I'd like to have it in there.

KP: You had a lot of time to think. Watches were probably very conducive to that, particularly, I think, in a dead period when nothing very much was happening. What did you think would be your personal future? Did you expect the career that you would have? What did you think would happen to you?

SRC: Yes, pretty much. I wouldn't do it today, but I wanted to go into business with a big corporation and, when I came back and out of service, ... one thing I did which was great, they really did a job, the big corporations in New York set up, at the 14th Street Armory in New York, evenings where you could go and talk with them. ... I remember talking with the Vicks Company, Vicks Vapor Rub people. The president was there and I wanted to write. So, he said, "Well, gee, about all I can offer you in that area is the company magazine. You can come write on the company magazine, but I don't know that's going to lead you very far. If you want to go up in management in the company, I can arrange to have you go out in the field for about five years and place Vicks Vapor Rub in the drug stores and the markets. ... After that, we'll bring you into a management spot somewhere," etc. I interviewed with several of the oil companies. I had thought maybe it'd be nice to go overseas, like with Texaco and Shell Oil, and I had two offers there. There were chances to go and ask. If you thought you might want to go into a brokerage house or something, they were there, and it was a great place to ask questions and I went there a number of times. In addition, I used to go around, like, in Newark, I'd go to Public Service and I'd go to Prudential and I'd go to the telephone company, and interview and put in applications, that sort of thing. ... They all offered me jobs, but the question is, "What do you want to do?" and you don't really know. I didn't know, really, what I wanted to do then. The telephone company offered me a job in either the commercial side of the house or traffic. The traffic side was the telephone operators and all that. Now, it's all dial equipment, but, then, we had thousands of dial operators, and it sounded pretty good, so, I went with them and I thought I'd have a pretty good career with them, which I did. It wasn't as great as I'd hoped, but it was good. I retired as a director in the company and I felt I did very well, sent my kids to college. Nancy wanted to get married and I did, too, so, it was good to get a job then, [laughter] but I'd saved some money and we were able to get started.

KP: You worked for AT&T in its heyday as the Bell System, the largest corporation in the world; I think in the world. It was definitely the largest in the nation.

SRC: At that time, yes.

KP: At that time. Now ...

SRC: It's all split up.

KP: It is all split up. It still exists, but it is a shell of what it used to be, in terms of when you had the whole Bell System.

SRC: Yes. Well, what we'd do in the Bell System, we had the associated companies. There were twenty-one of those. New Jersey Bell was one of them, the New York company was another, later became NYNEX, and New England and New York merged, and so on. AT&T was the mother, the holding company, and AT&T would provide financing, if you needed it. AT&T handled long lines. They did the long distance service work, not overseas, just in the United States. So, we'll say New Jersey Bell handled the local stuff, and then, if you wanted to call San Francisco, New Jersey Bell would connect you to AT&T who would take you out to the coast, connect you to Pacific out there and complete your call. So, now, three companies would split up your telephone costs. AT&T had a big operation and AT&T brings in, from the associated companies, individuals, and that's what I did. I went to AT&T from New Jersey Bell and went up to Basking Ridge and worked there. I used to redesign organizations and I'd go in, it'd be a thousand-person organization, and I would redesign it for them. They knew they had troubles and they weren't operating as well as they should, but they didn't know what to do. So, I would go in and ask for ... ten people, we'll say, and ... they'd give me the ten best that they could, and we would identify problems and, in a matter of two weeks, would identify all the problems that you had and determine what it was costing you to have those problems, and, also, I would take on what we called a "parallel path." I would take the top officials in this organization on four hours a week, on a maxi [macro] basis, to determine what their problems were and, at the end of the time, this team would come out in detail and these fellows would come out in macro with the same problems. Amazing, wasn't it?

KP: In many ways, you were doing something that a lot of companies go to outside consultants to figure out.

SRC: Sure, and we would put a dollar sign on the problems, and [say], "I'm sorry about this, but you have about nine million dollars worth of problems." "You're full of crap. I don't have any nine million..." "Oh, yes, you do." "Well, how do you arrive at that?" "Tell him, Joe," and my leader here would be trained to tell him. "All right?" So, you would explain to them why it was nine million dollars and, finally, I would then ask you if you would like to have all your problems designed away. Now, that takes guts, because, first of all, you've got to admit you've got the problems. Secondly, you have to have faith that if you devote more time to this, out of a busy organization, you're going to get some really good results.

KP: Or you could even make them worse.

SRC: Yes. So, you buy me. Now, I need ten people. The first group could be, it didn't matter what discipline they came from, but, now, say, I'm doing an engineering study, "I need ten

engineers, because I can't teach people engineering overnight, and I've got to have the best you have. ... If you give me somebody who's not good, I'm going to give him back to you in about two days, so, make sure you give me top quality," because they have to be able to analyze, they have to be able to write particularly well, and quickly. So, we would go in and redesign the whole thing, every ... piece of work they did, every work flow, everything.

KP: What were some of the departments you would redesign in the different areas?

SRC: Engineering, traffic, personnel.

KP: A traffic department in, say, a Bell company in the Northwest.

SRC: Yes. The systems that we used were discipline independent, could do anything. I could go down to your organization at Rutgers and redesign it for you. We used to work with people from academia. ... My particular area of so-called expertise was strategy, corporate strategy, and I had two professors at the Columbia Graduate School of Business that I used to work with. Other people in my group at AT&T had different things and we developed models and so on that we used, but I can't talk to a businessman about academic theory. He's not going to listen, but I can talk to him about dollars and he'll listen. So, we play down the professorships and we play up the dollars. I did a directory study ... down in Virginia. There's a guy named Bob Morgan, who was one of the best managers I ever saw, and he had a pretty good organization, but it was the best in the Bell System when we got through with it, and Bob was rapidly promoted after that, because he saved so much money.

KP: What would be some of the things you would identify in an organization? What were some of the problems? What were the things you typically found in the area you were working on?

SRC: Well, we did not go in to eliminate people, but, oddly enough, you would, at times.

KP: That was not the intention.

SRC: No. I'll give you an example; you're going to have a work flow. "A" does some work, then, he passes it to "B." What's the first thing that "B" does? He checks the work of "A," right? That takes twenty percent of his time. Then, he passes it to "C." Well, what's the first thing "C" does? He checks the work of "B" and the work of "A." That's forty percent of his time, and so on. Finally, you can eliminate this guy. You eliminate the checking. It's like putting a goalie behind a goalie, or a third baseman behind a third baseman. You eliminate that. Joe is responsible for what comes to him and that's it and we're not going to check him. That's it. He's going to do it and he's going to do it right and, if he doesn't do it right, it's on his head. ... So, you eliminate somebody, but you don't plan to do that. In a directory, for example, oh, in Washington, DC, they have a directory like that, one group of women would handle that directory; wrong. There's no responsibility. The whole group is responsible for that. So, [if] they make an error, it could be any of them. Oh, no good; so, we take one girl and we give her all the "A" through "D" listings in that directory. That's her responsibility. So, if something goes wrong, we can pin her. In an engineering group, down in West Virginia, we threw out all the old

engineering practices. We took and pushed down to the first level engineer total and complete responsibility for forty central officers. They had everything to do with those, so, they anticipated problems, they cleared up problems before they started, and so on. They loved it, never had so much sunshine in all their lives. We took the second liners who were checking the work of the first liners, eliminated that. We took the second liners who were signing bills and vouchers and eliminated that. We took the second liners who were doing no training, no development, no interfacing with anybody, and on and on, and showed them what they should be doing as managers and not what they were doing. "Oh, we understand." So, we eliminated the next level, the third level, completely, didn't need them, and that was it. So, we went away for a year. We came back, came back a little sooner than that; I'll tell you why. We came back. The second liners were still signing bills and vouchers and reviewing the work of others. They weren't interfacing, they weren't training, they weren't doing a damn thing except what they had done before. So, we realized that we had failed, because we should have trained them to do the work the way they should've been doing it. The first liners were ecstatic. They'd never had such great times. Their job, they were thrilled with their job. They couldn't wait to get to work in the morning. They just had a marvelous time and there was sunshine and light in there for the first time. Just about that juncture, the engineering department at AT&T, because this was the only thing that existed like this in the Bell System, everything was the old system again, came to West Virginia and said, "You've got to stop it, you've got to go back, because we want standardization around the system." That's what they said, and the president of the company said, "Now, wait a minute, I hear you, but let's go ask the men who are doing the work," [laughter] which they did. "No way. We're going to stay the way we are," and a good portion of the Bell System now is the way we started them down there.

KP: In fact, that whole standardization model, there is no Bell System now.

SRC: No, but it shows you what you can do, and the whole purpose of this is job satisfaction.

KP: That has been popularized now, but you had a sense of it then, because my impression, looking from the outside, I mean, is that Bell Labs, being so big and being, in many ways, a monopoly, was a very bureaucratic company. Everything was very orderly, to the point where you could have a lot of redundancies.

SRC: ... Sure, that's one of their problems.

KP: Particularly now, it is not the same world, really.

SRC: No, but a lot of people thought, and still think, there's no competition. Well, now, there is competition, but, in those days, the internal competition was absolutely mindboggling.

KP: When you say, "internal competition," in what way?

SRC: Results, results. We measure everything. We send a coin collector out to collect the coin telephone [income]; we measure a hundred things that he does. Now, you know, how many guys are going out in a little (panel?) truck and getting measured a hundred ways from Sunday? We

have a pie plate that goes on and we know exactly how fast he goes when he's driving. [laughter] An experienced supervisor who knows the routes can tell exactly where he was at any given time, all on this, and he turns it in at the end of the day. Everybody, including the top, top manager, 175 of the top people in the Bell System were given bonuses for improving results. So, if you're one of those, what are you going to say to your subordinates? "Look, Jack, you get the results held up or you're gone, [laughter] because I'm going to get my bonus," but that kind of thing.

KP: There was real pressure, in fact, to compete.

SRC: Oh, I think it's even worse today.

KP: Today, you have no choice.

SRC: Blinding today, yes, and so many people have been fired, laid off, and, if you haven't been laid off, you're scared to death you will be. That's one of the major problems.

KP: You left the system just before things really changed, just before divestiture.

SRC: Well, I worked the last three years on divestiture, in my area, which was material supplies, and we set everything up to do that and, within a year-and-a-half, after we had done that, all the plans were changed, [laughter] which ... gives people work, right. "Let's change things, right. They didn't know anything, right. We'll do it differently," [laughter] but, even now, they're laying people off, and by the thousands.

KP: Did you ever join any veterans' organizations?

SRC: Never, no. ... Well, I don't want to downgrade them, because I'm sure they do some good, but I had no interest in what they do.

KP: Even the Retired Naval Officers.

SRC: No, none.

KP: You had two children.

SRC: Yes.

KP: Neither one of them served in the military.

SRC: No. My son had a number, but he escaped, he says. [laughter] I wish he had. I'd like to see him [in the military]. In fact, I would like to see two years, mandatory, for all the young people, men and women. I think it would be good for them, I really do, but I don't think we'll ever get there. [laughter] A lot of people say, "Oh, my God, if we have another war, I'm afraid the country's going to go to hell." I don't believe that. I think they'll rally, in their way, and their way's going to be a lot different than our way. It's going to be all computer-controlled and long-

distance fighting or whatever they do. It's going to be a different, different war. Well, you saw what happened there in the Gulf, [Operation Desert Storm], a lot different. [laughter] I'm one of the barnacles. [laughter]

JS: Did you want your children to go to Rutgers? Did you push them at all?

SRC: No. As a matter-of-fact, I'd rather they didn't. I'm not crazy about size. The size of Rutgers, I think, is just too great. My daughter went to Cedar Crest, which is an all-girls school in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and she liked that and one of the reasons she liked it was, she had some identity there. ... I guess you know, a girl who goes to a men's school and has classes with men, the men tend to dominate and they override the girls and so on, and they don't have the same expression that they would at another type school. So, that was good for her, and my son went to Colgate, a little different way. He played basketball. He was All-County in basketball and a Colgate man from Westfield used to come to the games and he was like a spotter. He wasn't a recruiter, but he was a spotter, because Colgate didn't offer scholarships, but he was interested in having Scott come up to play basketball at Colgate. So, he talked Colgate a lot with him and Scott had a friend, George Murphy, from Columbia High School, who was a big baseball player. I think he might have been All-State; he was very good. The two boys went up to Colgate themselves, just the two of them, and both fell in love with it and decided that's where they wanted to go. So, they did, and Colgate had a Phi Gam House. So, I said, "Do you want me to tell the Phi Gams you're around?" He said, "No, I'll find my own way." So, he went ATO, and ATO is the offshoot of Phi Gam. So, he really was a Phi Gam; that's what I tell him. "You're really a Phi Gam, even though you don't think you are." Well, both houses are gone now. They're not up there anymore, interesting, how time moves around, but, no, I didn't talk to them about Rutgers at all, and they never went there to see the campus or tour the campus. No, they always dealt in smaller schools, and I see my granddaughters, well, one's going to Colgate, the other one has to make a decision now, by the end of the month, and she's been accepted everywhere she applied. ... She applied at Delaware, Gettysburg, Muhlenberg, Dickinson, what's that other nice school in Pennsylvania? Bucknell, and she's been accepted everywhere, but she doesn't know where she wants to go yet and, over the weekend, we were out there and she starts talking Grove City. I said, "Where?" Grove City, that's out west in Pennsylvania and, apparently, they have a very fine dramatic program and she's starting to get interested in dramatics now, or something, I don't know, but imagine this, seven thousand a year. I didn't know a good school could have tuition that low, my gosh, seven thousand. So, it's very popular, obviously. So, you said you wanted to know something about what I did after the Navy. These are the awards that I received, Joe. They're in here. They were all unit awards, ... the last page there.

KP: Did you stay in touch with anyone you served with after the war?

SRC: No.

KP: No Christmas cards.

SRC: No.

KP: Did you ever run into anyone you served with?

SRC: Never. Isn't that interesting? Yes, I never have. I know, or knew, they're both dead now, a couple of officers, naval officers, who were Supply Corps.

-----END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO-----

KP: This continues an interview with Sigurd Robert Christensen on April 20, 1998, in Cranford, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JS: ... Joseph Scott.

KP: You mentioned you kept in touch with some Supply Corps officers.

SRC: Yes.

KP: One lived nearby.

SRC: In Westfield, the next town, and he was a full captain when he retired. He was a big personnel man, at that time, and that's really what a big portion of what he was doing [was], supply in the Navy. I didn't realize that he'd been in that long, because it takes awhile to get to be a captain.

KP: It is not the same as the Army captain.

SRC: Oh, no. This is colonel level, and I know one who's out in Oregon now. He's a son of friends of ours who was in Navy Supply Corps, but, no, it's interesting. I've never run into any of them and we would have nothing in common, actually, Kurt. I don't know what we would even have, except, "Gee, what are you doing now?" and then, how long is that going to last? Once you left school, you went on your ship and that was it. Then, you had shipmates and we didn't tie back to the school. I guess some guys do. I'm not that type. I'm not an alumni relations type, either. I've never been back to a reunion, never, no, don't intend to go, but some people can't stay away. They just love it, yes. My son's that way. [laughter]

KP: There are people in the Class of 1942 who have monthly meetings very regularly.

SRC: Sure, sure. Some of them have been very active over the years, bless them. The class reunions wouldn't go forward without them, I'm sure.

KP: How long have you lived in Cranford?

SRC: That's a good question, I guess forty-five years. We lived in Fairlawn, up in North Jersey, our first house. We first lived in Englewood, when I went with the telephone company, and we rented, it was hard to find housing at that time.

KP: There was quite a shortage.

SRC: Terrible, yes. We rented the main bedroom of a lady's home and her husband was the greatest athlete in the history of Englewood High School and he was killed during the war, and we had her main bedroom for awhile. Then, we moved to two other places in Englewood. Then, I bought a house in Fairlawn.

KP: Did you use the GI Bill for the house in Fairlawn?

SRC: No.

KP: You had written to Harvard about going back.

SRC: Yes.

KP: Had you thought of using the GI Bill for any other additional schooling?

SRC: No. It's interesting. I think I learn more on my own than I do going to some class where I'm going to be bored or I'm going to waste time or whatever. I can do more, and more effectively, on my own. Nancy and I get material from the adult schools and all that and we do look at them. We get material from the hostel groups and we look at them and a number of our friends go on these, but we don't. We travel. We do a lot of research before we go to a given area, given countries. I'd rather do it myself. Now, that may sound self-centered, but I find that I go faster and learn faster, more quickly and better, doing it that way. For me, it works. The only course I've taken, I think, was a photography course, [laughter] was having some trouble with my photography. So, I took a night course in photography one time and the fellow was very helpful, and I took a night course in golf and that was a waste. The assistant pro up here, at our local golf course, Echo Lake, had us hit those balls, the little celluloid balls, in the gymnasium. That was a waste. [laughter] I went three times, I think, and never went again. [laughter] I learn more in the backyard than they do over there. [laughter] Now, did you want to know anything about Nancy or where we're going? ... Where do you want to go from here?

KP: We would like to send you a survey for her to fill out and we would like to do a separate interview with her.

SRC: Okay, that's great, if she's agreeable, yes.

KP: Unfortunately, I did not bring one with me.

SRC: ... And you're in charge of all this?

KP: Yes, for the past four years.

SRC: Wonderful, good. Well, I think they made a good choice.

KP: Thank you. Is there anything else that we have forgotten? To end on a humorous story, I noticed a great story about the pea in the safe.

SRC: Oh, yes. [laughter]

KP: Could you talk about one of your more perplexing, but, in the end, more humorous stories from the war? There would be this pea that would rest on the shelf.

SRC: Yes. I had a large safe and I opened and closed the safe myself, period.

KP: No one else had that information.

SRC: No way. So, I open the door one morning and there, on an inner shelf, is a dried pea, right, P-E-A, and I said, "Oh, that's interesting." So, I discarded it and went my way, did my thing, and, the very next morning, there was another one in the same place, [laughter] and I began to say, "Uh-oh, what's going on? Who's got the combination?" etc., etc., and I have very good peripheral vision. So, I'm looking at the safe, but I can see storekeepers smirking. Now, so, I figure something's afoot. Well, when I arrived on the ship, the then chief petty officer was a chief petty officer and I made him a warrant. So, he felt he should owe me something, I guess, I don't know, but he tipped the hand, anyhow. He told me. They let it go for a couple of days and they had their fun, but the way they got it [in] is, there was a bolt hole in the side of the safe and the bolt was missing. ... If you suck on a drinking straw and create suction, you can get a pea to adhere to the end of that straw and you insert that straw through the bolt hole and, when you take the suction away, the pea will land on that shelf and stay there, [laughter] and that's what they did, and they apparently had done it to my predecessor, too. [laughter] Once they found it, they couldn't let it go.

KP: How did you get along with your petty officers and warrant officers? It sounds like you had a fairly good relationship. They invited you to their mess and you promoted one.

SRC: Oh, very well. If you are human and if you respect them and respect the man's knowledge and his abilities, you can get along with most anybody, and I didn't have any hard cases. I mean, I had real good boys, and my warrant officer was a Kentucky hillbilly from back in the hills in Kentucky, and he didn't have any hidden agenda or anything else. He was just trying to do a job and he wanted to go back to Kentucky when it was over. He wasn't going to make a life case of it. So, that was true of most of them, and quite a few of them were married and [had] children, a full life and hoping they lived through it. So, I think I got along, I can say without fear of contradiction, better than my predecessor. My predecessor was sort of a hidebound kind of a guy, who thought that being an officer was something next to God, I think, ... and he didn't work to get the guys promoted, and that was pretty important, to get them to take the proper tests and pass in the shortest period of time. So, they see guys in other divisions going up and they're not moving and they're unhappy, and it wasn't any reason why they couldn't. They were perhaps a lot brighter than most of them. So, we took care of that. The Chief Warrant and I fixed that up and we moved them, but there are a lot of things that go into that and I have found that if you praise

people, I mean, really, truly praise them, and they deserve it, you'll get a better job. You tell them they're doing a good job, they'll improve it, and that's true everywhere I've ever gone. I had a guy in the telephone company tell me one time, "I don't want you talking to your underlings," because I'd go talk with them, people worked for me at all levels. I'd go out with foremen and supervisors in a car, on a day trip, and talk with them. This guy didn't believe in that at all. Well, as big a man as General Ike Eisenhower was, he didn't want a general around him who couldn't go down and talk to the troops in the field. He didn't want any general that couldn't talk to a GI. "You go down and talk to them," and I think that's important to recognize that they're there and what they're contributing, and they are, all of them, if they are, [laughter] but, anyhow, ... I don't want to philosophize too much. [laughter]

KP: Thank you very much.

SRC: Well, thanks for coming. I think it's terrific.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/14/08

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/20/08

Reviewed by Nancy S. Christensen 9/8/08