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AN INTERVIEW WITH ARISTOTLE GAZONAS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second interview with Aristotle George Gazonas on November 18, 2013, in Stockton, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

William Fernekes: … Bill Fernekes.

SI: And also …

Dorothy Gazonas: … Dorothy Gazonas.

SI: Thank you very much for having me here today and for continuing the interview series. Thank you, Bill, for helping to put this together, and Mrs. Gazonas, for having me here. I want to pick up where the last interview left off, which was in the middle of your overseas deployment in World War II. We want to talk about the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Can you tell me which ship you were serving on at that time? Was it the *Wasatch*?

Aristotle Gazonas: The *Wasatch* [(AGC-9)], yes.

SI: Can you share with me some of your memories about serving on that ship, what it was like, the conditions on the ship, what your job was like?

AG: Okay, it was a rather small ship. When it got up to about fifty-five radiomen, that was the limit, but there are other ships that had 155. So, there was a limit because of the dimensions of the ship. This was a period of time, early in World War II, when blacks were not in the service. They weren't being selected by any means to get them into the Armed Forces. Now, about the time that the war ended, Truman, I think, was the one who changed it. [Editor's Note: In July 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, ending segregation in the Armed Forces.] So, at the tail-end of the war, we did have some black men come aboard, and so on.

SI: Did those African-American sailors work as messmen or did they serve in other jobs?

AG: Some of them worked as messmen. Others, if they went to a radio situation, they probably knew something about radios or sending messages out. In other words, they learned about the game eventually, some of them, but there were some that just had jobs that involved cleaning on the deck, preparing food for the various meals, that kind of thing.

SI: Do you remember serving with African-Americans who were radiomen on your ship?

AG: The war was over and a bed that I had was vacant on my side. I'm talking about four decks [bunks], boom, boom, boom, boom, on the ship that I was on. There were four levels. You could sit on the bottom one, you could sit on the top one, but, once you did, you had it for as long as you were going to be on that ship. So, as soon as blacks were being brought to the ship, I happened to just be sleeping next to one. I did not have the bottom berth, but the second one. Then, one was above me, but he was the only one in a very large area of the ship. They didn't come on in big groups. They came on--Truman saw to it, I guess--that, eventually, black people were allowed to be brought into the Navy. So, there were very few of them.

SI: How did the white crew members get along with the African-Americans who were brought onboard?

AG: I think they got along pretty good. They did have some jobs on the ship that were the lower end, cleaning things in the kitchen, having some prisoners on their hands that they took care of, maybe seeing to it that they wash themselves properly in the shower, stuff like that. So, they did have some responsibilities and they took care of them.

SI: On the ship, what was your daily duty schedule like? What would you do during your shift? How long was your shift?

AG: Talk about duties--the only duty I had was being a radioman. I never had to work in the kitchen, I never had to clean a deck, nothing like that. So, it was all radio work. Of course, there were opportunities that had occurred. Sometimes, if you went to an area where there was going to be, let's say, some bombing or some fighting or something like that, you had to keep track of all the radiomen, what they were doing, and so on. If you have a radio and you're paying attention to it, there's not too many other people around. There might be a second radioman, very, very rarely, a third radioman, at that particular spot, dealing with certain issues.

SI: Where was your duty station?

AG: Sometimes in an office, where there was a radio to deal with. Sometimes, it involved, let's say, following, over the radio, what were pilots doing at the time. I mean, the pilots would fly and they would call the ship to involve the ship in what they had to do. If they got information about three Japanese planes were coming south from someplace up north, they might find out that they had some responsibility to do to halt those three planes. So, a couple of them would go up. There'd be some fighting up in the sky and they would be reporting, as they went along, what was happening in that fight. Sometimes, they'd be giving information, too, like, "They're three hours away from the ship and they have nothing to do." In other words, they went there, maybe, perhaps, with the hope or expectation that they'd have something to do, but they'd be communicating with the ship and, pretty soon, they'd just start coming back to the ship. It might be three hours away, might be an hour-and-a-half away. So, what was happening with the pilots was something that they learned from the people on the ship who would supply them with all the information they wanted.

SI: Were you mostly communicating by voice or by code?

AG: Voice. There were some code things going on on the ship, too, weather and, sometimes, weather from Central America, south of Mexico someplace. The Panama Canal supplied all kinds of information about weather that's going on in China, that's going on in the Philippines, that they would supply the information.

SI: What do you remember about getting into the time of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, do you remember when you first started hearing, over the radio, indications that there was going to be a major engagement?

AG: A major?

SI: Engagement, with the Japanese forces.

AG: That doesn't sound like anything that I would've learned about.

SI: Okay. US forces were out there and they discovered this massive naval fleet threatening the area; you would not have been hearing about that over the radio. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Leyte Gulf was fought from October 23 to October 26, 1944, near Leyte, Samar and Luzon in the Philippines. It was the largest naval battle in history and the first time kamikazes were used in battle.]

AG: There were hundreds of pilots. Many ships had pilots. The ships were spread all over the place. So, [if] somebody learned something when he's outside some part of the islands [Philippines]--there are seven thousand islands in this place where the fighting was going on, seven thousand islands, boy. Of course, there were the big ones and that's where most of the fighting was occurring, but, if a plane was coming north from someplace, the pilot would say, "I'm going over so-and-so island." At least then, you knew exactly where he was. Of course, you're talking about seven thousand islands. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these islands never came out in considering what's going to happen in fighting and all that kind of stuff, because it was the big islands that were more important. So, people would report what was happening to those big islands.

SI: When the battle developed at Leyte Gulf, how close was the *Wasatch* to where there were Japanese airplanes or ships coming in?

AG: Well, the *Wasatch* was just a half a mile off a particular island. If it's a big island, a large island, they would have observers up there. You want to know when the Japanese are coming with their airplanes? Well, the only way you're going to find out is tell people to fly around and try to locate where these planes are, where they're coming from, "Where are they going? What time? How long will it take them to do this? How long will it take them to do that?" All that was being conferred by pilots up in the sky. I remember, once, I had to type, with my earphones on, what was going on up in the sky. So, the pilot was talking and I was getting all the information that he was supplying and typing it down. After three hours of flying, he'd go and sit three hours, too. By then, he might be back to the airfield again that he wanted to land at. Sometimes, pilots would be flying around up in the sky, looking for things to report about, but they'd find nothing. So, after two hours of searching up there, they'd call the radio people on the ship and they'd say, "Hey, we're going to be coming back, because we haven't found anything." They'd come back, land at the airfield, unless it was an aircraft from a ship, they would land on the ship. So, that's the way it went.

SI: Around this time, your ship was with the *Nashville* [(CL-43)], according to these notes. Do you remember if there were any other ships with you?

AG: I don't remember seeing the *Nashville*. It was too far away, because, if too many ships got together, they just drew attention from the enemy. Many times, too, they wouldn't even be

anchored, they'd just be moving around. Sometimes, they'd be moving around with [US Army General and South West Pacific Area Commander] Douglas MacArthur. If it was danger, they're moving, because a moving craft, or a moving plane, is harder to hit. So, sometimes, they'd be moving. Sometimes, depending on the type of a ship it was, it just anchored. These radio ships that I was on, they were all very heavily armored, see, all kinds of machine-guns all on the outside, not too many cannons, sometimes a cannon in the back, a cannon in the front, maybe--I want to say twenty inches, certainly, not a twenty-incher, but a five-incher, seven-incher, that kind of stuff.

SI: When you were on duty during that battle, would you just be in your position and not able to see what was happening outside? You obviously know what the planes are doing through your radio communications, but would you be aware of what was happening to the ship at that moment?

AG: Oh, yes. During the day, in twenty-four hours, we always worked about eight or twelve hours, in the morning, at noon, at night. Sometimes, you had the responsibility to keep track of a couple Japanese planes that have been found flying a hundred miles away. "Where are they going to go? What are they going to do?" So, that information had to be passed on to others, officers. They would decide what to do.

SI: Do you remember if your ship came under enemy attack at all during the Leyte Gulf operation?

AG: I don't think our ship ever--I'm thinking of this, what the heck's the name of it now?

DG: What, the ship?

AG: Yes.

DG: The *Wasatch*.

AG: Oh, the *Wasatch.* That was pretty safe all the time. They had plenty of ammunition, plenty of radiomen and, also, radiomen who knew how to handle weapons, if that was necessary, how to take care of prisoners. Those are the kinds of things that they did.

SI: You were mostly in contact with aircraft, but did you ever have to work with other ships by radio, maintain contact with them?

AG: Yes, we did. Generally, when we were all at anchor, for instance, you take the first island that we attacked, this one here, right here--that's the first island that we invaded.

SI: Is that Luzon or Leyte?

WF: "Lingayen Coast."

AG: You've got a name there?

SI: Yes, the Lingayen Gulf Invasion.

AG: Yes. [Editor's Note: On January 6, 1945, an Allied naval force commanded by Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf began a three-day bombardment of Japanese positions along the coast of the Lingayen Gulf. On January 9th, the US Sixth Army landed between Lingayen and San Fabian to begin the liberation of Luzon.]

SI: What stands out about that invasion, from your perspective?

AG: Well, we left New Guinea. We were in New Guinea. We were going to attack the Philippine Islands. Seven thousand of them--which one you going to attack? Well, we would get information from the radios as to what was going to be done, so, we'd have an idea about it. We were always in the know. We were never ignorant about what was going to happen. There's no surprise ever, because we knew all these things. So, we're going from New Guinea to the Philippine Islands. It took a day to get there. Once we got there, we knew which places we wanted to go to, to anchor. Sometimes, we had to anchor, unload our ship. Of course, our ship then, there's not too many sailors who had to get off and get ashore. There were other ships to do that. They would have maybe two thousand soldiers on them. The ship would have to get close to the land, so that they could get into crafts that could hold forty people at one time, all dressed up with their weapons and their suits. That goes in, unloads all forty of them and goes back to the ship and picks up another forty. Sometimes, when that situation occurred, why, it'd be very interesting for me, if I wasn't on duty any particular time, to be up on the deck, outside, and see some of these vessels getting rid of sailors and soldiers, putting them into ships. Then, they would create kind of a pattern. There would be ten of these boats, forty of them in each one. That's four hundred people, all with their uniforms and stuff, and they would all approach the shore at one time. They knew all about the shore. You don't go ashore where the water is eighty feet deep, you go ashore where …

SI: Where you can step out.

AG: [laughter] Yes. So, that's the way the soldiers would get ashore, too. Sometimes, they had [problems], because the water was very deep right up to the beach, but they didn't turn out to be too often a place that we would invade. This is where we want to invade, like that.

SI: When you were not on duty, you were free to observe all that was happening in the invasion.

AG: Oh, sure, sometimes.

SI: Since you could see the invasion area, were you worried about Japanese artillery or planes? Were they a threat at all to your ship or the ships around you?

AG: No, no, because the invasion would be at a place where there was no artillery. If there was artillery, it was fifty miles away or thirty miles away. We could land at the shore, at some particular place where it was safe, in terms of fighting. It might be dangerous some other way; maybe the water's no good there or maybe there are a lot of wild animals. So, that's the way they

worked and, don't forget, you've got Filipinos coming aboard. They would supply information that all those American officers wanted to know about, "Are there any Japanese nearby? How far away are they? What kind of weapons do they have?" Sometimes, that would be information supplied by Filipinos. You didn't have to worry about sending ten American soldiers into the jungle someplace to try to find out what's safe and what's not safe. Filipinos would help.

SI: After the invasion, were you able to go ashore in the Philippines or did you stay aboard ship?

AG: Well, in the Philippines, one island, I can't think of the name of it--here it is, right here again, that island.

SI: That was the island that Manila was on.

AG: Yes, [Luzon].

SI: Did you get to go ashore and go to Manila?

AG: Near Manila? I don't know.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I was just asking if you got to go ashore at any of these islands.

AG: Oh, right. D-Day [the first day of an operation], I wouldn't go ashore, D-Day, none of my friends would go ashore. About five days later, some ships had been stopping--of course, they're going to be right near an airfield. The airfield's right there, so, a lot of soldiers are sent in to conquer that area. If there's a village nearby, and there generally was, a small village, there would be our artillery people, our rifle people, who would also go ashore to that little village to take it. There were things like supplies. Supplies would be brought by ship, they would be taken into small boats, taken ashore, and then, they would be going wherever they were required, I mean, depending on what kind of supply it was. If they're going to open up a cafeteria that was a good Filipino place where people would eat, well, they would have to fill it up with food of all kinds, with workers of all kinds. Sometimes, planes would be damaged when they'd land; the people whose responsibility it was to take care of them, and so on, would all be going. So, they had all kinds of jobs for the soldiers to perform and for those who were just workers, not soldiers at all.

SI: In some of these photocopied transcripts of your conversations with, I assume, pilots, it seems like they are talking about …

AG: This is the first invasion of the Philippine Islands.

SI: Yes. It seems like they are also talking about attacking ground forces. Do you recall working with pilots to strike Japanese positions in these areas that were held by the Japanese? Would that be part of your job?

AG: No, no, they were mostly fighters, fighter aircraft, but, at all invasions, they also had very small planes. The job of the pilot in that thing was to sail around, up in the sky, and pass information back to the ship, to other officers, as to what's there. "What's two miles out of the airfield area? How about twenty-two miles away?" Twenty-two miles is not very much for a plane to get there fast, Japanese airplane. So, we had to know what's going on and one way was to ask certain kinds of soldiers [pilots] to supply that information.

SI: These would be Piper Cubs.

AG: Correct, yes. Generally, it had one member in the cockpit, one man only. They would be very important in informing the ship what's happening.

SI: Here, it looks like you are sending back a weather report.

AG: "Weather report is sent," yes.

SI: You were on for eight hours, and then, how long would you be off?

AG: Well, sometimes, it was just four hours, but, mostly, it was six hours. Eight, that didn't happen too often--well, forty radiomen on the ship. Actually, on this invasion, when it occurred, we had about 140, 150 radiomen. Now, some of them had three stripes, some of them had two, some had one, some had no stripes at all on their arm--they were very, very lower [ranked]. They weren't experts yet. My job, as a radioman, was to have my earphones on and some guy's up there reporting that he's following two Japanese airplanes at so-and-so place or point. Then, the airplanes are flying north, towards Manila, and he's following them towards Manila, or he's following them to some other direction. That was to get information about aircraft, Japanese aircraft, that needed to be destroyed, so that they couldn't do anything to us.

SI: Tell me a little bit about life on the ship. What would you do on your off-time? Was the food adequate?

AG: I thought food was good--breakfast, pancakes, eggs, toast, coffee, tea, if you wanted it, various kinds of cereals, coffee. [laughter] Mailing, we got a lot of mail from people, from the United States, sent to their relatives on the ship, with the address, but, before it gets to the ship, it's got to be flown across the Pacific Ocean, flown to a particular island, which they had on the envelope. You had to tell them where, by the numbers that you were putting down, this envelope was supposed to go and, generally, there were no mistakes. I mean, they handled the mailing pretty good, very important. So, you figure they took about two, three days to get to the Philippine Islands, and then, depending on whether the military had occupied a city where they had, let's say, a place where there was a post office, where the mail would be sent to, or, if they had no post office, they would supply some big device that would hold a lot of mail and they would take it to the place where it had to go. Then, it would be sent out. You've got fifty vessels in an immense harbor all getting mail. So, it has to be sorted and that was a job for many people, to be a sorter. Then, it would be taken and distributed. If we had forty ships in the harbor, in the Philippines, they would all be getting mail, but it took a lot of work.

SI: When you were getting mail from home, was that very important to you in terms of your morale? How did it make you feel to get mail from home?

AG: Oh, it felt good, sure.

DG: Can I say something?

SI: Sure.

DG: Tell him about how your letters would go to your [mother]. I do not know if that was in the last interview, how his letters would go from him to his mother and father, because they didn't speak English, so, it had to be in Greek. So, they had to be translated.

SI: So, you wrote to your parents in Greek.

AG: And some Greeks who weren't parents.

SI: Did you have to translate them for the officer who was going to censor them?

AG: No. They would receive the mail on the ship and, depending on what the message would say, that it's got to go to a post office and it's got to be sorted and it's got to be read. So, somebody at some post office far away, like, when I mailed things to my mother and to her sister, they lived in two different cities, but they would get my mail all the time and some guy had read it, or some gal had read it, in some post office before they sealed it again and sent it to them. I never received mail that was sorted, read by someone.

SI: Censored.

AG: No, that didn't happen, just the other way.

SI: It was not an officer on your ship; it was someone down the line that did the censoring.

AG: Correct.

SI: What about your other letters? Did any of the officers censor those? I know officers had to censor the enlisted men's mail. Were you aware of that at all?

AG: I didn't know about officers on ships censoring mail, no. Of course, they had to read the address to know what the heck to do with the envelope. It says, "Washington, DC," and they're in the Philippine Islands someplace, well, it had to get to that city first, and then, it would be sorted.

SI: You also sent recordings home, in addition to letters, where you would tape yourself and send it to your parents.

AG: I'm trying to think now of any recordings that I sent home of my voice--can't think of any.

SI: Let's see--going back to when you were supporting these operations in the Philippines, I would assume your battle station was just going to your radio, or did you have another battle station? When they called general quarters, would you just go to your radio?

AG: Yes. In other words, I was not a soldier.

SI: Some sailors have their regular station, and then, they would have their general quarters or battle station. Your regular station and your battle station were the same, based on what you were doing.

AG: I would say so.

SI: You do not remember being assigned to anywhere else.

AG: No.

DG: Can I say something? Maybe he can say something about it, but his group, they were not really part of the ship's crew. They were a special group that went from one ship to another, so, maybe that's why they didn't have general quarters. [Editor's Note: Mr. Gazonas served in the Commander Aircraft Support Control Unit (CASCU).]

SI: When they called general quarters, did you have to go beyond your eight-hour shift, be on the radio for much longer?

AG: If I was on duty for an eight-hour shift or a six-hour shift, I would pay no attention to some other horns that were going on, other whistles were going on, no. My job was there, right there.

SI: How did your unit get along with the ship's company on the ships that you were serving on?

AG: Well, we looked at all these people as friends; after all, they're running the vessel. The same ones, of different jobs, suppose they were cooks, we treated them good. [laughter] We treated everybody in the ship very nicely. They treated us nicely, too, yes, because, sometimes, if you had an eight-hour job, holy mackerel, you'd go in at midnight and you'd get done at eight o'clock in the morning, sure. [laughter]

SI: How did you get along with your officers?

AG: First of all, I didn't see too many officers while I was on duty. The officers stayed in a different part of the ship. They would be in the radio shack area, where maybe there were five radiomen working and five radarmen working, not radio, radar. So, people had certain responsibilities and they knew what those responsibilities were. You take one guy, he was a pilot. He'd get into a little aircraft and fly around to see if any planes were shot down and where they are, floating around. He would find out these things and call for help, if help was available and if help was not coming too late.

SI: We talked about the Lingayen Gulf operation, where you could see the ships going in. Do you remember any other invasions after that?

AG: After the main invasion?

SI: Yes.

AG: Yes. Of course, if you land at the shore, at a little town, you may have a city twenty miles away that's large. Sometimes, you didn't have to worry too much if you considered going to this city, because the population there might be very, very friendly.

SI: When you would go to these cities, were they mostly in the Philippines or elsewhere?

AG: Well, the Philippines took six invasions for me. I was a radioman in six different cities--the ship was in the water all the time, someplace, but six places. The people were very friendly. The people were Filipinos, okay; the Japanese were not Filipinos. They may have had some people who were friendly [collaborators], because they too realized that if they got off the hook and started acting too anti-Japanese, they'd get it. They'd get it. I'm sure that was going on. Sometimes, we'd come into a small town. Of course, I was not a soldier, so, therefore, I didn't do too much going ashore. I would go to a mail area, sometimes, ashore, or, sometimes, I would have to help transport stuff from a little town or city to an airfield. So, there were opportunities for me to interact with the citizens and other people.

SI: Did you ever exchange anything with them, trade things? [Editor's Note: Mr. Gazonas did not hear the question and continued talking about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines.]

AG: Yes, some had friends in the people, but they were also invaders. They were occupying homes from Filipinos and, if they didn't like the Filipinos, they'd pile them up, have a little shooting practice.

SI: The Japanese were doing that to the Filipinos.

AG: Yes, sure.

SI: When you would have interaction with the Filipinos, did you do any kind of trading with them, for goods or souvenirs, that sort of thing?

AG: Oh. Sometimes, I'd have something where I'd need some help. First of all, you had to try to find somebody who could talk English. I didn't know any Filipinos. So, they were friendly, though, very friendly. The women were friendlier, I think, than the men.

SI: In these other landings, you said there were six others, did they all go basically the same or was there anything unusual that happened in the other landings?

AG: Well, every invasion was different. Some invasions involved putting five thousand soldiers ashore at a small field, on a small island that was ten miles long, and no Japanese at all there, but

it was a place where our airfields [could be built], where the pilots could come, planes could land, no problem at all. So, regular sailors would go ashore, go to a restaurant, if necessary. I think that in the Filipinos, I found women very, very friendly. Of course, I think women are friendlier every place. [laughter]

SI: During any of these combat operations, were you ever near any ships that were attacked or hit? Particularly during this part of the war, the *kamikazes* were being used. Were you ever near any *kamikaze* attacks?

AG: Well, there was a lot of Japanese shipping, warships, in the Philippine Islands, okay. So, that means, if you were on one ship and you're traveling, you could be easily caught, bombed and sunk and killed. I can remember any number of invasions. We had six invasions of the Philippines that I know about, that I attended, went on, and so on. We never traveled alone, one ship to an island and tried to conquer it. That wasn't done; ten ships at one time, yes. I can remember going from the southern part of the Philippines up to the northern part, when we were invading--got a map handy? Yes, well, we prepared ships here--this is Leyte Gulf--and this is where we took this part of the Philippines, goes through here with a ship and right on this island, right here, Mindoro, pick up seven, eight, nine, ten other ships. Pretty soon, we've got twenty ships. What are we going to do? We're going to invade up here, Lingayen Gulf [on the western shore of Luzon], okay. So, twenty ships would be all lined up, five, five, five, five, twenty ships, four times five, twenty ships. Out of the twenty ships, there's one ship on the extreme right at the end of the line. As I said, five, five, five, five--my ship was the last ship of the fourth line, okay. Now, that could be dangerous--and was. In this particular invasion, when we went from …

SI: Leyte to the Lingayen Gulf?

AG: Yes. We went from here, Leyte Gulf, up to Mindoro, where we picked up a lot more ships, all filled with soldiers, twenty ships sailing now to go up to Lingayen Gulf. That was the initial invasion of this long, immense island. Mindanao is immense, Luzon is immense, you can see the other islands now are a lot smaller, seven thousand of them. These are visible; they're pretty big. So, anyhow, we're sailing up and I'm looking out sometimes. I saw--what do you call it now, a bomb that's traveling in the water?

WF: Torpedo?

AG: No, not torpedo; well, all right, a torpedo.

SI: Maybe a mine?

AG: If it came from a submarine, a Japanese submarine. They're in the way as we're heading up to the Luzon island. As we're heading up there, the torpedo would come right through these twenty ships. I saw a torpedo, once, start with the first ship up there and go through all twenty ships, past us. Then, what would happen? All of a sudden, all of the destroyers that were around, because we had protection, too--we had destroyers around the twenty--ten of these destroyers would race to where this ship was and, "Boom," try to get it by dropping bombs down in the water, because they're down there. I don't know how far, but they could be gotten. So,

sometimes, we were traveling and, at the end of the trip, when we got up there, they sank four submarines along the way.

SI: Do you recall seeing any of the other ships in the convoy getting hit or would the torpedoes always miss?

AG: No, I saw a couple of ships get hit and, eventually, sank. In other words, if it was part of a [convoy], twenty ships, then, immediately, some supplies and ships would be going there to where the ship got sunk to save as many as they could. So, this happened to some ships.

SI: Did your ship ever take part in a rescue like that?

AG: No, no, and not much fighting, either. They just had two cannons on the ship, one on the front and one on the back. Now, [if] you take a big battleship, they've got a big turret up front, a big turret farther back and they've got three big rifles here and, below it, three more big rifles, same thing the other way. All ships had one, at least one, maybe, sometimes, two, big rifles, cannon, because, if a submarine surfaced, for instance--that happened a lot--a submarine got hit with a bomb going down to it and hit it.

SI: Depth charge?

AG: If it was not destroyed completely, it could come surface. Once it surfaced, then, it's easy to capture it, take all the people who are still alive on it, put them in a jail on the ship.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During these operations, aside from the submarines, did the Japanese Air Force pose any kind of threat to your ship or the ships around you?

AG: Oh, yes, they always had aircraft try to get to our ships, sure. As a radioman, my job, sometimes, was to follow an American plane, where it's going, what they intended to do, and so on. Sometimes, if they were running into two, three Japanese airplanes, well, three is better than one in a battle, so, you might just turn around and go back someplace, see. So, sometimes, you're responsible for locating these three planes, sometimes, and inform them, "There's seven Japanese planes, they're coming south. They're so far away," blah, blah, blah. I would see to it that the message was communicated to some American ship or to some American airfield, or the ships that was now under American control, like some ship at some base. They would be looking to protect the American ships. I would start out by seeing what's going on, "There's a Japanese plane, there's an American plane," or, "There's a Japanese plane and three American planes." You see, sometimes, it's in favor of the Americans, sometimes, it's in favor of the Japanese. Whatever the circumstances were, I knew exactly what I had to do. I would do it; didn't happen often. I'd say, during the whole war that I was in the Philippines, maybe I had to call the people that had to be called five times to rescue American planes or see to it the Japanese airplanes were destroyed. A lot of Japanese planes were destroyed, a lot of them.

SI: Do you recall any times when Japanese airplanes made it through to attack the convoy you were with or the ships that you were near?

AG: When we were in the invasion, this first invasion of the Philippine Islands that I was on, there were a hundred ships in the bay. Some of them were immense battleships, destroyers, cruisers, submarines. Then, you had thousands of these little "rowboats," as big as this room, would hold thirty people, thirty soldiers. They'd have a going engine on the back and two guys would be sitting up there and they would run this vessel to wherever they wanted to go. Maybe they wanted to attack a Japanese ship with twenty American rowboats to attack this ship--they had a job to do. In this harbor that I was at in the Philippines, I would say that if I could count them all, there were five hundred ships there. It was a big harbor, right there, where it says Tacloban.

SI: Okay, yes, in Leyte Gulf.

AG: Tacloban, that was a large city and a beautiful bay, open, and so many ships were there, so many American ships were there. The Japanese were not around there at all. They were getting there, or trying to get there, with their torpedoes, and so on, submarines or planes. They're trying to get there, but they didn't do it. One time, I'm on the ship, with my hands on the rails, looking down. A hundred yards over there is a ship that's just loaded with all kinds of clothing. A ship over there was a small fighting vessel. Right in the middle of those two ships was a Japanese plane that had been hit and is floating; whatever had been smoking got wiped out, but the plane is floating on the water, two men in it. There's a Japanese rifleman, in charge of a gun to shoot other airplanes. He was dead. The pilot was climbing out of the plane. He's on the wing. Eventually, we send a big whaleboat to the plane, which was still floating, and rescued him. He was slightly wounded, okay. They brought him back to our ship. I'm like this--I'm looking down, I'm seeing this whole thing happen. I was not on duty. That little boat comes alongside our ship and down go about ten men, down the ladder. It's like steps, not like a ladder that you climb yourself, it's like steps on the side of the ship. So, they go down where that little boat comes to the ship, our ship, and they get the Japanese guy who's wounded and aching, carry him up the steps on the side of the ship. I'm there. When we get to the top, most of the crew members were there, twenty-five of them. They're all making fun of this Japanese guy. Well, they're all Southerners. [laughter] They were all Southerners on this ship and they're making fun of this Japanese guy now who's wounded. He also has a wound in his head, the Japanese fellow. They finally get to the top of the steps, after about thirty or forty steps, and they say, "Hey, get that blanket, so [that] we can take him down to sickbay." I'm there like that and one guy points to me and says, "Hey, you can help. Take this guy down to the sickbay." So, I helped. Eight of us grabbed the blanket, he's lying in it and we start walking down the deck. Then, we're going to walk down about three different steps to get down in the ship where the sick area was, where the doctors were, where the operations were and all that kind of stuff. While we're walking along the deck, some guys, they're punching the Jap, they're punching the Jap. They're hitting him a little bit. Finally, we get to the steps and we start working ourselves down the steps. Well, I told the guys, when we got onto the steps, to stop injuring this guy some more. He's wounded, he's bleeding, he's got a big wound in his head, he's not completely unconscious, but he's in pain and he knows it. Anyhow, we take him down the steps, take him into sickbay and the doctors treat

him immediately. The guy does not die immediately, but, the next day, the Japanese guy was dead, okay. I told the officers that were down there what was occurring, that these guys that were carrying him with me--I'm the only Northerner that happened to be there doing this--I said, "They're treating him like they shouldn't." So, some of the other high-ranking officers spoke to these fellows and said, "Look, guys, if you continue this kind of treatment, you're going to get a lot of work [that] I'm going to put you to." So, it ended. He died, the pilot died. He [the other airman] was like a machine-gunner on the plane, in the back. The pilot was sitting up front, sailing the plane. This guy was in the back, the machine-gun and radioman, dead.

SI: You said your ship brought other prisoners aboard.

AG: Yes.

SI: Did you have any other interaction with Japanese prisoners or was that the closest you came?

AG: See, the Japanese plane was right next to us. It was floating around, but it was going to sink, too. So, the only reason they brought him to my ship, to our ship, was that was how close they could get to him and bring him to safety, treat him physically. He died anyhow, the next day.

SI: Was there any other time when your ship took Japanese prisoners aboard?

AG: Oh, yes, sure. Sometimes, we'd go to take our shower. Showers were not each one in every little room. There was a big room which could have fifteen people at one time showering in different showers and places where they can look in the mirror and shave themselves, that kind of stuff. Anyhow, this pilot died. I'm trying to think of some other ships, too, that I was on, but the same thing happened. The people who worked as crews, they tended to be Southerners. I don't know.

SI: After your combat tour in the Philippines, were you sent back to Hawaii? Did you go back to Hawaii after your tour in the Philippines?

AG: Not then. I did end up back in Hawaii, okay, six months' rest-and-recuperation in Hawaii. We weren't fighting at all. We were still sailors and the war ended. Then, they would take a lot of them, put them on planes, take them down to ships, back to San Francisco, back to Los Angeles, back to the northern part of the United States, okay. I'm waiting now to get invited to go on a ship, go back to the United States; didn't happen, didn't happen. They put me in charge, not of the Philippines; because by now, the Philippines had been adequately taken over. I mean there's seven thousand of them--we didn't take seven thousand islands, but we took enough islands. After a while, there was no more fighting by the Japanese in the Philippine islands. I was sent to China.

DG: French Indochina.

SI: Did you go to Hong Kong first?

AG: Oh, here it is, to Hong Kong.

SI: What do you remember about what you were doing in Hong Kong?

AG: Fighting the red Commies. I was in Hawaii and a guy awakened me at five o'clock in the morning and he had awakened a lot of other guys. He took some of them to a certain place and said they've got to get on this ship to get back to the United States. They said, "You, you're not going to go back to the United States. You're going to go to China;" *Ingham*.

DG: The Coast Guard. Wasn't that the ship you went on, the Coast Guard Cutter *Ingham* [(WAGC-35)]?

AG: Yes, I was on that one.

DG: Wasn't that the one that you went on when you went to China?

AG: Actually, Dorothy, to get to China from the island where I was, in Hawaii, they wanted to make sure that they didn't take anybody who was supposed to be going to the USA. I didn't have all my points yet to go back to the USA. So, they put me and fifteen guys on an airplane, but they also showed us a movie on how to abandon the airplane when it crashes in the ocean. [laughter] "The plane's going to float for a while. You run out, jump out of doors and out of windows. There's these rubber boats that are created, filled with air--jump on that, so [that] you don't have to swim for a couple hundred feet, and then, drown or get eaten by an animal," I don't know. Anyhow, the guy says, "Gazonas?" "Yes." [He] says, "So-and-so number?" "Yes." "You just came from the Philippine Islands?" "Yes." "Okay, you're in charge of fifteen men. Right now, you're going to have to go back to the Philippines, and then, China," or not China, but …

SI: Hong Kong.

AG: Hong Kong. So, they put us in a plane. There were no chairs in the plane, just the floor. Everybody went to sleep on the floor. [laughter] The plane went about an hour and, all of a sudden, the pilot turned on some kind of a whistle that's telling you that there's danger that the plane may sink, okay. It may crash in the Pacific Ocean. So, anyhow, he says, "We're going to go back to the island again, where you were stationed for a while. We'll probably get another airplane to get you to China, where we want you to go." Yes, that's exactly what happened. They showed us a movie about how to abandon a plane that's floating in water, and then, they says, "Okay, guys, you've seen it. Now, we're going to take you to another plane that's going to fly," about five different islands in the Pacific Ocean that we stopped, one island, another island, another island. Remember, now, that time has elapsed from the time we conquered the Philippine Islands. When we get to Hong Kong, actually, not China--we didn't get into China, but Hong Kong, which is next to China--they showed us this movie, showed exactly what to do, how to act, where to go if the plane crashes in the water. Then, we traveled all through these islands and got to Manila. Then, from Manila, we got into a plane that was not something that I knew anything about. It's a plane that had …

DG: A helicopter?

SI: A rotating blade?

AG: Yes, a blade going around on top of it.

SI: It was a helicopter.

AG: Helicopter. We fifteen guys were lying on the floor. And when we got to Honolulu, a guy says, "Hey, you want to do me a favor?" I says, "If I can." He says, "I want you to hold me around the waist and, with your left hand, hold on to the side of the door," around him, around his waist. He had another guy on the other side doing the same thing, except he's using his left hand around this guy's stomach and he has his own thing to put his hand on to hold himself. So, we're over [the ocean] now, the door is open, this guy's got his camera out and he's leaning out as much as he can. He's taking pictures. He's taking pictures of sunken aircraft--Japanese, French, English, Dutch, Australian. I don't think I saw a single USA aircraft. [laughter] Anyhow, after he took all his pictures, the plane eventually closed the door, everybody sat on the floor again in the plane and landed. Boy, when it landed it, boy, it was really bad, because it went down. The hull of the ship went down below the water and you could see all these little windows, all of them were underwater now. We're underwater and these windows are all underwater.

DG: Are you talking about the helicopter?

AG: Yes, the helicopter, the one that we just took pictures from. Anyhow, in this helicopter, he takes us to a big American airplane ship, loaded with planes on it, on its big deck. For the first time in my life, I got aboard a seaplane like that and, for the first time in my life, I slept all night long on this big boat, all of us on the floor. Then, the next morning, after we had some breakfast, they lowered us, put us in this little boat and took us to another vessel that's going to take us down to French Indochina, all the way down to French Indochina.

DG: That ship was the *Ingham.*

SI: According to this, you took the *(Fremont?)* down to Haiphong, where you caught the *Ingham.*

AG: Yes, "To Haiphong, French Indochina, to catch up with the Coast Guard Cutter *Ingham; Wasp*," yes, the one which is part of Charleston, South Carolina, Naval Museum, "then, back and forth between Hong Kong and Haiphong to help prevent the Reds from taking over China; finally, on to the repair ship the USS *Prometheus* (AR-3), anchored between Victoria [Harbor] and Hong Kong, Island of Kowloon." That's what transpired next.

SI: You were going between Haiphong and Hong Kong on the *Ingham* for a while, and then, the *Prometheus*. You were also on the *Prometheus* in that area.

AG: That's where we got on the ship that took us all the way down to French Indochina, yes.

SI: What were your daily duties like on those ships? You said you were helping keep the reds out of Hong Kong. Was it similar to your activities in the Philippines?

AG: Yes. Well, people traveling on the ship, even if they're sleeping on the floor, they take it in. It's not like they're feeling sick or anything like that. Traveling on a plane has certain problems. Sometimes, it's going like that all the time.

SI: Shaking, turbulence?

AG: Yes, shaking, makes you nervous. Then, the plane starts dropping a thousand feet and they put the brakes on. It's pretty bad. So, getting on this airplane, aircraft, that was going to take us someplace, and then, getting off that plane was also very dangerous. We traveled so many times, back and forth, trying to get off that plane--we did it, but it was dangerous.

SI: Did you get to go ashore in either Hong Kong or Haiphong?

AG: Yes.

SI: What would you do there?

AG: Not Hong Kong. Hong Kong, we just went from one vessel to the other vessel in the harbor, but, when we got down to French Indochina, we also got a ship down there. The one that took us down emptied us to a smaller ship, because the ship we got on now was going to go up river into French Indochina, into the country itself. So, they had maps, they knew which rivers would accommodate the ship that we were now on to go into the country. What they did is, they stopped at a lot of places. They liberated a lot of Frenchmen and natives who were doing things wrong, as far as the [occupying Japanese] government was concerned. That was scary, because, sometimes, we would go by someplace where, two hundred feet away, we could see fifteen soldiers who, if they could've, would've gotten us, "Bang, bang, bang," or whatever they want to do to us. I don't know. They didn't do it, got away.

SI: Did you know if those fifteen soldiers were Communists?

AG: The fifteen soldiers, no, they were not Communists. They might've been. There are people who have, let's say, a Communist inclination. They want to do it, but they're not members of the Communist Party.

SI: Were the fifteen soldiers Japanese soldiers who were stragglers? Why did you think they wanted to attack you? What gave you that impression?

AG: Well, they all had weapons. Sometimes, they'd take shots at you, if you're traveling up a fairly wide stream--never got hit, here I am.

SI: Were they Japanese holdouts?

AG: I don't know. I can't tell you if they were Japanese or French commies.

SI: They were just shooting at you.

AG: When I was in Hong Kong, because, eventually, I got back to Hong Kong--I stayed there for about a week before I got a ship, then, that ended up taking me back to San Francisco--things are pretty bad, where you might think that the place is run by Commies. Sometimes, they're not being run by Commies. It might be, like, a Spanish group or a French group trying to make some money somehow. One of the things I learned was that Communism was on the way up in this French place. Communism was on the way up. We were in a little ship. Somebody would announce, over the public address system, "We're going to be dumping some slop in the water now. We're going to be anchored, going to be dropping some slop." So, all of a sudden, you see there are fifty rowboats all around us. They were rowboats that did not have just somebody rowing, it had a little hut on it, something as wide as this table, and then, like, a little canvas above it, like a little house. In the front of it, there's a big stove where they're cooking something on the ship and, on the back of the house here, these people throw their slop off the ship, old clothing that's burned or something or it's falling apart because it's been cleaned so many times it's ripping, gets thrown in the water. I'm in the back of this little ship and I see these kids jumping in the water, getting all the kinds of clothing that they can get. Other, older, kids, they're jumping in the water. The cooks are throwing big pieces of meat or bone, stale things, in the water, any kind of food they'd be throwing away for some reason, I don't know. They're getting this stuff and that becomes their regular food to eat. Then, this place became a Communist place. I saw a lot of hunger, a lot of efforts to try to get clothing, yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about your time in Indochina.

AG: Well, no, that was part of my stay in the Pacific, Indochina. Yes, after my stay in Hong Kong for a while, then, an officer said to me, "Hey, how long you been in the service here?" I said, "Well, I came in so-and-so." He says, "Well, Jesus, you should be going home now." Eventually, when I left Hong Kong, I got in the harbor and a little ship took me to a large vessel. It was a Greek name and I'm trying to think of the Greek name that it had. It was not a Greek name, but it was an English word that was about a Greek topic.

SI: The *Prometheus*?

AG: I can't think of it now. Anyhow, it was an American vessel that had a Greek name, Anglicized. This vessel is going to stop in Hong Kong, in the Philippines in certain places, like in Manila Bay, and go along heading towards the United States, stop at certain islands and pick up more Americans. Eventually, the vessel was filled with Americans. We went across the Pacific and the vessel did not take me to San Francisco or the West Coast of the United States. It dropped me off in an island where there were a lot of Americans. It was one of the--I can't think of the name. Anyhow, I was there about another month, and then, I got freed to 'Frisco and, from 'Frisco, I got trips coming home. Then, I went back to Oregon again and stayed for a very short time, then, back home again, and then, I got released.

SI: Coming back to the States, did you have any difficulty readjusting to civilian life?

AG: No. For instance, when I was in some cities, the people there would try to use the customs of the United States. They'd use their customs if they could and if they knew about them. I remember, in one city, I went to a movie and the movie was all in English. It was an old movie that I remembered seeing years before. It was about the Spanish Civil War. Then, I watched another movie about an American city where there were problems of poverty. I thought I was going to get home very fast, but I didn't. I got stuck here and I got stuck there, and so on. By the time I did come here, I was feeling very, very happy to make it.

SI: Once you got out of the service, what were your plans for the future? Did you already know about the GI Bill? [Editor's Note: The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill of Rights, offered funding for college or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment and loans to buy homes, to returning World War II veterans.]

AG: That's a good question. I knew that I had a good rating and could make it, to get to school, and it would be free for me. Yes, the GI Bill, that was known to me. Of course, I had to try to have enough credits to make it. When you're going to go to college, you've got to have X number of credits; if you don't have them, you don't get into college. So, me and a bunch of Italians from Norristown, Pennsylvania, where I was born and raised--that's where I went back, that's where my parents were, but the point is, I realized that I could not make it to college unless I prepared myself. So, preparing myself meant I had to go to college where they would allow me just to go in and pick up some credits, okay. I got down to Philadelphia, in an old synagogue, a Jewish synagogue. And there, all kinds of sailors, like me, and soldiers and Marines were all going there to try to offer what they have in credits, but that they lacked some credits. They would make the credits that they lacked, and then, get to college. So, I went there for about eleven, twelve months, picked up all the credits that I needed to get to college. A whole bunch of friends of mine, from Norristown, Pennsylvania, where I was born and raised, they did the same thing. They took courses that they did not take in Norristown public school. They didn't have enough credits and they did the same thing. They took some regular courses that they were allowed to take to earn more credits.

SI: Was it difficult to get back into studying after your time in the service?

AG: No, I did very well.

SI: Did you work at the same time that you were going back to school?

AG: No; wait a minute.

DG: Didn't you work at the candy [store]?

AG: Yes, I did some work. I'm trying to think now what store it was--Mr. (Kellas?).

DG: It was a candy store.

AG: Candy. I worked in a candy store in Norristown, Pennsylvania. The owner was a very, very good guy. He was married, but they did not have any kids. So, I was welcomed to work

there. My brother was welcomed to work there. An Italian guy from the east end of Norristown, he was also invited to work there. So, we had two Greeks and an Italian, and then, there were the female waitresses. They were Italian, most of them. So, by going to the school at the temple, and then, working also and making some money, it fit in beautifully.

SI: After you were done with the program at the temple, you wound up going to Ursinus.

AG: Yes.

SI: Why did you go to Ursinus, instead of Temple or another college?

AG: Well, that's a good question. Going to Ursinus was shorter. There was a bus in Norristown, Pennsylvania, a well-running bus; they had a lot of buses going all over the place. So, I could get a bus and go twelve miles to Ursinus, so easy. Going anyplace to Philadelphia was a little more expensive and, also, crowded and more students in the schools, too. So, that's why I went to …

DG: Ursinus.

AG: The school up there in Collegeville.

SI: So, when you got into Ursinus, were most of your classmates also veterans?

AG: A lot of them. Many of them were, yes.

SI: Was there any kind of conflict between the GI Bill veterans and the younger students, the people that were coming out of high school?

AG: No, no. As a matter-of-fact, I think the kids that were regularly there were looking up to us as veterans. We got along beautifully with them.

SI: Could you see any ways that the veterans were having an impact on the campus? Does anything stand out about having so many veterans at the college at that time?

AG: Well, the veterans were older, of course. So, I think the fact that they were older made them pick certain courses than some other students. I took courses that I enjoyed, instead of a course that was required that I take or pass. When we would play cards at Ursinus, it was all the veterans--sailors, soldiers, Marines--would play together more [often] than playing with the younger ones who had just finished high school. We had a little more of whatever you pick up in the four or five years of military [service].

SI: Going back to the idea of readjusting to civilian life, I know a lot of veterans I interview say, in the military, they used a lot of crude language, for example, and then, it was difficult to switch back when they came home. Did you have any experience with something like that?

AG: No.

SI: What did you study in college?

AG: Mostly history, I guess.

SI: Why?

AG: Why? Because I loved it. I took all the history courses that I could at Ursinus, and then, I took things like anthropology, sociology. Some of them have a lot of history as part of them.

SI: You got involved in some student activities at the college as well. Were you on the football team?

AG: Yes, for two years. Why? because my parents did not have a toilet with a bathtub. So, when I went to Ursinus, I had an opportunity to have a daily bath, with a shower, and I didn't have to worry about a bathtub. My mother's house at Lafayette Street in Norristown was in the black section, except the corner house. The corner house was one of the most famous Italian families in Norristown, the second house, blacks, third house, blacks, fourth house, Greeks. [laughter] That's on Cherry Street.

SI: You also got involved in the International Relations Club.

AG: Yes.

SI: Do you remember what they would do?

AG: Well, the IRC Club, it was a subject I took at Philadelphia, when I was filling in the two years [to get to college], and I like history. So, if there's a subject that's about history …

SI: At that time, when you were going to college, did you plan on becoming an educator? Was that your ultimate goal?

AG: I think I had to lean towards becoming an educator, yes.

SI: You graduated in 1950 from Ursinus.

AG: '50.

SI: At that point, did you already have a job lined up or did you go out to look for a job?

AG: No, but all the four years at Ursinus, I was working at a candy store. My father had been a candy maker. When he came from Greece, he became a candy maker. His brother, Nick, my father's brother, became a candy maker. Mr. (Kellas?), the guy that hired me for the Le Moderne restaurant, he was a candy maker, too, a good candy maker. Jim Gazonas, my father's cousin in Norristown, he was a candy maker. The richest Greek in Norristown, he had all the stores from Ann Street to DeKalb Street. Do you know Ann and DeKalb? Do you know Norristown?

SI: No, I know where Norristown is on a map, but, other than that, I do not know the town itself.

AG: Okay. I just gave you the names of certain people--they all turned out to be owners of candy stores, and ice cream, too, because ice cream was just cold candy. [laughter]

SI: So, you worked there for a long time.

AG: I worked for Mr. (Kellas?) for four years, might've been five years, but my brother worked there, too. And then, I visited various schools. The first one I started with was (Philadelphia College?). I took two courses and passed them, two history courses and passed them. In the meantime, I was told that, if I want to, I could go to a nice history class and get a nice diploma up in Massachusetts. So, I came to Massachusetts, where I met my bride-to-be and went to school at …

DG: Clark University.

SI: That is in Worcester.

AG: Yes.

SI: How did you two meet?

AG: Her father had a candy store. [laughter] Her father had a candy store and I used to go to the candy store, get something to eat, hamburger, soup.

DG: We had a luncheonette, too.

AG: And after a while, her father put her to work in the candy store, too. And I helped Mr. (Kellas?) make candies in the cellar of the one on Main Street. He used to make candy down there and I enjoyed making it too.

SI: Did you work in the candy store up in Worcester?

AG: Yes, she was working there, too, sometimes, not much.

SI: Did you work there or were you just a customer?

AG: Well, I worked at another luncheonette, another Greek.

DG: He also worked for a trucking company.

AG: Yes.

DG: (All Homes?) Transportation.

SI: That was all while you were getting your master's at Clark.

AG: Yes. My GI Bill ran out. Your GI Bill ran as many months as you went in the service, plus twelve. Did you know that?

SI: Yes, I have heard of it.

AG: So, I ended up with all the twelve courses up in Massachusetts.

SI: What was your master's program in? Was it just in history or was it in education and history?

AG: I took a lot of education courses, yes. History, though, was the major one.

SI: At that point, you were thinking of becoming a teacher for sure.

AG: Yes.

SI: After you earned your master's at Clark in Worcester, what brought you back to New Jersey?

AG: Marriage.

DG: And a job.

AG: And a job.

SI: You guys got married in 1954.

DG: Yes.

SI: That was while you were still up in Clark.

DG: Yes.

SI: How did you find out about the opportunity to go to Vineland?

DG: Teachers' Agency, wasn't it, in Philadelphia?

AG: There are businesses that do that. You'd go to them and they try to lay out some work for you, to make money. They get you a job someplace and they get paid for that, you see. In the meantime, you're working for a college.

SI: Your first teaching position was in Vineland High School.

AG: Yes.

SI: Did you move to Vineland when you got that job?

AG: I lived in Vineland while I got my master's degree there.

DG: No, you already had your master's.

AG: I started a doctorate program at the same school.

SI: At Clark?

AG: Yes.

SI: Okay, you started a PhD program at Clark. Tell me a little bit about your first job as a teacher at Vineland.

AG: My first full teaching job was not in Vineland. In Vineland, I went to fill in for some teacher that was sick or something. I'd go in and fill in. So, I'd fill in in a lot of places and got paid for it, but it wasn't a full job.

DG: Well, we really wanted to live closer to Trenton.

SI: You enjoyed being in the classroom and teaching in your time at Vineland.

AG: Yes.

SI: How did the opportunity develop to come to Hunterdon Central?

AG: Hunterdon Central High School?

SI: Yes.

DG: I think it was the same organization that he had a job in Vineland [through]. There was an opportunity also in Trenton and up here.

SI: You came to Hunterdon Central High School in 1957. Was that just around the time that it had been founded? I am trying to remember when Hunterdon Central was founded [1956].

DG: It was a new school.

SI: When you first got there, as a social studies teacher, what was it like for you?

AG: Very easy, very friendly. The students were very friendly. The teachers were also very friendly. That's all I can say.

SI: Which subjects did you teach within history? Was it American history, European?

AG: Yes, I'm trying to think now, my regular schedule.

DG: Economics?

AG: Oh, yes, economics, contemporary world problems. I have a sheet of paper, long, like that, it's got the subjects for each of the colleges that I've been to, four colleges, because, when I was going to my summer college in Philadelphia, and then, I changed my mind and started coming up to Massachusetts, I would be studying certain courses, even if I wasn't teaching them, and those courses were history courses, mostly. That's one reason I stuck with it--I like history. I don't know if that answers your question.

SI: No, this is certainly good. Does anything else stand out about those early years at Hunterdon?

DG: He was the assistant football coach.

SI: You were a football coach.

AG: Well, I was one teacher out of fourteen. I introduced several subjects at the high school level. If you go to the high school right now and say, "Let's see what your courses are," the courses that I introduced, three, four or five of them, they're still being taught, see. It's not just history 1 and history 2--economics, contemporary world problems. Can you think of any others now? In other words, I introduced a lot of subjects and they're still being taught.

SI: When you say you were one of fourteen teachers, was that the entire faculty or just in the Social Studies Department?

AG: Just Social Studies. The English Department was the biggest and Social Studies was second. Of course, there are some other subjects, sociology; I can't think of any other.

DG: Not offhand.

AG: I can't even think of all the history courses that were introduced.

SI: That is okay. How big was the school then, how many students, roughly?

AG: Right now, it's about three thousand.

SI: What about when you first got there in the late 1950s?

AG: First got there? I would say a thousand.

SI: Do you think the school itself and the way classes were organized were adequate? They did not overcrowd you with students.

AG: I do not think they were overcrowded too much. Sometimes, you'd have some subjects that maybe just had a very, very small number of students. That happened; if things got crowded, more classes.

SI: Later on, you started a doctoral program at Rutgers. You went to the Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

AG: Yes.

SI: When did you go there and what degree were you going for?

AG: I can't remember exactly when I started teaching education courses.

DG: We have it somewhere. I don't remember exactly when.

AG: But, it fit in very nicely with history.

SI: When you went to the Graduate School of Education, were you there as a student?

AG: Yes.

SI: Here, it says 1970 to 1976.

AG: "Clark University, Western Mass.; Rutgers and the School of Education, 1970 to 1976."

SI: You became the department chair in 1969.

AG: I can't say if it's '69.

SI: Okay, or around that time. What were some of the challenges you faced as a department chair at that time?

AG: I'm trying to think of the main challenge. I think introducing the number of courses for teaching, probably, that was the most important thing, as far as I can remember, see, because, when it all started, it was US history 1 and US history 2. That's not much, is it?

SI: You introduced these other courses. Did you branch out into other areas, like European history or world history?

AG: Yes, sure. Some people did not prefer to teach American history. They're in the department and they don't like US history that much, although they're there working for it and making a living out of it, but they would like to teach other things. Sometimes, you realized that the kids need something different, too, not just US history 1 and US history 2. You might teach geography, you might teach economics; that's one course that I feel very happy about. I started teaching economics. I'm teaching US history 1, US history 2--US history 1, US history 2, five a day. I start economics. Pretty soon, you've got a couple classes of economics. In other words, the kids find out that it's worth listening to and teaching and learning it also. Of course, history's still important, but so is economics, so is contemporary world problems and others.

SI: In speaking with other educators who taught at the same time, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were a lot of issues, such as strife between white populations and African-American populations, that had an impact on high schools around New Jersey. Do you remember that being a major issue at Hunterdon Central, something that you and other faculty members had to deal with?

AG: No, I didn't think so.

SI: There was no tension or violence.

DG: I think there was a good relationship, because our two children went to Hunterdon Central and they never had any problems or anything. I don't even remember it ever coming up.

SI: You retired in 1987.

AG: Do you remember, Dorothy, when I retired? [laughter]

DG: It's been a while. Around that time, I would say.

SI: What have you done since your retirement? Have you been involved with any activities or other work?

AG: I love to do crossword puzzles--not to solve them, to construct them. I have done a lot of that.

DG: Genealogy.

AG: Oh, yes, genealogy.

SI: On your form, you wrote that you were part of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.

DG: Yes. It's called AHEPA, A-H-E-P-A.

AG: Here it is.

DG: That's a Greek association. I think there used to be something in Flemington, too.

SI: The Exchange Club?

DG: The Exchange and there was also another one, too.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Does anything about those activities come to mind?

AG: Not Hellenic Education.

DG: AHEPA, and then, I think he's on the veterans' VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars].

SI: You are involved with the VFW.

DG: Yes, local.

SI: The post over here.

DG: Yes, down in Sergeantsville.

SI: Did you get involved with the VFW soon after you came back or was that more recently that you became involved?

AG: Come back from where?

SI: The war.

DG: I don't think so; I think since we came here.

AG: I've always been interested in Veterans of Foreign Wars, or just foreign veterans, period, doesn't have to be wars, although there are a lot of wars.

SI: Do you think that there were ways that your time in the service in World War II influenced how you presented yourself in your career and what you did in your career?

AG: I think that they are important to me and I am glad to know all about them. I've made an effort, at the high school level, anyhow, to introduce some subjects that were not introduced until I did it. To me, that's important.

DG: Yes, the world problems is probably one that, since he was in the war, maybe that was an influence, to introduce problems that are around the world.

SI: In introducing that course, did you want your students to be aware of things that maybe people were not aware of when you were growing up?

AG: Well, a lot of times, the awareness by students depends a lot on their ethnic background. Some kids that just know English, they're not too excited, they're not too happy, if you give them some new, different course, a language, maybe--stay away from other history. If you're being taught American history, okay; you want to teach about German history, Australian history, Indian history in India, that becomes more important, especially if the population of the country's changing. I think the United States is much more different nowadays than it was fifty years ago.

DG: He has a minor in Spanish and he knows Greek.

SI: After World War II, were you able to find out if you had any family members still in Greece, how they made out during the war?

DG: Yes.

AG: Yes. I've been to Greece twenty times.

[Editor's Note: Mr. and Mrs. Gazonas and the interviewer discuss regions of Greece briefly before the interview resumes with Mrs. Gazonas describing her Greek relatives' experiences in World War II.]

DG: Anyway, they said, during the war, they weren't afraid of the Italians, but they were afraid of the Germans. The Germans came in and took one of the houses. That was [for] their officers. The officers, they took that house and they were kicked out. My father used to send clothing and food. Sometimes, they would get it and, other times, I guess, it got on the black market, stuff like that. But they were thankful for the United States when they came through with the Truman Doctrine. They really did.

AG: Yes, but I've been to all of these states, every one of them, except that one. That's next to Turkey. Well, over here now is entry into the Black Sea. Once, Dorothy and I, we took a boat to go here, then, up here, then, we went in here to Constantinople. The captain of the ship said to me and Dorothy--we were on the bow of the ship, up at the tip of the ship--the Captain says, "Will the couple up at the bow of the ship come on up to the office here?" So, Dorothy and I went up. He says, "I can't stay parked here for a while. I've got to go into the Black Sea. Do you want to steer my vessel while we're in the Black Sea?" He picked her to become the navigator.

DG: I know, but it probably was on autopilot. He says, "Make sure that the dial is over here all the time." He probably had it on autopilot or something.

AG: She made one big circle in the Black Sea, back to the Black Sea again, after about six hours or something; Dorothy did very good.

SI: Do you know if your relatives survived the war?

AG: See, now, I have a lot of relatives up here, Epirus. Right up near the border, here's where I have a lot of relatives, Macedonia, I have relatives, I have relatives in Thessaly, *Thessalía*. Then, here, of course, is Athens; I've got relatives there. Some of the islands, there's a lot of islands, I have some relatives in some of the islands. What relatives have we seen in the Aegean?

DG: I don't know, George.

SI: You have relatives all over Greece.

AG: Well, no, not all of them. Down here, you have the Island of Crete. Then, here, you have a whole bunch of islands up against Turkey, okay.

DG: Defend those borders. [laughter]

AG: There's some island here--I can't think of the name of it--I have relatives there, too.

SI: So, nobody was killed by the Germans or the Italians during the war?

AG: Oh, yes.

SI: They were?

AG: Yes. Now, you see, here's Epirus; this is where my father came from. This is where my mother came from. This is …

SI: Thessaly?

AG: *Thessalía*, yes-- *Thessalía*, my mother, Epirus, my father. They got married. Now, they have kids that are from both.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record about your life?

AG: I can't think of anything offhand.

SI: I am not sure if you talked about this in the first interview or not--you said you were wounded, but not in combat.

AG: Yes.

SI: When did that happen?

AG: Well, I was dancing Russian style. Do you know what I mean?

SI: Yes, with the squatting low and kicking out.

AG: Squat and kick your legs while you're there, one at a time. Well, I did that on a ship I was traveling [on] and I was getting sick--I couldn't walk properly. Whatever it is in your lower back was screwed up because of this dancing that I did. The ship was going [Mr. Gazonas imitates the ship shifting] and I hurt my back. I still have it. So, I was eighteen, nineteen and twenty in the service and I still have this injury.

SI: When you were in the service, did you have a chance to go to religious services? Did you have the chance to go to religious services when you were in the Navy?

DG: Tell him about your dog tags, that led up to it.

AG: Oh, yes. When you get in the service, initially, they give you dog tags. I asked the guy, "Look, can I put whatever religion I want down?" He said, "Sure," but, when I put down my religion, I put down Greek Orthodox. The point is that a lot of officers who would allow you to go to church on the weekend would not agree to a Sunday there in a Greek church. So, you had to pull out the dog tags, but it didn't help, to go to a Greek church. There, you could go to the Episcopal church, you can go to a Catholic church, you could go to any kind of church, but you couldn't go to a Greek Orthodox church. Now, the way it happened is, when I was in boot camp, I had myself made these dog tags with a Greek symbol. So, when I went across the United States, starting in Pittsburgh, in Chicago, all the way over to California, San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, in all those places, I went to a Greek Orthodox church. And you were excused on a Friday even, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, to go to your religion. My dog tag had a symbol of Greek Orthodoxy and it got me to church on weekends, where some officers, they would not allow it if it was a Greek Orthodox church, because they said, "It's not legit." That's all.

DG: But, he did get to go.

AG: Now, when I got to Hawaii, there was a Greek community there, but they did not have a Greek church. [laughter] When I was in Hong Kong, I found a church, but it was in English and it was there for a Protestant church; no Greek church in Hong Kong. Now, there are so many Greek Orthodox churches in this country, holy mackerel.

SI: Thank you very much for your time today and thank you for your service.

AG: You're welcome.

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

Reviewed by Albany Stafford 9/2/2014
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