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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARISTOTLE GAZONAS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins an interview with [Aristotle] George Gazonas on July 15, 2013, in Stockton, New Jersey, with Nicholas Molnar. Joining us today is Bill Fernekes and his wife, Dorothy Gazonas. Thank you for having me here today, George.

Aristotle George Gazonas: You're welcome.

NM: Just to begin, for the record, could you tell us when and where you were born?

AG: I was born in Norristown, Pennsylvania, June 14th. My mother went to the doctor on the 13th, but, because they did not have me as a baby that day, I was actually baptized on the 14th, the following day. In other words, I had so many injuries of some kinds that I did not get my babyhood on the 13th, but I got it on the 14th. So, sometimes, you'll see me listed as the 13th, but that's incorrect. That's when I went to the doctor, but I was not born then; I was born in the wee hours of the 14th.

Dorothy Gazonas: 1925.

AG: Oh, yes, 1925.

NM: Now, before we get into your experiences, I just want to learn a little bit about your background. Could you tell us about your family history on your father's side, what you remember about it?

AG: He was born in 1890. He was from Epirus, E-P-I-R-U-S, which is one of the big Greek states, up in the northwest corner, adjacent to Albania. In other words, if you go about five, ten kilometers from his village north, you're in Albania, okay. Dad stayed in that area for about ten years, I'm pretty sure, but, eventually, he came to the United States. I don't know if he was brought here by relatives, which I suspect, because, from Greece, he came directly to Norristown, Pennsylvania. And right away, there were some Greeks here already from Epirus, *Ípeiros*. Two of them were his relatives. One was a cousin, another was a brother. So, he started working in this restaurant, (La Maderine?)--no, not (La Maderine?), I can't think of the name of it now. It was not the Le Moderne, although the (La Maderine?) was a restaurant that was eventually owned by another Greek from Epirus, *Ípeiros,* and he had it named that way, (La Maderine?). I worked there for a while, my cousin Gus worked there, his father owned part of the business. My father never worked there, but, with his brother, he started another candy business. Now, he had a lot of bad luck with 14 East Main Street, where I was born, bad luck business-wise. I suspect that maybe some aliens, or alien, singular or plural, I'm not sure, started the fire, okay, in the Le Moderne. Presumably, I discovered the fire. I yelled for safety from the second floor, because we lived on the second floor of 14 East Main Street. So, one good friend, who I knew as a fireman, came into the building. This was in the morning, two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning. I was rescued, carried out by a good Italian friend of mine, that I knew already. See, this is--I'm trying to think of when the fire occurred--but I was only about eight or nine or ten. He also rescued my brother. We slept in the same bed together. My mother and my father were also rescued. We stayed in the Valley Forge Hotel for a couple days. Eventually, the place where we were living, 14 East Main Street, was cleaned up enough, because the fire was in the cellar and in the first floor of the restaurant. It did not extend upstairs to the second floor, but

there was smoke up there. So, when we evaded, why, we evaded the smoke, too. So, from our house, my brother and I and my parents, they were taken to a hotel that was only about five stores away from where we were. We stayed there a couple of days, until we finally found another place to go to. My father's brother had a place, not on Main Street, but just around the corner one block, called Cherry Street. He had a home on Cherry Street, a three-story building at 210 Cherry Street. So, eventually, we ended up with my father's brother, Nick Gazonas; sound familiar? [laughter]

NM: Now, I also wanted to learn a little bit about your mother. Could you tell us about her?

AG: Yes; just stop the machine for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: In the States, did your mother work outside the home?

AG: Oh, no. She didn't work, no, until many, many years went by. Do you want to know where she worked?

NM: Did your mother have any relatives in the area?

AG: Yes. There were a couple of relatives who came from Epirus, *Ípeiros*. They had all come to the United States and settled in Norristown, just like other Greeks. Norristown was a relatively popular place for Greeks. So, they were settled all over the town.

DG: Didn't she come with Aunt Olga, with Olga, her sister?

AG: Right, but Olga didn't settle in Norristown. She ended up in Bordentown, New Jersey. But eventually, when my mother came here, too, we used to go to Bordentown regularly to see her sister. Her sister began to have a family, married a Greek from Epirus. As a matter-of-fact, it's the same area of Greece where my father was born. So, they were related; they married two sisters. So, they had a very close relationship. He moved to Bordentown, New Jersey. And he did very well there, after fifteen, twenty years, and he ended up living in Trenton.

NM: Did your family speak Greek in the home?

AG: Yes. Mom didn't know any English, Olga, her sister, did not know any English, so, they spoke Greek to each other all the time. Every time we were in their presence, they were always talking Greek. We learned a lot of Greek, me and my brother. We were proud to learn Greek. Anything else you want to know about the learning of Greek?

DG: When he went to school, he didn't speak English.

NM: So, did you speak English in the home at all?

AG: Well, I learned English out on the sidewalk. I had a bicycle when we were living on Main

Street, 14 East Main Street. We lived on the second floor. It was a perfect home, three bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom, a parlor, living room, all on the second floor, okay. So, we also learned English. When I started first grade, I did not know much English and I can still remember the first day I was taken to Cherry Street School, grade number one, with Miss (Sailor?). My father took me and Miss (Sailor?) loved teaching kids who didn't speak English. She had a circle of kids around her class, about twenty kids. She said, "Aristotle, you're going to sit next to me." So, I sat next to Miss (Sailor?). She said, "I'm going to teach you English while you're here in this class." By golly, she did. Every day, five days a week, she'd be working at Cherry Street. Across the street from Cherry Street, there was a grocery store at Airy and Main Street in Norristown, Pennsylvania. She would send me over to the store to buy a sandwich or to buy the things that went together in a sandwich. You could make the sandwich at the school. Many times, I would get some kind of a food made over there for me, because Dad had a lot of money, I mean, in the business that he had with his two cousins, Jim and Nick. So, when I went to this grocery store across the street, every day, five days a week, I would always be taught a little English to say to the grocery man and make sure that I got something correct, and then, walk back to school, ate my lunch, gave Miss (Sailor?) her lunch. I don't think she was ever married, but she always had friends. She had boyfriends, too, I suspect, I can sort of remember, but I'd go back to the Cherry Street School, right across the street. I lived about two blocks away on Cherry Street. Later on, when we had the fire, we found a place to live, it was the second floor of my father's brother's home on Cherry Street. So, she was also, with her home, about two blocks away, Lafayette Street, Main Street, a couple of small streets hardly having names, and then, Airy Street. That's it. So, the teacher lived in a very friendly place with me. The school at Cherry Street went for four years, first, second, third and fourth. First was Miss (Sailor?), second was Miss (Castle?), third was--who the heck was third? I can't think of it.

NM: I want to ask, was religion an important part of your life growing up?

AG: Well, my parents were Greek Orthodox. If we wanted to go to worship, we would get in a trolley, or a train, and go to Philadelphia. We'd go to St. George's, which was, I think, about 20th Street or 21st Street, going north/south, off the main street of Philadelphia. We would go to St. George's, a Greek church, very large. I'd say it had at least twenty, twenty-five rows, aisles and seats. In the church, everything was Greek, no English. Everything was Greek. So, if I wanted to understand anything that was said, I would have to stick around, pick up words, pick up sentences. Of course, picking up something like religion was very hard, because there are two kinds of Greek. There's a common, ordinary Greek that people learn in the village and they come to the United States talking the same language. In Greece, there's churches. The churches, they would have a completely different kind of language. It was much more difficult, much more difficult. So, if somebody's talking to me in church, if it was a priest, five people in the church, all working for the church, all getting paid by the church, all speaking this church language. So, at home, it was completely different, but we're learning both things today. Today, if we go to church in Trenton, when the church is over, we get a menu; not a menu.

DG: A program.

AG: Yes. Of the whole thing--do you have one handy?

DG: This is what he's talking about.

AG: This is from last week.

DG: This is probably what a lot of churches do.

AG: Go to the last page, now--all Greek.

DG: Well, that one isn't Greek.

AG: And there's Greek on the front, too? Isn't there?

DG: No, this is the English one, George. I don't have a Greek one.

AG: But, all this was in Greek and all this is in Greek, too, except, sometimes, when something has to be in English, happy birthdays and many more. These were all people having a birthday in July.

NM: You mentioned that where you grew up, in Norristown, there was a large Greek community.

AG: Yes.

NM: Were there any other ethnic groups that lived in the town?

AG: Oh, sure, Norristown population, fifty percent Italian. Going to school, I didn't have many Italians in grades one, two, three and four, Cherry Street School. The boundary line in Norristown, in population, all the Italians lived on the east end of Norristown. Then, there was a big, famous street with a trolley, it went from the center part of Norristown all the way out of town for ten, fifteen miles and come back again. Italians lived on that side. On the other side was mostly Irishmen, and then, Anglo-Saxons. Most Greeks, I'd say ninety percent of the Greeks in Norristown, lived on the west end, okay, with the Irish and with the English, and so on. We didn't stay with Italians in the east end, okay, but all my best friends in school were all Italian. They were all my age, all good boys--until the Greek war with Italy, until that. And then, all of a sudden, we learned a lot more English, because we had to be able to talk to the Italians and we also learned a little bit of Italian when the war started between Greece and Italy. [Editor's Note: The Greco-Italian War lasted from October 1940 until April 1941, ending with Nazi Germany's intervention.] My best friends, believe it or not, were all Italians. I liked Italians, Italians liked me. Right now, I can think of Italians who died. One of them died a couple weeks ago, my friend. Then, his wife called me up and told me about his passing. So, Norristown was a mixed population. I'd say forty percent of it was Italian. There was only one Greek family that lived in the east end of Norristown and he had a big business. Some of his workers were Italians. It was the Italian section, east end of Norristown. So, we had to be good with Italians because there were so many of them, especially in this store owned by a Greek. He used to bawl us out if we'd act against Italians.

NM: Now, you mentioned that your father had a candy store, eventually. Was that also in

Norristown?

AG: 14 East Main Street, same place. Upstairs we lived, downstairs was the store.

NM: Where was the restaurant?

AG: In the store. When you walked into the store, there was a fountain. The fountain area was, I'd say, thirty feet long. On the candy side, window displays for candies, I'd say, is thirty feet long also. Then, back of that, after that, there were a lot of tables to seat people. We could hold a hundred people. Behind the hundred people, there was kitchen facilities. All the cooking was done back there, all the candy was made back there, see. So, I grew up watching candy grow and watching restaurant stuff grow, too.

NM: Did you and your brother work in the store growing up?

AG: No, because this fire got us out of the building when we were still young. When I grabbed my brother to take him out of the building, he was only a year younger than me. Let's see, I don't think I was more than six, seven or eight. So, my brother was a year younger.

NM: Was your father able to reopen the store at that location?

AG: No, they lost it. When they lost it, the store became unified with the [business] next door, which was clothing, a Jewish business. They got my father's business in some kind of a--it was a group of about ten, fifteen people, all got together and they bid for the business. And the Jew next door got the same property, enlarged his business. So, the New York store later became twice as big. Do you know Norristown at all?

NM: No, I cannot say I am familiar.

AG: Okay.

NM: What were your interests, educational or sports interests, in junior high and high school? Did you get involved with any organized activities?

DG: Scouting?

AG: The only thing that I was pretty well involved in, sports-wise, was swimming.

NM: Were you …

AG: Wait a second, I'm looking for something that I want to find, but I can't find it. Dorothy, do you have my swimming window? It's downstairs on the fireplace.

DG: I'll go down and look, but I don't know.

AG: You know the one, the one where I won.

DG: Yes, I don't know, George.

AG: Look above the fireplace. When I was growing up, my mother sent me and my brother, about the age, maybe, of ten, eleven or twelve, to the YMCA. The YMCA was our blessing. I turned into a great swimmer. If she [Dorothy] can find it, four swimmers, Gazonas in charge, another Gazonas, Gus, another Gazonas, Alex, and then, a Ziguras, Arthur, we four swam and passed out a thing we're swimming with, about seven or eight back-and-forths. The pool was sixty feet long and four guys on one line, and then, there were about another four lines, four more lines, five teams all together, swimming back and forth, trying to see who's going to be first and who's going to be last. Gazonas is first; well, I shouldn't say Gazonas--Gazonas, Gazonas, Gazonas and [Ziguras].

DG: Was it this?

AG: Yes?

DG: It says Scout Award, but I don't know.

AG: Wait a minute.

DG: Scouting, doesn't say about swimming.

AG: Yes, ten years of age.

DG: No, you had to be older than that, because that says '41.

AG: Oh, yes, right.

DG: I don't know if there was that. You're not going to get that in.

AG: Tennis ball. I was also very good at tennis.

DG: Not tennis. That's table tennis.

AG: Yes.

William Fernekes: George, were you involved in the Sea Scouts?

AG: Oh, yes.

WF: Can you talk about that?

AG: Sure. Well, the Sea Scouts comes later, age fifteen. Boy Scouts starts at twelve, for me. I mean, I guess some Scouts might start earlier. Are you aware of that? Do they start earlier some places, kids?

DG: Yes.

William Fernekes: Yes.

AG: Okay. I started at twelve in the YMCA and in the Boy Scouts. In the Boy Scouts, I stayed in that for three years. When I got to be fifteen, I joined the Sea Scouts. I had to learn all about saving people, saving peoples' lives, saving people who were in the ocean or a river, because the Sea Scouts had their headquarters on the Schuylkill River in Norristown, Pennsylvania, up near Phoenixville, Norristown, Phoenixville, up the river. That's where our Sea Scouts were. When I was a Boy Scout, I was so damn good, I learned so fast. I learned starting a fire in so many different ways. When I went in the Navy, at eighteen, I used it, all that information that I had about starting fires, [laughter] no matches, no matches, but five or six or seven different ways of starting fires, from the time I was twelve to the time I was fifteen. At fifteen now, I got in a much bigger thing. Now, we were saving lives. We were rescuing people in floods on the Schuylkill River, which comes from Northern Pennsylvania and goes all the way down and empties into the Delaware River in Philadelphia, PA. There's a place where the Schuylkill River empties into the Delaware River in Philadelphia. Did you know that? You ever travel along the Delaware River?

NM: I am not too familiar with the Delaware River.

AG: All right, how about the main drag of Philadelphia?

WF: Near the Museum of Art, Fairmount Park.

AG: Yes, Museum of Art, where my brother was a member, as an artist.

WF: There you go.

AG: I was talking about something else; I've lost that.

DG: Saving people.

AG: Oh, saving people, yes, on the Schuylkill River. I was fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, all in the Schuylkill River, until I was twenty-one. Even when I was in the Navy, every time I'd get home, I'd try to visit my Navy buddies.

DG: Your Scouting buddies?

AG: And Scouting, too. Scouting, Navy, Sea Scouts, that all lasted with me as an adult. As a matter-of-fact, when I first came to Flemington; I can't remember now what my age was. Dorothy, can you tell me what my age was?

DG: About thirty. You were thirty years old. We can come back to that.

NM: What did your father do after the store was sold?

AG: Well, the store was not sold--it was taken over by some other person. They couldn't take it over; they didn't have any money. Dad worked--the first job that he got after being kicked out of 14 East Main Street was something called the Roma Cafe. In Norristown, Pennsylvania, there was an Italian place called Roma Cafe. They catered to Italian work, Italian customers, Italian foods. Dad had learned enough about cooking in the store, even though, basically, he was a candy maker, but he also worked in a kitchen. When you're working in one or the other, if you run out of making candy and there's some potatoes to peel or potatoes to make into mashed potatoes, then, you drop the candies and go over to the veggies. So, my father had learned some of that in the candy business and in the restaurant business. So, he was working in the Roma Cafe for about three or four years. One of his coworkers was a black man. He didn't have any name except Wow, Wow. Wow lived in an alley that went from where the restaurant was, which had a back alley, to an old garage. Wow lived on the second floor of this old garage and he was a coworker with my father. He would work, peel potatoes, help in cooking. Whatever was involved in helping cooking, this black man would do that. My dad would be right next to him working on some other kinds of foods, too, but this black man lived about a hundred yards away on the second story. Dad lived about two blocks away, on Cherry Street, where my brother had his home.

DG: Didn't your father also work in another candy store?

AG: Oh, yes. He worked at the Roma Cafe for about three or four years. Then, he and his brother, they opened up a restaurant that was--do you know Norristown at all?

WF: No.

NM: No.

AG: Well, there's a theater that was created in Norristown in 1931, the Norris Theatre. It is the greatest theater I've ever attended. It's beautiful.

DG: Well, it was. [Editor's Note: The Norris Theatre opened on December 22, 1930, and closed in the early 1980s.]

AG: In 1931, they had a big vote in Norristown, Pennsylvania. They had to get a majority vote to be able to create, to open up, the Norris Theatre. The Norris Theatre was immense. It could hold two thousand people, big; the tickets, eleven cents. Getting a dime was very easy in the 1930s--getting that extra penny was hard as hell. [laughter] So, Dad got the next job. It was the Norris Theatre and next to the Norris Theatre was a jewelry store, next to the jewelry store, a Greek restaurant opened up that my father and his brother, Nick, owned. They bought it, they set it up, with candy on one side and a fountain on the other side and some tables in the back, but not as big as what they had on 14 East Main Street. This was on the opposite side, about a block away, and it was right next to the Norris Theatre. So, there always was plenty of business in this restaurant.

NM: George, did you have any jobs growing up, as a teenager?

DG: Didn't you pass out some kind of leaflets for some businesses?

AG: There was a family of four Greeks; they were in my brother's age. These guys were just about a year apart from me, maybe two years, four brothers--one, two years away from me, another one, a year away from me, another one, exactly my age and, another one, about two years younger than me. My brother was right in the middle of that, too. He was one year younger than me. So, we six, many times, would work. What would we do? Part-time work. Well, there was this Jewish clothing store in town and they would sell clothing. They would also advertise the sale of their clothing by working them along the main streets of the town in carts. We didn't have anything to do with the carts; we were too young. Elderly people would move the carts, but, sometimes, we had to put the clothing in the carts. Sometimes, we would deliver the carts, too, as we circled the various businesses in town and circulated these things, give them to people. Some, we would sell, some, we would give to be sold by other people. What we would do many times is, we would have a wagon that would hold three or four big bundles, this high, how many newspapers there, eighty to a hundred newspapers, *Norristown Times Herald*. Well, we were not too good to our Jewish friend, because, many times, we would take our wagon where there was a sewer. Every block had a sewer. It had a metallic thing on top of it. The fireman would open that up, empty the water there if there was flooding, with their hoses. So, we would open them up when nobody was around--the cops wouldn't see us and big people wouldn't see us and owners of the stores wouldn't see us--dump in the newspapers. [laughter] Why? Because we got paid on a time basis. When we delivered them all to various homes, then, we would get our money.

NM: You lived in Norristown while the Depression was occurring. Do you remember if this had any effects on the community?

AG: Well, a lot of people who lost their jobs would get part-time jobs, sometimes, or, if businesses went out of business, they would try and open them up, maybe. There were people that I know that opened up businesses elsewhere. A few businesses that were opened up by people, they did not involve too much capital. I mean, they couldn't buy fifty uniforms to sell or fifty suits. They couldn't buy that many things and sell them. They would have other things, a cheap restaurant, a cheap candy place, where, if you wanted popsicles, you'd go to someplace where you could buy those. Some cheap stores would open up during the Depression years; I can't say much else for you.

NM: Was your father's business affected in any way?

AG: No, the business was doing well. The Norris Theatre, they had all kinds of things in their place that they were selling. That took business away from luncheonettes in the city and I know there were several luncheonettes that closed down. One of them was a Greek, another one was an Italian and another one was an Irishman. Whatever ethnic groups we had in town, in large amounts, they all tried to do business, too, open up places to make a living. Sometimes, they'd succeed, sometimes, they wouldn't. When Sears & Roebuck would open up, they would put a lot of these businesses out of business, their competitors. Food, too, they even had food in places. I

had a job, when I was about twelve, thirteen, fourteen, my job was to go to "Adam the Tailor"--it's one of the part-time jobs I had when I was kid--Adam the Tailor. Adam would give me uniforms that needed to be sewed, because they were long, they had to be shortened, they had to be lengthened, the sleeves had to be adjusted. Clothing needs adjusting sometime. Adam the Tailor would be the adjuster. He had a place like that. He would take suits and fix them, clean them, enlarge them, make them smaller, whatever was required, had to be done with clothing. He had a business in the center of town. Everything had to be delivered by hand, taken to his place by hand. I had that job. I did it for several years. I would get paid fifty cents a week, fifty cents a week. That was it. You could always get into business selling newspapers. The *Norristown Times Herald* would sell for three or four cents, could make a business that way. You wanted to sell flowers? You could sell flowers and do business that way. So, me, I was delivering clothing, as far as four or five blocks away, because, if you got farther than that, there was always a danger you would run into areas where there were some people who were not so friendly. Depression years, they'd rob people, if they could get away with it. They'd steal from little boys, if they could get away with it. See, so, it was a lot of fun, but I was careful, working for Adam the Tailor, delivering clothing for a number of years. When I finally quit, it was because I got a better job. Offhand now, I can't remember what it was, but I got some buddies to apply for jobs with Mr. Adam the Tailor. One of them got a job, too. He continued the work that I had been doing. I would say selling newspapers became a job in itself, but not so much the daily newspaper, although we did that, too. Mostly, it was a Sunday newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Can you name some others for me? I forgot them all--selling newspapers, but newspapers were a nickel or a dime.

NM: Now, you would have been in high school when Pearl Harbor occurred.

AG: Let's see, Pearl Harbor occurred [in], what?

NM: In 1941.

AG: '41, yes. [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

NM: What do you remember about when you first heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

AG: Let's see, I was born in '25, '45, I'd be twenty, so, I was sixteen, right? What do I remember about it? Well, I remember that we were involved in the war and I was in the Boy Scouts. There were so many things that had to do with the war when I was in the Boy Scouts--first aid, I learned everything that sailors learned when they first get drafted. When I got drafted into the Navy, I didn't have to learn a goddamn thing. I knew everything the sailors knew, which I had learned in the Sea Scouts, as I just said '43--when did the war start?

NM: Pearl Harbor was in 1941, but you entered the military in 1943.

AG: Right, '41, until [age] twenty-one, I learned it all--what affected what was going on in the war, too. Anything that's warlike, I learned. When I went into the Navy, I didn't have to learn a single knot. I learned thirty knots in the Sea Scouts. They were all lassos, hanging people,

executing people, all kinds of things, how to save people.

NM: Before we get into your time in the Navy, I wanted to ask, how did Norristown change when the war began? Did the town change in any way? Was there rationing or air raid drills, or anything else you remember?

AG: Well, in the Boy Scouts, we did a lot of things that were warlike and would help the Army, Navy and the Marines.

NM: Could you talk about some of those things you did in the Boy Scouts?

AG: Sure, yes, knowing all about the knots, practicing all about the knots.

DG: The code, Morse code?

AG: Morse code.

DG: Flags, signaling?

AG: Flags, all about flags, all about having flags. Things like the Morse code, when I went into the Navy, the guy says, "You were in the Scouts? How's your knowledge of the Morse code?" I said, "Pretty good." Here I am now, I'm eighteen, having been in the Scouts from the time I was twelve, knowing all about knots, I knew all about knots when I got in the Navy. Running, when we got in the Navy, we would also have long-distance runs. Some of the times, it would be, like, two-and-a-half, three miles. 120 guys, who all lived in one shack, up in the State of New York, there were about twenty shacks, every shack had a hundred seamen learning how to be sailors. Everything that they were learning, I knew it all. Flags, I'm going to send you a message immediately and I want you to try and translate it. [Editor's Note: Mr. Gazonas can be heard making signal motions.]

NM: I am not familiar.

AG: Semaphore, semaphore.

NM: I am not familiar with semaphore.

AG: "U," that's the signal. When you're sending "U," that's the "U" of the alphabet. This is the "R" of the alphabet. And this is the "N" of the alphabet. I would send to my buddy at sea, in the South Pacific, "U-R Nuts." [laughter] When we were far away from the enemy and there were fifteen ships all anchored someplace, we could have a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun with code. [Editor's Note: Mr. Gazonas mimics Morse code with his mouth.] Did you get that one?

WF: Nope.

AG: "N-E-T-P." That was the signal of the last ship I served on in the Navy, "N-E-T-P." So, you got twenty ships together in some harbor, radiomen, signalmen, we'd help out each other.

Because if I knew the Morse Code, which I did know, and then, also semaphore, three or four guys from the ship could go on liberty, because they're getting filled in with me, because a lot of them had to learn their side. Radiomen had to learn signaling, a signalman had to learn radio work. So, we tried to reduce the amount of work [that] would be on the ship, we'd get some liberty. In the Philippines and in Hawaii, these things could happen; go ahead.

NM: I wanted to ask; just the process of getting into the Navy, where were you inducted into the Navy?

AG: Well, I turned eighteen on the 14th of June. I got a letter [from] the guy whose responsibility it was to inform eighteen-year-olds that they're old enough now and they've got to go to be trained and to be inducted into the Navy. That's what happened to me. I was eighteen, I got a message from Uncle Sam. I forgot the name of the guy that did it, but it was the guy who was very common; his name was very common. Do you know what it might've been?

NM: No.

WF: No.

AG: I don't remember it now. As soon as I got this letter, I knew what I had to do. I had to go someplace in about two weeks. The best thing I had to do was get together with some of my buddies and go down to Atlantic City and have a three or four-day weekend as a farewell, okay, Gus Gazonas, cousin, Nick Gazonas, cousin, Arthur Ziguras, not a cousin, Alex Gazonas, cousin, (Mimi Grecamelious?), so that five or six of us got one room, had two beds in it. Some of us slept in the bed and some of us slept on the floor. It was a way of getting together with each other. That's what happened. Two weeks after that, I got a letter saying, "You have to go and be examined." And where were we going to go? We went up to a town in Central Pennsylvania; I can't think of the name of it.

DG: Shippensburg?

AG: No. Is it listed anywhere there?

WF: No.

AG: Anyhow, there's a trolley that goes from Norristown, Pennsylvania, that used to go to this town. It might be Allentown. How far away is Allentown, about fifteen miles?

WF: It is about an hour to get there.

AG: Okay. I get on the Allentown Express in Norristown, Pennsylvania, and there's some other guys that get on. There was one mother at the station in Norristown, Pennsylvania, who would say, "My son has not come, all you jerks." She actually repeated this for half an hour, to--there were fifteen or twenty other parents in the railroad station on Main Street, Airy and Main Street, Airy and Main, Swede [Street] and Main. Do you know Swede and Main in Norristown, PA?

NM: No.

AG: Well, it's the main street, [had] the Penn Trust Bank, the railroad station, everything. When we got to Allentown--I'm pretty sure it's Allentown--when we got to Allentown, they say, "All right, guys, I want you to line up in the gymnasium--150 in one row and 150 in another row," three hundred of us. And then, they began to ask questions. "Do any of you feel that you should not enlist in the Army, Navy or Marines? If you do, move forward;" two people, of three hundred people, two people moved over, me and one other guy. We were both Sea Scouts. The Sea Scouts believed that the right thing to do was to become a sailor. That's why I stepped forward. Two stepped forward, [myself] and another guy that I didn't know from anybody, but he was also in one of the two lines, he stepped two steps forward. So, some officer came up--he wasn't an officer, he was like a sergeant--he came up, "All right, take two more steps forward," went to the other line, got the other guy. He says, "All right, now, we want a good number of you to step forward now, where these two other guys have volunteered already." These officers now went down the line and, before they had finished, they had taken a good one half of all those people to join the Army. Then, they went to the ones that were left and they says, "Okay, so many of you now are going to go into the Navy." Now, they took a big chunk in the Navy. When all that was done, they said, "The rest of you guys are all going to become Marines." That's it. So, we all went up there, three hundred of us, and we all came back either in the Navy, the Army or the Marines. That's it, that's the way it happened. I mean, you asked me something, that's it.

NM: No, that is great. Just to be clear, when you volunteered, did they initially put you in the Army, is that what you're saying, or was it the Navy?

AG: No, no, Navy, because I was a Sea Scout. I knew everything that the Army guys already knew. Everything, I knew it; not only me, all my other buddies in the Sea Scouts also knew everything. There were a number of guys, including my brother, including three cousins, who were also in the Scouts with me. When they tried to get into the Navy, they were in the wrong line. They ended up in the Army, all four of them. Three cousins and a brother all ended up in the Army. My brother ended up fighting the Germans in France and in Germany, Alex, my brother.

NM: Talk about your experiences after induction.

AG: After induction into the Navy. Well, as I said, I went up to the Navy base in New York State. Do you know about that one?

NM: Yes, you wrote it on the survey.

AG: Repeat the name for me.

NM: It says here Sampson Training Center in New York State. You went to Sampson in New York State.

AG: Yes, six weeks. In those six weeks, we had--learning knots, I knew it--exercise and, man, I

had already been an exerciser, but, now, I joined exercise with 120 guys, okay. I wanted to end number one all the time. We're all in one big line, 120 of us. Then, they told us, "Run through the woods, follow the signs that you see, that you run through, and come back again." Two-and-a-half miles, we ran. No matter [if] there's 130 of us starting at one time, I ended up first or second. Every day, we did this. I was first or second, because I wanted to be first or second. A lot of us believed that if you were good at running, you would end up in the front lines of the war, but, that if you were no good, you wouldn't end up there, see. So, I ended up first or second. For six weeks, every day, we would run this two-and-a-half miles. Knots, we would have sessions where everybody would try to make knots. We would have them in the gymnasium. "Okay, make a knot now which enables you to jump from this high place into water." It wasn't water, it was just a high place, but it was faking the water. I would do that. Sometimes, I had to leap as high as eighteen feet, sixteen feet, from a high place, jump down. I felt competent at doing that. So, it wasn't only just running and knots and signal flags. Everything that they gave me, I knew already, starting a fire, bang, everything. Six weeks at Sampson; from Sampson, I had a meeting and a high-ranking radioman says, "Well, you did very well on the radio business, you know all about the flags--we're going to send you to radio school. You're pretty good already." So, they sent forty of us to radio school in Altoona, Pennsylvania, although not immediately. I mean, when that base was over with us, we got three days home. Then, we got back to the New York State base again. Then, we got picked up by train and forty of us were dropped off at Altoona, Pennsylvania. That's where the radio station was. I was there for five months and there were forty of us. There's a guy who was born and raised in a foreign country in the Near East, but I can't remember now what country it was, right next to Turkey, though. [Editor's note: In 1943, countries that would have shared a border with Turkey would be Bulgaria, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran and the Soviet Union, which occupied Georgia and Armenia.] He was the best radioman in the Navy. So, he had two stripes and, now, they gave him a stripe on the arm, radioman, third-class, out of forty-five guys. He says, "Aristotle George Gazonas, come forward and get your …

DG: Stripe?

AG: Medal, my medal, and I got my thing, too. Four of us, out of forty-five, got the stripe. So, now, they're going to put me in charge, after we finish radio school, five weeks in Pennsylvania. Where am I going to stay? Where are my papers? I got the papers, finally--I'm going to be in charge of fifteen men, out of forty-five men. "From Altoona, you're going to go to Chicago. At Chicago, you're going to pick up a train that's going to take you to San Diego, to a training place for radiomen," more radio, and so on. So, we got to Chicago. They gave me the paperwork, tickets, for my fifteen men and me to get on a train in Pittsburgh, near Pittsburgh, to get to Chicago; from Chicago, another set of tickets. This time, we did not get on a crowded railroad thing. We got a special bed. Fifteen of us each had a special bed. The other ones, they were all sleeping together. We slept together when we left Altoona and got to Chicago, but, in Chicago, we picked up the fanciest kind of transportation you can have. Rich people would have a single bed, they would have a place to sit down and have their meals, three meals a day. So, we get on the rail, fifteen of us. I didn't know a single one of them, except when we learned [about] each other from the radio school. One guy was very close to me. He was in the same high school as me. He did pretty well as a radioman, but he didn't get a stripe. The best guy was a guy who came from ancestors in Europe, I don't remember where, but he was the best radioman, I was

second, and then, two more. Alone, I've got fifteen guys and we crossed the United States.

DG: Because he has the tickets.

AG: When we got to--what's the big state in the middle of the country, right in the middle of the country?

WF: Colorado, Kansas, Colorado?

AG: Neither one of them.

WF: Nebraska?

DG: Nevada?

AG: Nevada, might've been Nevada. In Nevada, we got about a ten-hour layover for the train to get fixed up somehow, or replenished with something, I don't know what, but we were there for about ten hours. I finally struck up a very, very nice membership with a guy that was working in a restaurant at the railroad station. What's the name of that country in the Far East? They all voted to join Uncle Sam, the country out there, near China, south of China, north of India.

WF: Tibet?

AG: Tibet? There's a guy that's waiting on me, though, in Colorado or the other one. He's waiting on me to serve me and I said, "Hey, you know your name is more like the name of an eighteen-year-old kid in the United States who has a nickname, but it's an American nickname." I says, "How did you get that name?" He says, "Well, my ancestors came from," that country near China. I can't remember which one it is; I'm sorry. He claimed to be a non-American, but a citizen now of the USA. He said, "Where you guys going to go?" I said, "We're going to go to California, the southern part of California, radio school." Well, after about eight hours there, we left, stopped at Salt Lake City, in the middle of Salt Lake, where there was another base. Did you know that, that they cross Salt Lake City all the time, because it's shorter and they have all this salt material? Then, we went to California and they left me off, and my fourteen guys, at a Navy place.

DG: Coronado? Was it Coronado?

AG: Coronado.

NM: You wrote here [Camp] Shoemaker.

AG: Oh, Shoemaker, California. Yes, that's the one I meant, Shoemaker, California. We all stayed close together. They put us all together. We all had cots. We had three meals a day. If you wanted to get a meal, you had to run someplace where there was a big cafeteria, a big Quonset hut, immense Quonset hut, would hold about five hundred people at one time. We would all eat at the same time. The food was very, very good. What they didn't want you to do

is try to get there early, too early. They wanted you to be there when the meals were going to be served out by the cafeteria. I want to go back on something I had forgotten. When I left Altoona, Pennsylvania, I tried to get dog tags that would give me my religion. Did I mention this before?

NM: No.

AG: When you got your ribbon to put on, it would stamp your blood type, it would stamp this, it would stamp that, the type of little metallic thing that we had. I've got one someplace.

DG: Tag, your tags.

AG: Yes, my tag. When a guy at the machine would stamp out my tag, I gave him my blood type, my name, spelled it, radioman, religion. So, I told the guy my religion, "Orthodoxy, Greek Orthodoxy." I says, "Orthodoxy would be good enough." He said, "We don't give out Orthodoxy." He says, "You can have Catholic, Protestant …

DG: Jewish.

AG: Oh, yes, Jewish, forgot the Jews; those three, one of those three. The guy told me that. He's stamping out dog tags on a chain hanging here [around the neck]. In other words, if you get shot, you're going to be buried by what your religion is. I said, "Look, I'm not a Jew, I'm not a Protestant, I'm not a Catholic. I'm an Orthodox, Greek Orthodox. You want to put something on mine, put 'GO' down." He said, "'GO?'" He says, "It might be affected by;" I forgot what the hell he told me, something else.

DG: Blood type?

AG: Blood type, "O," it was a blood type. "If you got wounded and you needed blood, they would look, 'There's the 'O," boom." He says, "In your case, it wouldn't be your blood type. That's Orthodox." I said, "I'm sorry, don't put anything on my dog tag about religion." He says, "All right, I'm going to talk to the officer, see if he approves it." He talked to the officer and the officer approved to this guy, who's typing out, [on] these immense machines, dog tags, two of them. So, he finished the dog tag and, by golly, he gave me 'O' alone for my dog tag, Orthodox, okay.

DG: I thought he put "GO."

AG: No, "O," Orthodox. I asked for GO, but I didn't get it, because I didn't understand it well enough. He just took the "GO" and left just the "O." Well, anyhow, we got to San Francisco, at this Navy base. What was the name of it again?

WF: Shoemaker.

AG: Shoemaker. So, I went to the leading officer that was in my area, I says, blah, blah, blah, "I'm Orthodox. I would like to go to church on Sundays," I said, "and I know there's one here, forty miles away, in San Francisco." I said, "As a matter-of-fact, there are three Greek Orthodox

churches in San Francisco. So, it's ideal for me to go to 'Frisco for my religion." The guy said, "Well, we don't ship you to San Francisco. We ship you to this little town where your base is right now." I says, "Well, how about if I depart on Friday? Then, I can go the long distance involved in going to 'Frisco and I can get out of 'Frisco, stay two nights, Friday night, Saturday night, and come back to Shoemaker on Sunday after religion." Well, he says, "Okay, you can do it." So, for two months, every weekend, I went to San Francisco. Of course, every weekend, I had to get transportation, somehow, from the Navy base to San Francisco, where there was a Greek Orthodox church, three of them. The worst thing I ever did, the first time I left the base and got to San Francisco, I got on a motorcycle. The motorcycle did not have a seat behind the regular seat; it had a fender. Below the fender, of course, was the rubber tire in the back of the motorcycle. "Oh," I says, "look, I can sit on the motorcycle and you can drive it safely. You can get me to San Francisco." So, the guy says, "Okay, get on the fender, I'll take you to 'Frisco." He took me to 'Frisco. When I got to 'Frisco, I had such a sore ass, it was black-and-blue. [laughter] I had to find a place to sleep now for the weekend. Some guy says, "Well, the Navy has a seven-story building here. They're on the seventh story and they've got about 150 cots up on the seventh story. And if you get up there, with the elevator, you can sleep there. You can also eat three meals a day, all for nothing." So, two months, I'm in San Francisco and I went up there every weekend, visited three Greek churches. Actually, only once did I visit one of the churches, but the other churches, I visited pretty well. I got to know [local] Greeks pretty well in two months. I ended up going, on both days of the week, to meals at these homes, where these girls were. [laughter] Every time we would leave the house of a Greek family--we wouldn't stay all day, make a nuisance of yourself--so, we would end up, a lot of times, in the regular base there, where you could play pool, if you knew the piano, you could play the piano, you could sing. There were so many things to do. Then, a train took us from San Francisco down to San Diego and, in San Diego, we went to a Navy base, beautiful Navy base. Have you ever been to San Diego? The Navy base in San Diego is right on the water. On the water, there were two battleships. I can't remember the name, offhand, of both battleships, but, in either one, you could get sleeping quarters, you could play games. It was good, for the whole week. Naturally, I was stationed at a base there and there were churches there, so, I didn't have to travel a long distance to get to a Greek church. I could make it easily, which I did. If I asked for permission to leave there on Friday and say I'll return on Sunday, sometimes, depending, they would let me do that even. It was pretty nice. Going from the Navy base to where I could stay at a motel for nothing, for sailors, I would meet movie stars galore at these stations south of Hollywood, because San Diego is right south of Los Angeles. It's about a two-hour ride to get from San Diego up to Los Angeles. I had no car, but I got to meet one of the officers at San Diego who, every weekend, would go to Hollywood. It was President Roosevelt's oldest son. Every Friday, he would take a girlfriend up to Los Angeles. The girlfriend would sit in the front seat of the car with him. I would sit in the open seat in the back, in the fender. There would be a thing that would open up in the back with a big seat.

DG: A rumble seat.

AG: I would be asked to sit back there, so that the lovers could kiss and hug each other, whenever they wanted to, whenever they wanted to stop the car and have lunch even. [Editor's Note: President Roosevelt's oldest son, James Roosevelt II, served as an officer in the US Marine Corps. Two of his sons, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr., and John Aspinwall Roosevelt, served

as US Navy officers during World War II.] Anyhow, every Friday morning, I would get to LA. It happened one Friday morning, the town of Los Angeles was running an affair where they were recognizing all ethnic groups, no matter where you came from, if you were not an Uncle Sam-er, you might not be an Uncle Sam-er because you're from Mongolia, you're from here, you're from there, and so on. They had, on that weekend, one weekend, parties all day long at this big place. I got to meet Greek movie stars. I cannot remember them all right now, can't even remember a single one of them, but three, four or five people, regular Greek actors and actresses, would gather with all the other hundreds of them in this big field, football field, chairs, enough to seat thousands of people, a lot of sailors, a lot of sailors, also soldiers and Marines, too. For the two months that we were in San Diego, I would get to go, on the weekend, with the son of the President of the United States and his girlfriend. That wasn't too important, but, later on, in the Philippine Islands, Philippines--that's the Spanish place, right?--I'm on one of the capital ships on one occasion and who comes on the ship? Franklin Delano Roosevelt's son, in the middle of the Philippines. [laughter] I met him again and he remembered me. He remembered me after two months in Southern California. In San Diego, after the two months there, they sent me to a school and the school was simple. "Here's a jeep. A jeep has two guys sitting up front and a guy sitting in the back with the machinery, equipment. All you radiomen that have been brought down from San Francisco," our group of fifteen and another group of fifteen, there were thirty of us, "thirty of you guys are going to go into jeeps, two men to a jeep, with a radio's equipment. We're going to drive from San Diego east," to this big desert outside of San Diego, an immense desert. It still is an immense desert, east of San Diego. Another short way was to go south about three miles, end up in Mexico. So, we were going to be working, out of San Diego, this automobile equipment out into the desert. The job was to split up in so many ways, and then, try to get back at this meeting place by using the radio equipment. So, for about three, four weeks, that's the kind of thing we were doing. Three or four days a week, we'd go into the desert. Then, when we got all this experience, they took us, once, to the ocean from San Diego and ended us up on an aircraft carrier right inside the port, where we practiced using all the radio equipment there, so that when we got out in the ocean again, in a battle or in a war or something, we'd know all this stuff. So, that happened.

NM: Okay, let me pause this.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AG: We got on a big ship, about two thousand of us, and it took us all to Hawaii. That's it.

WF: George, just pause there.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: We can handle the rest of this later.

AG: And the other session is going to be also so uninteresting? [laughter]

NM: No, no, no--this is great. You are providing a lot of detail. We want to capture that. How long were you in Hawaii?

AG: Two months.

NM: What were your duties in Hawaii?

AG: Well, Hawaii has five main islands.

DG: Are you talking about going or coming home?

AG: Going.

DG: Oh, going, okay.

AG: Yes, a ship took us from San Diego to Hawaii. We got off at the capital and traveled south, several of the islands. There's five big islands. We got off at the one that has the largest erupted volcano in the world, twelve thousand feet, on that island. It's about the fifth largest. What the hell was the name of it? Anybody have a map?

DG: Maui?

AG: Maui, I'm sorry, yes, Maui. [Editor's Note: The volcano, Mauna Loa, is on Hawaii's big island, not on Maui.] We went to the Island of Maui. In the Island of Maui, they had a lot of airmen-in-training. They had an artificial airport. Planes would be landing on this artificial airport, built on land, which was the shape of a naval airport on the ships. Planes land on airports on ships. They have ways of slowing them down when they land by catching the plane and there's, like, a chain on the plane that slows itself down, okay. So, that was the island we were on. We had our own training. We got to go up to the top, or near the top, of that volcano. Why? They wanted us to start killing goats on the top of the mountain. Why? Because on that island, there are some crops that they were in business, pineapple mainly, pineapple, but there were also some other ones, but the wild goats would eat anything they could. They would come down from the tenth or ninth floor, where they would hang out all the time, to a lower level. That's where they would start killing, "Get those goats." That's enough for now. I don't want to keep you from that meeting you have right now.

NM: No, I am not in a rush.

AG: Okay.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WF: Just go right ahead.

NM: Did you have any other duties on Maui, besides killing the goats? Did you have to practice your radio training?

AG: Yes, the radio training. There were Quonset huts that had the layout of the ships. They

were very easy to learn.

NM: After Maui, where did you go?

AG: After that, we got on a ship.

NM: Where was the ship headed?

AG: I still need a map of the Pacific. Dorothy, you got a map of the Pacific?

NM: Sure, we have a map of the Pacific right here. There are the Hawaiian Islands. After Hawaii, where did you go?

AG: We got down to …

WF: Did you go to the Solomon Islands, George?

NM: There are the Philippines. There are the Marianas.

AG: This was my first invasion. Palau Islands was my first invasion, Palau, P-A-L-A-U. Now, there was a lot of violence, but the two that were invaded were Angaur and Peleliu. Peleliu was invaded by Marines, P-E-L-E-L-I-U. That was invaded first and, a couple of days later, Angaur was invaded, A-N-G-A-U-R, by the Army. I was on a ship that had taken me from Hawaii, and two thousand soldiers, down below that, below where the invasion was; I'm trying to find it. It might've been Tarawa. [Editor's Note: On September 15, 1944, the First Marine Division landed on Peleliu, part of the Palau Islands. On September 17th, the US Army's 81st Infantry Division landed on nearby Angaur. The US Army defeated the main body of 1,400 Japanese fighters within a few days, but remained to battle several hundred holdouts until October 22nd. Military planners expected the battle on Peleliu to last only three days, but the island's 11,000 entrenched defenders resisted the Marines (later joined by the 81st Infantry Division) until November 27th.]

NM: What were your duties aboard the ships?

AG: Just radio, all radio work. Infrequently, when we were not involved in an invasion or, say, getting Marines to some island or something, we might have some kind of labor to do on the ship, go around, maybe, and clean the ship. But, most of the time, we had so much air work, radio work to do for airplanes. See, our units were to supply aircraft to a particular island where, on that island, they could attack Japanese aircraft or Japanese forces. So, we had a lot of work to do with them. Now, when we were on an invasion, we're going a long distance to get from one place to another. Before the invasion itself, they would give us work to do on the ship. When there was work to do, we would do the work. As soon as that's over and we had our work for the sailors, the airmen, the planes, all that, then, we wouldn't have this [duty of] cleaning a room for someone.

NM: I wanted to ask, do you remember the first ship you were on in the Pacific?

DG: Was it the *Prometheus* [(AR-3)]?

AG: Well, remember, when we were in California, we had some training on the ships. It was right along the shore, anchored, but in water.

DG: That is the list; the main ships he was on, if you want to organize it.

AG: All right, the question now was from California to Hawaii. That got us there. A little ship would take twenty guys at one time from there to the island in Hawaii.

DG: Maui.

AG: Maui, from Oahu to Maui. You've got to go through a whole bunch of islands to get down there, five big islands, but some small islands, too. So, that was, again, that we were in water to get down to Maui. When it came time to get overseas, we got on ships in Hawaii, after getting there from Maui, and then, going out into the deep Pacific, way down, to have our invasions, planning for the first invasion. On the first invasion, we had a large number of Marines. I'm mistaken with the two--it's not two hundred, it's not twenty, it's at least two thousand, two thousand. Don't ships hold two thousand people?

NM: Yes.

AG: Yes, they all have bunks and that's all they have, and they're all completely attired, they're all dressed, they all have their uniforms on.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AG: So, you see, there was that boat in the water, giving us training, then, there was one that took us to Hawaii, and then, from Hawaii, there was a small ship that would just hold a hundred or eighty people, take us from there down to that island. What's the name?

NM: I am not familiar with that island. You mentioned Saipan. Is that what you are referring to?

AG: Is that in Hawaii?

NM: No. You are talking about Maui, right?

AG: Yes. Well, Maui, and then, there's the main island is--what's in the Philippines?

NM: Leyte?

AG: No, it's not Leyte. Dorothy, what's the main island in the Philippines?

DG: Luzon.

NM: Luzon is the main island. George, I have some general questions I want to ask.

AG: Okay, go with your general questions.

NM: You mentioned, you wrote that you served on about a dozen or so different ships.

AG: Nineteen.

NM: Was it hard to get acclimated to the different types of ships, the different crews? Could you talk about that?

AG: No, it was very easy. When you would be boarding any new ship, there would be guys in a line as you're coming aboard. That was also a factor. You could come up a ladder and get up the side of a ship and get on the vessel itself with a ladder. The ladder could sometimes take two or three people up together at one time. There could be a boat down below, holding a hundred, maybe holding only twenty, maybe only holding enough people to row a small vessel. So, if you go through nineteen different ships in the Navy, of different sizes, different destinations, different work that they had to do, different responsibilities, you have all kinds of different things going on. Sailors, they were curious. [If] they would be alongside some boat where there were people coming aboard, they'd be so curious. Once, we rescued a dozen women from Japanese prisons on the Island of--what's the biggest island, Oahu?

NM: In the Philippines?

AG: Yes.

NM: Luzon.

AG: On Luzon, we picked up women. Why? because they had been freed from prisons, working for the Japanese. They had been pre-freed because they had been rescued by American soldiers. I was on a ship. They says, "Guys, we're going to have a bunch of women, former prisoners of the Japanese who have now been rescued, come aboard our ship." I get in the line and watch people come aboard, and so did a whole bunch of the other sailors. Our sailors, though, were allowed to grab a female coming aboard, to treat her comfortably and help her understand what breakfast is and what lunch is, supper, where they're going to sleep and all that. They were on our ship for a couple of days. I had a companion for a couple of days, okay, but that was a surprise from the Philippines. These women were rescued from prisons. Now, there were prisons where men were rescued, too, but our flagship did not get any American prisoners, males. We didn't get any. We just got those females, because the admiral of this invasion was on our ship. He was the big boss. We were on this ship, we were with the big boss, but we were completely different. We were not part of the crew. Sometimes, they gave us some work, if it was busy, sometimes--but that was a rare thing. Most of the time, I'm busy with my radio, my radio work, you see.

NM: You would be assigned to ships to do the radio signals and that sort of thing. You would not be assigned to that ship permanently.

AG: Correct.

NM: Okay, now I am getting a sense of what is going on. Prior to coming to the Philippines, were there any ships you were permanently assigned to?

[TAPE PAUSED]

NM: You mentioned that in Luzon …

AG: Luzon was, no, more like towards the end.

NM: Prior to that.

AG: I was on about seven different invasions, seven. The last two were on the one you just mentioned [Luzon].

NM: So, prior to the Philippines invasions, are there any experiences that stand out on these invasions?

AG: Yes, New Guinea. New Guinea, we stayed at a couple of ports. New Guinea had been liberated by American Marines, starting--this is New Guinea, [referring to a map in the room]. The Marines landed on the northern end of the island of New Guinea, and then, they worked their way from east to west along the more northern coast, capturing bases the Japanese controlled, but, then, they had to evacuate or die. That was not in the Philippines.

NM: What do you remember about New Guinea when you were there? What were the living conditions like? Did you live aboard a ship?

AG: We never had a base there; we had a ship. You could get off the ship, depending on when the Captain would say, "Okay, we're going to let so-and-so get ashore today." They would allow us, at times, to get ashore. I got ashore at three or four places [in] the northern part of New Guinea. As soon as you got ashore, let's say you were on a ship, a little boat, that would hold thirty people, they would be standing in it. As soon as they got ashore, sometimes, they had to put the front down, so [that] people could get out, walk out. Sometimes, there would be a wharf there, to get on the wharf. As soon as we got out, we could do whatever we wanted, in terms of learning about the woods, or we could do, sometimes, things that involved games. Two hundred Marines now, fifty of them are playing dice, fifty of them are playing cards, fifty of them are doing this, whatever game you could involve yourself in. If I got into a dice game and I won--do you know what my pay was every month?

NM: Twenty-one dollars? I am not sure.

AG: No, more than that, eighty, eighty dollars. They gave me eighty dollars. I generally sent seventy of it home to my mother. If I had eighty dollars, now, I got ten [dollars], every month, pay. If I got ashore with twenty dollars, two months' pay, and there's a dice game going on, I could go over and join the dice game. Dice game bets were a dollar a game, but, sometimes,

you'd end up with five dollars in the pot. The first time I ever did it [was when I] got ashore on New Guinea, playing with many other sailors, and natives, too. Natives, some who played these games all the time and learned them as well as the Americans, some of them would carry money around all over their body, in their pockets, and so on. Why? because they were so smart and got so lucky at the games, whether it was cards, whether it was dice or it was something else. They had a lot of money. I had a cousin, though, who lost four thousand dollars in Japan. He started playing dice in the Philippines, working his way [across]. He was a cook in the Army. He was a soldier in the Army, but that's what he was doing, cooking. He was a Greek cook, too, in his Greek restaurant, George. George made a lot of money in the Philippines. He would get some kind of automatic fluids and automatic stuff that we're passing around. He would enlarge them, then, sell them. With the money, he'd play dice. Playing dice, he'd make a lot of money. By the time he got to Japan, he had thousands of dollars, but he did lose four thousand dollars at one time. He hoped he was going to get home with it; he didn't. So, we got ashore in New Guinea. Before I stepped off the boat, the Captain was giving out free booze, free liquor, not even for money. I had six bottles in a six-bottle container of beer. Now, it happened that I was born and raised in Norristown, Pennsylvania. In Norristown, Pennsylvania, there has been, for scores and scores of years, a brewing company called Adam Scheidt Beer. Did you ever hear of it?

NM: No, I am not familiar.

AG: Okay. It no longer exists in Norristown, but, when it existed, it was big and important. Cars were being completed there and sent all over the United States to sell Adam Scheidt's beers. I'm getting off this ship in New Guinea, the Captain hands me six [bottles of] Adam Scheidt's Beer. It's the only beer company in the world in Norristown, Pennsylvania. I'm five thousand miles, on the other side of the world, maybe ten thousand miles, I don't know how far away it is from home, [about nine thousand miles]. I now have six bottles of beer. Well, I drank one of the bottles of beer and I'm walking around with five bottles and an empty bottle. A native says, "Would you please give me your bottle of empty beer?" I said, "Sure. You got anything for me?" He gave me a buck and took an empty bottle of beer. His body was loaded with beers from all over the world, tied with ropes and wire, hanging from his body. He also had other big pockets loaded with money, packed with money. This guy was a native. Well, I now have--what did I say, six bottles or was it eight bottles?

NM: You had five bottles. You drank one, gave it to the native and he gave you a dollar.

AG: Okay, I've got five, but I play, I play. With the money that I play, I made about seventy dollars, American money. You played with American money, you pay off with American. So, I gave most of it to somebody on the ship, when I got back to the ship, to give to my mother. You used the procedure that goes from me to him, from him to some other doctor or physician, a guy that can take the money and do what you want with it, and send it to my mother. That's what happened. I used to send my mother money every month. All I would need [is] five dollars a month. You get every meal free, you eat every meal you want to eat. So, money was getting to my mother. I was playing cards and I was playing dice and I was being very lucky, luck.

DG: And you know something else you didn't say?

AG: What?

DG: That when you wrote home to your mother, because she didn't speak English, you used to write in Greek. They used to censor. You would have to send your letters …

AG: During the whole war, when I got to New York and [was] told that I'm allowed to write letters to my parents, but I have to use a regular ship address, I didn't want to send it to a ship address, I wanted to send it to my mother. So, I wrote a letter to a guy in Washington, DC, "I'm sending you a letter, in Greek, to my mother. Would you please turn it over to some translator? If you are not allowed to send my Greek letter home to my mother, send home a mail that's been translated to my mother in the English language." So, during the war, I would say, initially, I sent home English mail to my mother that stayed English all the way.

DG: Are you sure about that?

AG: Yes, I sent some mail home, initially, Dorothy.

DG: How could she read it then?

AG: Well, there was my sister there. She could read it, but, then, I got permission to send it home in the Greek language. Some Greek guy, or some guy who knew the Greek language, in Washington, DC, would translate it from the English into the Greek and send it home to my mother.

NM: How often would you be in contact with your family through the mail? Did you write or receive letters often?

AG: Once every several months, mail, not only to my mother, but to other people, too, my Aunt Olga in Trenton, her sister. I sent a lot of Greek mail to her, too, and I'm pretty sure now, as I recall, they translated her stuff, too, into English. She had three kids in the family, all teenagers, all spoke English and Greek, but they spoke English, too.

NM: I know that your brother in the Army served in Europe. Did you keep in contact with letters to him?

AG: She kept in contact with him, yes, sure.

DG: But, you didn't?

AG: He didn't.

DG: Yes, but you didn't? Did you have contact with your brother?

AG: Rarely. Yes, it was rare, but I did it.

NM: Now, I wanted to ask--how long were you in the New Guinea area?

AG: I can't remember. I left Hawaii on the boat and I went all the way down to the South Pacific. We have established that I was in the South Pacific and I'm not certain yet about the island. From there, I'm pretty sure that a regular vessel that we got on when we were down in the South Pacific took us up to New Guinea. See, we landed over here in New Guinea and worked our way along the northern shore. When we got to one of these [areas], we got into the ship now that was going to take me to the invasion of Leyte Island in the Philippines. That's when I got aboard that ship, with many others. So, I boarded [the] USS *Wasatch* [(AGC-9)].

DG: In that one, that list that they have, some of those ships, maybe, I don't know if that's the one.

NM: No, this is good. You were communicating with aircraft.

AG: Oh, yes.

NM: Could you talk about some of the things you did in your duty?

AG: Yes. One of our duties, remember, we are on a flagship of a fleet that was controlled by an admiral. He had other admirals with him and some of them were on other ships. Ours was not a big fighting ship. We had one five-inch gun on the front of our ship. We had an awful lot of machine-guns all over our ship. They were regular machine-guns, and then, there were machine-guns that had bigger bullets, but I cannot tell you what size they were. So, sometimes, if you look at a ship, you can see it's got some small guns here and, if you look over here, you can see that the guns are bigger. Then, you can look at the front of the ship and, if it's a battleship, they've got big twenty-inchers, you follow me? So, you've got three different types of vessels all along the ship, okay. Some sailors would have the responsibility of the smallest ship's weapons. Others would have responsibility for higher weapons. Then, there would be others, the highest weapons of all on the ship, a five-incher.

NM: So, you mentioned that you were aboard the flagship of the fleet with the admiral. You would be communicating with the aircraft. You mentioned you had an air liaison role of some sort.

AG: Yes. As far as I was concerned, I never had communication with pilots, okay. Sometimes, we would try to get the information that pilots were communicating to other people, okay. Say a plane takes off from the aircraft carrier--nothing to do with us--the plane is now in the air and it's flying along and it sees three Japanese planes. It could call our ship to tell an officer who had that particular channel on his plane, so that he [the officer] would learn that the pilot told him there are three Japanese planes at so-and-so place. Do you follow me? Then, other people would have the responsibility of deciding what communications they should have, what weapons they're going to turn out on this Japanese plane that somebody has identified, and they reported it to somebody on a ship who can then tell fighter planes to go to it and destroy this Japanese plane. We wouldn't hear anything about that last message. That was not our responsibility, although, sometimes, when a plane got out of control, a plane is flying north to try to destroy a Japanese base, which it knows where it is, but, on the way there, two Japanese planes become noticeable.

This guy, in this single plane, would want to call others behind him, somebody from a ship, to tell him about those two Japanese planes. Then, others would learn where these Japanese planes were and they would send the planes there to destroy these Japanese planes. The pilot who had discovered it didn't do it necessarily, okay. They would call others to do the job.

NM: I am going to wrap up this session soon. In general, what types of messages were you dealing with? Were they routine? What were the types that you encountered?

AG: All right, the basic type of message that we had was to identify places--Japanese soldiers, Japanese equipment, tanks, Japanese cannons, Japanese machine-guns and the Japanese who were manning any or all of these weapons--we had to pass this information on to somebody. We generally learned it from a guy who did not have a fighting airplane. He just had something that searched and found things to do, and then, would relay it to ships or to planes. Of course, everything would end up very shortly with the soldiers that had the weaponry to do something.

NM: You would be working with reconnaissance planes.

AG: Yes, there would be reconnaissance going on and we would receive it. Then, we could pass it on to officers who were also fliers, who could also bomb or strafe.

NM: So, during your time, you mentioned that you went aboard different ships. Do you always stick with the same group, or were you being moved around individually?

AG: We stayed generally with the same group.

DG: It's called CASCU, Commander Air Support Unit or something like that [Commander Aircraft Support Control Unit]. What was the name of the unit, the group of men that you were always involved with, CASCU?

NM: You mentioned that you were sticking with the same people. Could you talk about the people that you worked with regularly, who they were and what you remember about them?

AG: Are you willing to accept a twelve-volume book? [laughter]

NM: We are going to schedule a second interview session. We are coming to the three-hour mark now. Thank you, George, for having me.

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

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