

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIS S. GENTILE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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LYNDHURST, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on April 19th, 2011, in Lyndhurst, New Jersey, with Francis S. Gentile, David Lee and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you so much Mr. Gentile for having us here this morning and to begin could you tell us for the record where and when you were born?

Francis Gentile: Memphis, Tennessee, January 20, 1920.

SH: Let us begin by talking about your family. Could you tell us about your father?

FG: My father's name was Peter Gentile, he was born in Italy somewhere around Palermo, I believe, ... Calabria, in that area, came to America, spent some time in Canada first, came to America with some relatives in Ohio at approximately the age of seventeen or eighteen and met my mother. Of course, she wasn't my mother then, met my mother in one of those family arrangements like you might have heard about, and they were married, moved to Tennessee, where she gave birth to ... nine children altogether in Memphis.

SH: Tell me a bit about your father's occupation. Did he ever talk about that?

FG: He was a laborer, he worked on a railroad, he was a little guy, strong, and he used his back. He was not as well-educated as some, he maybe finished grammar school, and he worked on a railroad until his appendix burst. ... He didn't work too much after that, and we moved back to New Jersey. That must have been around 1930 and they had one more child because there was a total of ten children. Incidentally, six boys, every one of them served in wartime in a foreign war. ... The oldest three were in World War II, in fact, my second brother passed away only this month, and we just had a service for him in Lyndhurst church, Saturday, and I'm the only brother left. ... My sister, youngest sister was born in 1931 I guess in Jersey, and in Jersey we moved from Clifton, Carlstadt, and East Rutherford. We didn't own a home, and we rented in different areas, and my family finally rested in Lodi, and when World War II came along, my brother was drafted, the oldest one. ... I volunteered for the Marines, and then, my second brother was drafted, and so all three of us were in the service at the same time. I served in the Pacific, and Tom--the one who died this month--served in the Eighth Air Force out of England bombing Germany. ... My oldest brother was with an air-sea rescue team which patrolled the Atlantic and that area, Mediterranean, rescuing downed pilots and stuff like that.

SH: He was part of the Air Corps as well?

FG: The air-sea rescue, Army. I don't know what the difference was.

SH: Ralph is the oldest?

FG: Yes.

SH: Then, Tom, then you?

FG: ... No, there's a sister in there, she died also, Margaret, and then I was born. I was the fourth member. ... I'm the last boy alive, and I have one sister ... only left, too. She is in Texas,

married and two children. I spoke to her the other day telling her about Tom who had passed away because he was up here. Actually, he lived in Lyndhurst for fifty or sixty years. Incidentally, he married a girl, and I married her sister. ... We were closer, we used to joke about how the cousins, her children and her sister's children, ... were closer than any other because they were doubles, their father ... was related, and their mother was related.

SH: Do you remember any of the projects that your father worked on in Tennessee?

FG: Railroad. ...

SH: Strictly for the railroad, then.

FG: The railroad, you know, the bottom part like fixing the rails and pushing the ties and the labor. He wasn't as well-educated as he could have been.

SH: What was your wife's last name?

FG: Colavita was the last name. They were from Lyndhurst all their lives, I think, my wife was born here in Lyndhurst, so was her sister, the one who married my brother. She passed away a few years ago and my wife, like I say, passed away in November of '09, at the age of eighty-six. She gave me sixty-three years and three daughters. ... I can't complain, anyway.

SH: Tell me about your mother. What was your mother's name?

FG: My mother's maiden name was Moretti. She was born in New York City, and she was married at the age of seventeen, I believe. Yes, she was seventeen, my father was a few years older, and like I say, they moved to Tennessee. He had a relative there, and they lived there long enough to have nine children.

SH: You remember being raised in Tennessee, then.

FG: I was about ten years old when I left. ... It was '29 or 1930, somewhere just about there, and then, the last child was born at that time, 1930. Yes, we were little kids, we went to school, went to parochial school there.

SH: Did you?

FG: The first couple of years, so we started I think at seven. ... I think I was nine when we moved, so probably 1929, had nothing to do with the big crash, because we didn't have enough money to crash with. [laughter]

David Ley: How was Memphis at that time?

FG: At that time, it was segregated, I have to be honest. The negroes or blacks lived off the main highways, off the main streets, sort of in the back, and they were treated like second-class citizens. We were southerners, of course, we didn't have anything to do with it personally, I

mean, but the schools were segregated. There were no blacks in my schools, because we went to parochial, anyway. ... Memphis was a town, my father worked after his appendix burst, he got a little wagon with one horse, and we sold fruit as a peddler around the streets in ... the late 20s.

...

SH: On your pre-interview survey, you said your sister (Catherine?) was born in 1931.

FG: That was when we came to Jersey. ... Evidently, we left there one year, '29 or '30, don't quote me, near as I can remember, and I don't have any records actually except word of mouth. My mother used to tell stories, my father used to tell stories. ... I remember being on the wagon with them on days I didn't go to school, and I had a picture or something, I don't know where it is, of being on the wagon.

SH: Did the family speak Italian at home?

FG: Very, very little. My mother spoke perfect English, she went to school in New York and my father was more or less half-English. ... The only Italian they spoke was when they were mentioning something about Italy and his brothers ... that were still in Italy, but otherwise he managed to speak English most of the time because my mother didn't talk much Italian. ... If he wanted her to understand he had to speak English.

SH: I wondered if she had understood Italian as well.

FG: ... Her mother came from Italy, my grandmother, so she had to talk to them more or less in Italian. ... In those days we spoke to them.

SH: Did any of your father's family emigrate from Italy to the United States?

FG: He had one or two cousins in the Ohio area, because we didn't see them too often because nobody had any money to travel in those days. ... We did meet them a couple of times. He had a cousin, I believe it was. I don't know if he had any sisters, I don't seem to remember any of them being in America, anyway. ... Sisters they had in Ohio, and they had another couple of cousins in the Niagara Falls area, Buffalo, and when we got married, my wife and I, we visited them because we went to Niagara Falls. ... There wasn't that much traveling going on, so we didn't have much of a relationship really, [we] sent Christmas cards and stuff like that.

SH: What other memories did you have of growing up in Memphis?

FG: ... The nuns were teachers then in the parochial schools, and they were a little strict, but I never had any trouble with them. The bad boys, of course, got sent home or something like that, but I was a good boy. She never had to hit me with ... the paddles like ping pong rackets, and they carried them strapped. ... They used to whack you with it, but not me, I never got whacked.

SH: What about your older brothers and sister?

FG: They went to the parochial school too. ... They were a couple of years ahead of me, and then, when we got here, I think one of the first schools we went to was in Clifton, Garfield. ... I don't think any of them really graduated high school, which I didn't either, actually. I took a test ... in the service. ...

SH: The GED?

FG: ... I didn't get a diploma, but I caught up I think, and I had enough education to have different jobs and raise a family, pay for my house. We lived here in, my mother-in-law, my wife lived on the next corner that you came up on the second house there. It's still there. ... They bought that in 1932, they built it. In those days you could build a house if you had the land for about three thousand or two thousand because it took you three, four years to make that kind of money. ... We used to take a walk, my wife and I. I lived there when I came out of the service. I joined the service a few months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and when I came back we were married in '46. ... We lived with my in-laws for a few years. ... We lived there seven years, because we didn't build this until '54, we liked the land, there were no houses here then.

SH: Oh, really?

FG: ... In '46, there were no houses here, this was empty land. ... We liked it, and she wanted to be close to her family too. ... We bought this property and we finally built in '54.

SH: It is a lovely home.

FG: It is, I built it the way she liked it. ... We looked at all the new homes for sale, and I designed it myself. ... This room was her favorite room, mine too, when the sun is shining you get it all during the day, and if there's anybody walking--there are not too many people walking up here--but you could see them. I wanted the kitchen on the southeast corner, and that's where it is. I wanted all three bedrooms in the back. ... I couldn't afford to build it any bigger. It's not a big house, it's only ... less than 1100 square feet which in today's market is small. Basically, it's like a thirty by forty.

SH: The house is so open and airy.

FG: Well, this was all my design, and the living and dining room together, and the three bedrooms in the back, and then I finished the basement myself.

SH: What is some of your earliest memories of being in New Jersey compared to having lived in Memphis, Tennessee?

FG: Jersey was much faster. ... The people moved faster and the people talked faster, the Tennesseans had the drawls, like they hesitate as they speak. ...

SH: Did you go to parochial school when you came to New Jersey?

FG: ... Actually, I missed a grade somehow. ... I finished the second grade at home and somehow I got into the second grade here. I don't know just how it happened, but I didn't graduate grammar school until I was fifteen, and I lied about my age and got a little job instead of going to high school because my father wasn't working. My brothers had quit school and went to work. So the three of us--between us--we made ... enough money to keep going. It wasn't easy in the '30s, you had the Depression.

SH: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

FG: Well, we never had much, so we didn't lose anything, to be practically honest. We lived with ten kids at the table. My mother used to cook, her favorite meal was hot dogs and cabbage, because you could buy five pounds of hot dogs for less than a dollar in those days. Of course, you had to work five hours to get the dollar. If you made a quarter an hour you were doing good in the '30s, but everything was cheap, you could buy a hot dog, like I say five pounds for less than a dollar, and we used to almost cook five pounds at a time with ten kids.

SH: I was just going to say.

FG: And a couple of heads of cabbage, it made a wonderful meal. ... Schooling, I don't have much of it. ... I kept going to school actually, I almost forgot, I went to Drake's Business School. ... I lived in ... Lodi, Garfield, Carlstadt, any one of those towns, I forgot. By the time I was able to drive when I was seventeen, ... I went to the Drake's Business School and tried to get a better education for a better job. I was going to be a bookkeeper. ... I liked bookkeeping, but I didn't like the rest of the stuff I had to take in school. So, I became a drop out again, and because of that I kept working until two years ago actually, odd jobs, like I had my main job was driving a small ... delivery truck, delivering non-food items to the supermarkets, sneakers, flowers, artificial flowers. My boss had ten, twelve, seventeen trucks on the road going to supermarkets and I made a good living, paid for the house, and then, when I retired in 1984, all my girls were married. ... I couldn't take it easy anyhow because I had my wife and the house to pay for, so I kept working odd jobs. The last one I had was in a cigar store selling cigars, smoking them too, because I liked to smoke a cigar until my throat went. I also owned a laundro-mat. I think I got most of this in here, but I'm not sure, I had the right rotation, I'm just trying to go by memory. Sometimes the rotation leaves me, and I forget.

SH: In the 1930s how did you and your brothers find work?

FG: We had odd jobs, like Ralph, the oldest one, ... went to work with the WPA when they first started that, the New Deal, and I think that had the terrific rate of fifteen dollars a week. They were doing roads, and then there was this CCC that was mixed in with it, Civilian Conservation Corps or something. [Editor's Note: The Works Projects Administration (Work Progress Administration after 1939) and the Civilian Conservation Corps were New Deal programs established to put unemployed Americans to work.]

SH: Yes, that is correct.

FG: ... He got his job that way, and Tom and I seemed to move towards selling. I worked for a milkman delivering milk for a dollar a night, that was tough, but the dollar was good because you could buy a lot with a dollar in those days, like chopped meat maybe sold for nineteen cents a pound or something.

SH: Did you have to turn your wages over to your mother?

FG: A lot of it went for the household bills, yes. Between the three of us we kept going. Most of it went for the house bills, but we got by.

SH: Was your family involved with the church as you were growing up?

FG: Outside of going to church, no.

SH: What did your mom do for entertainment?

FG: Raised kids. She raised ten kids--what entertainment? [laughter]

SH: I thought maybe she had a hobby.

FG: Well, she liked to sew, which wasn't exactly a hobby. She sewed dresses for the girls, and she even fixed clothes so they would go from Ralph the oldest to Tom and if they were still good, she'd adjust them to fit me. ... She took care of the house, and that was a full-time job, really. She enjoyed sewing which my wife did too later on. She made a lot of clothing for her three daughters.

DL: When you were living in Memphis, was there a large Italian community there?

FG: I don't recall an Italian community exactly. We had relatives across the street, the relatives my father moved there for, because he knew the relatives and they got him a big job on the railroad--anybody could have got that with a strong back--but we more or less stayed together. I used to cross the street, Vance Avenue it was, now that I'm thinking.

DL: Was the church you attended Catholic?

FG: It was Catholic. We went to parochial school, and like I say outside of going to school and going to church on Sundays, in fact, if I remember right, the school used to start with a prayer in church, and then, go to the classes. That seems to be in my memory there some place, and it was probably true in those days. The churches were pretty strict.

SH: Were your sisters working outside the home as well?

FG: No, no, they got married young. Of course, in those days most girls got married. ... They didn't go to high school ... to finish and they got married at early ages, and started raising their own families.

SH: Who was the disciplinarian in your family, your mother or your father?

FG: I don't think we had any, to be perfectly honest with you. We knew what we had to do and we seemed to do it. I don't ever remember my father hitting me or anything, or my mother scolding me. She used to always tell me to be a good boy and that was all, that was enough. In those days, it was pretty hard to get in trouble unless you ... became a thief or something. ... We grew up as fairly, a little backward maybe I would say, shy, because we had nothing, we had no money in our pockets, until we really started to go to work. ... In those days you could buy, when I was seventeen, my brother and I together bought a car for twenty-five dollars, an old [Ford] Model A, 1932 Model A. It was only about seven or eight years old. Today, you can't buy a car like that, they don't have them that cheap, but we picked up the hood when it didn't run, and we fixed the wires together, and kept it going. ... As time went on, we got better jobs. ... We just did our jobs.

SH: Did you listen to music?

FG: It was on the radio, you turned the dial, you got music, but we didn't play music, none of us played an instrument that I can remember, no. Although, Tom might have had a harmonica in his pocket--couldn't play it worth a damn--but he had it.

SH: What about dancing?

FG: Dancing, I never became a dancer of any kind because I couldn't follow the music. I had a deaf ear to music. ... It was a strain to me to dance with my daughters when they got married. ...

SH: What were some of the events that you remember happening in the country that you would have heard on the radio or maybe even impacted your neighborhood?

FG: Well, I can go back to some of the Depression years, the Depression area, and there were things going on across the country, bread lines--they were right here too--bread lines across the country. ... Roosevelt became president with the New Deal, and he seemed to be helping the people on the bottom of the list, all those poor people. ... There were lines of people getting welfare. I remember there were a couple of times when my mother brought me down to one of the welfare agencies to give me a pair of shoes. ... I remember that much because like I say by that time my father had his appendix burst before we moved to Jersey, in fact I think that happened right when he was on the railroad, by the time they got him to the hospital, they couldn't save anything. His appendix had burst and he always had that ... extension of his belly there. ... In those days hospitalization wasn't that great, and the war years, war in Spain, war in Europe, before we got into it in the late '30s. I remember reading about that.

SH: Did your family ever hear from an relatives in Italy?

FG: We used to have letters from his people there, they didn't like Mussolini much because he took everything from the people, Mussolini was there, and Hitler was there, and I remember reading about them, but mostly we used to hear music on the radio. We had one little radio, one

of those \$9.95 jobs where you just turn it and maybe you had to move the radio to get the reception, probably, or there was a wire in the back. ... Sometimes you connected it to the radiator to make it pick up ground wire, and we listened to Crosby and Rudy Vallee, and that's what we did at night when we did our homework and when we were going to school. ... We used to sit around the room, if we had heat in the room. In the winter we're more or less bundled up. ... We came through the Depression that way.

SH: What about prohibition. Was that ever discussed in the family?

FG: Prohibition was in the movies as far as we were concerned. My father wasn't a drinker--he couldn't afford it--and none of us did any of that. The prohibition was outside and I was too young to drink anyway in the '20s. I was born in 1920, so by the time prohibition was over when Roosevelt took over, ... I was twelve years old. So, I don't know much about that except what James Cagney did and Humphrey Bogart in those pictures, and Jean Harlow. We used to go to the movies for ten cents on a Saturday, and I don't know much about it otherwise. In fact, you still see those movies today, they're still on. My favorite channel is TCM [Turner Classic Movies]. ... Our entertainment was the radio, like once a week we'd go to a movie.

DL: What sort of things did you do with your friends?

FG: If somebody had a ball and a bat, we played baseball. If somebody had a glove, he would be the fielder, and we played stickball mostly with a little stick we made ourselves with a point on it. ... You'd hit the stick and it would go up, ... it was like an angle on it, and you hit it from the top, it jumped up, and then you'd whack it like a baseball, or if somebody had a ball, and we'd use a broomstick for a bat. Nobody had gloves like kids today, they got uniforms, they're two years old, but we lived in a poor [area] and you were never jealous of your neighbor because he didn't have anything either. So, we got along.

DL: Was it a mixed community here?

FG: Jersey was, yes, like in Garfield and Clifton there were Polish neighborhoods, Italian neighborhoods, and that was the way we grew up. ... As far as we were concerned nobody was better than the other. We didn't have problems with each other, we all spoke English. In school the kids didn't have any animosity towards one or the other nationalities, and that was about it. We didn't have any trouble growing up. ... We started working and as years went by, I became a bartender because I liked people, when I was twenty-one. In fact, I cheated a little bit--I was a bartender at seventeen.

SH: What about your mother's family, did they remain in New York City?

FG: Some of them did, yes.

SH: Did you get to see them at all?

FG: Oh, yes, we saw them on holidays and like I say none of us had too much and it wasn't that you got a big meal some place or something like that. You lived within your means. ...

SH: Was your mother from a large family?

FG: She was a twin, she had ... a twin sister, and ... two brothers. ... I guess that's it, four children, and the old people, like I say, they were [speaking] broken English. ... As a family, Christmas time, we'd have maybe fifteen or twenty people in the house, the relatives would come, cousins. ... After we got married, of course, it was a bigger family, we had mine and we had hers. ... I got out in '45 and we were married in '46, we used to visit her family and my family on holidays, you know. The families were close.

SH: Had you met your future wife before World War II?

FG: Yes, but I avoided her. I didn't want to get involved before the war. I didn't want to have a girlfriend home. I didn't want to get serious.

SH: Do you remember the first time you met her?

FG: Sure. You want to hear about it?

SH: Yes.

FG: ... My brother Tom was going with her sister, she was older, she was about three years older, Frances and Tom was three years older than me. ... They were going together, but I had never met Nettie. Antoinette was her name, they called her Nettie. This time Tom was with Frances at a fireworks [show] here in Lyndhurst, and I was there with a friend of mine and his girlfriend, but not together. ... We said, "Hello," to my brother and his girl, and we didn't notice Nettie. ... I heard later that she was telling me to move, she couldn't see, because I was standing in front of her, so that's the first time I met her, I turned around, and she fell in love with me right away, of course. ... I didn't want to get involved. ... We exchanged mail, and then I came home on furlough, and I found out she was telling me the truth in her letters, and she must have, I think she always was crazy about me, there's no sense in denying it, and I guess I was crazy about her too. So, we got engaged, and I had to write to a girl ... anyway because ... the war was still going on. The furlough came in '44, I guess, and the war was over in '45, and I got out, and we were already engaged, so I had to get married--it's too late to back out. ... After sixty-three years it was wonderful, the highlight of my life was my wife, I got to say it, besides my granddaughter is listening. It was a great life, I can't complain, I can't even complain about her not being here because she left me with such a great thing I'd be a hypocrite if I complained. I wish she was still here, don't get me wrong, but she suffered a bit toward the end, her blood failed, she got dialysis three times a week, and it didn't cure it. Some people can live with that for quite a few years and control it, but it didn't control hers and she died from it.

SH: I am sorry to hear that. Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you first heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

FG: I was tending bar at night. It was a Sunday, I was asleep, I woke up, there was a ballgame going on in the Polo grounds--football. It was December 7th here, and when I heard about it, it

was on the radio about noontime I think it came out, it was seven o'clock in the morning over there, which would have made it about noon, New York. ... The first I heard about it was I was listening to the ballgame on the radio. We didn't have any television in '41, and there was an announcement came over the loud speaker, "All military personnel report to your," wherever you were stationed in the area, "report to your home depot," or whatever the heck they called it, if I think long enough I might remember what they called it. ...

SH: Duty station?

FG: Yes, ... report back to your base. ... That gave me an idea that something was going on, and then, a short time later they announced it.

SH: What did you do?

FG: I decided to join the Marines, but I didn't do it right away. I can't say that I did, some people did. I had to get things set up, I had to buy a lot of canned goods and leave them home for my family so they'd have enough to eat, as much as I could. I had a thing going on down in the basement, cans of tomatoes because being Italian, we ate a lot of tomato sauce, and it took me a few months, and then I got into it. My brother had already been drafted before the war started, when they started the draft. ... Tom was drafted after me.

SH: Your older brother worked for the CCC.

FG: Yes, the second of us. We got odd jobs, like we both worked on the milk trucks.

SH: Where did he work with the CCC? Did he go out West?

FG: No, right here in Jersey. ... I'm not sure. ... There was another organization. ... Anyway, he worked in the area. ... They went to different towns where they needed people in the fields mostly. ... He didn't go away, he must have been with the WPA in the area doing menial work because we didn't have the great agitation to go in an office.

SH: Where was he stationed when Pearl Harbor was attacked? Was he already in the Air Corps at the time?

FG: ... No, he wasn't in the Air Corps, he was in the Army. ... We went to see him in Georgia.

SH: Did you really?

FG: We had an old car and we made the trip. ... He was almost coming out, he had been in a year. I forget when he actually started, it must have been 1940, they started the draft actually, and he was the oldest, and they took him, and then, I joined, and then, my brother was drafted after I left, and the other brothers were too young. Actually, all six of us ... were in the service, Tom, and then, Ralph and me were in World War II, Peter was in Korea, ... Jim and Willy joined for Vietnam.

SH: Were they really that much younger?

FG: ... They stayed twenty-two years. The two of them, they were always together and they joined the military police. They were always together, and then, when I got out I didn't rejoin or anything, or even the Reserves, I didn't even join any organizations until January 1st of this year. I joined the VFW.

SH: You talked about getting everything prepared for your family.

FG: To go into the service, yes. ... It was six months [before I joined].

SH: Why did you pick the Marine Corps?

FG: Well, I didn't know anything about guns except we made wooden guns. ... My brother Tom was pretty good, get a piece of wood and shape it into a gun, the barrel and everything, and he'd fix the back so you could put a rubber band on it and release it and we'd shoot each other. So, that was our hobby, but I knew nothing about it and I figured in my own mind that if I was going to meet the enemy I'd rather be better-trained than the enemy, and I always knew from reading, the reading I did, and from the movies ... that Marines were the best-trained, and I figured I'll join that and when I meet the enemy, I'm going to be better-trained than him. Actually, the Marines were the second best. The first best was the French Foreign Legion, but they were trained to die and they didn't care. They were the toughest. If you went against them you were going against the toughest fighters in the world, but I wasn't willing to die, I wanted to fight with a chance because I wasn't worried about dying. ... We shouldn't worry about it. That's why I joined the Marines; I figured they were the best outfit.

SH: Where did you go down to sign up?

FG: First, I went to Paterson, and they checked me out and they sent me to New York and made an appointment for me, 99 Church Street, that's where I actually joined, because they didn't take them from Paterson. ... I remember that, walking around about a hundred guys ... naked, getting examined by different doctors and getting weighed. We had a towel, but we always had to move it when we got examined. It was quite an experience really, embarrassing for me because I was a skinny kid, 127 pounds. I remember talking to a guy that was built like Johnny Weissmuller, [the actor who played] Tarzan, 6'2" and 200 pounds of all muscle, and there I was just like a stick, 127 pounds. ... We went up to the doctor and I was perfect, this poor guy had a heart murmur and they rejected him, this big hunk of man, crying because he couldn't go, they wouldn't take him with a heart condition. I remember that, and then, he sat down there on the floor just wiping his eyes because he couldn't join the Marines. He probably wasn't wanted, and he wound up in the Army, but I remember that like it was yesterday really, something that really sticks to you, but they took me all right, they put me through that eight weeks of Parris Island.

...

SH: How soon after you were examined in New York did to Parris Island?

FG: Ten minutes. ... "Come ready to go, all you needed was your shaving gear." ... Some people came with suitcases, where the hell are you going, you're going in the Marines, they got everything you need. So, we got on a train after we finished there. We got on train for Parris Island, which is South Carolina, I believe, and we went right there and, of course, we got uniforms. We went with the clothes we had on, whatever we joined with. It was summer, so it was just pants and a shirt, and eight weeks later we left. I think I went into Jacksonville, Florida, they put me through an air school. You volunteered for certain things every so often, and being twenty years old I wanted to fight, I want to get the war over with. ... They just had their own way of putting us, and I wound up in the Marine Air Corps.

SH: What was the train ride down to Parris Island like?

FG: You really want to know?

SH: I do.

FG: We couldn't open the windows, and if some guy got the window open all we got in was hot cinders. ... They forced the windows open, a couple of them, and it was hot as hell, if you can imagine what hell is. ... We got there, sweated, and I should have realized that I made a mistake because we got there around noontime. ... It was only a few hours ride, and they had us standing, there was a shady spot on the side of the building. ... They had us in the front standing there. There must have been a couple of hundred of us, there wasn't a great deal of men. We all wound up in the same platoon, and we were standing in the hot sun while the officers and non-coms were trying to place us where we were going to go. ... We must have stood at attention, and then, we finally had parade rest like standing there with your arms behind your back, and then, I realized that the Marines were a little different than everybody else. ... I stuck it. I think I gained a few pounds, must have been muscle, I guess, I don't know. Anyway, I was glad I chose them because that's what I wanted.

SH: Did you have the proverbial "mean" drill sergeant?

FG: Oh, yes, of course, they had to be mean to make you mean, but after hours, they weren't that bad because there was more of us than the sergeants. There were sixty-four men in a platoon, and there was a drill sergeant and two assistants. ... One of them would always pick on us, but there was a war going on, ... nothing unusual, really.

SH: How did they portray the enemy? Were there caricatures of the Japanese?

FG: No, I never saw any. I never saw anything about the Japs, except that we had radios.

DL: How was the training at Parris Island? Were you spending all of the time out in the fields?

FG: Well, it was mostly drilling, ... like left, right, left turn, right turn, rear march and all that kind of stuff, until we acted as one. That must have been maybe a week or so, and then, we were drilling with rifles, and then, we were drilling with bayonets on the rifles, which made it tougher because when you're carrying a bayonet and you're making rifle movements also, like down, up,

side, ... turning, bumping into each other. ... They tried to mix you up, like they'd give three or four commands at one time, like left turn, right turn, rear march, they came together, your left foot went out, you made a left turn, then your right foot went out, and you made a right turn, then you made a rear march, and with the bayonet in your hand we were bumping into each other at the beginning, and that's what they wanted. They wanted you to get used to it, to work together, they figured when you went into action, you were going to be bumping into each other anyway, and you had to allow for that and you had to get down on the ground. ... It worked, I mean they had their way of training us, and I can't complain about it, they never abused me, maybe hit the hat. We had these pith helmets, ... but they couldn't touch us, you know, as much as they do holler, and they'd slap your hat once in a while, but I never had any trouble with them. I was never a wise guy, I never challenged them, they were better-trained than I was anyway, but I was never sorry. When we got to Jacksonville, we were studying again, we were learning about how to take care of airplanes which I didn't like, I was never a mechanic. Tom was a mechanic, he wound up in the Eighth Air Force as a crew chief. ... I wound up as what they call a plane captain, which is the same as a crew chief in the Army. I took care of the planes, and let them fly. So, actually, what I did, I followed the main line of attack marines. We went to Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Makin Island, and another one, Espiritu Santo, I think, but they wasn't any fighting there. ... I didn't personally actually meet a damn Jap in the first place. I trained ... using my rifle and I never used the damned thing anymore. I was using a screwdriver, but I came back so. They needed me there, we had planes flying over, we hit the islands one at a time. We backed up the main marines.

DL: After Parris Island, did you go home?

FG: No, I didn't get my first furlough until I went overseas and came back, thirty days furlough when I came back. I joined in '42 of July. We went to Jacksonville, my mother and my younger brother came to visit us in Florida, and then from there I went to California, Miramar, and I joined the air wing.

SH: Did you have additional training in Miramar?

FG: Yes, actually on the airplanes. In Jacksonville, we just did the school work. ... Actually, I also took part of my training in Jacksonville as ... a mechanic and a metal smith. The metal smiths had to make parts because we couldn't expect to go to the hardware store and get a part for the plane, so we had to make them. So, I learned how to take a piece of steel and blend it into different things besides operating, putting things together, but when I wound up in the Pacific, I was just doing the air work, running the planes, taxiing them from place to place, and keeping them.

SH: What do you remember about Jacksonville other than the training? Did you get any time off?

FG: Oh, yes, it was like a job to us, every weekend we had time off. Jacksonville was a nice city full of sailors and marines, which is what most of it was, a nice southern city. ... Like I say my mother came to visit us there, and stayed at a hotel for a few days.

DL: Did rationing affect your mother?

FG: Well, they had rationing [of] certain things, and she used to say--you know, speaking to her--that they had to wait for things and they couldn't get everything they wanted and you had to wait in line for the butcher shop and so forth. They only had so much to dole out.

SH: Did they take the train down to visit you?

FG: My mother and the brother [took the] train because he couldn't drive and she never drove. My brother was too young to drive.

SH: Was your brother impressed to see his big brother in a military uniform?

FG: Oh, yes, they were all impressed. They used to tell me, "You were the only one in the family that joined the Marines." How many stupid people do you want in your family? [laughter] ... It turned out good, I can't complain about any of my life. In a way, if there was anything I could change, I would have liked to have got a better education, but that was my fault. I can't say that I didn't have the chance because people with ... less money than I had, and they went to work and got their education. People I knew went to college, and got their education working through it. I could have done it, I didn't like school--didn't want to say it too loud because my granddaughter [is in the other room]. No, I just didn't like school, that's all there was to it. ... I got by on working and kept my wife home to raise the children. I had two jobs, I worked in factories. I worked making bowling balls in Manhattan Rubber, they used to make the bowling balls, and they made tires. I worked there when they were in Clifton, I worked there for a couple of years.

SH: Did you know you were going to fight the Japanese in the Pacific when you joined the Marines?

FG: Oh, I knew when I joined. That's where the war was. They were training us to go to war, and I knew that it would be a matter of time. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Mr. Gentile kept a log of the places he went to when he served in the Marines. In September you go to Cherry Point, South Carolina and refer to it as an easy assignment.

FG: We weren't trained at all, we were waiting to be assigned. ... It was a new camp, and they had brick buildings with modern lavatories and showers, and the best little ... sloop shoot they called it, brick building. ... They even had like a bar in it, because we only drank beer, and you had to buy your beer like for twenty cents a bottle, ten cents a bottle. ... That's all we did--waited. I don't know how long we were there, but we were waiting to be assigned, ... maybe two weeks. ... We went to Jackson, we went to school. ... See, some people went to first-line infantry for instance, which was what I wanted. They asked me what I wanted to join, and I always wrote the same thing, paratroopers, which I found out I was too small, ... and the Marine raiders. I wanted to join the Marine raiders or the paratroopers. I wanted to fight, I was a kid

and I was mad at them for bombing us, and I thought of all those ships, but they figured I was better off so they told me to put my gun away and gave me a screwdriver.

SH: What was your impression of Jacksonville?

FG: Too little for too many. There were too many soldiers, sailors, marines, it was just crowded. If you went into a restaurant, you couldn't sit down. You went into a bar, and everybody had a beer. Where could we go, and even they had USOs which were very helpful to us, but they were crowded, they gave you donuts and coffee and small drinks and things, and it was just too many people there. San Diego was the same thing, but we were never actually stationed in San Diego. Camp Miramar was above it, ... but actually it's part of San Diego, and when we got there, we were the new people. We were the new people in Cherry Point, and we were the new people in Miramar. There was nobody else there when we got there. Now, it's still a big base, an air base, and from there I believe we went to El Toro. ...

SH: When you finished in Jacksonville, you were sent to Miramar. Were you transported by train across the country?

FG: Yes. ...

SH: What do you remember about that trip?

FG: Boy, would I remember.

SH: Tell us.

FG: Dirty and more dirty, they didn't have showers on the trains. The only thing we could wash ourselves with was spit, I think. ... It took us five days, we took the southern route. ... It was all troops on the train. ... We must have been going like two miles an hour most of the time, and side trips, and so forth. The only thing good about it, when we passed through a town once in a while, they let us slow up, and there'd be these girls handing out cigarettes and stuff like that, these sweet little girls hollering, "Go, Marines, go!" ... The rest of it was just dirty, I mean, and we're sitting there and we had to open the windows so we could breathe, and all we got in was the soot. We had a change of clothes which we changed, but our bodies we couldn't wash; there was no place to wash. We couldn't even shave because there was only so much water. That was a mess.

SH: How did they feed you?

FG: Oh, we ate, they wanted to make sure we were alive when we got there. We ate rations. The funny thing--like when you ask a kid that came home from a school meal or something, he doesn't remember what he had because it was so bad he wanted to forget it. So, I don't remember what we ate, but we had our little things.

SH: You ate rations on the train.

FG: Mostly rations that we could just throw away, because we had no washing facilities.

SH: In other words, there was no dining car or anything.

FG: No, [laughter] they forgot to attach it. That was probably the worst of it, I completely forgot that. ... Like I was saying, you get rid of those thoughts. We were dirty.

SH: What did you think of Camp Miramar when you got there?

FG: Well, like I say, it was the newest, there was a fence, and the buildings were nice. They weren't brick buildings, but they're still there to this day. Miramar is a built up place. There wasn't much, and we were only there a short time, I think it was a very short time. ... The only place we had liberty was San Diego and that was another place like this, too much for too little, it was a wonderful city though, San Diego. ... There again we found out the USO was wonderful there, because it was a bigger city.

SH: How did the civilians treat the soldiers?

FG: They couldn't have treated us any better. They invited us into their homes. The USO would have a billboard, "Four marines wanted at so and so house for supper," and you'd sign up for it if you were going to be in town at that time. We all had different liberties, that maybe some of us walked in the day. ... We didn't have a bad overnight because we were only there a short time. When we reached El Toro, sometimes we had a weekend pass and the people were wonderful--the USOs were great.

SH: Did you ever go to anyone's home and have dinner?

FG: Yes, a couple of times. ... I remember one time we went with this lady, older woman--for those days older woman, maybe she was fifty, today fifty is young, I'm ninety and I'm young. ... She had a Cadillac and she drove us. She got four marines, in fact there was two of us, I had a friend with me from my camp, I don't where the other three were, but it was going to be four and I said, "Well, we can't take that one because there's two of us." So, she says, "Wait a minute," the girl at the USO, and she called the woman and the woman says, "Yes, I'll take the five," and she took us to a place for lunch. It was off into the ocean, like if you've ever been to Atlantic City where they had the old pier, this was like a pier going into the ocean. This restaurant was one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen, a very expensive restaurant. She must have had money, and maybe she lost somebody in the service. Anyway, we had the best meal we had out there, and she was very good to us, she took us to ... a place in LA, it wasn't the place in San Francisco was Chinatown, this was China City in Los Angeles, smaller, but all Chinese. She took us there and she bought us a couple of trinkets, she bought me a little thing, the guy with a fat belly, ... but I got this from her. It might have cost seventy-five cents, and I still got it.

SH: That is amazing that you were able to keep that.

FG: His arm broke. ... It's still a symbol of some section in China.

SH: That is amazing that you were able to carry it all that time.

FG: Some things you keep, I mean, she was such a nice person. There were so many nice people, every place we went. That's what made me very sad about Vietnam. People were against Vietnam, I was against it, but the soldiers didn't start it, they were drafted, and to be against the soldiers, they never gave them a parade or anything when they came back. They're still against them, I still see that ... some of these veterans' organizations are trying to get people to come in from the Vietnam area, but those guys were so disgruntled with the way people treated them, it was terrible. We lost 50,000 men died in that place for ten years, we never should have been there I thought, but it wasn't the soldier's fault, he was drafted.

DL: When you got to El Toro, were you with your unit by then?

FG: Yes, we were a unit when we got there--we were in BMTV 232.

DL: That unit was in Pearl Harbor when it was attacked. Did you know anyone who spoke of Pearl Harbor?

FG: ... They were in Guadalcanal with the first invasion, so they could have been in Pearl Harbor. The first I heard of them were in Guadalcanal, because when I went with them. It was the second trip they had made.

SH: Did they give you any advice as to what to expect?

FG: The people there, yes, sure, because once I got in with them, they had been there. I was assigned to a plane to a unit, and we had torpedo bombers, ... VMTB, heavier than air Marine bombers, torpedo bombers. We had to bay on the bottom, and we carried a 2000-pound torpedo, or four 500-pound bombs. ... I apologize for questioning you because I didn't know it had come from Pearl Harbor. There was a lot of things in Pearl Harbor, a lot of ships were there, one is still there with all those people in it, the *Arizona*. Yes, they had been over with the first units when they had all that fighting, when it was really a tough fight. I met some of them too that had been in the ground crew, and the people had been there, the ground crew that had been in Guadalcanal with the first unit, were teaching us as the second unit. So, by the time I got there, I was trained by the people who had actually been there on how to keep the planes ready. In fact, the first time I learned how to taxi an airplane, the plane captain was somewhere else with other planes, and the Japs came over to bomb us, we were very close, they weren't too far away from us, and we had to move the planes, so I say what the hell, it's like a car, you push the left foot down, it turns left, you put the right foot down, it turns right. So, I got in there, of course, I knew how to start it because that was my job to start it and rev it up right. So, I got up in there and I started it up, and there was a little wheel in the back, and two wheels in the front, of course. Now, what you had to do to move it, was rev it up high enough so the tail end would go up, but not too high you don't want it to turn over, and if you don't go high enough, you're dragging your feet in the back so I had to pick it up just right. So, it was all sand, so I got to move it under the trees, so when I picked it up, I had to rev it up a little bit, and I must have blew 10000 pounds of sand at everybody that was in the back of me, but I got the plane going, one left foot, right

foot, left foot, I could go, finally turned it around behind the trees and the Japs missed us. See, without your questioning, I wouldn't have remembered these things. You're doing a good job.
...

SH: Let us talk about the ship ride over to the Pacific.

FG: ... There again, we couldn't shave. We all had our helmets. ... They had water fountains with a very trickling of water for drink, and one guy once filled his helmet up with the water, and tried to shave, and he was caught. They didn't have a brig there, but they isolated him, in other words they were punishing him. They had told him not to do anything with that water, but drink it. He was stupid because he shaved, everybody was seeing him, he was clean shaven, they knew he used water, but anyway, that wasn't very nice. ... The trip was terrible in the fact that we had enough food to eat, to sustain us, but I can't remember what it was because it ... wasn't so good that it was so bad that I wanted to forget it. Outside of that, we zigzagged, so it took us ... over a month before we finally got to Espiritu Santo.

SH: You did pull into New Caledonia before Espiritu Santo.

FG: Yes, temporarily, we must have took on something. ...

SH: What did you see?

FG: Pretty French girls, and new mail. ... If I may speak plainly, I didn't see too many girls, but I did see a line of soldiers going to this little cabin. ... I'm not going to tell you what they were doing, I can only tell you what I imagined they were doing. It was the only cabin, and the only line of soldiers, but naturally I didn't join them--too big a line I guess.

DL: This was in Noumea?

FG: Noumea, yes. ...

DL: The ship you were on was a Dutch ship?

FG: Yes, the crew and captain were all Dutch. They spoke very little English, and we couldn't communicate with them because the seamen were all Dutch.

SH: Were you still being kept physically fit?

FG: Yes, we were told to move around and exercise. ... We did the jumping.

SH: Calisthenics?

FG: Calisthenics, and we ate. ... I can't remember any meal, but we ate, we must have, and we sat down and talked to each other. ... If somebody had cards, we'd play a little cards because we couldn't have any lights. Even when it got dark we didn't go any place, we just sort of coasted like, I guess the captain knew what he's doing because we never saw any foreign ships or

submarines, but you hear about all the big ... convoys, ... that's what the Japs went after with their submarines. When you got close, they went after them, and try to get the big ships, but they never bothered us because they didn't know we were there.

SH: When was the first time that you came under Japanese fire?

FG: Outside of bombing?

SH: Bombing would count.

FG: ... Well, every island, we were bombed by Japs. The first time had to be Guadalcanal. The Hebrides was before--that wasn't even in the fight actually--they were sort of where they took people wounded and so forth until they could ship them home or whatever. We were bombed--of course, we were never hit. We had a hole dug. ...

SH: Fox holes?

FG: Right. You're good. ... I lied about my age actually, I'm ninety-one. So, they came down, but we didn't actually get hit. I'm not going to say that I went through hell, I didn't. I never met the enemy. ...

SH: Your ship was never strafed by the enemy.

FG: ... Never under fire, we did get bombed at the airports once in a while, like I say, we had to move the planes because they were getting ready to attack. ... Naturally, if the Japs came in at that time, ... we had fighter outfits in the same area. The fighter planes were circling and protecting the bombers. Of course, we had guns, we had two gunners on the bombing planes. You had a turret gun and a belly gun. ... The gunner was lying down and shooting straight up for any Jap planes trying to strafe, trying to come at them, but our main mission with those ... torpedo bombers were to hit the ships. We'd go low and drop the torpedo in.

SH: Were you on board the plane when it took off?

FG: Occasionally we took a ride with them, but I was never in an active ride, on an attack. They had enough of their own gunners. I was never trained. ... There's another school they went to in Jacksonville, they had a gunnery school, and it lasted a few months, so I guess they trained different ways, but I never did any of that.

SH: What about defensive positions, did you ever have to man an anti-aircraft gun?

FG: No, we never did, but once in a while they might have thought that we were going to be invaded, and we kept our rifles with us all the time, even on the field. ... When we were working on planes, of course, we didn't carry the rifle onto the plane with us to work on, but we were nearby, we always had the rifle.

DL: What about on the ship?

FG: ... We had our rifles with us all the time, we were ready to fight, we had our ammunition with us. If we had seen a periscope, we all would have fired at it to save time, I guess. ... Every place we went, ... except on liberty of course, we had our rifles with us. It doesn't make much difference, but I have an expert rifleman medal, having been an expert rifleman.

SH: You went into the Marines so that you would be well-trained to fight. Do you think you were?

FG: For my job, yes, but I was thinking of a different job. I was thinking of meeting the enemy.
...

SH: How often would you have to use your training to keep the planes flying?

FG: Outside of the metal part, where I didn't have to make any parts, I used the skills, yes, to keep the planes going.

SH: You did not have to use the metal training?

FG: No, they had other people making them. ...

SH: How well-supplied were you with the parts that you needed to keep the planes flying?

FG: Pretty well, it seemed pretty well. Once in a while, we were able to fix it. ... We had the metal smiths with us, and we had planes that were down for different reasons, maybe one was shot up quite a bit, because they did get shot up, and we lost a few planes. ... We had some planes where something was wrong with them. ... They had holes in the wings, and we'd take the parts from there and put them into a plane that needed a part. We kept switching back and forth more than actually making parts because we didn't have the equipment to make a part with. We didn't have the machinery there, and so forth, but we did lose men. In other words, if a plane went down, ... three men crew, the pilot, tail gunner, and the turret gunner, and sometimes they had an observer with them, so there would be four. We lost a few planes with four in it, observing and flying over the Japs, because we were only a hundred feet away from them really, even on Guadalcanal, although we were the second unit in, second air unit in. ... The Japs were still there waiting, see we didn't actually go in to get them, ... the marines on the ground. What they did was, in fact, on Bougainville especially, when most of them were going on the canal by the time I got there, Bougainville was the next stop, I believe. ... The Army came in to relieve us, and the Marines moved on, and they had a set up with spotlights. Every once in a while, the Japs would come down, maybe they were hungry or something, but we never went in because we didn't want to lose any extra men. So, we waited for them to come down and they'd pick them off like clay pigeons. ... The one thing at the time, maybe I wasn't proud of it, but we didn't take prisoners. You couldn't, because what the hell are you going to do with them, I mean we don't got the facilities for ourselves, what were we going to do, put them in a place, and take care of them? So, I never saw a prisoner, and they'd set up these lights and when the Japs came down for whatever reason--some of them had guns, some of them had rocks, or whatever--they'd just pick them off, and eventually there was none left. ... They were in the caves, and they still had

munitions, they still had guns, so ... the higher ups decided, let them come and get it when they want it bad enough, let them come to us. The islands were secured after a while, but the biggest thing happened, if it hadn't been for that atom bomb, hitting Japan and making them surrender, that war could have gone on for a couple of more years because we had to go step by step, and we still had tough fighting going on, like Saipan, Iwo Jima. ... We lost half of three different divisions going in here because there was all Japs, you had to kill every one of them to get past them. ...

SH: Tell me about when your unit was in Guadalcanal.

FG: Yes, we were treated pretty good there, because we didn't do any fighting. Most of the Japs were gone. There were a few in the hills or marshes that came down. ...

SH: Just before Christmas, you were in Munda.

FG: Munda, that's one of the islands in between there. We weren't there very long.

SH: You also went to New Georgia.

FG: Yes.

SH: What was some of the wildlife that you saw in New Georgia?

FG: Little small snakes, ... lizards, little ones, big ones, every time you went for a walk. Now, snakes don't attack. If you step on them they'll come at you or if you interfere with their little nests. ... We didn't worry too much about them, if you stepped on them, ... and, of course, the mosquitoes. I don't know if I ever put it down in anywhere, but when I came back to the States, I had a touch of malaria. It was gone in one day.

SH: Really?

FG: They took me to the hospital. In fact, when I went home from furlough I started to get a fever, a temperature on the train, and when I got there I went right to sick bay, and they checked me out and said, "You got malaria, fellow," and they put me in bed. The next day I didn't have it anymore.

SH: Had you taken Atabrine?

FG: I was one of the only ones that took it, and I was one of the only ones that got it. So, I don't know how well it worked.

SH: What was it like in Bougainville?

FG: ... They had a bigger air base and it was clean. ... The Christmas dinner, they brought it in from somewhere, and we had a nice bunch of cooks there, they did everything for us.

SH: You were there in January of 1944.

FG: I celebrated my birthday. January 20th we got there, I think, or pretty close to it. It was my birthday. ... I remember that was one of the times when we got there, the Japs, we were in a tent, and as we walked in we saw the poles in the middle of the tent holding it up, but then when the Japs attacked us, we forgot about the poles so we got up. We were sleeping on the ground. Of course, we got up and we dashed out to get to the foxholes and each one of us, there must have been ten guys in the back of the poles, each one of us hit that pole and went down. I mean, we were going fast, so we hit the pole and it fell, and then we finally got outside into the foxholes and nobody wanted to be first in the foxhole, because everybody else came in on top of you, but this time we didn't wait, everybody got there and jumped in because that was one of the worst attacks we had. They dropped bombs pretty close to us, but I didn't see anybody hurt.

DL: What sort of jobs did you do as a mechanic? You mentioned before that you were in charge of taxiing.

FG: Taxiing, gassed them up, checked them out. We'd ... start them up in the mornings, run them ... fifteen, twenty minutes, or if they were going out, we'd prepare them to take off, and if there was something out of the way, ... I forget what they had under the hood really to adjust, ... but sometimes there were adjustments made, that they weren't running clear and checked the tires, air and all that kind of stuff, just like you're checking your car. ... I don't remember each little detail, but there were enough of them to keep us busy.

DL: Were you arming the planes as well?

FG: We had a separate unit arming them, yes. ... They put the bombs in, and they had to be very careful, and when they were putting the bombs in, I sort of walked a little further away from the airplane, because it was a better view. ... They knew what they were doing, they would load up the munitions on the guns, the pilot had guns, and the two gunners had guns and, of course, they had a certain amount of ammunition they took with them. ... We didn't do that, we just kept the plane running. If it was bad and didn't sound right, we fixed whatever it needed, like adjustments under the hood, and we kept them going.

DL: Did you have enough supplies for the planes?

FG: Supplies were pretty good. We had the Navy behind us and in front of us on the ships, and we had plenty of supplies coming in. No shortage of food, we had a barracks to eat in, a mess hall, and we had running water, showers. If you got real dirty and you could get off the line for a half hour or so, if you got dirty, like oil in the engine that spilled on you while you were working, you could go take a shower and come back.

DL: Were the conditions as good on all the islands your unit went to, like on Bougainville?

FG: Yes, that was good for us because, like I say, we didn't go in and fight the Japs to take the island. I wasn't in that group. ...

DL: Were they dirt runways or tarmac runways?

FG: They were made by the Seabees, and they were cut down as far as they had to be cut down, like get all the brush off it, and some of it had sand, and some of ... the islands were rocks, so it was pretty easy to level it off. The Seabees had all the equipment they needed.

SH: What about the weather, how did that impact what you did?

FG: Well, it was always hot, because we were there in January. ... I mean you were near the equator most of those islands, where we were South Pacific, and it was hot. ...

DL: Did the heat ever affect the equipment that you were working with?

FG: No, not from the heat.

DL: What about the monsoon season?

FG: There was rainy season, but Bougainville, and the rainy seasons really hit. I think I was farther south with those little islands, I didn't stay too long, like Hebrides, Espiritu Santo, we were there for a few days and it rained every day. I almost drowned once.

SH: Why?

FG: I didn't want to. [laughter] ... We had guard duty every place we went, because we didn't know what was coming [or] if the Japs was still active. So, I'm walking guard duty with my rifle. ... It was raining like cats and dogs, and like I say, we had foxholes. Now, when it's raining so much a foxhole could get filled up, so there's me singing a song in my mind, keeping myself awake. It was getting dark on that particular night and I stepped into the foxhole. The foxhole must have been five feet deep, and I'm about 5'8." ... Well, right now I lost two inches, I'm 5'5," can you believe that? I went to the doctor and she took my height, I lost ... two inches, 5'5" and a half instead of 7" and 1/2. Anyway, I'm standing in this foxhole full of water, right up to here.

SH: To your chin.

FG: If it was two inches more, I'd be dead, there was no place for me to go, I had the rifle on under my poncho, ... that thing that just goes over the top, protecting me, but that hurt me in the water, because now I could hardly move my arms, and I wouldn't dare call for help, because I don't want to admit that I was stupid enough to step in a foxhole, but I got out. I got my rifle out, and then I crawled out. The rifle got wet of course, I kept it dry while it was under the poncho.

DL: Did you dig the foxholes or did someone else?

FG: No, we did it. ... Actually, these guys that had been there before me, one outfit, so some of the huts where we slept already had a foxhole. ... When we got more and more men, we had to

dig one, and all of them weren't too deep, but you had to go 5' because when everybody jumped in there, you might be on top of somebody and you don't want to be exposed. ... Some of them, we had a cover on it, we put boards across the top and put things on it so they couldn't see it from above when they came strafing low they could see an open hole. So, we tried to disguise them, and we were ready to fire back if they came close, but I never had to fire that gun the whole time I was overseas, and I shouldn't call it a gun because it was a rifle.

SH: Did you ever get to swim in the ocean?

FG: Well, that's the silly part that I don't like to admit all the time--I was a lousy swimmer. In fact, I couldn't swim and they used to ask me, "What the hell are you doing in the Marines if you can't swim?" But I managed to pass every inspection, because you see, you're supposed to jump in the pool to pass inspection, and I could swim underwater for about three feet, and the pool is only ten feet wide, so if I jumped in the middle, I can manage to get to the side, and I passed inspection, but if I had been in the infantry, I would have had to learn, because they knew how to swim, ... especially if you got put off at the beginning of the boat, ... and maybe your little boat with the twenty guys going in might have tipped over or something. If you didn't swim, you're a fool to be there, but I was a fool anyway. So, I couldn't swim and everybody else, some of them would dive off the top of the boat when we were docked, and land. You know, I just steered away from it. They tried to teach me, in boot camp they tried.

DL: You first went to Guadalcanal, is that correct?

FG: After I passed those two little islands, but we went there permanently so to speak. We spent six months there, or maybe more.

DL: What were your aircraft targeting at that point?

FG: We were targeting a couple of islands, ... we were in the Solomons group, Gilbert Islands maybe. See, our planes only had a radius of about 300 miles, I think.

SH: According to your log, you were on Guadalcanal from October until just before Christmas.

FG: It was like ... two months, three months, and then, we moved up to Bougainville.

SH: You went to Bougainville on your birthday, and you are there until May when you go to Espiritu Santo.

FG: We were on our way back then. Yes, that's when I came back in '44, and we were going to go back in '45, I think that's it. ... We were going home then. I think we were here as standbys in case they wanted us to go back. ... The war was still on. San Francisco, that's the first stop--good to be back.

SH: What was it like to be back to the States even though the war was still going on?

FG: ... Good to be back--it was good--that's what it was like. [laughter] ... Well, we were cheering, we were glad to be back, and at that time we came home, because that was our first furlough, we got the thirty days furlough, yes. It was only a couple of weeks later, I got engaged, I think it will tell you that.

SH: The log says October 21st, 1944, engaged.

FG: And the following year I was on my way home, October.

DL: When you were on these airfields, was it always just Marine units there, or were soldiers from other branches there, too?

FG: Yes, it was the Marine unit, we were on small fields. ... Whenever we joined a convoy, or protect sometimes, we went out to protect ships coming in. ... They didn't tell us where they were going, they didn't know. ... Sometimes, when they put the torpedoes on, we knew they were going on a bombing mission. There were Jap ships in the area or something like that or it was in the three hundred miles. I think it was three hundred miles was their limit to how far they could go and still come back. There were no other planes there. They would meet, like I say, if they were going to a convoy, there were Army planes in the area, ... Air Corps planes. They became the Air Force after the war.

SH: When you were on the island preparing the planes, how much interaction did you have with the crew? Were you assigned to just one plane and one crew?

FG: Yes, more or less, one plane, but the crews would change sometimes, depending on where they were going. ... We were all friendly, the officers and all. ... The officers didn't pick on us, they trusted us to keep the plane going and that was our job.

DL: Was there an officer in charge of the plane maintenance?

FG: Oh, yes, we had line chief, and we had a section where they did the repair work. If it needed a complete job, or whatever it needed for a couple of days, we'd bring it in and taxi it into the area where they serviced them. If it was something smaller we could do ourselves or ask for an engineer more advanced than we were, they'd come out to the plane, but we had an area where we took care of them, like a garage so to speak. Everything was open, but on the fields we took care of them, in fact there was one time where we had more planes than people. I used to start as many of two or three planes and get ready to take off for the pilots, and when they came down, they trusted me to have the plane ready, and there it was. Our main job wasn't exactly fixing the things that went wrong. Little things, adjustments we could do. The main thing was to check it out, and make sure everything is working, you know, we'd get up in there and we'd start it off, spin the prop first thing in the morning, and then, get up there and start it and check that all the computers are working, all the dials are going, and taxi them when we had to, and the pilots come out and the crew came out, of course. They were all setup with parachutes and everything, and they got in the plane and moved the guns around, pilot would check it out again and take off. Then, when they came back, we were ready to guide them into their area. You know, we'd tap that wheel and move this wheel to turn that way, and then, stop

that one, and turn this way, and then pull it in there. It was interesting work, sometimes you felt good.

SH: How long did you have before the planes would come back?

FG: Like I say, they had three hundred miles radius, and I think their top speed was three hundred miles an hour, so if you figure they were back in a couple of hours at the most, depending on where they were going. ... In other words you had six hundred miles of flying. I'm just guessing, it may be a little more, a little less. So, they're not going to go more than three hundred miles away because they got to come back three hundred miles. So, maybe two, three hours is probably the most they had to spend.

DL: You were working with the TBFs at that time?

FG: ... TBFs were the original made by Grumman, "F" means Grumman, and we had some TBMs made the same way by Martin, but they were basically the TBFs.

DL: How many marines would be on the airfields?

FG: Well, I can tell you just about a little over two hundred in my unit. The MTB was something like 220.

DL: That includes the support crews as well?

FG: Yes, everybody [was] in the group, they were mechanics and so forth. ... The commander was a pilot, R. F. Smith, I think. I got a picture if you want to see it. Would you like to see a picture of the unit? It's downstairs hanging on the wall.

SH: We can look at it when we finish the oral history. What did you do when you had downtime?

FG: Well, usually there was nothing to do, but if there was something we could fix, we fixed it. ... The people working in the garage, ... they would work through the night sometimes, get the plane ready for the next day, but us, if we weren't flying, weren't going out, we were off. We were playing poker, pinochle, or exercising, but I never fired that damned weapon to keep her in shape.

SH: Did you have any target practice at all?

FG: No. ...

SH: Did you ever have to have an inspection?

FG: Once in a while, I think Admiral Halsey came down once in ... either Bougainville or Guadalcanal, and everybody was on their toes, but we wore our white clothes, white clothes with the dungarees.

DL: How was integration in the unit?

FG: You mean blacks in the service?

DL: Yes, were there blacks in the unit?

FG: Well, when I joined there was one guy ... that was talking to me and checking my eye to see if I had two and my ears to see if I had two, or one nose, in other words clearing me to go to New York. There was a "colored" boy, we called him colored in those days, I guess you've got to call him black now, "negroes," they don't use those words anymore. Anyway, he came in, he wanted to join and the attendant there, whatever he called himself, the recruiter, he told him that it was only for certain jobs, it wasn't for the regular Marines. You'd be a marine, you'd get a uniform, but you ... drove the gas trucks to load up the gas, and that's what they were doing, and I guess they had more menial jobs, but they weren't in the infantry, they weren't mixed, I don't believe, not at that time. It took a while to get them in.

SH: Did you see soldiers from any other allied countries while you were in the Pacific?

FG: Not on the islands, we handled them ourselves. I imagine my brother did in England because they had big airfields and he worked on the B-17s. I worked on the small planes, and we were all alone out there technically. We had our section, there may have been other sections, but we were on small islands, so I don't know if there were any other sections on these places.

DL: Did you come across any of the infantry on Bougainville?

FG: No, I don't remember meeting any. Some of the guys went out to where the battlefield was, but at that time we just had a few people standing by in case the ones up in the hills or whatever they call them came down. Bougainville, there was quite a few up in there and they had the setup with the lights. When they saw them coming, in the dark, they'd turn the lights on and you'd see them running, running to their deaths. ... We couldn't take them prisoner, ... the Army that came later, or the Marines guarding, what are they going to do with them, they got to kill them. Like I said before, I never saw a prisoner, but that was the way of the war.

SH: Did you have a good medical crew?

FG: We had corpsmen. That was the only Navy there outside of in the bay and on the ships. We had corpsmen and we had a sick bay where they had a little section, like a little hospital unit, but most of us didn't need it.

SH: Did you ever see any of the USO shows that came through?

FG: Yes. Once, I think the Jack Benny group came in, Carole Landis was singing. We went crazy for her, beautiful blonde girl, I don't know if you ever seen her in the movies later on, beautiful blonde girl, and she couldn't sing worth a damn, but boy she was beautiful. Raining like crazy, we're all sitting there watching, that guy with a mustache was on Benny's show too,

Gerry Colonna. ... We didn't see too many, we never saw Bob Hope although he was out all over, but he never came to the little islands, and there were some that I never heard of, you know, smaller units that came out once in a while.

SH: When you first went across the equator, did they have a ceremony for the Shellback Society?

FG: Oh, yes, crossing the equator. ... Yes, we had it on board ship, they doused us with hoses and the more friends you had the worse it was for you, but they gave you that as a graduation.

SH: The document says, "You are now an official member of the Shellback Society."

FG: Yes, something like that, "Neptunus Rex." I think I have a bigger one on the wall downstairs, which you can come and look at it after, if you want.

SH: When you came back in October of 1944, were you confident the war was coming to an end?

FG: No confidence at all, I figured we're going to have to take each island. I thought it would go two more years, and if they don't drop that bomb it certainly would have gone a couple of years. That's why it made me a little mad when people, even soldiers said that we shouldn't have dropped it because we were worse than the Japs. How the hell can you think like that? ... We bombed them because they bombed us and we entered the war, so maybe we killed a hundred thousand at one time, I mean I don't even know how many we killed, but what's the difference if you killed ten a day for hundred days, kill a thousand at once and end the war. We were trying to save our lives and they sent that in ... and the Japs surrendered. [Editor's Note: Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, and May 8, 1945, was declared V-E Day. The first bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, on Hiroshima. The second bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945, on Nagasaki. Japan surrendered on August 16, 1945, V-J Day.]

SH: Where were you when you heard the news that the Japanese had surrendered?

FG: That's very interesting you should ask that question. I was standing on a sidewalk with my sea bag all packed, ready to get on a bus to get on a boat to go back overseas. They had us designated to go back, and it must have been in the middle of August there, in '45, when they dropped the bomb. When they dropped the bomb, they held us back, and after the second bomb toward the end of August, ... if I remember right, they signed a peace treaty on board the *Missouri* with MacArthur, ... in the beginning of September of '45. ... I had enough points, I think the point minimum was ... eighty-five or better because I have been over there and so forth. 23rd of October, I was out, on my way home. I was home on the 27th. I took a train.

SH: Were you aware how the war was going in Europe while you were in the Pacific?

FG: Yes, more or less, we knew that the Italians were finished, and Germany was being slaughtered. ... Germany made the mistake of going against Russia. ... They lost a lot of men in Russia, that's what helps France and England. If Russia had stayed on Germany's side, all of

Europe would be German today, unless we would have gone over there to beat them, and then I don't know what would have happened.

SH: Did you and your brothers send letters back and forth to each other?

FG: Very seldom, our families used to write in their letters what was going on with Tom or Ralph. We knew we were in good shape.

SH: President Roosevelt dies in April of 1945, what was the reaction where you were?

FG: We were all sorry because we all loved him. I never heard a bad word about him from the servicemen. Later on, I had a few arguments with people that told me he was a warmonger, but I couldn't see that. I used to tell them we went to war in '41 when the Japs hit us, England and France went to war with Germany in '39. If he was a warmonger, he would have gotten us in quick if he was trying to help England. He wasn't, in my opinion, or all the servicemen I ever met. He was a good President. ...

SH: What did you think of Truman before the bomb was dropped?

FG: Before the bomb was dropped, I didn't think of him at all. After, I could have kissed him for saving my life, because if we had gone overseas, who knows what would have happened.

SH: When you came back from your furlough, you got to come home.

FG: Yes, almost immediately, yes.

SH: Did you then go back and do more training?

FG: Yes, yes, ... in fact I went to Memphis, and trained in advanced training for the new airplanes. It was only a short course, five or six weeks, something like that, and my mother came to see me with my brother Pete, and we stayed at ... my relatives across the street that we had stayed with, ... and from there we went to San Diego, ready to go overseas again.

DL: At this point, were the new aircraft being fitted with radar?

FG: I don't remember radar, but I remember rockets. They were putting rockets on the wings, which we didn't have. So, they were getting ready for a long war, I think, but nobody knew about the atom bomb, that was top secret. ... When I realized that it was up to Truman to drop it, and I thank God for him dropping it. I wasn't a bit reluctant.

SH: What was the celebration like when you heard the war was over?

FG: I'm glad you're asking me these questions because I forgot. We, the Marines and the Navy, were barred from going to San Francisco, especially the Navy, they went crazy when the war was over. They turned over street cars, how the hell they did it, I don't know, and we used to have liberty. ... I think was I back in El Toro. ... I was ready to go overseas when the war

ended, I was in Miramar ready to go on the boat. Like I said, the busses were there, and we had our sea bags packed, we're leaving as soon as we were ready, but definitely they held us back one day, and then, another day, and then, the second bomb fell and, go home. I forget where they shipped us back to Miramar to go home from. ...

SH: What did they do with you to keep you busy?

FG: Nothing. ... We played cards, pinochle, I used to like pinochle because it took longer, played for nickels, you know, we were waiting. We had movies, we had liberty like once or twice a week and San Diego was a good place to go, but it was crowded, but at least it was off the base, and we were ready to go and fight again. ... When the war was over, Frisco was hit hard, I know they barred Marines, you couldn't go in to the city, the MPs were on the streets barring us. They went too far, I mean you could be happy, but gee, I hope there was nobody in those streetcars when they turned them over. I wasn't in the town, but we must have been close to it. Well, even so, from San Diego to Frisco is six, seven hundred miles. ... We couldn't have gotten there anyway.

DL: Were you going out in uniform the whole time?

FG: Oh, yes, we never took our uniforms off, except when we went to bed. ... There were no civilian uniforms, you couldn't wear civilian clothes even on furlough, you had to wear a uniform always. Now, I think you see people in the service are not wearing uniforms all the time, that's different story. ...

DL: On your furloughs in 1944, how are people treating you by that point?

FG: Good, people treated us in World War II every place I went, people were glad to see us and glad we were part of them, opened their homes, invited us from the camps. Of course, when I came home, I stayed at my house, my mother was living in Lodi at that time. ... My wife was living over here, so between the two, I didn't go any place to look for any side meals or anything, I kept pretty busy. ... We went to New York and got an engagement ring too.

SH: You did?

FG: ... I had heard people talking about the jewelry in Canal Street, the Bowery, the Jewelry Lane or something they called it, and people had told me you get good stuff there. So, I went there, and we got a ... nice ring for her, and I got some crosses. ... In fact, this ring came from there. It cost me ten dollars. It's probably worth more than that now.

SH: I am sure.

FG: ... I still wear it as you can see. We had to wait a while for them to put the stuff in, so I said, "Let's go to the movies." So, a serviceman was free in New York or Jersey as far as I know, even California, I think, and the movie you get in for nothing. So, of course, she had civilian clothes on, short, 5' tall, less than 5' tall. So, I go up, and I put up a dollar, and ... he says, "Well, you're free." So, he gave me half a ticket for a child, so I don't know what he's

doing, he's giving me, he charged me fifteen cents for her, I think it was a quarter and fifteen cents. So, when we go into the movies, I said, "Here's your child's ticket," I said, "you give it to him," to the guy that collected. "Child?" she said. Anyway, I saved ten cents. I got in free, and she got in for a child, she looked like a child. I just thought of that. So, my mind is filled up, as it comes up, I don't think of these things all the time. ... In fact, if I didn't have this, I don't know how I'd remember the dates.

SH: What a beautiful photograph album. This is the pith helmet that he was talking about. What are you doing up here in the picture?

FG: ... I'm standing in front of ... one of the places on Parris Island, it could have been anyone of the bases in front of the hall or whatever they call that, the office building.

SH: This is a marine statue?

FG: Yes, that was the statue behind ... Jacksonville, and that's the picture I took home. ...

DL: The unit that you were in lost quite a few airmen, were you close to any of them?

FG: Not really, because we didn't work together. We set the planes up, and then, they'd come over just before flight time and look at it, you know, and get in, ... shoot the breeze with them for a few minutes, but never knew by name except for the captain, he was the head of the unit and he was the commander of the flight too. In fact, one of his brothers worked with us was on the ground crew with us, Mr. Smith, Captain Smith, but we got along with everybody. We were all on the same boat, we all were young fellows, pilots were young, gunners were young, we were mostly young. I guess the oldest man in the Marines at that time they didn't take them over thirty-seven, and we didn't see too many of them that were much older than that at all, except ... some of the officers were. ... I knew Admiral Halsey came in once, we watched him, we were on the base, and we watched him get out of his plane, Navy plane, but the comradeship was great, we got along with everybody. It was a war that everybody in the country was behind. If you weren't in it, you had somebody in it. We had fifteen million men in the war, men and women, there wasn't as many women at that time, but there were a few, and a few in the Marines too, and they were supposed to have taken over the office work to release the men for the front lines, but we had fifteen million men, we only had 140 million in the whole country, so you had better than 10% of the people who were directly involved in the service, and give them another four people for their families, so you got another 20%, 30%, directly involved with relationship to a soldier and everybody was helping in some way or another because it was a popular war. We were attacked.

DL: How did you feel about the Japanese after the war?

FG: We beat them, we got our peace, the ones born after that, they were fighting the same way we were. They didn't start the war, the higher-ups did. I don't know what we did with them, I don't remember what we did with Tojo and those people, but a lot of them killed themselves in disgrace after the war, but I didn't hold it against the Japanese themselves. I didn't know any

personally until later on in years when they came to the country. They fought the same as we did. ...

SH: Did you have family that worked in any of the war related industries?

FG: Well, in ... Woodridge, ... where they had that Wright's plant, I knew people and some of them were related, I think that worked there, and then Bendix in Teterboro, that kind of stuff, not high up, you know, just working. Some of the ones that didn't make the service or couldn't get in or the older ones like my wife's sister's husband, he was 4F I think, and he worked in munitions and stuff like that, in plants. Those are the kinds of people they had that couldn't go in the service because when I said there was fifteen million in the service, it was practically every eligible man was there, unless he wasn't eligible, because we had a big Army.

SH: It must have been very difficult to find a job when you came back.

FG: Yes, it was because we had a slight recession under Truman the first couple of years. I went to work, I forget the exact timing. ... I don't know if I kept track, I had so many different jobs, I worked for Manhattan Rubber for a while making billiard balls, and I worked in different factories. ... I was a laborer, I wasn't a specialist in anything. Every time I found another job, I heard of another job paying more money, I went to it, so I worked, I didn't even put them down in there, because I worked two months or three months in here, I may have maybe twenty jobs, and after I retired I worked part-time, I retired from my main job in '84, I had a slight heart palpitation, when I was delivering to the food markets. We delivered sneakers from Formosa and different cosmetics, hair lotions and stuff, all this kind of stuff that you found. Today, you find that kind of stuff in the dollar markets, and there were a lot of jobs that I didn't put down because they didn't last long enough.

SH: Were you advised of your GI Bill benefits?

FG: ... You ask those questions that bring it back. I actually went to carpenter school in Newark on the GI Bill. I said, "Someday I'm going to build my house," and I wanted to learn something and they had a masonry, brick laying, and carpentry. So, I chose carpentry, but I didn't like to be a carpenter professionally. So, I'd rather work in a factory which I did, and tend bar at night which made up for the money I couldn't make. I was in a high-income class, but I got by with two jobs. I never missed a payment on my mortgage.

SH: Did you take advantage of the "52/20 Club"? [Editor's Note: The "52/20 Club" was a colloquial term for the unemployment insurance offered through the GI Bill, which provided veterans with twenty dollars a week for up to fifty-two weeks.]

FG: No, that's a regret I had. I was too honest. Some people got jobs under the table so they didn't pay and they joined that and got paid for it and I could have done that, I could have kept off the books, but I was honest and I missed twenty dollars for fifty-two weeks and that was good money, I wasn't making much more than the twenty dollars either at the beginning, but I didn't take advantage of it, that was my fault which I never would have thought about if you hadn't brought it up, but that's part of your job right. ...

SH: What are you most proud of?

FG: Outside of my family, and being the head of a great family, in my estimation not that we did anything great in the world, but I'm proudest of being a good husband, good father, uncle, grandfather, whatever they want to call me, that's my most proud thing. I didn't do anything else proud. ... My service record don't mean that much, I was one of a bunch, did everything asked of me, everything I was told to do, and I guess in the great scope of things, I did my part of it, but to be proud, my position, being a husband, father, grandfather if that qualifies as pride, I don't know there's so many people that got the same orders and after ... my third daughter, that's Annette, my third daughter that was in '56, I think she was born, and ... she never left home, she got two kids of her own, big ones. ... She's got a son younger than Ashley, he's with the fire department in Livingston, and without me they wouldn't be here. So, I think that's the most proud thing I have. Not that I'm not proud of being a marine, but that's done, that was a thing that had to be done.

SH: You have a daughter Linda and a daughter Francine.

FG: Francine, I just spoke to her, she missed me because I was with Annette yesterday, I was supposed to come home from Linda's house, Linda lives in Galloway which is Exit 44 on the Parkway near Pomona, Little Egg Harbor, and Annette lives in Livingston, and Francine I spoke to her this morning, she lives in Oregon, I'll be seeing her again when she comes in June. ... I'll be going there because my second granddaughter Zoey, she's expecting in October, her first child, which will give this child a cousin.

DL: You were married in 1946, after you had come home from the war.

FG: A year later, yes.

DL: You went to business school before or after the war?

FG: ... Before, that's when I got out of high school. I didn't go to high school, I went to business school and studied accounting.

DL: Did you have any plans of picking that back up after the war?

FG: No, I didn't like it and I didn't even have any plans to go to school. ... I say to myself, it was too late for me to go to college because I didn't really excel in the so-called ... academics. Well, I didn't finish high school itself. So, it would have been tougher for me to go through. In fact, when I went through the school in Memphis after being overseas just before I was going to go back and study the ... rockets, ... I wasn't apt in schooling, reading books. I'd read the book and I'd understand it and put the book away, and the next day give me a test on it, I'd fail. It just wasn't there. So, I said why should I waste the government's money going to college, they would have given me something for it, but what was I going to take up? Anyway, I got jobs in factories, and with tending bar between the two, my house is paid for.

SH: You said you recently joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

FG: Veterans of Foreign Wars, right down here. I never was interested, in fact I don't think I'll go to many meetings because all they do is drink--two cans of beer, and I'm finished. ... These guys get a little tipsy and they start slurring their words. I went to a couple of meetings, got a beautiful shuffle board, but nobody is playing, so on my second beer I got up and I'm going to play with the shuffle board. You'd think one of the five guys at the bar would say, "I'll play you," so I'm playing the shuffle board by myself and it gets tiresome walking back and forth to play both ends. ... I used to like it, but if that was better I'd go, but I don't know, I don't think I'll bother with that. I don't need them to drink with.

SH: Is there anything else you would like to share?

FG: ... I had good life I think, I don't know what you're going to put in for the Archives, what ... if anybody in the future is going to be interested in what I did, but it would make interesting reading maybe if you print it up properly, the way I spoke probably wouldn't be too coherent to everybody, but you seem to understand, and if you were going to write something in your own words, I'm sure you'd put it on paper better than I said it. ...

DL: Later in life, you owned a laundry mat.

FG: ... Yes, I even had a bar of my own, I tended bar for people, and I wanted to get started on my own. There was this little bar in Clifton that was for sale, and some real estate man ... [said] you can get into this bar for five hundred dollars. So, I called up and met the real estate [man], and I went down and looked at it. These old people were dying off, and they were selling it. It was a bar with a big shuffle board and a little dining room and a little kitchen owned by a family that had outlived it, and the guy was going to buy it, a rich man in Passaic, ... an Armenian, and he wouldn't buy it unless the bar was, the building had four families upstairs, and he wanted to buy the building because it was a good deal of income, but he wouldn't buy it without having a buyer for the bar. So, he was putting up the money to buy the bar, and he wanted five hundred dollars down. So we made a deal, I took the bar, he took the building, I took care of the building for him, he paid me a little extra for that, I lasted six months, I think. I don't know if I put that down, I probably didn't, it was out of my mind and I worked, but I wasn't making money, and I was putting in like thirteen, fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. So, then he said, the owner, he had a building in Jersey City, with an open store downstairs, a big store, and the laundro-mat people wanted to make a laundro-mat out of it, and he asked me if I was interested in that. So, I said, "I got no money." He put up the money again, how much there was to go into that from the sale of the bar, which I didn't get anything out of it, because I only put in five hundred to start with and after I ... bought this laundro-mat, ... he connected me ... to a dry cleaner in North Bergen, and I could take in dry cleaning and still run the laundro-mat which I did. ... I lasted ten years, most of the money I made profit was from dry cleaning because in those days we were charging like a dollar for a suit, a dollar-and-a-half for an overcoat, but I was making half profit on the washing machines and the laundro-mat. We were charging twenty cents for a wash and maybe I was making a penny on each wash so that was covering the expenses and I kept the kids in school and so forth, and finally I got out of it when I needed new machines, somebody else bought it, and I got out of that, and then, I went back to work in this for

seventeen years. We put in secondary stuff into supermarkets, sneakers that came from Formosa, and fancy shoes for women and children. ...

SH: Where would you go and buy the products from?

FG: Well, they would pick them up and I worked for the guy, we put them into supermarkets. In those days, they may still have some, each supermarket, especially the Pathmarks and Grand Unions and later on when, it was in the '60s, that's when Shoprite came into being, and they had these things at the end of the aisles, and they had trays and you had different sneakers on each tray and we had a time thing on a stand, and we had cosmetics we sold. ... He imported all these from foreign, and we sold it at a commission, we brought it into the stores, he got the store setup, Food Fair, we had a lot of them, and we'd set it up and we'd keep it supplied. My job was to keep it supplied with, sell so many lipsticks, so many nail files, so many sneakers, so many slippers, and every time I brought in a slipper that was charged to the store or a case of slippers, I made 3% on the complete sale, and some sales wound up a thousand dollars. So, I would make thirty dollars, so I made good money there servicing these stores and I did that up until the time I retired, and that was in '84. From then ... on I just went from one job to another just making a few dollars, I don't even know how I put them down on the paper. There were so many of them, but I don't know who would be interested. ...

SH: It is interesting to see the different jobs people work in their lifetimes.

FG: Certain people got through life, how I reached ninety-one?

SH: I think that is something to be written about.

FG: Part of all the different things I did probably kept my mind occupied.

SH: Well, I thank you very much and I am thankful that your son-in-law found the Rutgers Oral History Archives and put you in contact with us.

FG: Well, I'm glad, I don't know what this is going to do for me later on, I mean for you at the Archives, of course. I guess people in the future would read this kind of stuff. It's like a capsule, if you want to read it, you'll read it, if you don't, leave it there.

SH: Well, I thank you again.

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Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 2/7/11