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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT DOXEY

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert Doxey on July 18, 2012, in Park Ridge, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you, Mr. Doxey, for having me here today.

Robert Doxey: My pleasure.

NM: Could you tell me when and where you were born?

RD: I was born in Park Ridge, 1921, and I was born at home.

NM: We usually begin the interview by asking a little bit about your background and family history. Could you tell me a little bit about your father?

RD: Well, my father, Robert Doxey, was born in Philadelphia. His father, Abraham Doxey, was a stonecutter from England and, of course, in those days, these people were brought to the United States because of their trade. He was working in Philadelphia at the time on a job and, I think, in his young thirties, he died of influenza, my grandfather. My grandmother was a (Westphal?), old-time family from Hillsdale, New Jersey, an old-time family in Bergen County, and she lived a full life, had children, were Robert, Stanford, Ethel, Theresa and Marion. Those were my aunts. My mother was born in Hackensack, New Jersey, of a German immigrant family. Her father was a textile worker in Paterson. That's about all I know of the background, of the history of my family.

NM: Do you know how your mother and father met?

RD: No, I don't. My mother, apparently, was an accomplished musician on the piano and played the piano in a dance band. They probably met where she was working, my father was at a dance.

NM: Do you have any siblings?

RD: No, I had a sister. My sister Charlotte was four years older than I am and she died a number of years ago from cancer. She had one son, Peter. She married a man from Rutherford, New Jersey, by the name of Harry Dabinete and they had one son, Peter Dabinete. My sister died and I believe my brother-in-law remarried. After that, I know nothing about him. Then, with my nephew, Peter, he was educated and lived in the Philippines for a while, with a bank, and then, came home. I think he had an alcohol problem and the bank put him through a rehabilitation program and he disappeared. I don't know where he is.

NM: You grew up in Woodcliff Lake.

RD: I was born in Park Ridge. My father built a home in Woodcliff Lake when I was four years old and I lived in Woodcliff Lake until I went in military. Woodcliff Lake and Park Ridge, in those days, were kind of blended together and Park Ridge had a high school. I went to high school in Park Ridge after graduating from Woodcliff Lake.

NM: Could you tell me what you remember about the area while you were growing up?

RD: As a little boy, everything was very primitive. There weren't very many houses. At the time, we lived on a road in Woodcliff Lake, was Glen Road, and it was very close to Park Ridge. It was separated by a little brook and that brook has fond memories for me. We would fish in it and, today, the brook is just about dried up, because of the construction that's gone on and all the springs in the ground have dried up. The glen is still there, but the brook hardly exists at all. I remember catching a lot of trout out of it when I was a little boy.

NM: Would you do a little fishing with your friends or your father?

RD: Well, my father, I guess he was the fellow that introduced me to fishing. I remember going along the brook, after they had stocked it, before the fishing season had opened, and my father was a great small-game hunter as well as loved to trout fish. We'd go to a pool and he'd take his cigarette butt, flip it out in the pool, maybe fifteen feet away, and the trout would come up after it, bite at it. [laughter]

NM: What other things did you do for recreation as a child?

RD: I had a very good friend that lived across the street, (Gib Eagleston?), and we were "Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn." We would play in the brook, that was the big [activity]. I'd catch garter snakes and bring them home and put them in a box. The thing with a garter snake, it won't bite you, but they smell horrible. They have some kind of a secretion, that they smell horrible. I remember, Gib and I set the woods on fire one time and we hid when the fire engines came.

NM: Did you play any sports?

RD: No, I was only a little kid. I went to high school in Park Ridge. Of course, the sports in those days were nothing like they are today. When we would play as little kids in the neighborhood, it was over in a sandlot and the baseball, it was all taped together and things like that. There's a lot of little games in the neighborhood, ring-a-levio, where a big circle was drawn on the ground and somebody would stand in it. I don't remember the details of it, and then, a lot of marbles, shoot marbles. I became a pretty good marble shooter and, when you played marbles, they were for keeps. It was gambling with little children and I had quite a bag of marbles.

NM: Growing up, a lot of people say they were involved in activities with a local church. Was that the case for you?

RD: No. My mother and father never went to church, but they did have me go to the Dutch Reformed Church in Park Ridge as a little boy and they saw that I went to Sunday school until I was old enough, like in high school, to pass my own decisions. Then, I'd go to church occasionally, and then, I grew up and my second wife was Catholic and I would go to the Catholic church with my children.

NM: It sounds like Woodcliff Lake was a rural area.

RD: Everything here was rural. I remember, when I was sixteen years old, the golf course was out here at the end of Prospect Avenue and this was a big farm here. There was an old colonial house right here in the front and this house was part of the farm. It must have been a tenant house, because I believe that the original house is maybe a hundred years, no more than that, because I'm almost a hundred, a couple of hundred years old. I remember, there's a great, big barn out here in the back, and then, right across the street was Lockwood's Dairy. There were cows there. That was when I was sixteen years old. The farm existed not as a working farm but right up until about ten, fifteen years ago.

NM: Was this area primarily for agriculture?

RD: Well, yes, the area here, in this particular spot where we are on Prospect Avenue, there were a few dairy farmers and they had little dairy farms, I guess, and sold milk locally, but, on top of the hill, going to the west of here, on top of the hill, there were big farms, Ticae's Farm, Van Riper's Farm, Mata Rocies Farm, and they raised produce. They sold some of it here, but they would take the produce into New York City and Paterson.

NM: Were there places nearby where you could go to the movies and things like that?

RD: When I was probably twelve, fourteen years old, my sister was four years older than I am and I remember that we would go to the movies in Westwood. Westwood is probably three-and-a-half, four miles from here, south, and my mother would give us each twenty cents. It wasn't every week. She'd give us each twenty cents and that was a nickel for the bus to Westwood, ten cents to get into the movies and a nickel for the bus home. Of course, when we'd go in the movies, there would be that big candy counter, big Babe Ruths, and I remember that there were a few other candies.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RD: Well, we were talking about the movies. I remember many the time I would buy that big Babe Ruth bar and walk home from Westwood after the movies. My sister would get on the bus. She'd go home and I'd walk. [laughter]

NM: Where did your family primarily do their shopping for groceries?

RD: My father worked at a local factory at Park Ridge. They manufactured typewriter ribbons and carbon paper. It was called Mitage and Vogler and I believe that Vogler was a German chemist. I know that he invented carbon paper and I assume that Mitagewas probably the financier, but they had a big factory in Park Ridge that ran along the railroad tracks. I don't believe I have a picture of it. I have a picture here of my father and the people that worked in the factory; they'd have an annual party out at Lake Hopatcong in Western New Jersey. I have that picture, but I don't believe I have a [photo of the factory], but it looked like a factory in Connecticut, big, old brick factory that ran along the railroad. It was an international company and my father worked there all of his working life. He wound typewriter ribbons, physically, and his hospitalization--I was told, I don't know whether I was born or not born yet--but, anyway, he got influenza. He wound the typewriter ribbons by hand with machinery and his

hospitalization was, they brought the machinery home to the house, so [that] he could continue those while he had influenza.

NM: Where did your family primarily do their shopping for food?

RD: Okay. My father would get paid on Friday evening and my mother would walk every Friday evening into town, to Park Ridge, which was probably about a mile from the house. She would go in the factory, get my father's pay, and then, we would go to the First National store and my mother would do the shopping for the week. I think she had a wagon and she put the things in the wagon and my father would come out of work and they'd pull the wagon home.

NM: Did your mother have a job while she was raising children?

RD: She was a seamstress and, I remember, she would make everything for my sister and I, my pajamas, all of my sister's clothes. Then, when I got a little older, probably pre-teen or teenage, people would come to the house and she would make dresses for them. My father's pay was probably forty, about forty dollars a week.

NM: During the 1930s, the United States was in the Depression. In your recollection, did it affect the area at all?

RD: In my recollection, no, I don't know; I really don't know. When you're a little person, young person like that, you're living for today. I do know that my father's forty dollars a week was big pay. Of course, it was just the fact that the company he worked for was busy and he was a good worker, I guess. Well, everybody that worked in those days really was a good worker.

NM: Your father worked at the ribbon winding facility throughout the 1930s.

RD: Yes.

NM: Until he retired.

RD: Yes.

NM: Did your mother continue to be a seamstress during this time?

RD: I remember that she was while I was a teenager going to high school, but after that, you're busy with other things, chasing girls and things like that, and I don't really remember everything.

NM: Moving into your experience in high school, did you have any academic interests in particular?

RD: No.

NM: Any favorite subjects?

RD: No.

NM: What do you recall about your high school years?

RD: Well, of course, I went to Woodcliff Lake Grammar School, and then, when we graduated from Woodcliff Lake Grammar School, the following year, we would go to Park Ridge High School. Park Ridge serves as a regional for Woodcliff Lake, Montvale, of course Park Ridge, a little bit of River Vale, half of Hillsdale. I don't know whether any of the surrounding towns, like Upper Saddle River, places like that, any of the students came [from there]. I don't believe so, but I do know those that I just mentioned, that there were students in Park Ridge. Of course, I struggled through my high school. I was more interested in trapping and hunting and fishing. I remember, I'd stand by the pencil sharpener in the summertime or the springtime, before school closed, and the teacher would say, "Doxey, sit down." I wasn't a good student.

NM: You mentioned that you were active in fishing, but you were also hunting and trapping.

RD: Hunted and trapped, yes.

NM: What did you hunt with?

RD: Well, in those days, it was rural. There was a lot of woods. You're not familiar with the area, but there was one area that I would say probably two, three square miles, that's completely with houses today, that was just forest, woods. You didn't see any--very rarely, very rarely would you see a deer--but small game, was rabbits, woodcock, pheasants. Of course, you hunted those with a shotgun and my father was a good small-game hunter. Of course, later in life, as I've progressed financially, I've been to Nova Scotia for moose and Maine, belonged to a fishing club in Canada, different things that I could afford to do, that my dad never did.

NM: What kind of animals would you trap?

RD: Well, I probably might've trapped--the animals that you would trap would be muskrats, which were a water animal, and skunks, possum. It was more of a young boy's recreation than it was for any profit motive. You'd only catch maybe one or two animals, three animals, in a season, and then, I think someone would come by and buy the skins. Of course, you had to take and skin the animal and pull the skin down over a stretcher and clean it, get the fat all off, and then, dry it. There was a lot of work and maybe get fifty cents for the skin, but it was more of a recreational thing for a young boy.

NM: Did you have any jobs growing up?

RD: I mowed people's lawns. You'd get twenty-five cents for a lawn and, of course, the grass was a lot different than what it is today. It was wire grass, it was a round grass, and it was so hard to cut and the only thing you had to cut it with was a reel-type mower. Then, the first steady job I had, I worked on one of the farms up by Chestnut Ridge Road that I mentioned and it was Van Riper's Farm. They raised tomatoes, corn. They had a stand, a roadside stand, that they'd sell stuff. I remember, I worked picking tomatoes, picking raspberries, and then, I was in

a barn sorting tomatoes. They would load the tomatoes on the truck, ride into market, and then, maybe bring half of them back. Then, they'd all have to be resorted to get those that were soft out and repacked again, then, off to market. The man would go again three o'clock the next morning.

NM: Did you have any plans for what you would do after high school?

RD: No. My first job--I was a high school graduate--I got in Westwood. I probably weighed all of maybe 120 pounds and I worked for Westwood Furniture Company on their furniture truck, carrying furniture. I started eight o'clock Monday morning and finished sometime Saturday night. I got twelve dollars a week.

NM: When did you graduate high school?

RD: 1939.

NM: How long did you stay with this furniture company?

RD: Could've been five or six months, and then, of course, the war was starting in Europe and that started to get any firms that were connected to the military supply, started to generate. I had an uncle that worked for Western Union in New York City. [Editor's Note: Western Union is a communications company best known for its business of exchanging telegraphs until it ended this service in 2006.] I had a job with Western Union, working--he was a machinist by trade and, in those days, we're making panels. They had slate panels and they'd put these clips behind them where telephone operators would plug their plugs in for the different telephone calls. I worked for Western Union for six or eight months. See, in those days, it started with this cost-plus business. In other words, a big company, if they had costs of so much in manufacturing a war material, if they had so much cost, they would get a "cost-plus [contract]." [Editor's Note: Cost-plus contracts, also known as cost reimbursement contracts, were utilized by large American companies during both World Wars. These contracts pay for the costs of running the company and the products they produce, but also give additional payment to allow for profit.] They would get extra pay for a thing. So, the more people they hired and crowded into their facility, they got paid for and made a profit. So, I went to work for Western Union and I might've drilled some holes in something, or something like that, but it was a very non-productive job. Then, of course, I had a friend and he worked for the Aluminum Company of America and I went to the Aluminum Company of America and put an application in, in Edgewater. I was hired and I worked for the Aluminum Company of America as a clerk until I went into the military.

NM: Could you tell me about where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

RD: I was in Westwood and I remember that I was in a diner in Westwood called Jaeger's Diner. I don't remember anything about the actual radio broadcast about Pearl Harbor, but there were other men in there, men older than I was--I was still a teenager, might've been twenty years old--that were more knowledgeable to the fact of Pearl Harbor or other things that were connected to the war than I was, but I remember them talking about Pearl Harbor. That was right after it

happened. [Editor's Note: The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred on the morning of December 7, 1941, when Japanese forces launched a surprise military attack on the United States naval base located there.]

NM: Can you talk about how you got into the service?

RD: I was in my early twenties and I was, at the time, working for Aluminum Company of America and I would have been drafted. I wanted to fly. I always remember watching Ford's Tri-Motor airplanes flying over my house and I wanted to fly. So, I went down and I tried to get in the Air Force. If you had two years of college, you could go for the Air Force physical exam. If you didn't have two years of college or were a high school graduate, you had to take a test. I went to Newark and took the test and I did not qualify as an Aviation Cadet. Of course, the Aviation Cadet field was full. My brother-in-law was in it at the time. You were in the service, but they didn't have any room for you. They sent you home and that was probably, maybe, another two or three months, four months, before you were actually taken into it. So, that was extremely interesting, also, that you wouldn't have to go right away. I went down to Newark, took the test, failed the test, but I qualified for a glider pilot. They wanted us to go to--aviation, as I said previously, was full--but glider pilots, they said, "You're in the service. Go right out to Floyd Bennett Field, take your test, physical. [Editor's Note: Floyd Bennett Field is located in southeast Brooklyn. It has served as a municipal airport, naval air station and is currently a park.] So, of course, I had an automobile I had purchased, I was making payments on, I had a lady friend that I was engaged to, I hadn't said good-bye to my mother. So, I said to them, "Can I go home and take care of my things that I have to take care of?" and he said, "Yes, come back next Wednesday." So, I went home, quit my job, did everything, kissed everybody good-bye, made arrangements in the bank for the payments on the car, jacked the car up in the garage, because that's what you did then. I packed a little ditty bag, kissed my mother good-bye and off I went to Newark. When I got there, they said, "The program is full." Do you know how lucky I was? A glider pilot is a one-way trip. You don't come back from being a glider pilot. You went with the troops and, when that glider was landing, you got out and you had a rifle. So, that program was full and I tried to get in. I went all the way out to Floyd Bennett Field that day on the bus and tried to get in, but it was full. So, I came back home and, the next day, I went down there, enlisted in the Marine Corps.

NM: Please, continue.

RD: Well, of course, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. First of all, I had to go to New York City and take a test, some kind of simple mental test, probably, and a physical test. Of course, I didn't come up to the weight standard. So, the doctor told me, he said, "Now, son, when you come back, get a big bag of bananas," he said, "and eat those bananas before you come in." I believe that they would've taken me if I was up to weight or not, but I ate the bananas. [laughter] Then, of course, a week later, I was gone. I kissed my mother good-bye, walked down the street and didn't come back for three years.

NM: Were there a lot of men in the community, or within your circle of friends, who had been drafted or joined the service?

RD: They must have. They must have been. I know that a lot of people that I knew, young men that I knew, that I was friendly with and things like that, wound up in the military. Whether or not they were drafted or whether they had volunteered, I don't know. I did have my buddy, Gib (Eagelston?), I told you, we grew up as "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer." Gib had a couple years of college, so, he volunteered in the Marine Corps right after I did. I was in boot camp when he came into boot camp and, of course, with his two years of college, he went on to become an officer in the Marine Corps, but he walked up on a lot of beaches with bullets flying around him and came through it. I never heard a gun go off in combat.

NM: Tell me about the process of leaving New Jersey. Was this the first time you left the state?

RD: No. Well, when I was young, just prior to going off in the service, and [I] worked and had an automobile, I would go with a friend of mine up to Pennsylvania. That was about it. We went up to his aunt's house in Pennsylvania, but, in those days, you didn't wander very far.

NM: Where did you go from New Jersey?

RD: The reason why I chuckle, it was the train ride from New York City to Parris Island, South Carolina, and that train ride lasted all night long. [Editor's Note: The Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island receives male recruits from east of the Mississippi River for their initial training.] I can remember, we'd pull into different places and the train would sit there, maybe for an hour or two, and then, proceed on. We left New York City and I think it was Rocky Mount, North Carolina, that we stopped to have breakfast. They must've had the food--it was in a place that had big tables--they must've had the scrambled eggs made a little early, because I can remember yet, they were covered with soot. They were cold, and then, we proceeded on there and went to Parris Island. We got off the train. We were loaded on trailers and taken into the complex. There would be platoons of recruits sitting there and they'd all holler, "You'll be sorry," [laughter] and then, we proceeded through boot camp. It was tough at boot camp. It was hot, it was in July, and they wouldn't let you drink any water unless you had permission when you were in training. I don't remember too much of it. Sometimes, the unpleasant things in your life kind of discharge themselves.

NM: Approximately how long was your basic training?

RD: I imagine it must've been three or four weeks, and then, I was fortunate. I'd made a good score in the rifle range. I don't know whether that had anything to do [with it]--I think it did--but I remember that I was very supple and, in the sitting position, when you'd fire the rifle, you sat down and your legs were spread apart and you could put your knees on them. I could put my elbows all the way down on the ground. So, it made it steadier and I qualified well with the rifle on the rifle range and, of course, that gave a boost to the rifle instructor, for all those that he put through that did well. I don't know whether it was for my score on the rifle range, they did offer me the fact of staying there to be a rifle instructor, but I wanted to get off Parris Island. Fortunately enough, I was sent to Sea School in North Carolina--in Virginia, Norfolk, Virginia. [Editor's Note: Sea School was a branch of Marine training that prepared recruits for sea duty on a ship.] Why I was chosen for it, the only thing I could contribute to it would be my rifle range experience and I don't know whether that had anything to do with it, but every major ship in the

Navy carries a contingent of Marines. They had what they called Sea School in Virginia and all it was was spit-and-polish and march and we were the last group, men that I never knew before, we were the last group to go through Sea School. I don't know whether you want this to go into the record or not …

[TAPE PAUSED]

RD: I can repeat it, but there were no black Marines in the Marine Corps. It was all volunteer, no draftees taken in yet when I went in, but, when we were in Sea School, I saw the first black Marine. We were on the drill field and everybody stood there and looked at him with their mouths open; like, block that.

NM: This is for the record.

RD: For the record, yes.

NM: I just wanted to make sure.

RD: I understand. The thing is is that when you go into the military, you are so confined. There was no socializing with anyone outside of the base. So, the only thing that I knew was Parris Island, South Carolina. It could've been just as easy up in Michigan as in South Carolina. That's all I remember. There was no socializing with anybody off the base.

NM: You had such a high score on the rifle range that they asked you to be an instructor.

RD: Yes.

NM: Do you think that your outdoor experience, hunting, trapping, shooting, assisted you in any way?

RD: I would say that if a country boy over a city boy, where I came in contact with these things, guns, and I had a little bit of, not training, but just information from my father. Then, of course, you had a twenty-two rifle that you could shoot and things like that. That would be the extent of my [experience], the fact that I did know what a rifle and a gun and shooting it was, whereas a person from the city would not.

NM: You trained in Virginia at the Sea School. Approximately how long was that training?

RD: Approximately, I don't know; a few months?

NM: Is this late 1942?

RD: Well, it was in the beginning of the Summer of '42 that I enlisted in the Marine Corps. It could've been six or eight weeks. I don't remember the time that I spent on Parris Island--it was just a blur. I can remember little things, but not the whole thing, and then, of course, like I said,

we were ready to be shipped off to different bases for further training, like, they sent the men to North Carolina for infantry training, things like that. I'm a very, very lucky person, at that time.

NM: Did you think you were going to the Pacific or Europe? Did you have any idea where you were going?

RD: No, in those days, you lived from one day to the next. That's why they choose young people for combat.

NM: What additional things did you learn in your Sea School training versus your basic training?

RD: Nothing. What we did mostly was march all day on the field, and then, there would be little things like gas mask training, where they'd have a thing, that you'd put the gas mask on and take it off, that sort of thing. Oh, we did go to a firing range for machine-guns. That would be in the event that you [had to use one]. That was the first we had any machine-gun training and we went to some beach and I remember the airplane flying with the target. The first time I heard--a fifty-caliber gun is pretty loud when it goes off--but that was the first time I ever heard a fifty-caliber and they go off. Then, later on, when I was on the ship, we're on a three-inch gun and, of course, that was a lot different.

NM: Could you talk about your time in the service after Sea School? Where did you go?

RD: Well, after Sea School, we were out on the ship. Yes, the ship that I was on, like I said when I told you before, it was [the SS] *Conte Biancamano*. It was an Italian luxury liner. It was taken over by the United States and refitted as a troop transport and it was the USS *Hermitage*. [Editor's Note: The USS *Hermitage* (AP-54) was commissioned by the US Navy on August 14, 1942, and decommissioned August 20, 1946. It was returned to Italy in 1947 and scrapped in 1960. Captain Donald F. Patterson was in command of the ship during its World War II service.] We were in Sea School and there was the group, a platoon, I guess you would call it, and we went right aboard ship. Prior to my going on the ship, they didn't have any Marines on it, but they went to the invasion in Casablanca and came back from Casablanca, right into Norfolk, and picked us up. [Editor's Note: The naval invasion of Casablanca took place from November 6 to 8, 1942, off the coast of Vichy-held Casablanca, French Morocco.] I think, I'm not sure, but I think, there were a few troops that got on the ship. Yes, there were National Guard troops that came on the ship and, of course, I was part of the crew then. We went right to Panama and the National Guard troops were unloaded for duty in Panama and we picked up some troops we took out in the Pacific someplace that were in Panama.

NM: Many men we interviewed mention that many people got seasick on these troopships.

RD: Yes.

NM: Is that something that affected you?

RD: No, but I'm subject to seasickness and I was very fortunate I didn't [get ill]. The first night that we left port, I did not have duty. So, I went right to sleep and, when I woke up the next day, of course, we're in southern waters and it was pretty calm. I don't believe I ever got seasick on the ship at all, a little queasy, maybe. Then, when you're off duty, you'd always go to the top of the ship in the center, because it was like a seesaw. The ends would go up and down, but the center wouldn't be affected too much.

NM: What were your initial duties as a Marine aboard the USS *Hermitage*?

RD: We were--can't think of the word--we're security. We were given a military [arm]band, MP [Military Police]. It's a little bit of a joke. We had a forty-five pistol and a club and, of course, when we were going to Europe, there were six thousand troops on the ship. They had four posts and you'd walk through these troop compartments all loaded up with American people. Like I say, I was a very lucky man, but the whole thing was a little bit of a joke.

NM: How many Marines would serve on the security detail with you?

RD: There would be four of us. There were four posts and you'd go on duty for four hours, I guess, and then, what you would do is, every hour, you'd report back into the office, the guard shack. Then, you would go on to another post, like if you start on top deck, you'd go to the bottom deck, and things like that.

NM: How many Marines were on the ship total?

RD: There were probably thirty of us. I think I have some pictures of that, pictures of us on the ship that I can bring up and show you.

NM: You were aboard the *Hermitage* for your entire service. Did the same hold true for these other Marines? Were they on the *Hermitage* the entire time?

RD: No, a lot of them were *gung ho* and, of course, they wanted to get out and come back in combat. When I went in and had the experience in Parris Island, I figured, "They can do and tell me what they want to, I'll do it, but I'm not going to volunteer for anything. I volunteered once," but the other ones, they were--you know how it is when you're young--and, if you never experienced combat, I've never experienced combat, you think that it's something you want to do. So, they were transferred off, and then, there were casualties, fellow men that I knew.

NM: Of men who transferred?

RD: Yes, it would come back, maybe three or four months after they had gone off and gone into combat. They were wounded or killed and, of course, that would be posted in the ship.

NM: Could you talk about the relationship between your group of Marines and the ship's crew?

RD: Very, if the word's amicable? if I'm using the right word, very good. Some of my good friends were Navy men.

NM: For the record, how many crew were aboard the USS *Hermitage*?

RD: Twelve hundred, and there were about thirty Marines.

NM: You talked about picking up the ship, which came back from Casablanca, and you went to Panama.

RD: Yes.

NM: What stands out about this first voyage?

RD: There's nothing special. We got to Panama. I can remember going through the Panama Canal, not in detail, but I remember it, and then, we came out of the Panama Canal in the Pacific Ocean. The only people that we had aboard were those National Guards that we had picked up in Panama and I don't remember [if] we went right up the coast to California to load other people or not, and then, of course, the whole thing in the Pacific, I can remember different things, but it was a big blur.

NM: On this initial trip to Panama, were you traveling in a convoy?

RD: No, we were not in a convoy. I made a statement like that--no, I don't know whether we could've had a destroyer with us or not, I don't, because we get on in the afternoon and, like I say, I went to sleep and I think, when I woke up, we're almost in Panama.

NM: After Panama, where did the *Hermitage* go?

RD: We sailed in the Pacific for quite some time. In those days, California was our home base and we would load troops and we would [cross the Pacific]. The first load of troops we had on, I know we went to Hawaii. I think it was the first load of troops we had on, we took to--we went to Australia and I know that we're in New Caledonia. I could remember, when we're in New Caledonia, it was for the Second Battle of Guadalcanal and I don't know whether we discharged troops in New Caledonia to go up to Guadalcanal, but, then, we came back and we were in Brisbane and that's where MacArthur was. [Editor's Note: The Second Naval Battle of Guadalcanal took place from November 14 to 15, 1942. General Douglas MacArthur was an American US Army five-star general.] We're in Brisbane, Australia. Then, we went down to Sydney, Australia. We're in Melbourne, Australia, and then, we went around to the west coast. Now, I don't remember if that's all in that one particular trip. Then, we went around to the west coast, and then, from there, up to India. We carried a load of troops to India and that's when I had the most interesting experience of my life, was in that country, just for an American person to see and to--couldn't understand the conditions that those people live under. It's just unbelievable. We would go to Bombay. They had Muslims and Hindus, I think. I don't think, I know it, and they couldn't work together because they'd kill each other. One group would be put on the ship--we would have some things that were coming off--and the other group would work on the dock, but you'd go in the city and beggars would be sitting on the sidewalk picking their wounds, their scabs and things like that, that make it worse. They said there were dead babies

that the women had in their arms, begging. Of course, we would hire a wagon and a driver and I think that whole thing cost us about maybe a dollar a day. It would carry four of us and we'd ride around and buy souvenirs and things like that, and then, we'd hire another person to run along behind the carriage for thirty cents a day, just as a novelty for young men, to just bring our things that we'd buy back and put them in the wagon. We went to India three times and, like I said, that today, I see the Indian peoples are the largest immigrants into the United States, after the Latinos, and they're the largest group of illegal immigrants into the United States today. I think an illegal will pay up to twenty thousand dollars to get into this country. Where they get the money from, I don't know, but they're very caste people. Like you know, you would be dirt and I'd be somebody else. That was an experience. You want me to continue?

NM: Yes, please, continue.

RD: Well, then, we brought--there were Polish refugees that had come from Poland, originally, and they'd walked and gotten from Poland, walked all the way through Russia and places like that to get to Karachi, India. Then, from Karachi, that was British, they brought them to Bombay and we brought them to the United States. Of course, Russia was an ally of America, United States, and they went right from where we landed them in the United States right down to Mexico, because Russia was our ally and the Poles were their enemy, but they were well taken care of when they [came aboard]. [Editor's Note: The Soviet Union annexed the eastern portion of Poland in 1939. A new campaign of Sovietizing Polish citizens was met with resistance. Those openly opposed to Soviet rule were subject to execution, arrest, or relocation to Siberia.] These people came aboard, everything they had would be--there would be a couple of them that were Jewish and they would have their suitcases and some rather nice things--but most of the people were like peasants and they'd have everything wrapped up maybe in a tin can that they owned. Of course, we acted like--the Marines acted like--immigration. They had to come past us and declare everything they had and we would take things away from them, like bananas or orange peels and stuff like that. They'd cry, but they got on the ship and they fed them. They had things that they hadn't had in a very long time and they cried again when they were in the mess hall. Most of them were women and children.

NM: After traveling so far, what kind of condition were these refugees in health-wise?

RD: Physically, they all seemed to be good. I don't know anything more about that. I do not know whether a medical officer on the ship checked them over or anything. I don't know anything about that, and then, there were a couple of--well, there were men in the crew, and they were in our platoon, that were Polish. Of course, they could converse with them and they'd use those as interpreters. There was one fellow by the name of (Zwa?) and one fellow by the name of (Zigloski?) and they were Polish and they came from homes that spoke the language.

NM: You had three trips to India. Roughly around what year was this?

RD: '44.

NM: Did you take on refugees on all three trips?

RD: No, I don't believe. I think it was just two of the trips, but we brought back other people. They had people, they called them the lascars and they were Indians. They were coming back and going someplace to sail ships, British ships. [Editor's Note: A lascar was an Indian sailor or militiaman employed on British ships.] They had a lot of peculiar habits, that when they went to the bathroom, they'd perch on the pot like a chicken. They wouldn't sit down and they wouldn't use toilet paper. Oh, one other thing, these lascars brought their own food and own cooks.

NM: Did you ever transport soldiers or civilians from Allied countries?

RD: Yes. I remember, we had Australians, young Australian men, that were coming back to the United States to be trained, I think for aviation, I'm not sure. I think that's what it was, and then, I remember, we had British troops. They had to come out of Australia, because we weren't in any European countries then. The thing that impressed me the most with them, they'd enlist for sixteen years. They made a lifetime of it; I think it was sixteen years. They made a lifetime out of the military in one enlistment.

NM: When you were making these trips to India, where was the final destination?

RD: That would be it, but we would travel and stop in various ports. When we would leave the United States, we would have a naval escort for the first twenty-four hours, and then, before we would go into an Australian port, and we were in Hawaii once, but, before we went into Hawaii or Australia or New Zealand, we would get a naval escort for a day going in and a naval escort coming out for a day. Then, after that, we traveled alone. That was in the Pacific. I've been in Hawaii, New Caledonia, Bora Bora, New Zealand, one, two, three, four ports in Australia, plus, Bombay, India. That was while I was in the Pacific.

NM: When you were in these ports, did you have time to go into the local cities and sightsee?

RD: Oh, yes. I know that in New Zealand, we were given liberty and I know that we had liberty in Sydney, Australia. We had liberty in the other two ports in Australia, and then, of course, we had liberty in India.

NM: I know you did security on the ship. In these ports, were you also responsible for the crew when they were on liberty?

RD: No. Our job was strictly security for the troops. It was security for the ship, make sure they didn't smoke in the troop compartments. No one was allowed on deck while we're [at sea] at night and no lights and things like that. That was our job, but, as far as the crew was concerned, of course, if we went out on the deck and a crew member was smoking a cigarette, we'd tell him he'd have to throw it over, "Throw it overboard."

NM: In the Pacific, what were some of the problems that you encountered while conducting your job on the ship?

RD: I don't believe there was any encounters we had. I really don't remember anything. No, I don't remember anything, any problems.

NM: With so many people, did you have to break up any fights, things of that sort?

RD: No.

NM: What did people on the ship, including yourself, do in your down time?

RD: Well, we had a table in our--we had a compartment and we had a little area, like this, I don't believe it was as big as this area that we're in here--but it was a table. We used to play cards and gamble. Of course, one of our jobs was to stop gambling in the crew, but we'd play a lot of poker in our own compartment. I remember, the last trip coming home from Europe, they had some big poker games going on the ship. I think one fellow won about twenty-five thousand dollars coming back. He had cameras and Lugars and everything else hanging off him. [laughter] In that particular game, I remember that. The chief steward ran it. I ran a crap game. We would take the troops down into one of the holds, where they had lots of things, food and things like that, storage, all canned goods and things like that. We went to Europe and I had a game going and, of course, I had another fellow with me. Then, the First Sergeant got a little bit of it and I can't remember the details, but, anyway, I was never brought up on charges, but I swept that load of troops off that had been gambling. If they got off the ship, I didn't have to worry anymore, so that never anything happened to me and it was nothing big. I don't know, any recreation that we had, like, we came into port, if we went over on the--well, you'd say "going on the beach," but you'd go on the dock--and maybe do a little bit of manual of arms.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RD: So, where were we, gambling?

NM: You were talking about recreation and how you would go on the beach.

RD: Yes. Then, we'd go over on the beach, if you didn't have liberty, where you were free. They just lined you up and marched you back and forth, do a little small arms stuff, right shoulder, left shoulder, and things like that. On the ship, we had movies and we had a ship's band. That ship's band was made up of men from Big Bands, like Benny Goodman's band, things like that. [Editor's Note: Benny Goodman (1909-1986) was an American jazz and swing musician known as the "King of Swing."] They were drafted into the service, but they were put into entertainment, which was a big thing. I had a personal friend of mine that was in the Army and he could play the accordion and things like that. He spent his time in entertainment, for the time he was in the military.

NM: This band aboard the USS *Hermitage*, was it similar to a house band, where it was always with the ship?

RD: Yes. They would sail right with us and maybe at the mess hall, when we're having lunch and things like that, or dinner, they'd be at one end of it, maybe about six or eight pieces playing. Then, of course, they'd play out on the deck to the troops, too. When you crossed the Equator for the first time, before you crossed the Equator, you were a Pollywog and, after you crossed the

Equator, now, you're a Shellback, but you can see the picture at the far end? [Editor's Note: The ceremony of Crossing the Line is common amongst several countries' navies and celebrates a sailor as he crosses the Equator for the first time with an initiation ceremony.]

NM: Yes.

RD: That's my certificate from the Navy for crossing the Equator. You're free to get up and look at it.

NM: [laughter] I see it. When were you issued that certificate?

RD: We were issued that after every [trip], all the troops, as you went. Of course, they had made tunnels out of canvas and all garbage in them that you had to crawl through, and then, of course, the canvas would lay on your ass and the Shellbacks would be there with paddles to slap you on the ass as you went through. Different, it was a recreation thing.

NM: Can you talk about your living conditions, where you slept, the routine, where you ate?

RD: Okay. We had a compartment that held thirty men and, of course, right next to it was a Navy compartment where the cooks and bakers were. We had three tiers of bunks and, every morning, you would have to make up your bunk and fold it and chain it up, because, probably, when the bunks were down, between the bunks maybe were about two-and-a-half feet, enough to put your feet on the ground. If you'd had a man sat opposite you, it was not enough room, but, every morning, you would have to make that bunk up and chain it up.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RD: Set up a boxing ring right in the back.

NM: We will start again.

RD: They set up a boxing ring on the ship, would be entertainment, and the different men would get in there and box with each other.

NM: You became friends with some sailors. Did you have any interactions with the troops and the people you were carrying aboard the troopship? Did you ever become with friends with anyone who was itinerant on the ship?

RD: No, no, not that I've continued a friendship with, no; had one particular thing that happened when we're coming back from Europe, when the war was over and they're bringing troops home. I heard this noise in the back of the compartment, loud talk, a talk I recognized, a voice that was familiar. I went back there and here was a man that was in high school with me. He had been over in Europe as a medic and he was one of those coming home. [Editor's Note: V-E Day was declared on May 8, 1945.]

NM: In your travels across the Pacific, are there any particular moments that stand out to you in your memory?

RD: Yes. I remember how pretty Sydney Harbor was when we went into it, and I told you about the conditions in India. Then, I remember, we went into American Samoa and I was on deck with a friend of mine and we remarked to each other, the people, the natives, that were standing on the dock, they had what they called elephantitis. [Editor's Note: Elephantitis or elephantiasis involves the swelling and hardening of skin and tissue of the arms, legs and/or genitals to an extreme size. The condition is caused by the infestation of the lymph glands by a filarial worm.] "Moo-moo," they called it "moo-moo," but their forearms would get big, from this insect, and their lower legs were big and their arms. They were normal people and I said to my friend, I remember that yet, we stood there on the deck as the ship was docked, I said, "Gosh, those people look like Popeye." Of course, troops that were stationed there would get it. It came from an insect bite, and then, of course, before it developed into anything like the native people, they brought them right home and, apparently, they got up to a more normal climate for us. I don't know how they treated it, but it didn't affect them like it did the native people. Then, we were in, not Bombay, but--isn't that awful?--in the Society Islands. [Editor's Note: The Society Islands are located in the South Pacific, part of French Polynesia.] I'll probably think of the name of the island, but the Navy had a fueling station there and we went into it once just to refuel. The Navy had blown a passage through the reef and, apparently, in the lagoon, it must've been shallower or deep enough for our ship. We went in there and the Navy had a refueling station and we got liberty and that was like a South Sea island that you read about in a book. There were probably only about, maybe, thirty permanent naval personnel and the women walked around, just sarongs on, nothing on the top. I remember, on the beach, I saw one of the islanders and he was in the water and I guess little reefs. He'd reach into those reefs and get a little squid and he'd bite it to kill it, and then, put it in a bag that he was carrying. I can remember that, and then, they gave liberty to the crew, but we had a full load of troops on. They didn't give any liberty to the troops that went up. The boat that we're on--because we were anchored--the boat that we were on taking us over to the shore, we looked back and the troops were all jumping off the ship, and then, that night, we had to go back and round them all up and bring them back. We went into Bora Bora twice; that was Bora Bora. We went into Bora Bora twice. The second time we went in, we had a load of military troops, Army men, and they were all high-ranking noncommissioned officers, but they were older men and, apparently, were, like, maybe, engineers, big equipment operators and things like that. We got a crack in the boiler and we went into Bora Bora and these men patched the boiler up. When we got patched up, we went right on to India.

NM: You occasionally would have escorts.

RC: Yes.

NM: When the ship traveled alone, what would be the most dangerous thing for you to encounter?

RD: Well, a sub, maybe a Japanese submarine, but this man I told you about, this Polish refugee, the son of a Polish refugee, he's done--oh, what a shame, I must've thrown the things

away--but I had books that he had written on things. I can't figure I was that dumb, but, anyway, I must've, because I looked all over the house for these things. He could've taken them with him, and then, returned them, but he was in Europe researching the ship. He went to Germany and got records on a German raider that had us in their [sights], and why they never attacked us, I don't know. I think it was in the Indian Ocean, but that raider did not come directly. They put a torpedo boat in the ocean and the torpedo boat would rapidly go to the victim, torpedo it, and then, go right back to the mother ship, but they never attacked us. I don't know of any other encounters that we could've had. Whether or not we were screened by some Japanese submarine or something like that, I have no idea, but, when we're in the Atlantic Ocean, there, we were in troop convoys, big convoys. You want to wait for that for a minute?

NM: Yes.

RD: We can get on to that in a minute, right? all right, yes.

NM: On these journeys, were troops struck by illness in the tropical climates, like malaria?

RD: Well, that, I wouldn't know. That would've been handled by the Navy, because there were naval officers--we even had a dentist onboard. Naval officers were primarily with the crew, but, when we would get a situation such as that, that would be handled by the Navy.

NM: Were there any outbreaks of sickness onboard?

RD: No. I do know that that time I said we were in American Samoa, we brought back some military because they had elephantitis.

NM: When did the USS *Hermitage* leave the Pacific?

RD: I don't believe they [did]. After I went off the ship, I think they went right back--oh, the Pacific, when'd they leave the Pacific?

NM: Yes.

RD: I don't know the dates, but it was prior to the invasion of Europe.

NM: Prior to June 1944?

RD: Yes. We were brought back to take troops now to Europe.

NM: From the Pacific, where does your ship come back to, California?

RD: No, we came right back--oh, wait, I don't remember. That, I don't remember. I don't believe we came back to California. I think we headed for whatever our last assignment was in the Pacific, right back to the Panama Canal, and then, up to New York.

NM: Did you get a chance to go on leave at that point?

RD: Yes, I went on leave and, I remember, we went on leave on the west coast of the Panama Canal. We had leave there. It was just one night.

NM: During your time in the Pacific, were you able to write letters, get letters, communicate with your family and loved ones?

RD: Yes, by mail, write letters to my mother and father and write letters to my girlfriend, and then, was my wife. Then, when we come into port, back in a country, there would be mail for us.

NM: Did you follow what was happening in the war in the Pacific or Europe?

RD: You lived from one day to the next, young people.

NM: Your ship comes back to New York.

RD: Yes.

NM: Can you talk about where the *Hermitage* went after you came back to the Atlantic Coast?

RD: Well, we came back to New York. I told you that we came to New York, that was our home base. Of course, my wife lived in Englewood, which was very convenient to New York City. The night that I came back, my daughter was born, and then, I would come back and I would stay in Englewood. I'd come back, the ship would come back, it would always be in for at least four or five days. Then, I just would come home to Englewood and commute back to the city.

NM: Approximately how many times did the *Hermitage* go to Europe and back with troops?

RD: I think four times. I'm not positive, because, to start with, before they invaded Europe, we were bringing troops into England. Then, after the invasion was complete, we're going into Le Havre and that was the first I had seen of any war damage. Between the Germans destroying it when they went out and the Americans destroying it when they came in on the invasion, the thing was just rubble, concrete all over. There was no place for us to dock. We would come in, the troops would be--I think there was like a floating dock we would go into, get the troops off, and then, go right back out. Then, any stores that we had on that we would bring over, they had what they called DUKWs. It was a truck, it was a boat that was a truck, had four wheels on it and they would have a net with the cargo. These DUKWs would circle, and then, one would come and they'd drop a cargo net. It'd go right back to the beach, ride right up on the beach and disappear. Well, there was one time, I remember, that the engine must've quit in the DUKW and, of course, while it was running, the bilge pumps worked on it, but it sank. I remember being on deck and seeing that. [laughter] We made one trip into Marseilles, Southern France.

NM: Did it come to you as a surprise that you were now working in the Atlantic, after being in the Pacific for two years?

RD: No, no, and for no other reason but a young person doesn't think too far.

NM: Tell me about your first trip in the Atlantic. How was it different from the trips in the Pacific?

RD: Well, in the Pacific, we would travel alone and I guess our ship would go pretty fast. That's why it would travel alone, but, in the Atlantic, we would travel in big convoys. We would go as fast as the slowest ship and, of course, the ships would disappear over the curvature of the Earth, had big convoys. Then, occasionally, you would hear, not see, but hear, depth charges being dropped on the perimeter, with the destroyers that were riding around us. Then, there was one time that one of the men, I think on a civilian ship, got an attack of appendicitis. A destroyer picked him up from his ship, brought him over to our ship and, of course, even though the ocean was calm, the swells are huge. They put a breeches buoy between the two ships and, of course, they were doing this and, when that fellow came over on the breeches buoys, sometimes, he'd be right down in the water and the next time be right up in the air, maybe fifty feet. I remember, they brought him over and I guess it was a success. We had complete facilities for medical care on our ship, a regular little hospital. I had two of my wisdom teeth taken out on the ship when I was on it. I had two wisdom teeth that came in, and then, the bottom ones never came in, so, there's just two big teeth back there. I went down to sick bay and it wasn't a dentist that took them out, it was one of the medical personnel, because enlisted men became nurses and things like that. He pulled those two teeth out of my head. I remember that they looked like a picture--the teeth were perfect. [laughter]

NM: This had been an Italian ship. Was there any evidence aboard the ship that it was formerly an Italian ship?

RD: When we came aboard, they had done as much work as they could to get it into service. So, of course, they had stripped a lot of stuff out of it, but there was a lot of stuff left on. When troops would come on, they'd make working parties out of them and they'd tear these big murals down and fancy [woodwork?], like on the stairs and railings and everything, went over the side. It was the first time I saw a bidet in my life and they were in the cabins. Of course, we were young guys, you'd go in there and step on the pedals and the water would shoot out. You know what a bidet is?

NM: Yes, it is a sink?

RD: Well, no, if you go into this bathroom right here, you'll see it; go in this bathroom.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: Aboard the ship, there were …

RD: Had these cabins that were private cabins and they had these facilities in there. Of course, we're young guys--you'd step on the pedal and the water would shoot right up and hit the ceiling. All that stuff was torn out and thrown over the side, until it was just bare bones. You'd go--the sides of the ship were right there. There was nothing between us and the water, except the metal

plate, and the waterline was about, I'd say, maybe three-quarters up on the side of the ship. You could hear the water racing by as you went through it.

NM: Being on the ship so long, you saw this transformation take place, as the ship was stripped.

RD: A lot of it, yes.

NM: Was weather a problem anywhere?

RD: I don't remember anything except, coming home from Europe on the last trip, there was a storm. We traveled--there were two other ships. I think one was the *Argentina*. The war was over and, I remember, we traveled together, but their ship was as big as ours. I remember sitting on deck and that ship would come halfway out of the water. You could look right at it. [laughter]

NM: On your first voyage over in the Atlantic, where was the destination?

RD: It was not London, because London does not have docks, I don't believe, but it was Britain.

NM: Does anything stand out on your first voyage over?

RD: I don't believe so. The only thing that was impressive was that convoy, but, as far as things taking place on the ship, I think that there were people that feigned insanity, because I remember this one guy that laid in the sink in the troop compartment. They had sinks as well as toilets. The only water that the troops got was salt water. If they wanted to shower or bathe or anything like that, it had to be salt water. This guy was lying in the sink with the faucets on. I remember that, I remember that. Things that impress you kind of stamp in your brain, but, then, I was a little bit of a conniver. I'd get eggs and boil the eggs, a big pot of eggs, and the way I could boil them is, I had a steam tube in the toilet that sent live steam out. So, you could put a bucket underneath that and turn the steam on, it would be hot in a few minutes. So, I'd cook boiled eggs, and then, go through the troop compartment, sell them for a dollar apiece. Then, you got to know some officers and you'd sell them a freshwater shower for a dollar.

NM: Fresh water, at sea.

RD: Freshwater shower, because saltwater showers, apparently, are not pleasant.

NM: It sounds like you became very familiar with the crew and certain individuals, where you could do things such as this.

RD: Oh, yes. [laughter]

NM: While you were in Great Britain, did you get a chance to go on leave?

RD: Yes. I remember going to a dance hall. I don't remember where the dance hall was, but that was about it. You'd get a few hours' leave in the evening, maybe.

NM: On the return trip back to the United States, were you bringing troops as well?

RD: Not the first two trips. No, the ship just went over and dumped off healthy men and came back. Oh, to finish that part, maybe there were a few people that, for some reason, were coming back to the States that I didn't know of. Then, we brought home a load of Germans captives. They were being brought back to the States and, I mean, there was absolutely no problem with them, but there was one officer that was Norwegian, but he was a German officer. Germany had gone into Norway. You take the armies in Europe, I often wonder where they got the men from, but these countries that were captured, their people went in the [German] Army--they were either drafted into it or volunteered. That's where Germany got their troops from to continue, because Germany's not a very big country. The German captives we brought back, they had quite a few officers, there might've been sixty of them or something like that. Of course, we would guard them at their mess hall and they were brought to officers' mess and they would eat there. The thing that impressed me is that if you had something left over on your plate, you'd walk across the mess hall and give it to me. There was nothing that went in the garbage pail but bones, that's all, with the Germans. There were high-ranking naval men and there were high-ranking Army men, I guess some aviators that were captured, things like that, that we brought back. Then, there were a number of German enlisted people and that's why they had this Norwegian, as an interpreter, and he could speak all these different languages, but there was one group of Mongolians, probably about, I don't know, they couldn't have been fifteen, thirty men. He could not talk their language and they just sat huddle there and, every day, they would bring a group to sick bay. Of course, that Norwegian interpreter would be there, but I don't know whether they ever brought any of those Mongolians up, but they were captured from the Russian Army.

NM: Were these captives in good physical health?

RD: Generally speaking, yes. I imagine that, number one, that they would probably weed out the bad cases, and then, we had good medical facilities aboard, but a lot of it, like they used to say, "Okay, sick, lame and lazy, report up to the sick bay."

NM: Was there any trouble between the crew and these German captives aboard the ship?

RD: No, absolutely no. I mean, their attitude was the same as ours, "The war was over." The war was over for them.

NM: This was after the war.

RD: Well, no, this was while the war was still going on, yes. There were diehards, and we both know that, in the captives that caused trouble here in our camps and things like that, but we didn't have any trouble on the ship.

NM: When you got back to New York, where did you go?

RD: After I came back to the States?

NM: Yes.

RD: Okay, I called my wife up and, just off the subject a little bit, my friends that came from all various parts of the country knew more about New York City than I did, because, when they got leave, they went right in on leave. When I got [leave], I just went right in the subway, come up to the George Washington Bridge, coming across the subway, on a bus, and my wife would meet me on the Jersey side and we'd go home to Englewood.

NM: Seeing the United States while on leave, how had the war impacted the community or your wife living in the States?

RD: Well, the only thing was gasoline rationing and the cheaters. There were people, always, that cheated and I knew this one fellow that had counterfeit ration stamps for gasoline, a civilian. Then, I remember, you couldn't get butter, but my mother-in-law was in a tavern business and she had connections. So, she'd get butter. I remember, my mother would get margarine and margarine would only come white. It would not come in the color that we see it today, like butter, and then, you got a little thing of coloring, that you would mix the coloring into the margarine to make it look like butter, but I know that my mother-in-law used to be able to get, because of her contacts, butter.

NM: After you saw your wife, you went back on the ship. What was the next destination?

RD: Go back to Europe. We were in the Pacific for a while, get back to Europe and, after a few trips to Europe, I was discharged.

NM: You mentioned that you went to Le Havre.

RD: We went into England at least once. Then, we went in Le Havre at least once and we went to Marseilles; I know Marseilles once. It's vague to me. I think we made a second trip to Europe and it was vague to me [if] we made any more than one trip into Le Havre. I think it was only one trip.

NM: Were you bringing troops directly to Le Havre?

RD: That, yes, we brought troops right into Le Havre. Now, they had big floating docks and, of course, a tremendous amount of traffic, bringing troops and food and munitions and things like that. So, I think we just went up to the floating dock for a few hours, got the troops off the ship, and then, went out and anchored, and then, took whatever provisions we took off, because, in those days, the ships were equipped with this mast and a boom. The man'd run a donkey engine that would bring the stuff out of the hold, put it down on the dock.

NM: You were bringing over cargo as well.

RD: Yes.

NM: Were they mostly the personal belongings of the soldiers?

RD: Well, no, we would bring the personal; they had sea bags. Everybody had a sea bag. When I was in the service, the Navy, still, the sea bag was their hammock, even though I don't believe they used the hammocks anymore, and I had a sea bag. All your personal belongings were packed into it and the soldiers would come on with bags. I guess they used to carry it with them, because I remember going down in those troop compartments and they were pretty jammed up. If anything ever happened, I don't know how the hell they'd get out.

NM: When you went to England, you were able to go out and see the area. Did the same hold true for Le Havre? Were you able to leave the ship?

RD: Yes, we left the ship at Le Havre. We went over on the beach. I don't remember anything about it, aside from the destruction.

NM: After Le Havre, you returned to the States.

RD: Come back to the States, and then, made that trip into Marseilles.

NM: You brought troops to Marseilles.

RD: Yes.

NM: Does anything stand out about that trip to Marseilles?

RD: Yes. Number one, of all the ports I was in--the medical officer took each liberty party and gave a speech to them--they said that Marseilles was the rottenest port in the world and that everybody had to take a prophylactic with him. Then, the medical, not the officer, but one of the enlisted men, would go down and make each one take a prophylactic package, and then, of course, they had what they called a "clap shack" on the ship, too. You came back off the liberty and, if you did have intercourse with anybody, you were supposed to go to the "clap shack" and take prophylactics. Even though they gave those men protection, when we're on our way back to the States, they still came down with gonorrhea, because it took about four or five days after exposure, but, then, on the beach, Marseilles wasn't bothered by the war at all. The thing that impressed me was, on the corner, they would have a urinal section that both a man and a woman could use. It was like a big--I think it was like the porcelain urinals that the men have in the men's room, the high ones, only it was a little different configuration and it just ran right out in the gutter and down to the catch basin.

NM: Were you able to go into the town for a couple of days?

RD: Oh, no, liberty would be maybe about four hours, maybe six, I don't remember, but you just had enough time to go over on the beach and have a few drinks and get back on the ship.

NM: When you returned from Marseilles, is this the trip where you were taking back the captives?

RD: No, we brought those captives--I think they came out of England. No, I don't believe we brought any; there might have been. There was always, on a return trip, a few people that were coming back to the United States for some reason or other.

NM: From Marseilles, did you go back to England?

RD: No, we came right back to the United States.

NM: Okay. I am just trying to pinpoint when your ship took back the captives. I guess it was on the first trip you took.

RD: I think it was, the captives, we were on the first trip, and then, I think the second trip, we brought back--the war was over--there was a contingent, a consignment, of returning troops. Like, our home base had been New York, but we went into Boston with those troops, but we just went into Boston long enough to unload them. I had a picture of the ship going to Boston and we had a problem, but it wasn't anything more than the fact that the ship, with all these people on it getting on one side, it would cause it to lean over. We were getting the troops away from the side and, of course, that was the load of troops that went to New England.

NM: Where were you when you heard that the war in Europe had ended?

RD: I don't know.

NM: Did your ship have any more trips across the Atlantic after the one to Marseilles?

RD: No, that was the end.

NM: Okay. You mentioned some of the games on the ship. There was a big game.

RD: Yes.

NM: Could you go into that a little more? Was that after the war had ended?

RD: No, those games went on every time the ship had a load of men on it. You could tell people just by their tone and actions in the game that were probably professional gamblers, but the Army was made up of everybody. I told you that myself and another person ran our own game. What we would do, I don't know how the chief commissary got his cut, but we would have a pot on the table and, every hand, I think--well, the game was twenty-five-cent ante pot limit--I guess we'd cut twenty-five cents a hand. I don't know how, but we had a crap game going. I don't know how we cut that. What you did, you stop the gambling in the troops--you won three, stop the gambling--but, then, you'd see somebody that knew what he was doing, because our experienced crap cutter runs the game. You shoot two dollars, then, you shoot four dollars, then, you shoot eight dollars, but you don't shoot sixteen, you shoot fourteen. He'd pull two dollars out, that if you made a hit, it would increase, and then, you would leave it and shoot again. Then, he'd take a couple bucks out, take a couple bucks out, take a couple. So, the cutter came in--just like going to Atlantic City, if you played long enough, the house wins.

NM: You remembered this twenty-five-thousand-dollar poker game. Was that on the ship?

RD: I remember one fellow, that just I remember the fact that one man won twenty-five thousand dollars coming back from Europe. It wasn't in the little games that we ran. I mean, us, with nickel-and-dime stuff compared to that, but I remember going down into the ship's stewards' place there in the kitchen, I guess someplace, and there was money on the table.

NM: The war in Europe ends, but the war in the Pacific is still on. Did you think that you may have to go to the Pacific for transport duty?

RD: Everything--I don't remember, really--but everything goes through your mind, I imagine, but you accumulated points for discharge and I had accumulated enough points. They would let you volunteer to stay in or you could get out and that was after Europe. Of course, I wanted to get out. Most everybody wants to get out.

NM: You had enough points. Approximately when were you discharged?

RD: I think it was 1946. I did have [my] discharge.

NM: Mr. Doxey is showing me his discharge. You had enough points to get discharged in December 1945.

RD: Yes.

NM: What would you say was your most vivid experience during your time in the service?

RD: Going to Bombay, India. I've never seen anything like that before; it wasn't anything to do with the war. I've never seen anything like that before. Probably, when we went into one of the ports of call or something like that, there might have been something that was impressive, like I said, in that one island we went to, where the native people had the big arms and legs, something like that, but there was nothing in combative things that I experienced at all. It just proves how many men have to be behind the man with the gun.

NM: Had you ever considered staying in the military?

RD: No, I don't believe so.

NM: You were married and had children. What were your plans for after the service?

RD: Well, the first thing was to get back to a normal life and I went right back to my job. I realized that if I worked there, I'd just be digging a hole. Of course, I didn't foresee the fact that the Aluminum Company doesn't exist any longer in Edgewater. I had a very good friend of mine, that we had been buddies in high school, and he was a machinist. He had a good trade and he worked for the Aluminum Company, also. My first wife's uncle had a coal yard in Englewood and we had a friend that was like a big brother to us, had been in the coal business. I

guess they still were in the fuel business in Park Ridge. They had hauled coal from Pennsylvania and Uncle (Tillard?) said that he would take all the coal that we could haul from Pennsylvania. So, I quit my job and went to work and we had a fabricated trailer. We bought this little old Ford truck--believe me, I don't know how we did it--but I went to Pennsylvania. Uncle (Tillard?) had an Italian buddy out there that had a breaker. What they do is, they mine the coal, it's brought to the breaker, the breaker crushes it up into different sizes, takes out the impurities and things like that. He made the contact that we would get coal from and I took him out. We went out the first time and Uncle (Tillard?) came with me and I think we put fifteen tons of coal in that trailer and Pennsylvania, the Poconos, in those days, were like this, [steep hills]. I really don't know how I ever made it to come home. This thing [discharge paper?] says I was a truck driver before the war--I don't know where they invented that. I wasn't--I was a clerk, I told you that, in the Aluminum Company. We got that trailer and, of course, with a tractor and trailer, [if] you have a post here, you have to make a big swing out to the left before you make the right. Well, I just went right up like in an automobile, made the right-hand turn, put the signpost right flat on the ground. Coming home from Pennsylvania with that first load of coal on, if you got to a steep hill, you had to put it in the very lowest gear the little truck had to get up the hill. I remember, the engine on that truck would go, "Roar, roar," and it kept saying to me, "No, no," believe me when I sit here. I'd shifted gears once on a hill and the front wheels came right off the ground and, if I hadn't gotten that clutch back in, it would've went all over and the trailer would've come right down on it. Well, anyway, we're coming home from Pennsylvania and came over the hill; here's a Greyhound bus stopped on the side of the road, two-lane road. The Greyhound bus stopped quite a ways before we got to it. It went ahead. I got down the bottom of that hill, the brakes were red-hot and, like a fool, I got water and threw it on the brakes. I broke the brake drums. So, we got back with the load of coal. Well, after that, I was an experienced truck driver and I went back and forth to Pennsylvania. I'd get up at four o'clock in the morning and get to Uncle (Tillard?) with fourteen tons of coal and shovel it off and be back up again at three o'clock the next morning, went back for another load. Well, that went on for a while. I think I was giving my wife twenty-one dollars a week. We lived with my mother-in-law in a two-family house. She was a very generous, good person, and then, the building boom was starting to develop in the country. I had somebody [that] called me up that wanted to know if I would haul a load of bricks. So, of course, there were all brickyards along the Hudson River in those days and there was also a brickyard down in South Hackensack, that went out on 46, called Paterson Brick. Anyway, we got a load of brick up around Kingston, someplace, and all those brickyards were down on the river for river transportation only and the hill's coming out like this. So, you had to get a truck to tow you out; your truck and the other truck had enough power to get out. Well, then, we accumulated a little bit of money and we bought a piece of property right in the middle of Park Ridge for twelve hundred dollars and, later on, we bought the property across the street. The property across the street is a big parking lot today for the Town of Park Ridge and the property that we bought for twelve hundred dollars is now a condominium. I think the land sold for a million, the land itself. We bought this piece of property and, of course, then, we had established [ourselves] as far as hauling bricks for somebody else. We started to haul them for ourselves and my mother-in-law loaned us enough money to get a load of bricks and pay cash for them and take them and sell them for cash. Well, we sold two loads to this fellow and the third load, he wasn't there. First two loads, we unloaded the bricks and he paid us and every one of those bricks came off by hand. We didn't even have brick tongs. He almost put us out of business, but we continued to prosper and, eventually, we had a building material business.

Then, we went in the coal business also, because our lot had a railroad siding on it and we'd get our coal in railroad cars. We'd bid on some of the schools and were successful with that and different things like that. We finally had established a business. I probably had maybe ten employees, and then, of course, we both got old--my partner is gone--and we sold the business. The people we sold it to expected to get more out of it than was there by not working. They sold the property in Park Ridge. They went up to Sloatsburg, which is in New York State, and he built a nice big block plant. Everything went broke. So, then, of course, after the Bratt and Doxey Fuel and Supply Company, we had three tankers running at one time, had people working for us, truck drivers. What we would do in our off season, we would haul tulip bulbs for a company in Park Ridge that had gardens in Holland. These containers would come in all packed with all the stops in them and just the paperwork was made up and we would haul tulip bulbs. One time, we had a trailer that went to the West Coast. So, we just hauled that for fill-in and we had big dump trucks, dump trailers, three tank trailers. We had sixty thousand gallons of storage in our yard. We had a delivery truck and a man that did the service work on the oil burners. Then, after Bratt and Doxey, I went into the athletic field supply business, but I managed to get the telephone number 391-4200, which was Bratt and Doxey's number. I had built into my building materiel business this athletic field business that was active and I didn't sell that part of it. We had quite a business going with that, too. I used to sell to West Point. They'd take a whole load of striping material for the athletic field, other places, and then, when I sold the business, I started Bob Doxey Athletic Field Supply. I had that right up until the time I hurt myself, a little over a year ago. I'm not in the physical or mental condition. I'm having a personally bad time with this up here, because I've been active all my life. This has been the best thing in the world for me, believe me, this interview. Otherwise, I'd be just sitting here, reading my book or in my car, just getting out to get rid of my energies, but you've come along and given me this couple hours of reprieve and I appreciate it.

NM: Thank you, I appreciate it as well.

RD: So, I had built a nice little business. Of course, with my building material business, all these things became built into it. Sales tax, that wasn't there when I started the business. Then, there was mileage tax that you had to pay on your vehicles, fuel tax. So, when I went into the athletic field supply business, I would only sell it to municipalities or a job that was connected to the government--it would always be tax-free. In other words, if somebody called up and wanted a load of infield clay mixed for a baseball field and it was a private job, either they would get the proper paperwork or I just would not sell to them. I didn't want to mess with the government anymore. I've never had any trouble with the government--yes, we did have trouble with the government. A little guy came in and ordered us [around] for three days and, finally, I went in to him. He was a government man; he was finding all kinds of troubles, little stuff. I went in to him, after he'd been there for three days or two days, and I said, "You've interrupted my business completely, had my women in the office," like, today, they'd just come in your computer, but, then, women had to get the stuff out for him. I said, "Either you find something wrong with me and fine me," I said, "or just get out." So, "Oh, I'll discuss it with my supervisor." So, he came back the next day and that was the end of it. I think they fined us maybe a thousand dollars. They always have to find something.

NM: Being in business for yourself, did the ups and downs in the economy affect your business?

RD: Didn't realize it, never realized it. I mean, now, I'm very conscious of it. I own a little bit of stock and I go on the computer and look at things. In those days, didn't realize, we just worked hard, like, I remember, we'd get three carloads of cement a week. It was in paper bags and they were ninety-four-pound bags and those freight cars had to be unloaded. Of course, our busy time would be in the spring, summer and fall, when it was hot. That tin box got hot, every one of those bags had to be picked up off the floor, got a physical workout. Now, I have a tough time picking up a piece of toilet paper.

NM: When the Korean War came up, was there a concern that you may be called back?

RD: Not with two children.

NM: Were any of your children subject to the draft?

RD: My son Raymond, who lives now in the Cayman Islands, was old enough to go in the draft, but I would have sent him to Sweden if it was necessary. I don't believe in any of these brushfire wars, what they do to us. I don't believe in them. I believe that, like, these little things that we have going on now in these other countries; of course, Korea was a big deal. No, Raymond was old enough for the Vietnam War and I didn't believe in that at all, but I believe they're just training grounds for equipment. If they develop new equipment, they don't use or test it, they don't know whether it'll do the job or not. Look at these drones now they have--we're right on the verge of a military where they have the ability to do things without a human being in it, such as flying an airplane. Raymond, that was Vietnam, I would have sent him to Sweden, I would have paid for it. He enlisted in, I got him to enlist in, the Air National Guard and they never called him.

NM: Before the war, you had been an avid fisherman and you hunted and trapped. Did you continue these activities?

RD: No; fishing, yes, and hunting, yes, but, then, we would go to Georgia, quail hunting. They'd be trips and, of course, then, I went to Newfoundland for moose hunting--never had a worse time in my life. I'd never saw a moose, heard a crash off through the brush, never saw a moose, and been to Newfoundland, deer hunting in Maine, fishing, used to go, we had a boat, we'd go down fishing in the Atlantic Ocean. We used to have a boat over in Alpine, [New Jersey], or in Piermont, [New York], and we'd go down. We'd stay overnight. We could sleep on the boat, my partner and I. We'd take people with us, and then, we had an airplane I flew. Remember, I said, when I was young, I wanted to fly and wanted to get in the Air Force? After the war, as Joe and I prospered, like, we had a boat, and then, we bought a Piper J-3 Cub that we learned to fly in, and then, after we got our private licenses, the Cub was too small, because we could take passengers up. So, then, we bought another airplane, it was four-place. That was one thing I loved to do.

NM: Where would you fly out of?

RD: They had a little airport in Spring Valley. That's now a big shopping mall, but there was a nice little airport up there in Spring Valley. It was a paved strip and we paid so much money to tie our airplane down there a month.

NM: Is there anything that you would like to say for the record before we conclude?

RD: I don't believe so. If there's anything I could remember, I'd be glad to say it. There's nothing that I have to be ashamed of or nothing that I did that I wouldn't want to mention; can't say anymore. The only thing that I've often said, and said in our interview here, is that I'm a very lucky person.

NM: Thank you, Mr. Doxey, for having me here today. I enjoyed the interview.

RD: Well, I'm glad you could come. Has this been of any value?

NM: Yes.

RD: Okay.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/12/2014
Reviewed by Molly Graham 3/4/2015