

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RONALD L. LEDWITZ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW BY

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AND

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Ronald L. Ledwitz on March 30, 1998 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Sean Harvey: ... Sean D. Harvey.

KP: And I guess I'd like to begin by asking you something about your father. Particularly, what led him to come to ... the United States?

Ronald Ledwitz: My dad came here in 1910, I believe with his older sister. Her name was Lottie. His father had come some time before. I don't know exactly when. And I believe they originally came to New York City. The other members of the family came at a later point in time. My father had, I think, nine brothers and sisters. I think there was one set of twins. And the ones that survived were as follows: he had three sisters and two brothers and himself. The others passed on. I remember him telling me that he had a brother named Harry who was an avid baseball fan. He was a great baseball player. And at Long Branch, New Jersey, somewhere around 1915/1916 or so, they used to have a medical wagon, horse drawn, that that would circle the streets to see if there was anybody who needed help. And they noticed that Harry was limping. And he had cancer. And they amputated a leg. But he still played baseball until the day he died. My father was born in a place called Minsk, in the province of Slutsk. Now depending on who owned what that would be either Western Russia or Eastern Poland. And Dad came here. And he was, I guess, about fourteen or fifteen years old. We're not sure when Dad was born. Dad was born either 1895/1896. And he went to school up until about the fourth grade. And then my grandfather, who was a pretty tough old buzzard, needed him to help make a living. So Dad was pulled out of school. But he did go to school in New York, to the Baron Von Hurst trade school. And he became a plumber. When World War I broke out in 1914, of course Dad was here. And in 1918 my father was inducted into the United States Army at Red Bank, New Jersey. And Dad was in the service for about two weeks and he was making a phone call to my grandmother. And the sergeant came by and said, "Ledwitz, hang up the phone." And the next thing he knew was that he was on an Indian cattle boat going to France. And they landed in Cherbourg. And he said that first night, there was like a warehouse at the end of the wharf, and they moved into that warehouse. But there was one problem. The tide was out. When the tide came in they had to sort of climb like pegs that were on the side of the wall. Dad was in the artillery. And I remember him telling me one day that he was on ... guard duty during the Battle of the Argonne. And as the wind blew the trees, as they swayed back and forth, and the light of the moon shone, he could see some buttons moving. So he went for his .45. There were only three problems: 1. He didn't know how to use it; number 2. It wasn't loaded; number 3. He didn't have any ammunition. But it was his sergeant. He was drunk. So my father took care of him. And then the next night, as a bonus for saving his life, he put him back on guard duty. But this time he fell asleep. And fortunately it was the same sergeant that came upon him sitting, in a prone position I guess, and he was asleep. And in those days they shot you. But the sergeant didn't shoot him. And he used to tell me that, before they would go over the top, he would play the mandolin. My dad was a musician, fairly talented. He played the violin. He played the mandolin. He used to play the piano of sorts. And I remember him telling me, also, that the Colonel in his unit had a Frenchy in town. And to impress her he would load up his whole regiment on flat cars and they would go into town. And on the way back they were all loaded, except my father, 'cause I don't think my father drank. Or one drink and he was out of it. And many of the men fell off the flat car and unfortunately they were killed. And I remember my father having to deliver letters, to the Post Office, saying that these men were killed in combat. He came back from the war

somewhere around 1919. He wasn't as good a card player as he later became. And they wouldn't let him off the boat because he owed an awful lot of money. So my grandfather had to bail him out. And that was World War I. They moved to Long Branch, New Jersey, sometime, I guess around, with my mother, back to Long Branch, somewhere around 1922. And that's the story of my father up to that point in time.

My mom was born in New York City, in the Bronx, in 1903. My grandfather was a tailor and she earned a scholarship to Hunter College. But he didn't have enough money to clothe her, or he didn't have enough money for car fare to send her downtown. So she never went. And I believe she became a secretary for the Swiss Consul. She married my father when she was eighteen years old. And my first sister came along about a year later. That was Evelyn. 1922. 1924, Rita came along. 1926, Berniece. Or I called her Beanie or Beans, 'cause I could never pronounce Berniece. And I came along in 1933. My father had the three sisters and two brothers. Two brothers lived in Long Branch. One brother, I'm sorry, lived in Long Branch. One lived in Long Island. And one sister lived in Long Branch. And two sisters lived in New York. And we were always very, very close. The Depression was a very, very hard time, I remember. I remember there were times where there was no money in the house. Maybe a dime. And my father would eat on Monday and my mother would eat on Tuesday. But us kids always ate. And he was a pretty good card player. And he would play cards at the Elks. And if he won a buck we'd use it for food. I don't really think he really ever lost. But it was a time when there was absolutely no money. And I don't know whether people can understand that. And it was sort of like the barter system. If you needed a toilet fixed or you need a sink fixed, my father would fix it and then the shoemaker would give us a pair of shoes. Or we'd go to the grocery store and we'd get a loaf of bread. But it was a wondrous time. It was a time where you didn't have to worry about locking your door. And Long Branch, New Jersey was a wonder, wonderful community to live in. And it was sort of segregated in the sense that the Italians and the Jews were in manufacturing. And I guess everybody owned a store. And everybody else, besides the Italians and the Jews, were the politicians. And it was a summer resort. It was really put on the map by President Grant around 1888. There was a Guggenheim estate there, which became President Woodrow Wilson's summer home. The owner of Woolworth's had a summer home there. President Garfield died there after the assassination attempt, somewhere around 1882, I think. And it was a great time to be growing up.

KP: Yes. I mean Long Branch ... I mean it's still a shore community in some ways. I mean it has a big year round population. But I think of ... all those towns. They're wonderful places to visit even today. And they attract large numbers of people. And I imagine in the summer you must have had a lot of fun ...

RL: Well ...

KP: ... on the beaches and so on ...

RL: In Long Branch there were three pool clubs. There was Kramer's on the corner of Chelsea Avenue. And then on that same corner, on the other side, was the Chelsea Pools. And then on the next corner was Wolf's Pools. And I can remember in the late '30s we had this great ... jukebox. And I can remember Ella Fitzgerald singing "A tisket, A tasket." And I remember there was a song that was called "Bei Mir Bist du Schon," which the Andrews Sisters used to sing, which was popular at the time. And I remember members of my family working as locker boys there. And I remember Mr. Wolf, who had one of these, like a French mustache, you know, he looked like Mr. Perot. You

know, he used to wax it. And across the street there was a little restaurant, on the boardwalk, and it was owned by the Arvanitis family. And they were great for salt-water taffy. They went from owning this little restaurant to where their son is probably one of the finest surgeons in the country now. Ciril Arvanitis. And then there was Max's Hotdogs, which are, I guess, world famous. And they were, of course, a nickel at the time. And then a little further ... was a restaurant that the mayor of Long Branch, Mr. Mahr, owned. And then, of course, there was a pier, which they just demolished a couple of weeks ago. Which had been in a state of disrepair after the fire of about ten or twelve years ago. And, of course, there was a Long Branch stadium. And it was a time where ... I guess you would say it was a wondrous time. Where it didn't take too much to be happy. I mean, if the sun shone and the weather was great and you could go down the beach and you could get a hotdog for a nickel, it was a happy time. The movies were, I think, a nickel. And then they went to seven or eight cents. I don't remember. And everybody knew everybody. And now, projecting the future, when I go to the cemetery, it's like our town. I see the shoemaker and I see the butcher and I see the baker. I see my doctor. I see my dentist. And as I walk by, I can close my eyes and I can remember talking to these people as a youngster. My son, whose name is Michael, goes and he looks at the tombstone of his great-grandfather, whose name was Michael also. And he, sort of, it's like a shock, because he can project, you know, what it's going to be like for him. I remember very vividly the beginning of World War II. Being at the Chinese restaurant, Eng's Restaurant. And all of the sudden there was an announcement that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The interesting thing is, nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was. And the rumor mill: they were going to bomb Fort Monmouth the next day. And when I got up that morning and I looked across the street on Long Branch Avenue, we lived at a place called 294, there were military vehicles. There were trucks. I don't remember whether ... And there may have been a tank or two, but I really don't remember. But there were troops all over the street. And we lived on Long Branch Avenue. And then about a mile and a half directly in front of us was Ocean Avenue. But it was a field or woods and the troops moved in. And it became child's paradise because there were gun emplacements and there were trenches and there were command centers. And we played there for years, but we were at war. And I remember going to school that day and saying they were going to draft eight-year-olds because we all wanted to go. And my brother-in-law, Harry, ran down to the recruiting station in Philly and he volunteered for the Air Force. And they took him, but not until the end of the semester. And he went into pilot training. My cousin, who was also at Temple, and was a pre-den, went into the Army. The Army took over Temple University and he went into the Army. And when he graduated they had too many dentists in the Army. So they let him intern at Grasslands Hospital in New York for a year. And then he went into the Coast Guard and they sent him to Greenland. And he basically went nuts. Not really, but, you know, they put him out on an ice flow someplace. And he was a Coast Guard officer.

KP: As a dentist or did he do just regular Coast Guard ...

RL: No. He was a dentist.

KP: He was a dentist.

RL: Right. Then my cousin, Willie, who was the son of my father's older sister, he was basically, legally blind. And he became a guard in Kansas, guarding German prisoners. My cousin Jerry, who was my mother's first cousin, and he had a twin brother. I remember Jerry was in a Rangers unit. He was in the 5th Ranger Battalion. He was at Anzio. He was blown out of a hole there.

They sent him back to England. Took maybe six months to a year to patch him up and then they dropped him behind the line with O. S. S. He married a W. A. C. And when I met him after the war he stammered pretty bad. But he had really been through it. He was a wonderful guy: gentle, kind, considerate. Had a lust for life. Very sensitive man. It's very hard to imagine that somebody with that sensitivity could have done what he had to do during the war. But everybody did what they had to do during that time.

SH: You mentioned a moment ago, you remember where you were for the announcement of Pearl Harbor.

RL: Right.

SH: How did your parents react to that announcement?

RL: My father had served in World War I. And I was hoping that he would go again. Now in 1941 Dad was forty-six and he had four kids. But he went down and he registered for the draft. And I think Dad became an air-raid warden. I'm pretty sure he did. And it was a war that everybody was for. I mean there was a terrible thing that was happening in Europe. I mean, Hitler, well, first he took the... Well, no. First he took, what was it? Alsace-Lorraine first. And then it was the Sudetenland in '38 or the push into Austria. Pretty close. It went one way or the other. And then in '40 he moved into France. And then they had the phony war during that period of time. And then he basically gobbled up all of Europe. And the British had their back to the wall. And, of course, anti-Semitism was running rampant in Europe at that time. Of course, we didn't know how bad it was. And, of course, being of the Jewish faith we were not unhappy to see us go in. It was also a period of hysteria. We didn't incarcerate people German or Italian heritage who were ... I mean, so many of them were good Americans. There were some members who had belonged to the Bund. But we incarcerated Japanese-Americans who were as loyal as any American. And that is really a period, in my judgment, a period of shame. And of course, as you well know, I think it was the 344th Regimental Combat Team, who had more decorations than any other unit in the entire United States Army, or any unit of any service during World War II. And they acquitted themselves very well during the Italian campaign. Of course, we didn't know what was really going on until, the public, until the end of the war. But the government did know. And, of course, there were attempts by Adolph Hitler to get rid of the Jews, not to kill them but to get them out. And they could buy their way out. But there was no country in the world that would take them. And, of course, we all know the story of the steam-ship *St. Louis*, where they tried to dock in Cuba, and they said, "No." They went to the islands. Nobody would take them. And many of those people went back and were exterminated. But they killed a lot of people. They killed everybody: gypsies, Catholics, priests, rabbis. But it was a terrible time.

SH: Did you see any of that anti-Semitism in Long Branch at all or ...

RL: The Ku Klux Klan marched in Long Branch, New Jersey, in 1922. And I grew up in North Long Branch. There weren't too many Jewish families there. There were the Waldmans, the Diamonds, the Mattlaws, the Cohens, and, yes, I was called "Jew-boy", "dirty Jew", "Matzo's, Matzo's, two for five, that's what keeps the Jews alive." I learned how to defend myself at a pretty early age. And these were kids. But I gotta tell ya. It always took more than one to beat me up.

SH: Long Branch had a Jewish-American Democratic Club during that period. Was your father a member of that? Do you recall?

RL: I don't know. There was no, to the best of my knowledge, there was no Jewish-American Democratic Club at all. I mean, my father was a member of the Democratic Party. And he was a friend of Paul Kiernan, who was a politician, and he was a mayor. And Dad always voted Democrat. Maybe that's why I became a Republican. 'Cause I asked him once, "Why?" And he couldn't tell me. So I became a Republican. [Laughs] But I always vote for the man. I even voted for Clinton. Forgive me God.

SH: Do you remember, during World War II, there were a lot of blackouts.

[Tape difficulty]

RL: ... the beach. I gotta tell ya.

KP: But, no. You ...

SH: Yeah. I was going to ask about the coast areas especially, and the rest of the United States, were prone to blackouts. As far as for, like, bombing purposes. How did ... Long Branch feel that?

RL: Oh, you know, you wouldn't put on the lights. And, I guess, you darken the curtains. And Mr. Johnson, the air-raid warden, and maybe my dad, you know, they'd walk up and down. It was an exciting time. We had a victory garden. And as a kid, I mean, it was exciting. It really was. And if you could get caps someplace, 'cause that was really like the black market. I mean, guys who had stashes and stashes and stashes of it, from like '38/'39, make a fortune. And if you had a medal cap pistol that was really a big thing. I remember my grandfather broke a toy rifle right in half 'cause he didn't think I should play with a gun, or a weapon.

SH: Really?

RL: But it was an exciting time. I mean, and we'd go to the movies and we'd see John Payne with Maureen O'Hara. And if you went to see a picture where you were a Marine that day, you wanted to be, then, a Marine. And the next day you went to see the Air Force and ... I mean I still look at these movies today on AMC and it's really a wondrous thing for me. Of course, John Wayne would get up there with a ... 50- caliber machine gun and I don't know how... I tried that. He could kill himself with that. I don't know how he did it. But, I mean, looking back now I realize, I mean, only in the movies, you know. And of course, what was interesting in that period of time: they used to use people of Chinese descent as Japanese soldiers. And they really had to work on them to play those parts. And they really took umbrage to that. But I can remember Corregidor and ... Bataan with Robert Taylor sitting by his grave that he dug with a 50 caliber, water cooled, machine gun going, "Bup, Bup, Bup, Bup, Bup, Bup, Bup." And he went on to become a naval officer. Tyrone Power was a Marine Corp fighter pilot. Glen Ford was a Marine Corp fighter pilot who even went back for 'Nam. Hollywood did go to war. Lou Ayers, who was All Quite on the Western Front, 1930, was a pacifist. And he was a Quaker. And everybody thinks he didn't serve. He did serve. He was in the medical corps without a weapon then, and he was in Italy. And he was really a hero. But nobody ever realized that.

KP: How did you know that he had served?

RL: Well, I ... was a history major and I read historical novels. I mean, like recently I read My American Journey by Colin Powell. Or other books. J. P. Van, America in Vietnam, was my tack officer. I didn't find out 'til 1988 that he was killed in '72. And he was right here.

KP: John Paul Van was ... Who was your tack officer again?

RL: John Paul Van was my tack officer right here.

KP: At Rutgers?

RL: Yeah. I could ...

KP: He was assigned to the ROTC?

RL: Yeah. I have a story to tell you that is incredible.

KP: Well, actually, I normally try to keep it sequenced. But I mean, he's such a ... I had never known that he had been ...

RL: ... You know that book won the Pulitzer Prize.

KP: Yes. ... It's on my bookshelf as a book I have yet to read. But we ...

RL: You want to talk about him? I can give you a...

KP: Well, ... I never knew there was a Rutgers connection to be honest.

RL: Oh, of course! ... His mother was a prostitute. And she remarried and, a husband who really didn't have much of a role, except for a name. And he was befriended by a homosexual Methodist minister from a very aristocratic family in Virginia. And I don't think he ever abused him, but I know, you know, he took him under his wing. And as a result of that John was able to go to college. And he went into the Air Corp during World War II. And he was a hotshot as he was. And, by the way, he looked like a little bantam rooster: crew cut, red neck, sort of pigeon toed, a hundred and fifty pounds. He must have been hyperactive now that I look back. But a wonderful, wonderful guy. And he flunked out of flight school because he did something he shouldn't have. And he became a bombardier navigator. When the service split in 1946 or '48 he opted for the infantry. In 1962 he resigned. And he resigned, allegedly, because he did not agree with the war in Vietnam. But he was our foremost expert in 'Nam. Now the reason he really resigned was because he had a problem. He liked women. And it was just trying to straighten out, I guess, the question of his problems with his mother and, maybe, this minister, and so forth. And he had seduced his baby-sitter in Japan. And he beat the lie detector test. And he went into civilian industry six months later. Tried to get back. Westmoreland wouldn't let him in. The President picked him up as a reserve foreign service officer. And he went on as a regular. And he fought the battle in the central highlands as a major general, equivalent.

KP: Yeah. ... That part I didn't even know. I haven't read the book. But I'm curious 'cause he was at Rutgers. Will you ...

RL: Right. He was ... here. And my entry to Army ROTC... I was in Air Force ROTC, but I wasn't smart enough to ... be a pilot. They figured a bombardier navigator. And they weren't looking for bombardier navigators. And you weren't going to get commissioned right away. You'd have to serve as an enlisted person. So I walked across the street. And we had a Captain Lepski, who was a West Pointer. And he had a cross, rifles, tattooed on his head. And I needed the ninety cents a day to live. To continue school. And I knew I was smart enough to know how to walk. So they took me in the infantry. And my first entrée to John P. Van was sitting at class and he had a stick of dynamite. No. He had a grenade. And he pulled the pin and he said, "Catch." And we thought it was real. I don't remember whether I had an accident or not. [Laughs] But he would do those sort of things. At Fort Bragg, he would take a stick of dynamite, which we thought was dynamite, light it, hold it, and say, "Catch." He was a character.

KP: ... What kind of contact did you have with him at Rutgers? If you could just ...

RL: He was my friend. I worshipped him. And when I tell you he looked like a bantam rooster that's exactly what he looked like. And he was someone you could talk to. And, of course, you know, I loved the army. And he knew that I was thinking of making it a career. And he was there for me. A friend is a friend is a friend.

KP: Although I haven't read the book, I know some of the brief outlines of his career, particularly his role in the Vietnam war, which is widely known. How much of his personal life, at that time, did you know?

RL: Nothing.

KP: Nothing.

RL: Zip.

KP: When did you learn all this other ...

RL: When I read the book.

KP: When you read the book.

RL: I was at Annapolis. I was dating a gal. And I was at a synagogue this one night. And there was a fellow who graduated in '54. Also ROTC commissioned. He said, "You know, John was killed." And I got the book. And I read the book.

KP: What surprised you about the book? 'Cause you got to know him fairly well.

RL: ... His private life. His proclivity. He reminds me of the president. You know, I mean, he couldn't keep his hands off, I guess. He loved women. And I guess, as I understood the book, I

thought that he was trying to prove his own manhood. And remind you his mother was a tough, tough woman. And she was a prostitute. A woman of ill repute. And here this young man had a lust for life. He was always living on the edge. Did you ever go to a roof, I think we all have, probably, and stand and think what it would be like to jump? Or to stand at a railroad crossing, and the train is coming, and you have that, it's a life pull. Flirting with death is probably the most exciting thing that you can do. You try to prove that you're not afraid.

KP: Right.

RL: I know that I went into the infantry because that was the macho thing to do. I joined a Ranger unit because I wanted to prove I wasn't afraid. The same way that I have a fear of heights, but I would get up on the roof to show my son that I, you know. But I would hug the wall there, you know, by the window. But I wanted to show him that you could overcome your fear. And John was always testing himself. He always wanted to prove to everybody who he was. And he would do things out of ... the norm. Now he had the equivalency in grade to a Major General. Now during the war in Korea he should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor. 'Cause he went up in a plane and he was sticking his head and his body, like holding on to the struts, dropping supplies to our troops. And he was dropping grenades on the enemy. I don't remember exactly what decoration he got, but he should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was smart, too.

KP: You mentioned that he would throw, you know, he would ...

RL: Yes.

KP: ... He would throw live grenades.

RL: Yes. It's been a while since I ...

KP: What else would he do in the classroom and what would he tell about his experiences? 'Cause it sounds like he didn't talk a lot about his ...

RL: Ah! You just hit the nail on the ... I remember! You remember the Battle of Dien Bien Phu? With the French?

KP: Yes.

RL: His feeling was that ... I guess, his philosophy was very much like the British. A British soldier is trained that that's what he is. And they can sit on a hillside forever. And if they're gonna die, they're gonna die, and that's it. I mean, that's what they prepared themselves for. Maybe, in the sense, like a Japanese soldier during World War II. John felt that at Dien Bien Phu they should have fought to the death. Now what happened at Dien Bien Phu is that the Vietcong trucked, or manually pulled, their cannons, their weapons, up the slopes. And Dien Bien Phu was a valley, like this. And it was the same philosophy that the colonial French had, that the French had, on the Maginot Line. That it was invincible. Once they got the height, which is the same thing that happened in Lebanon, going back where we lost two hundred seventy-three gyreens. They just rained down. And they couldn't get supplies in there. And they died. And that was the end.

KP: ... Did he ever talk about his experiences in World War II or Korea to you?

RL: All I know, I mean, John presented himself, I mean, he was the Captain.

KP: He was the ...

RL: He was the instructor. He was the ... He would never say anything negative, but he was a hellion. I mean ... he loved us and we loved him. And that's one thing about the military ... These are guys that, it's not that you're just gonna bend an elbow with 'em, they're gonna die with you, maybe, someday.

KP: From what you've described of him he seemed to have wanted to instill a real, you know, a...

RL: He was gung-ho.

KP: Right.

RL: Yes. Yes. That's it. I mean, look, I know what happened with me. I was fifty-seven when I went back. I mean, I would go back now if they'd let me because it's the only time I ever felt alive.

KP: Really? I just couldn't resist. Was he at Rutgers the whole time you were in ...

RL: To the best of my knowledge.

KP: Okay.

RL: I wouldn't swear to it. It's a funny thing for an infantry officer. I'm a great dancer. I really am. But I always would get out of step. And if I was marching in front of somebody I was in good shape. If I ever had to get out in front, in that first line, I was a dead man. And I remember being at Fort Jackson with General Armando A. Costello. And I had a major whose name was Sweat ... and he was out of step so I got out of step. He didn't get into trouble. I did. And he said, "You see that Lieutenant? Don't ever let him march again." And I never did. So that was pretty funny. But I could... That book is ... a very good book.

KP: Yeah. It's one I keep meaning to read. But I never knew there was a Rutgers connection with John Paul Van.

RL: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I ... can review the book. I remember everything about John. I remember being with him. I particularly remember the episode at Fort Bragg. And I remember the class room episodes. He really loved his family. But he was always trying to prove something. I guess, maybe it's the Napoleonic syndrome, you know. If somebody, as I say this I'm only five foot six and a half, maybe a little shorter now. But if you're tall, when you walk into an office, you have a new position, and you're tall and you're good looking, people automatically make the assumption that you can do. And then they find out you're an idiot. [Laughter] When you're short of stature ... they don't look at you the same way. You have to prove yourself as to who you are and what you are. But, in many ways, that's a good thing. Especially if you function in an environment where

you're not really who you're suppose to be.

KP: ... Going back to World War II and growing up. You mentioned, in many ways, having the Army set up all these facilities right after Pearl Harbor was just great as a child.

RL: Oh, yes! Yes.

KP: How long was the Army patrolling the area around Long Branch?

RL: Oh, for, I would say, for a couple of years. They used to have amphibious landing on the beach in North Long Branch. And our school was on Church Street and Atlantic Avenue. And the next street was, I guess, Ocean Avenue. And the troops used to come in right there. And right in the back of our playground they used to come into a very small field. Maybe the length of this building and half as wide. And they would have trucks there. And we always used to watch the soldiers, with their old canvas leggings and their round steel pot. But they were there for quite a period of time. And, of course, we had Fort Hancock there which was an artillery or coastal artillery ...

KP: Right.

R.L: ... Guarding New York Harbor. Weapon was never fired in anger, of course. And now that's part of the park system, Sandy Hook. And troops were all over the place. It was interesting. I remember there were two Negro cops.

KP: In Long Branch?

RL: Yes. Mooney and, don't remember the other gentleman's name. And Mooney's son was, who also became a police officer later, but then left, he was a football hero, too. And a couple of southern crackers made some remarks about these gentlemen. They were really fine guys. And they ran after these two guys and they got 'em. And they beat the living daylights out of them. And they deserved it. I mean, they were really bad people. But it was also a time, we were segregated, you know. African-Americans went upstairs. We went downstairs in the theaters.

KP: In the movie theater in Long Branch?

RL: Yes. And we had an African-American maid, who I loved dearly. Her name was Elizabeth Lane. And I remember as a child, my mother paid her twenty-five cents a day. And she ate with us. And we gave her food. Things were pretty tough for us, too. And her son was killed in Italy. And her husband had died, also. He was killed during Prohibition. And she was alone. And I always said that when I grew up I was going to build a statue of Abraham Lincoln for her. Never did. But she was a wondrous lady.

KP: Go ahead.

SH: Do you remember bond or scrap drives at your school or home?

RL: Oh, sure. Oh, absolutely. We had a victory garden, to start it off, on the corner. And old Mr.

Price had been a Marine during World War I. His son, Frank, was a Marine during World War II. Kenny, I think, was in the Army and Richard was in the Navy, I think. ...Or the Air Force. I'm not sure about that. I remember their daughter Betty died. She had rheumatic fever and she died of a heart attack when she was in her, I think, early twenties. During the war, I remember their dog, Red, died. He was a beautiful Irish setter. And we buried him on the side of the garage. My dog, Rex, served in the Coast Guard in the Canine Corp. And, I think, we originally gave him to the Army. And then my mom was afraid to take him back at the end of the war.

KP: But he came home?

RL: He came home. And I remember, I remember very vividly, he was shot. He was shot. But he wasn't shot in combat in the stricter sense of the word. He went to Mr. Naylor's chicken coop, who was a police officer, and killed a couple of chickens. So he shot him. And Dad had him operated on. I think Dad just about passed out in the operating room of old Dr. Combs. And then we gave him to the Coast Guard. But it broke my heart. He was my dog.

KP: But Rex came home?

RL: He came home.

KP: Where had Rex been in the Coast Guard?

RL: I guess, along the coast here. I don't think he went overseas.

KP: He didn't go overseas. [Laughter]

RL: I don't think so. I'm not sure to be ... but, I don't think so.

KP: Yeah. But nonetheless he was away from home?

RL: He was away from home.

KP: Did he recognize you when he came home?

RL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. My grandfather, who lived in New York, who had one leg, by the way, we went to pick him up and [Rex] didn't recognize us at first. And then he did. I got goose pimples now. And I remember he looked at my grandfather, you know, to lick him and to, you know, to show him that he remembered. He was a wonderful, wonderful dog. My best pal.

SH: Do you remember any reports of submarines sinking any ships along the coast of Long Branch?

KP: Or did you ever see any?

RL: Well, I remember. I think it was in '42, a couple of German spies landed in Long Island. And they were executed. And, I think, later on, there were two spies that were caught and they were ... sentenced to death. But their sentences were commuted. And I think that I remember, it's no, what

I just remembered now, but in that book, The First Year of the Atomic Age. I think that was in the book and I just skimmed right through it. But I do remember those ... six Nazis that were executed. Yes. And, of course, there were blackouts because we were afraid of the submarines. And submarines ... sunk shipping right off, you know, the Jersey coast here.

KP: But you never, actually yourself, saw any ships ablaze in the water.

RL: No.

KP: No.

RL: No. No. I mean I remember the newsreels and that.

KP: Yeah. But not from the water.

RL: And that's what I really miss when I go to the movies now. The news reels, you know, and the Path News. And the guy going around. Or Paramount.

KP: ... Were you scared at all? Particularly in the opening months of the war ...

RL: No.

KP: ... When we were losing.

RL: No. No.

KP: You weren't scared with all this military ...

RL: No. Because I knew we were gonna lick 'em. I mean, I had no concept of what fear was. I had no concept of dying or anything else like that.

KP: What about your classmates? Were they all as confident and as calm?

RL: Nah. I mean, we were kids and we now played soldier. And it was a wondrous time, I mean, I have to tell you. And of course, we'd go to the movies. And we'd see Bataan and Robert Taylor would get killed. And then there was also another movie, with Harry Carey, and it was ... an Air Corp movie. And they were going to the Pacific and they wound up in the Philippines. And I'll think of the name probably after I get home. And then I'll just call you. Or I'll just ...

KP: Or you can just add it, eventually, to the transcript.

RL: Yes. Okay. Well, of course, there was Wake Island with Brian Donlevy. And, oh, God, it's an actor ... A great actor. And he committed suicide. And he played the part of a construction foreman. A civilian who stayed at Wake Island. Bill Bendicks was in it. Robert Preston was in it. Albert Decker was his name, if I remember correctly. And that's a great movie. Have you seen any of these?

KP: Some of these I have. Some of these I've seen or I've seen ...

R.L: Sergeant York. World War I with Gary Cooper and Teresa Wright. Great movie. Of course there was a movie with Charlie Chaplin. The Little Fuhrer or...

KP: I think, The Great Dictator.

RL: The Great Dictator with Paula Goddard, I think. And then there was ... Jack Benny played in the movie where he took the part of a Nazi SS officer. But it was a comedy. And I think Mary Livingston was in it. I'm not sure. Either Mary Livingston or Carol Lombard. I think it was Carol Lombard, who was the wife of Clark Gable. Who was killed in a plane crash in 1942 or '43, coming back from a bond drive.

KP: ... You have very fond memories of the movies. What about radio?

RL: Well, as a kid we had a Philco radio that we got from my uncle, who owned Eagle Tire Company. And that was in the living room. And I would sit next to that. And let's see, there was The First Nighter. There was the Lux Radio Theater. There was The Shadow. There was The Green Hornet. During the day, when I would stay home, there was Our Gal Sunday, Ma Perkins. There was The Lone Ranger. There was Jack Armstrong. Little Orphan Annie. And, of course, if you bought cereal or whatever, you'd have this... Oh, Dick Tracy, I guess. And they would have, you know, Dick Tracy rings and a badge. And of course, you would go to Light's, which was a toy store and they would have, you know, like a policeman's kit. It would be a little hat with a peak, which was made out of cardboard, and a Sam Brown Belt, and a little holster and gun. Pistol. Weapon. Which is an Army thing. You never call it a "gun" 'cause then you would do seven million push-ups. [Laughter] And there was a, you know, they have a Mountie police suit or something like that. And I remember only once in my life did I ever steal anything. My friend, Bobby Perry, had a lot of trucks. And he and my friend, Tommy Brooks ... Tommy Brooks and I went into his back door, there was like a little pantry, and we swiped a couple of trucks. We all gave 'em back the next day. And I must've been five. And never ever did I ever do anything again. And I swear to God. And that's not bad for a Jewish boy. I mean, I take it whenever I can get it. So now I've admitted to a crime. I hope I don't go to jail now. [Laughter] ... God, that was sixty years ago.

SH: You said, before, that your mother served as a secretary of the Swiss Consulate. And, of course, they were neutral during the war. How did that affect your views at home, if at all?

RL: Well, she worked for them when she was a young girl.

SH: Oh, Okay.

RL: Back in, you know, maybe 1917/1918. Had no effect. I remember she just ... Either my mother told me or my sisters told me, but I know she did that as a young girl. But it's a shame that she didn't go to college.

----- END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE -----

RL: ... But it was, you know, that old mind set that the son goes to college and the daughters become housewives. And to this day my sisters still talk about it. And I think that's one thing they still can't really forgive my father and mother for.

KP: For that mind set?

RL: Yes. ... Yes. That's right. I mean, they loved them dearly and we're a very close knit family. And just before I came here... There is a note when my mom died in '83. She died in my car. And a friend of my sister's wrote a note about us and what a wonderful lady she was. And she always used to say, "Nobody takes your good name. You give it away." And in Long Branch, New Jersey, to this day, we still have that good name. So whatever you do in this life, just make sure that you're not ashamed of it.

KP: You mentioned the scrap drives and the bond drives. I think they were very important for your school and your community. Did you do them through the school or...

RL: Well, we, at school, we had a stamp drive. Where, you know, you bought books of stamps. If I remember. And then we had bond drives. And I remember my best friend's father, Sam Waldman, had a gas station. And he used to buy a lot of bonds. And we tried to buy as many as we possibly could. You know, there was twenty-five dollar bonds and fifty and a hundred and so forth. But there were also bond drives where the Hollywood stars would get on a train and they would canvas the country. I mean, like Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. And Jerry Colona. By the way, whose son was killed during World War II. And Danny Kaye, for example. Frank Sinatra. Dinah Shore. Claire Trevor. I'm trying to think. And there's one other one. She was a singer with Bob Hope. I don't remember, but I'll think of it. Yeah. It was important because we were doing our bit. Just as the victory garden or the fact that we had a star. You know, I guess, if you had somebody serving in the ... I don't mean a gold star either. Nobody wanted that. But we were all ... very proud to be doing our part. And of course, you know, the news reel clippings, as they started to come in, you know, we realize what a monster that we were fighting. And that it was a terrible time. I mean, you know, it would show the Blitz and how lucky we were. Today we're not going to have that luxury.

KP: You mentioned that your brother-in-law, it sounds like, who you looked very much up to as an older brother ...

RL: Yes. Love him to pieces.

KP: You mentioned that he was involved, I mean, there was very active Bund activity in this part of the country: New Jersey/ New York region. And you mentioned that he was, in a sense, fighting the Nazis before the war.

RL: Yes. That's a very good question because when Harry came from the war he went into the clothing business with a GI Loan, a prayer, and a shoestring. And they gave him a thousand bucks. And he opened up a little store in Asbury Park, directly across the street from the YMCA. And this big guy came into the store and really was breaking his chops. And Harry was a boxer at Temple University. And he didn't take anything from anybody. And if I can digress for a minute. I remember on like the day or two that he came back from the service, he walked into the Strand

Theater in Long Branch with my sister and my kid sister, Beanie, and myself. And Harry, who is very demonstrative, put his arm around my kid sister. In 1945 Beanie must have been eighteen/nineteen years old. And somebody turned around and said, "You let that Jew bastard put his arm around you but not me?" And the guy stood up. And he made the mistake of taking a swing. And Harry almost knocked his head off. He just hit him once, on a button, and he lifted up and the guy went right across the seat. And if my sister didn't stop him, I think, he woulda killed him. And I remember him saying that he fought for his country for four years or five years and he didn't have to take that kind of crap, excuse me, from anybody. Now, moving forward to a year or so later. This guy came in, and really was breaking his chops. And he says, "Don't worry about him." He says, "We're friends." And they were a group of Jewish athletes in Philadelphia who used to go into the Bund meetings. And when they began to sing "Duetchland uben Alis" they would take beer bottles and break it over a guy's head. And they would completely disrupt these terrible people. And then they would run out and the Bund members would come after them. And they became so notorious that the Bund had a hit order on them. And these kids began to carry weapons because there was a death notice on these kids. And a Bund member would come up, say to my brother-in-law, say, "Where did those Jew bastards go?" And he'd say, "That way," when they went the other way. But ...

KP: What was the name of the organization?

RL: ... I haven't got a clue. I mean, that's as much as I remember. I was like twelve years old and I worked for my brother-in-law. He wasn't a great payer, I mean, a dollar a day, and I cleaned the shelves. And he gave me car fare to get from Asbury Park to Long Branch. But it was for my brother-in-law and we were very close. I remember when he came home from the war.

KP: Now, your brother-in-law. ... You showed us earlier his scrapbook. The scrapbook you kept during the war.

RL: Yes. Yes.

KP: You very much followed his activities.

RL: Oh, yes. He was my general. He was it.

KP: And he started out in pilot ...

RL: Pilot training. Wiped out. And then he became an enlisted man.

KP: Now you mentioned that he had learned how to fly before the war.

RL: That's right.

KP: And how did he learn how to fly?

RL: He took lessons.

KP: Okay.

RL: Didn't do much good, but it probably saved his life.

KP: Right. Because you mentioned that he washed out through no fault of his own. That, in fact, he ...

RL: He said it was the saddest day of his life. Especially when he walked the ... he trooped the line. You know. But I'm sure that it saved his life.

SH: Did he influence your decision to join the Air Force ROTC?

RL: No. He hates the military. He hates the military, probably because he wiped out. His little brother-in-law became an officer. Of course, as years go by, things change. I mean, I still care about him a great deal. We are not as close as we used to be. But, having to deal with me for sixty or seventy years, I can sort of understand that. But he's a wonderful, seriously, he's a wonderful, wonderful guy. And my sister, as a youngster, looked just like Olivia De Havlin. Probably one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen in my life. Not that I'm prejudice, but I am. If you don't believe me you can ask my mother, but she's not here.

KP: ... Because he washed out, what ... happened to him?

RL: He became a radio operator and gunner. And I remember him telling me the story that my sister followed him to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. And I don't think they'd ever seen a Jew before, there. And, of course, my brother-in-law is blond, blue eyed. My sister looks like anybody else. And especially since she is a Russian Jew, I don't know if you're aware of this, but there's a historian by the name of Vernadsky. Russian History. Are you familiar with him? The ... Yale University Press and I was ... I studied a professor by the name of Aloff. The Russian Jew was not a Semitic person. The Russian Jew was convert to Judaism in the year 860 A. D. There are ten or eleven tribes in Russia. And they decided to send emissaries to the West, to Germany, to study Roman Catholicism, and to Constantinople to study Greek Orthodoxy, and to Jerusalem to study Judaism. And the Khazar tribes and the Khagan decided to convert to Judaism where the others converted to ... Greek Orthodoxy. The Russian Jew is no different than any other Russian. And we were pagans. So we're not a Semitic people and we're converts. But it's hard to tell. But, anyway, he would sneak out of the compound at night to see my sister. And he forged passes. And then at the end of the night he would take a bus to a certain spot and as the troops would be marching in from field activity he would just tag on. Well, he got caught. And they threw him in the can. In a cell. And fortunately there was a toilet there. And he had all these ... The guy said, "Empty your pockets." And he had the dummy passes tied up in a hanky. And he threw that. And he said, "Put your snot rag back in." And when they weren't looking he ripped them up and flushed them down the toilet. When his unit moved out he was in jail, not for very long, maybe a day. And he told everybody ... that my sister was pregnant. And then that commanding officer and his troops moved out. So he was saved. But then shortly thereafter he went overseas. And he was North Africa. He was in the China/ Burma/ India theater. He was in Italy.

SH: Before he left, you had said, he was in the South. Did he face any of the common misconceptions about Jews about horns and things like that?

RL: I don't know. Harry always acquitted himself very well. I mean, he became an insurance man with New England Life, when there weren't any Jews in the main office when he started back in the '50s. ... And today he's one of their most trusted and most successful retired agents. His sons are in the business. They have the Berger Financial group now. Times have changed.

KP: How much did he tell you of the war and his experiences? Like when did you, for example, learn about him breaking up Bund meetings and how much did you learn...

RL: 1946 was that. I don't know when he told me. I guess at family functions he would tell me about the funny things. Only the funny things. He told me about being in North Africa. And they were selling black market goods. Cigarettes, I guess. And the MPs came up and they were just looking to buy a pack of cigarettes, or something, too. British MPs I think it was. I guess through the years they would talk. And there's a lot of nostalgia there. But you have to remember it was a war worth fighting. There was no division in this country. Really.

KP: 'Cause I'm curious how much ... I mean, what did he tell you when you were very small. Particularly in the letters he wrote home and if he ever got back on leave.

RL: You want me to read 'em?

KP: Yes. Actually, that would be great. I'd be curious what he ... actually said.

RL: Okay. I think this thing weighs more than I do. I'm pretty sure that these letters, to the best of my knowledge, according to their post mark date. I have two here. One is May, 21, 19... It looks like 1945. And one is November 7, 1944. It says: PFC Harry W. Berger and his serial number. And it says Miami Beach. And it says: to Master Ronald Ledwitz, 294 Long Branch Avenue, New Jersey, U. S. A. And it was passed by U. S. Army Examiner 06441.

Somewhere in Angola, Egyptian Sudan.

"Dear Ronnie,

I've been meaning to write you for some time. However, it seems that your lovely sister takes up all my time, which leaves my other correspondence quite in the lurch. Today though, I find myself ... not the least bit sleepy when after writing Evy. So here goes. As you can tell by the heading I have now left the Gold Coast and am on my way east. My eventual destination is the Aden Protectorate in Saudi Arabia. Evy will show you that on the map. Right now I'm in the heart of the desert, and only because we had a little engine trouble with our plane. I showed it to you once. It's a C-46 and you'll find it in the aircraft identification book I sent you."

[Addressing Kurt and Sean]: That's what you looked at.

"Fortunately the trouble occurred before we took off. You'd have liked the Gold Coast. It was quite exciting. For one thing you'd have gotten a big kick out of the natives. How they lived, how they fished, and the way they spoke. Little boys in that part of Africa, ranging up to about thirteen, don't wear any clothes whatsoever. Some wear the leaves of loin clothes. The girls wear something, usually a white piece of sackcloth wrapped around them. They live in thatched huts like

in the card I sent you. ... The main means of livelihood is ... fishing. And they do that with the most primitive of methods. They have these huge nets that native boats take out a ways. Then the ends, which have long ropes tied to them, are brought above. Here seated on the sandy beach with each rope are about twenty-five natives who, very slowly, while chanting in deep, chesty voices, "pull in the nets." It's all done to rhyme. A very curious thing I notice is that these twenty-five natives, who are seated ... in the following order: first the big, husky, perfectly build blacks; as they go back they get older and slighter; and the last one is usually very old and decrepit. The young blacks do all the work. In the meantime there are similar groups pitching up and out the other ends of the net. Little boys are always swimming and riding the surf more like little fish than people. Their skin is shinny black and they laugh and sing and have a grand time. The beaches are a lot like ours except the coconut trees are all around us. They're quite beautiful. When I come home I'll tell you about how they're educated, the food that they eat, and some of ... their religious beliefs and superstitions. Our camp was a few miles inland and we lived good and had more comforts that one would think. Have you ever heard of a red ant? The kind that are suppose to be meat-eating ... I've seen lots of them there and they are truly amazing. They build huge anthills, sometimes as high as a man, and the hills are tunnel rooms, families, and eggs. They pull in the food ... that they eat and they work hard all day long. I believe they are the most diligent of all insects. Oh, I forgot, the natives keep clean by scrubbing themselves with muddy sand, then washing it off in the ocean. It does a much better job than soap. However, it does not remove BO. Up in Casablanca I met lots of Arabs. Golly. They're the dirtiest people in the world. They cheat and steal and they can't be trusted."

RL: Maybe I shouldn't read this.

"I much prefer these natives. There is lots more that I want to tell you, but it will have to wait. Lights are soon going to be turned out and I must start closing. ... I'm making a collection of foreign coins and currency for you."

[Addressing Kurt and Sean]: Now that's what I gave you.

"I'll try and have some Italian, French, English, Indian, Egyptian, and Arabic money before I'm through."

RL: And he was able to do that. So you looked at those coins and you looked at the tobacco pouch that is sixty-some years old I got from my grandfather.

KP: As a young boy growing up that must have been awfully exciting.

RL: It was. It was an exciting time, as you can see. I mean, there's a lust for life, you know, in my memories. And I'm excited. And I sort of get emotional because I remember how it was when I read this. And this is taking me back in time. And I haven't looked at this in years. I just happened to go through this last night. It'll take a little time though, so be patient.

"This desert is horrible. In the daytime it gets as high as a hundred-and-fifty in the shade. At night it's cool and beautiful. Haven't seen any sand storms yet and I hope I won't. They are pretty rough. From the air it looks beautiful. From the ground it's sometimes frightening. Good night now Ron. Take it easy and be good. Don't aggravate mom. Help her out. Give my regards to Pop, Daddy,

and the family. How about giving Evy a kiss for me? What say?

Love, Harry.

Your letters are great. Write more."

RL: And as we got on I was able to read his writing a little better.

KP: How did your sister cope with having your ...

RL: Brother-in-law?

KP: Yes. Your brother-in-law.

RL: Well, they had a love affair that you could probably get in the movies. He sold his bike when he first took her out. He had, I guess like, an old, beat up old car that he took her out. And I remember that was when we lived on Long Branch and Chelton Avenue. Don't remember the street here. And we had a driveway that ... bisected our block. And back of that driveway were woods. And Evy and Harry parked the car one night. And my father, of course, a pretty tough guy, and he said, "You know you shouldn't do that." And my sister said, "Whatever we can do [after] twelve o'clock ... we can always do before." Which meant that they didn't do anything. And to this day, in their seventies, you walk in their house and they'll be making out on the couch. I'm tellin' ya. I mean, I've never seen anything like it in my life. For a guy who's been married three times. [Laughs] Do you want me to read the other one?

KP: Absolutely. It'd be good if you could.

RL: Okay. This one's dated May 21. I'm sure my brother-in-law, with his ego ...

KP: May 21, which ...

RL: I think it's 1945.

"Dear Ronnie,"

RL: Yeah. May 18, 1945

"I just received your letter today. I'm answering at once. As you see I'm printing, just as you asked ... me to."

RL: So you understand why I had trouble reading.

"In a little while, perhaps a day or so, I'll be leaving here. Evy knows where I'm going so she'll tell you. I'll try and get some pictures that you may like while I'm on my way. We're travelling by plane. I prefer, myself, to boat. Boats get me seasick. You asked me whether I thought Hitler was dead. Personally Ron, I don't think it matters. The harm he has done will never be detracted from whether he's dead, living, or otherwise. Torturing him would only be lowering ourselves to his

warped and perverted level. Perhaps it's best that he's disappeared from the face of the earth. The most important thing now is never to allow anyone, or any people, to cause such unhappiness again. But, perhaps I'm getting too serious. Why don't you tell me of the things you do in your spare time? I'll bet you'll be glad when June 15th rolls around? Are you going to take a locker this year? Where? Have the gang from New York come down yet? How's mom and dad? The rest of the family? Has Rita had her baby yet?"

RL: That's Bobby, who's now in her fifties.

"Thanks for telling me how pretty Evy looked in her new suit and rain coat. You know how I like to hear those things. Give her my love, huh? I must close now Ron.

Love, Harry

My best to everyone."

RL: So the war had just ended. What was it, May 12th? Something like that. So the war had been over like six days.

KP: Right. Where was he then, when he wrote that? Or does it indicate?

RL: Yes, Aden, Arabia. Where he said he was going in November. And I remember he came home. 'Cause he had been... And I remember that night. We had just sold our house on Long Branch Avenue. My father got \$12,000.00 for it. It cost him about \$5000.00. It was a tremendous amount of money. Three months later the house went for \$22,000.00 if the new owner wanted to sell it. We moved to Joline Avenue. And Evy painted the one room that we had. This was a way stop until we moved into our new home. Which was reconstructed to a three family, you know, three level house. Humongous. That my father converted into three apartments, you know, each level. And we did that primarily so Evy and Harry could have an apartment. And we were all going to wait up for him. And my sister said, "Absolutely not." And they shared their first night together. I remember that.

KP: ... He mentioned in the letter that ... Were you going to take a locker? And that the gang from New York. Who's...

RL: Right. ...My Aunt Evelyn and my Aunt Bess would come down and stay at, well, this one summer, it had to be '45, because that was the year Bess Myerson won the Miss America contest. And I can remember opening up the centerfold of the New York Daily News and seeing her in a white bathing suit, sitting on a diving board, you know. You know, sitting down with her legs up, like that. And if you check the archives that's exactly what you'll see. Who knew later on that she would get into so much difficulty? And they took the Johnson house. And that was my Aunt Bess and Carol. They had one child. And then my aunt and Allen. And that was the summer. And I remember when the war was over and we all ran down town. I mean, we had a victory celebration.

KP: For both V-E Day and V-J Day?

RL: It must have been V-J Day that I remember. Yes. It was over.

KP: What would they tell you at school about the war?

RL: I don't, I don't remember. I don't remember that. I just remember what I did and what I saw. I would think that it may have been discussed. And maybe not. ... I think that the teachers were too provincial. It was something that they probably felt that kids really didn't have to know about. But I do remember when the pier at Earl blew up. And I was in seventh grade. So that had to be 1945. Ammo ship ... blew sky high and windows got blown out all over. And I also remember that the British Navy was in ..., come to think of it at the Berkley Carterette. And at the Monterey. And they were taken over by the government. And the Russian Navy came in. And my Uncle Jack Brodsky had a kosher restaurant on Chelsea Avenue in Long Branch. Prior to the Depression he owned a hotel and they lost that. They got a rooming house and everybody in the family worked there. And being of Russian descent the Russian Navy came there. And all the very wealthy Jewish people from New York used to come down, during the late '30s and the '40s, to go there. And during the war he was making thirty grand a year. ...I mean, do you have any idea what that is today? You know, it's got to be in the six figures or God knows what. But it was really a wondrous time. And something else that I forgot to tell you was that on that pier that they just demolished, there was a guy named Red Skeleton, who used to stay at my aunt's house. And we had his trunk. And my father and my uncle used to feed him. And the day that I was circumcised ... Is that okay to say? Red Skeleton hopped a train to California, and the rest is history.

KP: Yes.

RL: Okay. He hopped a freight to California. And I had a cousin by the name of Stanley Ledwitz, who was a football player, and he had a brother named, Jules. And they went West. Stanley went out in 1929 in his 1928, yellow Buick convertible, and became a movie actor with Educational Films Company. And he always played an Arab. And then he went on to get work from Columbia pictures and was put in charge of their wardrobe department. In 1933 he was fired. Now what does a poor Jewish boy who only went up to the ninth grade do? He decided to go into the insurance business with a company called Prudential. But just to make sure he could make a living he also went into real estate. And when I was out in California in '88, and I hadn't seen Stanley in forty-eight years, I said, "Where did you sell real estate?" And he said, "A little town called Beverly Hills." And the rest is history. He was one of the owners of the New Frontier Hotel in Vegas. Until the boys said to him, "You know, Stanley, we really like your business. But we want you to sell your interest in New Frontier to this guy named Howard Hughes, who's a friend of yours." And Stanley said, "I don't want to sell." He said, "Stanley, I understand you like to do gardening." And he says, "Yeah." He said, "Well, how would you like to be planted with your flowers?" So he sold. And he was a friend of Sammy Davis. And he used to play golf with Gary Cooper, horseback riding with Gary Cooper, Tyrone Power. That sort of thing.

KP: ... When did you join the Boy Scouts?

RL: Well, I was a Cub Scout first. And then I joined Troop 33. I don't know, in what you started. And my Scout Master's name was Goldberg. And I guess, it was at the Jewish Community Center. It was a Jewish troop, I guess, primarily. ... But I guess anybody could join. And we used to go camping. And I was a Tenderfoot. And then a 2nd Class. And then a 1st Class. And then a Star. And then a Life Scout. And I never made Eagle Scout. Probably the story of my life. 'Cause I

never made full colonel either. Just like colonel, you know. But I think ... And that bothered me for a long time. I gotta tell you. But I like it.

KP: You came pretty close to being ...

R.L: Well, a miss is as good as a mile. I mean ...

KP: Right.

RL: I should have brought something. Like I graduated in the upper seventeen percent of the Command and General's Staff College. And at that point, you know, I never ... had a paid slot in the Army once I became a captain. And I remember at the Command and General's Staff College, in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, ... Can I use profanity?

KP: Go ahead. Oh, yes.

RL: I said to this light colonel, who was a reservist, who was an instructor, I says, "You know the problem with you stupid bastards is that there's never a slot for me. Why?" And I was so bad that they took me back, at fifty-seven, for Desert Storm. So look what they missed.

KP: I'm eager to ask you about going back to Desert Storm, but ...

RL: That is a story in itself. I took on the whole United States government. [Laughter]

KP: ... Were you a Cub Scout while the war was going on?

RL: I guess so. Yeah. I was also a lousy football player. I remember my sister, Rita, bought me a helmet for \$1.99. She bought me shoulder pads for maybe \$3.99. And football pads. No matter how much equipment I got I couldn't throw the ball. I couldn't tackle. And I was always the kid that sat on the bench. I was really a klutz. I gotta tell ya. I mean, if I tried to hit the ball, I think I missed. Even in baseball. I just was not athletic.

KP: Okay.

RL: But things turned. As I grew older I did other things, you know, the military. I guess much of it was trying to prove that I could do it.

KP: I'm curious. Did you do anything with the Bot Scouts war related? Any bond drives? Or Cub Scouts? Any ...

RL: I know that we collected the cans. And nylons were collected. Paper was collected. Toys that, you know, that were metal. And I don't remember anything as... Tin pots, I guess. You know, stuff. Nothing was thrown away. Absolutely nothing. And there were black outs at night. And, as I said, the air raid wardens. And, I mean, you sit on the floor and you would listen to the radio. And it's amazing what your mind could see.

KP: Right.

RL: I mean our mind was our television set.

KP: What about Memorial Day and Armistice Day. They must have meant a lot different things...

RL: Before the war. Before the war. Let's say 1938/39. That meant that the Spanish-American War was in 1898. And Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill. And the blowing up of the *Maine*. Which was really a boiler blow up. That's exactly what happened. I'm sure we're all aware of that. I remember those veterans going up on the stage with their blue shirts and their khaki leggings and their khaki pants. And a guy blowing the bugle. And they were old men. They were probably younger than I am right now.

KP: But they looked old?

RL: Yes.

KP: To you. A young boy.

RL: Yeah, well, I mean, I look in the mirror now and I say to myself, "Well, all I have to do is this. I need my ears, a little bit. And if I do this. I need a hair transplant. I'm gonna fix my nose. The rings under my eye." 'Til I lost weight I also needed a breast reduction and a tummy tuck. But I don't need that now 'cause I weigh less than I was when I was eighteen.

KP: And then the war comes along. And what happens to Veteran's Day and Memorial Day?

RL: Well, we were all very patriotic. I don't remember any parades. I just don't. I remember going to the North Long Branch school. And the Spanish-American war veterans were there. I remember my father was a member of the Jewish War Veterans.

K.P: But not the American Legion?

RL: Dad may have been. I don't know.

KP: Yeah. But he was definitely part of the Jewish War Veterans?

RL: Right. That was Post 365/366. And, of course, today I belong to the Jewish War Veterans. I don't go. I belong to the Disabled American Vets. I don't go. I contribute. The American Legion. The Retired Officers. The Reserve Officers. Uniform Military Association. And God knows what else. But I guess it was a different time. I just don't go.

KP: What was it like ... I mean people went off to the service, and though your brother-in-law came back, others did not.

RL: Correct.

KP: ... Could you talk a little bit about the people who came. Classmates of yours whose older brothers didn't come back, or neighbors whose husbands didn't come back.

RL: I remember that down the street... Price lived on the corner. I don't remember the name of the street. But across the street there was a kid there whose father was enlisted. And he became an officer. And I know he was killed. And I remember when I found out that he died. And he had a sister. I don't remember his name. But I remember the void and this terrible sadness. And I remember... Trying to think of his name. I think the Jewish War Veterans' post is named after him. He was a pilot and he was killed in Italy. And I should remember it. And it's probably on the tip of my tongue. And I can ask my brother-in-law. His name was Lieutenant Allie Kahn. I remember that, at Fort Monmouth, a guy would get assigned to Fort Monmouth in 1919, after the war, and he would be there for twenty years.

KP: Right.

RL: There was a sergeant there by the name of Abe Abramowitz who had gone in during the Mexican Border War in 1916. And he served in France during World War II. And he was on the wrestling team. And he was at West Point. And one of his pupils was Dwight D. Eisenhower. And he probably taught every general in the United States Army. And as a signalman he was great. When the war broke out on December 7th, little General Van Dusen, who recently passed away, maybe ten or twelve years ago, called Abe in and two or three sergeants. And he said, "Look." He says, "I'm gonna send you to officer candidate school." And three guys said, "The hell you are." And he says, "Okay. You're outta here." Abe said, "Yes." And in a week he was second lieutenant. And two weeks later he was a first lieutenant. And a month later he was a captain. The three months later he was a major. And he went ... And he was on Eisenhower's staff in Shofe Headquarters. He was a lieutenant colonel. And then he developed high blood pressure and he was retired. And I remember him going... I was president of the AZA, which is an American Zionist organization, as a kid. And he came to lecture us. And somebody made the mistake of calling him, "Mister." Just as you [Sean] said before. And he said, "I was a Colonel in the Army and I'll always be a Colonel in the Army. And I'm not a mister." And I guess I have the same philosophy. I am the Colonel. I mean, that's the way it is. You can either call me "Sir," or you can call me "Colonel," or you can call me "Ron," but don't call me "Mister." Just a joke. I mean, I'm not serious. [Laughs]

KP: When did he come and speak before you?

RL: Oh, I must have been about thirteen or fourteen-years-old.

KP: So you were very ...

RL: And I remember that when I became an officer, and his wife had died, and he was going with a guy's wife. They were separated. And she was beautiful. And she was a lot younger. And he still looked like a Sumo-Japanese wrestler. And I worshipped him. And his son became a colonel in the Army. He was a pilot. He was in a Ranger unit. And he said, "Gee. A guy could get killed in here." And he bombed out. I mean he... A great big hulk of a kid. Maybe 6'3"/6'4". And running around hill and dell you had to be nuts. So he decided to become a pilot. It wasn't because he was coward, because he wasn't. But he was a very fine officer. He did a couple of tours in 'Nam. And now he's a school teacher. His father was a wonderful man. He was a real Damon Runyon character. I mean, you could write about him.

KP: What about rationing. How did that affect ...

RL: Oh, well, I mean you couldn't get anything. I mean, and you know, we had, you know, stamps. And if you wanted food you had to give 'em the stamps. If you didn't have the stamps you didn't get it. But I remember our next door neighbor was a guy named, Cohen, his two boys, two of his three boys were in the service at the time. One was an officer. They were both ... I think both were in the Air Force. Melvin and Max. And my buddy, Paul, became an Air Force officer after the war was over, I guess, during Korea. And he had, you know, you make things kosher for Passover, you know, for Jewish people. And you're suppose to have a rabbi bless it or whatever it is. And they had this fellow at work for 'em who was an African-American. He just stuck labels on pork and beans and that type of thing. I remember that. But you had stamps. And if you didn't have the stamps, unless it was black market. Bingo! You didn't get it. Now, there was a gentleman who got a scholarship to Harvard, became a very well-known lawyer. Was the assistant Attorney General for the state of New Jersey. And somewhere during the war he picked up a couple of boys from the Mob, and he got 'em on black marketing sugar. And he said to them, "Hey, man." And he says, "I know how you can beat this." And he said they said, "How?" And he said, "Cut me in." And that worked for a couple of years. And then he was caught. And they sent him away, minus the one day that he would have lost his citizenship and his right to vote. But he could never practice law again. And he became a financial consultant to the Jesuits. And he was brilliant. And he's still alive to this day, I believe.

KP: But he went in on the black market?

RL: Oh, yes. Yes.

SH: Was black-marketing big in your area?

RL: Oh, yes. Yes. I remember my father worked for a guy who was a lawyer. Oh, geezers ... Bob Freund? Anyway, he worked for a couple of guys from Jersey City who were builders. And Dad was just a poor kid from the Depression, who lost his real estate license. And when people declared bankruptcy or just look off ... Dad would sign notes for 'em. And when they took off or killed themselves, dad paid off every dime. He was the most honest man I ever met in my life. And I guess maybe that's where I get it from. 'Cause my mom used to say, "Nobody takes your good name. You give it away." And Dad paid off all these debts. And during the war they said to him, they said, "Gee, Abeie, we have ..." I think. I may be wrong. He said, "We have these \$50,000.00 bills." Or very high numbered bills. And they wanted him to put dummy people on the payroll. And he wouldn't do it. And he could have made a fortune. I mean, he could have retired into the next century. But he never did it. And I guess these people eventually got into trouble. But Dad never did because he never did anything wrong. He was a very honest man. And I not only loved him, I liked him. He was sensitive. Cried easily. So do I. Doesn't mean you're not a man.

KP: Right. How observant was your family growing up? Did they keep, for example, a kosher household?

RL: Yes. Oh, yes. My mother used to soak the dishes for Passover. And we belonged to an Orthodox synagogue. And my father went to World War I. My grandfather, who brought a Torah

from the old country, said that if Abe came back alive he would donate it to the synagogue. Which he did. That's probably why I'm not very religious. My mother sat upstairs. My father sat downstairs with me. And my sisters sat upstairs. I went to Hebrew school and I had no clue as to what was going on. I memorized everything. Maybe it's like memorizing Latin if you're a Catholic or whatever. And my Hebrew teacher was a man who had been hit by a truck. And he was crippled. He was a mean sucker, though. And he used to hit me with a ruler. And one day I took it away from him and broke it over his head. But he,... Not really hurt him. I just broke it over like ... I wouldn't hurt him. But it was a ... Nothing stuck and I never knew what was going on. So I really wasn't religious for years. And I joined a reformed temple where the services are in English and we have an organ. And it's beginning, I think, going more to the center now. And I just disenjoined after twenty-eight years. It's a temple that was founded by the Lehman banking family. And all the wealthy Jews from New York and Pennsylvania and Philly used to come there during the summer. Founded in 1888. But extremely wealthy congregation. And people who sort of walk with their nose in the air. Not all of them, but the young people. The nuevo-riche. And it got to be a little bit more than I could stomach. But I eventually will go back. ... As I said, I'm not religious. I believe when you die that's it. End of chapter. The maggots have a feast. I'd like to believe something else, but I don't. You gotta show me. I'm basically a mathematician.

SH: When ...

KP: Yes. Go ahead.

SH: Okay. When you came to Rutgers there was mandatory chapel. Did you ever attend that or did you get ...

KP: Did you still have mandatory chapel?

RL: The only thing we had was mandatory English with a guy who used to write a book. What was his name? He had white hair with a mustache. He must have made a fortune. But it was good. I didn't have to write a term paper that time. So it was a good idea to flunk that test. I don't think I flunked it because I wanted to. I flunked 'cause I was just stupid.

SH: So there was no mandatory chapel?

RL: I think so.

KP: You don't remember having to go to chapel?

RL: No.

SH: But you did join a Jewish fraternity. Was that for religious reasons or did you just happen to like those guys better than ...

RL: Well, I don't know. I mean I don't know whether ... We were pretty liberal. I mean I had a fraternity [brother] named Erwin Ohngemach, who was Protestant. Bob Polcari. Tony Brilakis.

KP: So your fraternity was not all Jewish?

RL: No. We broke the line. I mean, I joined ... I mean, it was, again, I didn't belong there. I mean, it was a very wealthy fraternity. I mean Henry Ross or "Cocky" Ross, as we called him, his grandfather owned High Grade Meats. And his father, who is now divorced from his mother, was a brilliant surgeon. The Buschs you know. I guess Busch campus and all. Mal Busch was my fraternity brother. These kids were pretty snooty. And it was a difficult time for me, you know, a poor kid. You know, I didn't have a car until later. Of course, I was going with somebody, my first wife, since high school. And I used to go home every weekend. And I really missed out. And, of course, we were married for about six weeks and then it ended. But, no. ... It's just that these were the guys that, you know, I just congregated with. But I think I joined that one, one of the reasons probably was, because in those years the Jew, at that period of time, they said we assimilated faster than any other ethnic group. Except we didn't seek conversion. At one point in time, you know, everybody was ghettoed. I mean, first it was the Irish. Then when the Irish moved out the Italians moved in. The Italians moved out the Jews moved in. The Jews moved out the African-Americans moved in. But today, and at that point, we wanted to be like everybody else. I mean, everybody changed their name. My cousin changed it from Ledwitz to Leeds.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Ronald L. Ledwitz on March 30, 1998 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

SH: Sean D. Harvey.

KP: I just want to back up to Long Branch. And you were very young, but you were very involved, it sounds like at a very early age with Zionism.

RL: No.

KP: No?

RL: No. Just a group.

KP: Just a group.

RL: No. It was just a group of guys. I'm not a religious person. I'm really not.

KP: But how did you feel about that? 'Cause you were in high school when the state of Israel ...

RL: 1948.

KP: Yes. ... is founded.

RL: Well, there was a group. I'm trying to... Loews Moving Company. These guys were running guns to the Israelis. And weapons. And I guess, people were, you know, contributing to the cause. 'Course the founder really of the Israeli Army was Mickey Marcus. West Pointer. Lawyer. Who was killed ... by one of his own men, just the way General Stonewall Jackson was. And if I

remember correctly, the Israeli Air Force, the founder of that was an Irish-Catholic from Boston. But yes, we, I guess, we supported, I mean, I didn't really know anything about it. I have never been involved with Zionism. I always feel that Israel owes its existence to us. We don't owe our existence to them. I have a mixed bag about the state of Israel. They don't consider me Jewish. I'm, you know, there's a very small minority there of Orthodox Jews, and most of Israelis are not religious, who, if you're not an Orthodox Jew, forget it. And, of course, I have intermarriages in my family. And if the mother didn't convert, even though the children may be brought up Jewish, they're not considered Jewish. My niece, Megan, she's certainly, her mother was Protestant, is Protestant. Is gonna be bat mitzvahed, or confirmed, on April 18. Her mother did not convert. If she went to Israel she wouldn't be considered Jewish. And her brother was bar mitzvahed. It doesn't make any difference to me what you are, if there's one God up there, and hopefully there is, it's all the same God.

KP: Right.

RL: For all of us. I don't think that ... I never saw a bullet that was labeled. Think about that.

KP: You had mentioned that ... It sounds like it was fairly important to your parents that you go to college.

RL: Yes.

KP: Even over your sisters. None of your sisters went to college.

RL: Yes.

KP: But you were ...

RL: We didn't have it. I mean, it was always a struggle. And I worked my way through school. ... I think it was eleven-hundred dollars. But they lied in the book. I think it cost about two thousand. And I took care of myself from September to February. And my parents took care of me, like, from February to May. And then I took care of myself during the summer, too. I worked for Schneider's Butcher Shop at sixteen, to go to school. I used to work for a guy named Charlie Klitzman who was a lawyer when I was thirteen, parking cars. And my niece, who's the Assignment Judge in the Supreme Court in Mercer County, married his sister's boy, who's an aeronautical engineer and environmentalist. She was the second woman that was appointed by the courts in the state. Young. Middle forties, early forties. Only been in the position five years. She doesn't even have tenure. She's a comer.

KP: When you were growing up what did you think you wanted to be? Did you want to go into the military?

RL: No. I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer. And I realized early in that... When I was born, I didn't say this, when I was born, the umbilical cord... I was a blue baby. And I had a complete blood transfusion. My grandfather and my father. Things come hard for me, not easy. I write well but it takes me a tremendous amount of time. My personality is in my voice. I'm much better speaking than I am writing. I don't know what happened. But I was tutored in math and algebra. I

was tutored in geometry. I was tutored in Latin. In geometry, when I was a kid, the teacher would tutor me and, you know, they have theorems one through five. And I'd memorize them. And when I'd have a test, she's giving us a, you know, a test out of the book. And my memory is great. You know, you compensate. Maybe it's like being a savant. And I'd get step one, three, two, five, and four. And I'd say, "Oh, I got confused." So instead of getting a hundred, 'cause everything was right. When I was at school here, for Spanish, the professor would give us ten sentences out of a hundred sentences in the book. And I had memorized those hundred sentences. All I'd have to see is one word and that was it. So I passed. I would sit in class and a lot would pass me by because I couldn't grasp what they were saying. So I would read the book from cover to cover. I still read everything from cover to cover now. Now I've learned to speed read, too. And ... I would memorize everything. And I wouldn't only do that once. 'Cause my notes were useless. For an exam, final exam, taking five courses, I would memorize everything. I would memorize the text books. And that's how I passed. And that's why I became a history major. Because I knew I couldn't do it otherwise. And I wanted to be a lawyer to be perfectly honest with you. Now with math, if I have to read a problem, that's one thing. But numbers in my head. I'm like a computer. And am I a savant? I don't know. But I did make it on the outside. But only because it took time and stick-to-it-iveness. And nothing was impossible. It's an old Army principle: Can do. No matter what it takes.

SH: You said that your favorite professor was Captain John Pram.

KP: Van.

RL: No. Van.

SH: Oh, was it Van? Oh! Okay, so ...

KP: It's Van. Yes.

RL: Well I don't know whether he was my ... I mean, I liked him. I mean, he was an idol. He was something I aspired to as a man. I don't know whether I aspired to him as a military person. Of course, I didn't know the background. I didn't know about some of the, the dark, dirty, secrets of his life. Which I certainly, to this day, do not admire. I would never do anything ... It's like ... Can I digress about our President?

KP: No. Please do.

RL: I'm a Republican who voted for a Democrat. The fact that Bill Clinton resisted the war is one thing. The fact that he marched in England against us, in a foreign country, is beyond my comprehension. As I find out what he did, nobody has to go, but he went. 'Cause this is our country. What he did, for me, is an abomination. I believe that whatever they're telling me, he did. I think he's a pig. I think for the President of the United States, or any married person, to do what he did, is beyond my comprehension. However, and there is a however, he should not be tried in the press. Whatever is between him and Hillary Clinton, they have come to an accommodation with each other. And if it's good for Hillary it should be good for him. I don't feel sorry for her because she's in it for the power and the glory. I feel sorry for their young child. I have two daughters. I have a son. No matter how bad any of my marriages were I never ever would cheat on

them. If Mr. Starr is not out to kill the President I don't know who is. I think he's broken every rule in the book. I mean, it's just terrible what he's done. And I don't understand how he can go from White Water and real estate to the President's private life. And I have to tell ya, if somebody asked me if I did what the President did, to spare my wife and my child, you bet I wouldn't tell it like it was. I would protect them at any cost. Now, I mean, that's what I think. But to do some of the things. This woman Wiley, if they would've given her the ambassadorship to Ireland or given her a cushy job, there wouldn't have been a word. I think a lot of it could be a figment of their imagination. I'm sure that she's in it for the money. But what bothers me is that, as my kid sister, Bene, who's a liberal Democrat, and thought that what Clarence Thomas did was terrible and what he did to her was terrible, and she believed Anita Hill. Regarding Clinton, she said, "I don't care. I love him." Why? Because the country's doing well? It's like saying, "Orders are orders. Lead 'em to the gas chamber." It's the same thing. It's the same stupid philosophy. I mean, how far have we gone? How far have we dropped in our moral standards and ethics? What are we leaving for our children? I think we really gotta clean up our act.

KP: I'm just curious on that point. ... How much of a shock was it to you? 'Cause you grew up and your parents were very much Roosevelt Democrats. They seem classic ...

RL: Right. I mean Roosevelt was no better, in my judgement, than Bill Clinton. I mean he was doing Mrs. Strauss from The Washington Post with her husband's permission. You hear the stories about Eleanor, that she was, she went both ways. Whether she did or not, but the fact is that she was married at the time. So I don't think she should have gone any way.

KP: But, I mean, how much of a shock has... I mean, I think what's striking is, I mean, Clinton is being harassed very publicly, whatever may have happened.

RL: I never... I thought that, having been a ... student of history and thinking about what happened with the *St. Louis*, and knowing years and years ago that Roosevelt could have done something where they could have bombed the rail-road tracks going Dachau, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz that could have brought people here. I think he was a piece of garbage. I really did. And, I mean, I know the State Department was vehemently anti-Semitic. In many ways it still is. It's like today. I better not get on the state of Israel, but...

KP: Feel free.

RL: Well, I mean, you know, the thing is the Arabs break the rules. And the Jews defend themselves. And there's a (huin?) cry against the Jews, but there's never anything against the Arabs. We have a very bad situation in the Middle East right now. ... Can I digress on this? We can no longer fight a war on two fronts. God forbid if the bell rings in China, which is the biggest thing we have to worry about now, we're dead. We don't have money for research and development into the 21st Century. We don't have money for maintenance. We don't have money to train our troops. We have absolutely decimated the non-commissioned officer corp. It would be like: we leave Professor Piehler here and we get rid of you [Sean]. Because it's the non-commissioned officer that builds the Army. It takes fifteen to twenty years to train a man and that guy's gonna keep kids like you alive. We have such a terrible, terrible state of affairs in the military now. We're just as in a bad a situation as we were prior to World War II. I mean, we have dropped the Army ..., the military, from 2.1 million to 1,416,000 and we're going down to 1,390,000. We are bastardizing

tanks and planes and ships for spare parts 'cause we don't have it. We just don't have it. We need a, the Osprey helicopter for the Marine Corps for an expeditionary force. If we get that it's gonna save eleven-hundred lives of men and women. If we don't have it we're gonna lose twenty-five-hundred when we go onto the beach. How much is one life worth, let alone thirty-six-hundred? Men are getting out in droves now. We just lost like eight hundred seventy-five pilots because they're not even picking up a \$110,000.00 bonus to stay in for five years. Because they can do much better on the outside. We're not getting quality people into the military today. It's such a foolish thing to do.

And we are breaking faith with guys, like me, who devoted our lives to this country. And we won the good fight. 'Nam. Korea. We beat 'em at their own game. We won the Cold War. And now if you're sixty-five, which I'm gonna be on September 3, I only get ... government health care on a stand-by basis. And they closed two hundred bases and those fifty-seven hospitals. So what do I do? My drugs alone, as a result of Desert Storm, are \$8500.00 a year. Just about. One drug is \$296.00 a month 'cause I'm pre-cancerous. What do we do? I mean, it's a rhetorical question.

KP: Going back ... you mentioned that in college that you thought ... you'd be a lawyer and a doctor, but obviously the military had an appeal.

RL: No. Well, the military had an appeal, that's true. I wasn't smart enough to be a doctor, I mean, and I knew it. I wanted to be a lawyer, but I didn't have the money. My father was asthmatic and he got sick. And it was my responsibility to take care of Mom and Dad. So I took a job with W. T. Grant at sixty-five dollars a week. And you have a personnel director here by the name of Kirkwood. And I mentioned something ...

SH: Right.

RL: ... about this on the phone. And, I guess, I will always be angry at him. He was a nice guy, but he didn't do squat for me. He never lifted a finger. And I went to work for W. T. Grant in retail. And, I guess, my brother-in-law had been a retailer. But I really wanted to go to work for Johnson and Johnson. But they weren't hiring J-E-Ws at that time. And I remember my sister putting down my name. I said, "I think I ought to change it to Leeds." And she said...

KP: J and J wouldn't ...

RL: No. I mean, I used to get letters of rejection. I mean, it was just incredible. And, of course, you know, I wasn't a football player and I wasn't a football star. I belonged to a Jewish fraternity. I was a poor kid. And I worked. I worked all the time. And studying came hard. R. O. T. C. was my big thing. I mean, you know, I, it was a big thing. But there was no entrée for me. And when I came back for my fortieth reunion, I was listening to the guys, and they were singing the acolytes of Mr. Kirkwood. But the guys were football players. And they were the stars. They were Chi Phi and whatever else. And I didn't have any of that.

KP: Right.

RL: And all that he had to do was open up a door for me. Woulda been great. But they didn't.

KP: ... Your last year of high school the Korean War broke out.

RL: Right.

KP: And you were here during, for part of your college ...

RL: I went down. I went down to the recruiting station.

KP: During the ...

RL: Yes.

KP: And what did they say to you?

RL: Oh, I was scared to death. And I was doing it, you know, to prove how macho I was. I guess, I was more scared than macho in a sense. I remember talking to the sergeant. He said, "Don't do it." He said, "You get a commission." He says, "And you get your education." He says, "Because if you don't, you'll never go back." And he was right. So I went back to school and I graduated in '55. It was probably the best decision that I made. But I made that decision predicated on the advice that he gave me.

KP: So you were ready to go and fight in Korea?

RL: Yes.

SH: Were you aware at that time of the number of casualties ...

RL: No.

SH: ... In the Army Infantry. I mean ...

RL: No. I mean, you know, did you ever see Gone With the Wind? And you see before the battles, you know, they're marching off to war with the flags, and the pomp and circumstance, and all that garbage. Hey, you don't think about those things. You think about what everybody thought about during the '30s, that they joined the National Guard. Saturday night they would have a dance and they'd put on their uniform. They didn't realize that they were gonna die in the mud. You don't think about those things. Nobody thinks about anything that's unpleasant.

KP: When you were at Rutgers what did you do for fun? When you weren't studying and weren't...

RL: I studied. And, I guess, I always ... worried about my grades. And money was always a problem. I never had a lot of anything. Of course, I was going with a girl. I met her in my senior year. And we married... No, I'm sorry. I met her my senior year of high school. And we married my going into my senior year of college. It lasted six weeks. We were just too young. And we were living with her and her parents and that, upstairs in the attic. And it just didn't work out. Very pretty lady. They said she came back. She's been married three times, as have I. And they said she's beautiful and she looks like she's probably about thirty-eight or forty now. But she's, you know, about my age. About two years younger. And I would go home to see her every weekend. The only difficult thing was that I was told to take a course that they told me was very easy for

science. It was geology. And the professor was from Canada. And he had three suits. He had a brown pin stripe. He had a gray pin stripe. He had a blue pin stripe. And he had frog eyes. And he was the driest guy I ever knew, but a nice man. And his class was Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. And two labs on Tuesday and Thursday. Not with him, but with a very nice guy over in the old barracks here. And I always made those classes. And I passed. I don't want to get into how I passed that course because you might take my degree away from me. [Laughs] Joke, but, not really, but... [Laughter]

KP: Why was that geology course the most difficult course?

RL: ...It was so boring. I mean, you know. And to be honest with you, he would ask you to write about one glacial plain and I didn't know the answer. So I'd write about another one. And I knew it cold. Again I would memorize and study one thing. And I wrote that and he passed me. And I'm trying to think of his... Mr. Smith. His name was Smith. He was a good man, though.

KP: You mentioned two names that are still remembered here in the history department. One of them was Professor Charanis, who has since passed away. What do you remember about him?

RL: Oh, he was a character. He was a wonderful ... He was born on the island of Lemnos and he came here as a kid. And he was Greek. "Grik," as he used to say. And he was a marvelous professor. He was a professor of Byzantine history. He was probably one of the foremost experts, I guess, in the country. And he had gray ... He had salt-and-pepper hair. And he was pretty Ivy for a guy ... I mean, you know, tweeds and gray slacks. He had an accent. And he used to, you were spellbound when you were in his room. And I was telling Sean, you don't think that was a little vulgar? It'll put it on... It's okay for me to tell that story? I had not gone to the john in a week and a half. And I called my mother. And I said, "I have terrible abdominal pains, mom. What should I do?" She said, "Well, take Milk-o-Magnesia." So I did. I took a bottle. And it didn't work. So she said to me, "Well," she says, "Take Exlax." So I ate a box. And then she told me to take something else. I don't know. Maybe citronella, or whatever it is that you take. And nothing happened. Eight days, nothing happened. And I was very uncomfortable. He was on one of his long-winded lectures, up at the Bishop House, and all of the sudden it was like the atomic bomb was gonna go off. And I thought my eyeballs were gonna come out. And I can remember twisting my hands, like this. And I raised my hand. And I was shaking. And he wouldn't recognize me. And this went on, oh, I said, for about ten or fifteen minutes. And I figured, man, I'd rather flunk the course than have an accident. And I ran across the court there to Demerest Hall. And that, I think, was the worst experience of my life. And one other funny thing. He got in class and he said, "You know," he said, "I just read this term paper. And it was a great term paper." I think it was him. I think it was him. Or it may have been McCormick. I don't remember. And, but I think, maybe it was Charanis. And he said, "You know it was a great term paper." ... And he said, "And I gave you an A+." Which was a better grade than when I wrote it. And that's a story that I remember. And I think the guy who got it was my fraternity brother. He became a dentist. But I wouldn't want him to operate on me, 'cause I'll tell you why. He was always sick at the time of the exam. So he would stay home sick. You'd give him the answers. He'd take the test. He's probably very successful, too. But a real con job.

KP: What about Professor McCormick, who still you can still see him on campus walking around?

RL: I can still see him with his button down Oxford and his tweed jacket. And he was also, he used to wear stripes if I remember. He was a very tweedy guy, I guess. He was very nice. A handsome, handsome man. Great instructor. And you could understand him. He had no accent. You also understood Charanis. Charanis had more of a flair to him. He was, I don't know ... There was a movie called Goodbye Mr. Chips, or whatever. He really had a flair. And he was loveable in a cantankerous old way. McCormick was the personification of America. He really was. And he was a New Jersey historian, if I remember correctly.

KP: Right.

RL: Really straight. Moral. Upright. I mean, you could set your watch by what he said. Honest to a fault. A decent human being. Someone you would look up to. And it was just instant respect. And I always thought he could be a movie star. I mean, the way he carried himself. And I have wonderful memories of him.

KP: Any other professors that you remember?

RL: Korahari was a finance professor. Japanese-American Marine Corps captain. Pretty good war record. Used to have classes outside. [Laughter] Of course, John P. Van. And then there was ... He was a political science professor. I don't remember his name. I think he was a refugee. Oh, Professor Aloff. Russian history. Gave me a D+ on my exam because he said it took him six hours to read it. Which I thought stank. But he was a good professor. There was a sergeant. Mitchum. Mitchum? R.O.T.C. He sort of took me under his wing. He got my first salute when I was commissioned at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Biology professor. Don't remember his name.

SH: You mentioned before, "William the Silent." And you had asked me, "if he had whistled yet." What is the story behind that?

RL: Ah! He whistles when a virgin goes by. And when I walked out, there was a young girl and a guy there. And I said, "Has he whistled yet?" And they had no idea. I don't think they ... knew what I was talking about. But when he whistles, and he whistles when a virgin goes by. And that's what I remember.

SH: I don't think that's a story that the students know anymore.

KP: Right.

RL: That's a statement of fact. Well, this was a Dutch Reformed college, if I remember. And I have a question. How much does a Rutgers ring cost now?

SH: I haven't bought one.

KP: I don't know.

RL: This was thirty-five bucks. [Laughter]

SH: I guarantee it's more than that. [Laughs]

RL: I bought the small one 'cause that's all I could afford.

SH: I would say at least a couple hundred dollars now, if not more.

KP: Right.

SH: Probably upwards of five.

RL: My daughter gets this. My son gets my Rolex. And I said, "But you can't have it yet."
[Laughter] And the baby gets my father's watch.

KP: I'm curious. My students, I don't know if Sean told you, but they've gone back and read the Targums from the '20s, '30s, '40s, '50s even. And they're rather envious of the social life you had, particularly, the fraternity parties. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that.

RL: Oh, yeah. I gotta tell ya. I originally belonged to a Sammy fraternity. But it was, I guess, it was too Jewish for me, I guess. And they were typical New York people. And I don't really cotton to typical, hope you're not from New York, New York City people. They're pushy and, no matter what faith you are, they're just pushy ... and even to this day, you know, they're ostentatious. And I just don't like the city. I mean, I'm just a small country boy. And so I joined this one. And I remember when we became pledges. And it was a terrible time. I mean, I remember "hell week." My God! They made us crush eggs, you know, and they put like Cracker Jacks, or like cereal, inside our clothes. And we had to live like that. I don't know how anybody could stand being near us. And they used to make me sleep in the bathroom with my face right up against the toilet bowl. And I told Sean that I stayed in the fraternity house for my first semester of my sophomore year. And I had an outside room. And Max Lubber and Balinkie had a room inside. And they came in drunk one night and dueled. And Max had his arm cut up here. And I got the heck outta there. And really couldn't afford to move to this rooming house, a little up the street, with this old Hungarian couple. And I was telling Sean that the old man looked like a ghoul. I mean, he looked like Boris Karloff. Except Boris Karloff with the nail in his head, or the peg, was better looking. And he would come into my room and I'd be sitting in the bay window. It was a little room, too. And I'd look up and I'd see, you know, Boris Karloff there, standing over me. I was only a little guy. And I mean, you jump, you know. And I always used to sleep with one eye opened with this guy. His wife was very nice. But it was a dank, musty place. And I, you know, I really should have slept with a machete under my bed. [Laughter] But I couldn't find one. But he was a character. ...And then they had Mom Bryant, who was our house mother. And then they had ... I could tell you something, but maybe we oughta ... I don't know whether I should leave it on tape.

KP: Well you could tell us and in the transcript you could take it out. But if you also prefer just to ...

RL: Well, we had a guy named Earl Hunt who had been in the Navy. And I guess, he went both ways. I mean, I know he went both ways. And you had to be very careful because if you were a pledge he would lock you in the pantry and scare you half to death. But he did a lot of things which I'm not gonna repeat on here. But he was a colorful character. And he really loved our kids. I mean, I don't mean in any negative sense. But he would horse around with the guys and he would

really scare 'em. And he was our steward, I guess, and our cook. And it was an interesting time.

KP: Was this the Sammy house or the ...

RL: Phi Ep.

KP: Phi Ep.

RL: Phi Ep at Four Mine Street. Which is now Chi Psi or ...

SH: Theta Chi.

RL: Theta Chi.

KP: When did you join Phi Ep? 'Cause you mentioned being in the Sammy house for ...

RL: Well, I depledged immediately and then I became a Phi Ep. And I guess, so, I came to school in September of '51, and this had to be September of '52. I was a ...

KP: And so you immediately joined Phi Ep or you ... 'Cause you mentioned a boarding house first.

RL: No. I was at ... Demerest Hall. Then I went to Phi Ep at Four Mine Street. And then I went to the boarding house. And I stayed there for my sophomore and junior year. And then my senior year I got married very shortly. And then I lived at home for that last year. So ...

KP: So you never lived in the Phi Ep house?

RL: Only for part of the first semester of my sophomore year. And then, you know, I graduated. And I went to work for W. T. Grant until November of 1955. Then I went on active duty for two years.

SH: Your freshman year you lived in Demerest Hall?

RL: Right.

SH: And you were a member of the Demerest Hall Club.

RL: Yeah.

SH: Could you talk about that a little bit? I mean it was suppose to be for spirit and things like that and so ...

RL: Well, Connie Melart was my roommate. He never graduated. And there was a guy diagonally across who ... was a World War II vet. He had been in the Navy. And I don't remember his name. But he was like a lumberjack. I mean he was, ... he really didn't belong. And then there was Eddie Schwartz, who went on to great things in advertising out in California. And I'll have to go back and look at my book. Eddie's roommate, Jerry Solomon, went on to work for ABC. But he was really

much of a hellion. I mean, like he'd pour gasoline under your door and then light the match. You know, that type of thing. And he worked for ABC for many years. Until he got bounced, you know, when they had one of their bloodbaths. And let's see, what else? And then there was Bill. I met him when I was interviewed by ABC. And he was working on the Pat Boone Show in the background. He was in operations, if I remember. And I was offered a job there for sixty bucks. And I should've taken it. I didn't, I didn't want to work in the city. I hated it then. [Laughter]

SH: Do you remember an incident your freshman year when someone lit a firework or firecracker of some kind and injured an upper classman?

RL: No.

SH: It was in the Targums that we had to read.

RL: I don't remember. To be perfectly honest with you I just don't. Right. No.

SH: 'Cause it sparked a big controversy about freshman dorming with upper classman and things like that.

RL: No. So ...

KP: Did you have any type of freshman initiation? Did you have to wear a beanie?

RL: I had a red beanie. You know, it said, "Class of '55" on it. It was a little peat cap ... if I remember.

KP: Yes. You did have it .

RL: I'm pretty sure I had that. I don't know where it is.

KP: Did you have to do anything like carry matches for upper classmen or ...

RL: I don't remember any of that.

KP: But you did wear a beanie.

RL: I think so. I mean, I remember I had one. I don't remember how long I wore it or for what occasion. I remember when I pledged, I mean, man, we were treated like ... How did it go? "My name is slermer ..." or "slimy" or something like that, "... I am the lowest of the low and whale ... blank, blank." It was "... whale shit at the bottom of the ocean." And I mean, that's exactly what it was. And they treated us just like that. I was so glad when I was able to take a bath or shower. But they were pretty hard on us. And they used to paddle us. And you would assume the position. And you would grab your private parts and bend over. And I mean, a very dangerous time. And I know, you know, you could really get hurt if they missed. And some guys really got hurt. I mean, you could be crippled for life. It was not too bright. But it was part of the rights into manhood, I guess.

KP: What about drinking? How much drinking went on, on the campus?

RL: The only time I ever drank is when I would go to a dance. It sort of, you know, I sort of danced better, I thought, when I drank. I realized later on in life, 'cause I don't drink anymore, but there was a time that I didn't drink any less, I danced just as good or bad with or without it. I remember drinking, I guess it was gin, at a beach party. And going home and going into the bathroom downstairs and sitting down on the floor and sticking my head in the toilet. And my mother came in, and my grandfather, and who I called my Aunt Betty, was my step-grandmother, said, "Grandma and Grandpa are here." My mother hit me with a wet washcloth. I remember that. But I was really sick. And I don't think I ever did that again. But, yes, we drank. It was, I guess, the thing to do. I think in college, here, the only time I ever drank was at the Academy Awards for 1954 or 5. And I had about three or four beers or maybe two or three beers and that was it. I never really drank in campus.

KP: What about other people? Your classmates, fraternity brothers and others?

R.L: Yes. They drank. Yes.

KP: I mean how much of a ... I've heard some interesting stories about fraternities and ...

RL: Yes.

KP: ... Keeping it away from the dean.

RL: The guys drank. I mean there was booze. You know, this Max Lubber and Joe Balinkie cut his arm right up. And that's why I moved out. 'Cause they were crocked, I mean, and they were really drunk. And I mean, these guys, you know, would lay down in their own swill. It was just terrible. There was a lot of drinking. Some guys never got over it either.

KP: What was the relationship between Douglass and Rutgers at the time?

R.L: That was the coop.

KP: It was still called the coop then?

RL: Yeah. Yes, I dated somebody from the coop, I guess after I got, in my senior year, after I got divorced. I remember telling her I'd been married. It broke her heart. Never should have said that. But I was honest. And, of course, in those years if you were divorced, I mean, it was tantamount to being an axe murderer. And even, you know, when you, I don't know, I've been married three times. One was for six weeks, one was for twenty-seven years, and one was for four and a half years with eight month relationship before. And you shouldn't tell people that, you know. So now I just, initially, I just tell them I've been married twice. And if it ever becomes a time that I have to tell 'em I will. But it's funny that people look at you at being divorced in one light, but you can be with somebody for six years and somebody else for two years and somebody else for sixteen months or somebody else for another year, and they don't think of it as in the same light.

KP: Right.

RL: I dated somebody. I was number twelve in six years. And two years she didn't date. But that was okay because they just didn't sign the paper, make a commitment, and take on responsibility. And I think the other way is better. It's very expensive, too. Trust me. I have one more good marriage and one more good divorce and then I'm broke. [Laughter]

SH: Communism made a really strong showing in the Targums. I mean it seemed like it was a very heavy presence and people were very aware of it.

RL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

SH: How did that affect ...

RL: Well, I have to tell you, as a Jew, the Rosenbergs, man, I mean, it made us all feel dirty. And I mean, these people, you know, sold atomic secrets to the Russians. And the brother-in-law, you know, finked 'em out. And they died. And you know, as you know, through the generations that followed they tried to establish, their kids have even tried to establish their innocence. But they were guilty as sin. But you had the hysteria of the McCarthy era. And I can remember listening to Welsh at my fraternity house. And Joseph McCarthy and Shine and Cohen. And it was a terrible time. And, of course, at Fort Monmouth there were many people, and many of them were Jewish, who were accused of being Communist. They were no more Communist than you or I. I hope you're not. But, I mean, you know, it was just a terrible time. It was a bloody witch hunt. And that son-of-a-bitch, they should have incarcerated him, his whole war record was fabricated. He wasn't "Gunner Joe." He was a bum. He was a first class bum. Now, then, of course, one of the things that happened that really put a notch in his coffin was the fact that stories began to circulate about Shine and Cohen. I remember seeing Cohen, oh, God, probably twenty years before his death, in Winterhaven, Florida with one his, then, boyfriends. And I knew that Cohen was gay, probably in the sixties, through a friend who used to attend parties with him. Who was not gay. It was a business function. But it was a sad commentary on our times where so many lives were absolutely destroyed. On A&E they talked about, oh, he just died, Lloyd Bridges. His life was wiped out. Larry Parks. His life was wiped out. You have to remember that during World War II the Russians were our friends. And, you know, it was the Communists against the Nazis and the Fascists. And it, a lot of people joined, not realizing what they were getting in to. But once the war was over they broke with the party. But they destroyed so many lives. And it was really a sad time.

KP: It's interesting that you mentioned that you knew before others that Cohen was homosexual. I mean, until he died no one could utter that publicly for fear of being sued.

RL: Oh, well, I had a friend, George Hobart, had been a very successful executive with a retail establishment out in the mid-west. And then he left them to go into his own business for a couple of years. And then he went to work for S. Klein as a store manager. And I also was an executive with them. I was the regional audit manager at that time. And this was, trying to think, from 1968 probably to 1976, I guess. And he really got around New York. And he began to tell me about Roy Cohen and some of the things that he was involved in. And I knew then. And that's over twenty years ago, that he was, in fact, a gay, you know. And he was.

KP: Were you surprised or ...

RL: No. I mean, I accepted it. I mean, if that's the way he was, that's the way he was. It's not my life-style. I probably had the provincial attitude that they do corrupt the young or whatever, whether that was true [or] not. I felt that same way about AIDS. And I know now that's really not the case, that they help to advance this terrible disease that we have. Of course, I just wish to God that we should attack this problem and, no matter who has it, I feel that we should wipe this terrible disease from the face of the earth. 'Cause nobody deserves to die like that.

KP: I'm curious. In terms of Douglass/Rutgers. In the '30s and '40s I've interviewed people and they said there were very rigid rules. Women at Douglass had curfews ...

RL: Yes.

KP: If you had a fraternity party all the men had to move out before the women ...

RL: Yes. Yes.

KP: And the events were chaperoned. How regulated was social life between Douglass and Rutgers at the time? And how much of the bending of the rules did you see going on at the time?

RL: Look, you got a girl friend. And, you know, you went with somebody. And, if you were lucky, you know. I grew up in a very strict house. Almost puritanical, you know. You didn't do anything until you got married. It was a sin. I was a sinner. I didn't, I never ... The only person I did it with was someone that I eventually married. And ...

KP: Was that a common attitude then?

RL: ... I was very active. ... And that's probably why her mother, probably, realized it and wanted us to get married and then broke it up as soon as it was over. But after that, you know, it's either, and then as a young man, until I got married again, it was either feast or famine. And most of the time it was famine. You could go years with, you know ... And even now, you look at it now, it's dangerous out there. I'm single again and I'm celibate. At least since last June. I mean, when my wife and I stopped dating each other, ex-wife. Because you gotta be very careful. You'd be surprised. Man, it's spooky out there.

KP: I'm curious. ... Do you think your attitude was shared by most of your classmates?

RL: Oh, heck, no. If you, I mean, we were always looking. I mean, and you always thought that you would get lucky. I mean, I don't think it's any different that today. I mean, you know...

KP: Well, 'cause it was... In the '30s and '40s I'm sure some of that went on, but it strikes me it was really, you really were, breaking the rules.

RL: I will tell you this. This I know of my sisters. I mean, the first person, and the only person, they ever went to bed with was their husbands. And to the best of knowledge, nothing before. And I really mean that. Because they [would] have rather have said, "No," and lose their potential mate than face my father. 'Cause he woulda killed 'em. I remember that my aunt, my father's middle sister, worked for Newberry's as a soda lady during the '30s. And her future husband was still

married. And he was separated for many years. And when my father and uncle found out, they beat the living dickens out of him and had him run out of town by the police. I mean, you know, just like you see in the movies. But he went on to become our favorite uncle. He was a wonderful man. He didn't do anything wrong. I mean, they just thought what he was doing was immoral and not correct.

KP: Your ROTC experiences seem to be pretty significant because you ...

RL: It was.

KP: Everyone at Rutgers had to take it for two years.

RL: Yes.

KP: Why did you decide to enlist? Was it in fact the financial you mentioned?

R.L: Yeah. It was ninety cents a day. But I loved the uniform and I wanted to be an officer. And I figured that set me apart. And all my fraternity brothers, who were well off, you know, thought that I was some sort of jerk for doing this. And even today people will say to me, "Don't tell anybody you were in the military, Ron." Or they look at you with disdain. You know, I must be a retard to love my country so much that I would sacrifice a great part of my life. And that's exactly what I did do. I gave it all up in 1991 to serve my country. 'Cause I am now 100% disabled. And I can't work...

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

KP: ... Memories of Mason Gross. 'Cause I remember he was provost when you were ...

RL: Yes. Yes. He was on television with Herb Shriner. Dang! Tall, nice looking man. Can't remember the guy's name. He was a television personality. And he was a very fine man. And he really focused attention on Rutgers University in the same, in a positive way, where, what's his name, Lawrence?

KP: Yes.

RL: Has not. Is that on tape?

KP: You can take it out.

RL: What?

KP: Please feel free to take anything out.

RL: Okay.

KP: 'Cause I've heard he was, even when he became more of an administrator, he was still very popular. He ...

RL: Yes. He was. He was a great guy. And a wonderful man. I didn't, I don't remember whether I knew him personally. I may have spoken to him in a fleeting moment.

KP: Yes.

RL: A very tall, impressive figure. Nice head of hair, which I wish I had. He had a wonderful, big mustache. And handsome. And very Ivy League, if I remember correctly. Thanks for the Coke.

KP: Oh, you're welcome. ... Did you have any contact or remembrances of any of the other deans? You mentioned having a not-so-pleasant memory of the Director of Placement. But any of the deans?

RL: Who I thought was a great guy until I needed him to get ...

KP: Yes.

RL: ... A job. Soup. Soup. Soup. Musical Director.

KP: Soup Walters.

RL: Wonderful man. I didn't know him, but a wonderful guy. And I've seen him, maybe four or five years ago. There was another guy. Bald. Sort of reminded me of Andy Gump, sort of. I don't remember his name. But outside of that I really don't remember. Course Charanis and McCormick, you know, are imprinted in my brain. Dr. Smith, who was the most boring professor I had in my life, but a wonderful person and extremely knowledgeable.

KP: What did you take Dr. Smith for?

RL: Geology.

KP: Geology. That's the Canadian.

RL: Biology professor I don't remember. And I'm trying to think of this English Prof. He was tyrannical. And danged if I remember. And then there was this fellow who taught political science, who was a German. Probably Jewish refugee who fought in the British Army.

KP: Right.

RL: During World War II. I guess everybody, just about, had served in the military, except a lot of my professors, I guess. And we still had veterans here. Guys who stayed in for a little bit of time.

KP: You mentioned ...

RL: Koven Ratzner was his name. That's the guy, came back to me, that guy that was in the Navy during World War II.

KP: How many veterans were there? You mentioned this veteran living in the dorm. Were there any others in Demerest?

RL: That was Koven Ratzer. I just remembered his name.

KP: Was there anyone else that you remember ... in Demerest?

RL: No.

KP: What about in your classes. How many veterans were there?

RL: I just don't remember their names. I could go through my yearbook and then maybe a face.

KP: Well, 'cause I'm just curious. Because people who went here in the '40s, particularly, say, '47/'48, remember seeing just a lot of khakis because veterans couldn't afford other clothes so they often wore their old...

RL: But this was '51 to '55 so ...

KP: Yes.

RL: ... You know, the time ...

KP: The numbers had clearly thinned out.

RL: Yeah. And guys had stayed in. Some guys went in in '46. They served for four years. They came in at, or they went in in '47. And, you know, they did, you know, duty overseas. And then, of course, the Korean War started and a lot of guys came back. You know, two years, you know, in and then out and then they came to college. And you were still considered a Korean War veteran if you got into the service prior to January of 1955. And I went in the service, unfortunately, in November of '55. And I was not entitled to the GI Bill of Rights 'til ten years later. They said, "Oops. We made a mistake." And if I had gotten that GI Bill of Rights I would have gone to law school.

KP: So the ... Did you think that at the time? That ...

RL: Yes, I mean, It really stuck me 'cause I, you know ...

KP: You needed like eleven months.

RL: Yes. And the interesting thing was that after Desert Storm, and I was at Walter Reed, if you were disabled, as I am, you could, the government would pay for school as long as you had not used your GI Bill. And I was a candidate. But I figured, oh, my God, you know, I'm fifty-nine years old. How am I gonna go to school? I had a hard time, at that point, sitting 'cause I wore braces on both legs and I wore a plate on my back. And sometimes I wore molded braces on my hands. If anybody robbed my house at night I looked like Frankenstein, you know. The thing I didn't have was the stake through my head. Or you could open up a business and they would give you up to a

hundred-thousand dollar loan. But I wasn't too sure about that. It was all offered until you probably actually asked for it. And so I never got that. But if I had gotten it I would have definitely gone to law school. And my life would have been different.

KP: You ... initially started in Air Force ROTC.

RL: Right.

KP: And I take it that you wanted to be a pilot. And that wasn't gonna be in the ...

RL: I wanted to follow my brother-in-law. I wanted to be a pilot because he was never a pilot. And I guess I wanted to do it for both of us. And I took this aptitude test. And they found that I would make a better bombardier navigator than I would a pilot. And during the war they were looking for pilots 'cause we were just losing pilots. And also, as I said before, it got to a point that, if you were in Air Force ROTC, you were not commissioned when you graduated. You had to serve two years or three years as an enlisted person and then they commissioned you. And I said, "No way, Jose." And one of my buddies, Lenny Blair, was killed in pilot training. And he was a Sammy pledge. And he was the school photographer, if I remember. So, as I said, I went across the street. I wrote a letter to Army ROTC I saw Captain Lepski, who was a West Pointer. And I joined Army ROTC. And as I reflect back through the years, it was the best decision I made because a large part of my pension is from the military. Even if it's not a large part, it's still a big chunk.

KP: I'm curious. You were in both ROTC and in Air Force ROTC. Were there any differences between the two? Now obviously you go into advanced...

RL: John P. Van.

KP: Was the big difference?

RL: Oh, yes. Yes. I mean, he was my hero. I mean, he was something that you would read about in a book.

KP: Right.

RL: He was somebody right off the movie screen.

KP: Right.

RL: He was Edward G. Robinson and John Garfield. And a miniature Gary Cooper. Clark Gable. Rolled up into one. Lloyd Bridges. Whatever. Robert Preston. I mean, he was something else. He really was. And he was like a movie hero. And he was guts, football. He was wild. I mean, he really was. I mean, he marched to his own drum. He was a real hero. I mean, this guy wasn't afraid of anything. He was a paratrooper. He, I guess, he had learned to fly so to speak. He was what they write about in text books. He was a gift. He was a true patriot. Does that answer your question?

KP: Yes. It certainly does. What other things, though ... Could you maybe talk a little bit about your ... training at Fort Bragg when you were in ROTC.

RL: Shoulda brought the book. It's called Stand Tall. I have it home. We got there. And we were paid seventy-eight dollars a month. And we functioned as a private. And it was hot as the dickens.

And I went at the end of my senior year 'cause I couldn't afford to go at the end of my junior year 'cause I was working my way through school. And during the summer I worked as head usher at Monmouth Park Racetrack. And I worked at Freehold as a paramutual cashier. I made pretty good money. I was making \$125.00 a weeks as an usher. I remember my buddy's father, who was a doctor, said, "You're never gonna make that kind of money when you get out." I said, "Sure I will."

No, I didn't. I made \$65.00 a week working for W. T. Grant. And I made twenty-six hundred dollars a year as a second lieutenant, or dumbjohn, in the Army. But we went to Fort Bragg. And I drove down with Gene Delasandro. And I don't know that there was anybody else with me. And I remember going on KP my first morning. And they had this redneck guy in the mess hall. Dumb son-of-a-sea cook. And I was just a little bit of a thing. I was probably about what I am now at one hundred fifty pounds. Eventually, in Ranger school I went down to one-ten, but at Fort Bragg I was one-fifty. And I was a typical, figured, city slicker, I guess, as he knew dry ice. And he said the ice truck was coming. And I said, "Okay." And he said, "Go out and get it." And the guy came back and he knew I was a city slicker. And he said, "Well, pick it up." I said, "Well, where are the ice tongs?" He says, "We don't have any." And I picked it up and it was dry ice. So it was like something that can really burn you. So I dropped that pretty quick. And this guy used to give me a real hard time. And the mess sergeant, this was the 82nd Airborne now, was an African-American.

A wonderful guy. Little bit of a guy and he was sharp as a tack. And this one redneck, again, used to give me a bad time all the time. And the garbage cans were bigger than I was. And he almost dumped me in them everyday. And I used to take this 'cause I knew at the end of that six weeks I was gonna be a second lieutenant of the United States Army. And I was. And I walked into that mess hall with my shiny new bars. And I didn't say anything. I just looked at him. And he stood at attention for me. And then he knew that there was a difference. And if he ever crossed my path again, in the military, he was dead. And that's exactly what happened. We were out in the field and there was this Jewish kid from Connecticut who was really a slob, not because he was Jewish, but he was just a slob. And being Jewish, you know, it really offended me. And what he used to do is: You would clean your rifle, he would take it and take your rifle and put it in his slot, and put his rifle in your slot. So you would get the demerits and you would be there on the weekend. So what we did to him one day, we carried him out to the parade field one day while he was asleep. You know, with his cot. But he wasn't a bad guy. And we went through the regular training. And, which was basic infantry in a sense. And at the end of that time, for those of us who were seniors and had completed the senior year at Rutgers, we were commissioned as second lieutenants. And we had the option of going on active duty for two years or six months. And I opt to go on for two years. And I remember saluting Sergeant Mitchum there. I think that's what his name was. And he got the first buck. And then I came home and I went to work for WT Grant in September, October, and November. And on November 17th or 18th I reported to Fort Benning, Georgia.

KP: How did you get your job at Grant?

RL: I was hired here. And again my work for my brother-in-law in this clothing store, and I guess that was my entrée into retailing. There was nothing else that came available. And it was probably the worst decision I ever made in my life because retailing has always been twenty years behind the

times. And working in a retail establishment is like working in a house of ill repute. The only difference is the girls, or the men, and the décor. Big mistake, but that's what I did.

KP: Why was retailing such a mistake?

RL: Well, because they didn't care about people. You were an animal. I mean, that's the way they treated you. No matter what corporation you worked for. You worked, suppose to get off Wednesday. And you worked Monday through Saturday, a half a day on Wednesday. Wednesday half a day meant that they locked the doors and you scrubbed the floors. You know, barefoot. Really! And you cut glass. And you banded the counters. And each manger of every store was like a Czar or like the king of that place. And he was like God. And I mean, you close this door a nine o'clock, you might work until eleven or twelve o'clock at night. Then you come in on Sundays. And it was terrible. It really was. Sixty-five bucks a week and you got a five dollar raise every year. And they couldn't control the shortage. So we used to jack up the prices. You know, unrecorded mark up. Which most retailers do today too. And then they take a mark down from the marked up price that wasn't recorded. So eventually you had a store with no merchandise and just a pole there holding up the roof. And that was it.

SH: What kind of positions, you mentioned a moment ago there was one African-American gentleman that you came in contact with at Fort Bragg, but what kind of positions did they hold in the Army ...

RL: At that time?

SH: Yes. Did it seem like it was equalizing more?

RL: The Army, I have to tell you, is the greatest equalizer in the world. You have Colin Powell. You have African-American generals, African-American admirals, the new captain of the ammo slip at Earl. I just opened up the paper today. He's an African-American and nobody thinks anything of it. The saddest thing about not having the draft, and I think that we should have the draft, it gave these people who have never been given the same educational, social, and economical advantages we all have, just because of the color of our skin. I mean, if I walk down the street nobody knows. If they're anti-Semitic they don't know that I'm a Jew. But if you walk down the street and you hate African-Americans or blacks or whatever or Asians, and just by the color of their skin. And you never get to know the content of their mind, you know, as Mr. King said. As Reverend King said. So, but the Army was the first one that really opened up. And today, I mean, the Command Sergeant Major of the Army, McKinney, happens to be an African-American. And it doesn't make any difference. The only thing that we only care about is that his rifle or his weapon or his tank is pointing toward the enemy. And they have been give educational opportunities that they never got. And these kids could get the GI Bill and then come back and be doctors and lawyers. And I think that that is the thing that has really advanced the Civil Rights. In my judgement.

KP: But that transition wasn't always that smooth for the Army.

RL: No.

KP: Particularly in the '50s the Army had just been ordered to integrate.

RL: Well, it was ordered to integrate in 1948. So now when I went in in 1955 I became friendly. There was a Captain Jackson who happened to be an African-American. And I would, well, I'd go to the Club at Legion Lake at South Jackson, South Carolina. This little old Jew boy would go sit with him. [Southern accent]

KP: With ...

RL: And it didn't set too well. It did not set too well. And I didn't care because the Army, generally, prior to World War II, was an all white, Christian, Protestant fraternity. It really was. And you'll find, like, the commander or captain who got one his ships out of Pearl Harbor, so it wasn't sunk, he was a Jew. He got the Navy Cross. He should have got the Congressional Medal of Honor. And those are the same things that happen to African-Americans because of the stereotype that people have about blacks, about Jews. As an example: The Jewish War Veterans, founded in 1896, the oldest veteran's organization ... in the United States. And it was founded, it was originally called the Hebrew War Veterans Association, because everybody said that Jews did not fight in the Civil War. That's not true. They were on both sides. And a lot of them died.

SH: So most people in the Army didn't share your open-minded view. You seem to have ...

RL: I wouldn't say that. I mean it was fairly new as Kurt said. It was nine years. The African-America squadron at that base. They never lost a bomber. They had one hell of a war record. People said African-Americans weren't smart enough to fly. What a crock that was. I mean, you know, as I said, the same educational, social, and economical opportunity. The only thing that breeds murder, rape, is a lack of education. Like everybody should have hospitalization. That's our right. That's a given. And look, that if it wasn't for World War II, I don't know, what do they say? You had 300,000 engineers, couple hundred thousand teachers, eighty or ninety thousand doctors, how many scientists that, without having the G. I. Bill, would have had nothing.

KP: ...When you were in R.O.T.C. did you expect you were going to get a regular commission and that you would do service or did you think you'd simply be in the reserves and never be called up? Was that an expectation that you ...

RL: No. I knew I wanted to do two years.

KP: You wanted to do two years and not ...

RL: I mean I wanted to get away. I had gone through a divorce as a kid, and, I mean, it really was crushing for me. It was a chance to earn a living of \$2600.00 a year. It was the excitement of going on active duty. I remember driving down to Fort Benning, Georgia and driving through the South. I had a 1950 Dodge that I bought. And the old woman who owned it, it had no radio. It was fluid drive. It was four door. And she was a customer of my father's. And it had been on blocks for like eight or nine months a year. And then during the summer she took it off. And it was a great car. And I remember it was raining through North or South Carolina. And as I approached Georgia I sort of got that sickening feeling in my stomach. I remember putting on my uniform at a gas station. And what vividly sticks in my mind. I had Thom McCann shoes with rubber soles, brown

shoes. It was a brown shoes Army. I think they cost \$3.99 or \$5.99. I'm not sure. And I remember reporting in. And the Master Sergeant had been a Lieutenant Colonel during World War II. And he had been in Hollywood. He had been a film producer, if I remember. And I don't know what happened that, you know, he was rift. And then after Korea. And I remember reporting in to this man who was a much finer officer and a much finer man than I could ever hope to be. But it was a time where, down South, I remember I dated a girl. Her name was Janet Leslie. And I have a picture of her. And my buddy, Izzy Nezvesky, who stayed in the military dated, I don't remember her name. She was an Irish girl with red hair and freckles. And she said to me, she said, "Ronny, are you Catholic?" And I said, "No." She said, "Are you married?" I said, "No." She said, "Are you engaged?" I said, "No." She said, "Are you going steady?" Now if I woulda said that I was divorced or that I...

KP: Hold that thought. [Pause] Go ahead. I just heard a helicopter.

RL: Oh. If I had said that I was married and divorced, or that I was Jewish, I basically would have been lynched. I mean, it was something you just didn't do. But I passed. And many times I would tell people my name was Leeds instead of Ledwitz. Although Ledwitz is really not a Jewish name. It's not a Jewish name. I had a guy who worked for me whose name was Lebowitz. He was German and he was Roman-Catholic. But it was a different time. And you did have to be careful. Even when I came back I applied for a job with Burlington Mills. And I did very well on the interview. And my cousin, I don't remember his first name, but he was this Jerry Snyder's twin brother, who had been with the 5th Ranger Battalion, and in OSS, and all that stuff. He worked as a top executive for Burlington Mills. And they said, "We'll call you in two or three weeks." And the next day they called me. They said I really did great. And they called me back in. And the guy said, "You know, there's no spot on your New York, on the application." 'Cause it's the law of the state of New York to state your religious preference. "But do you happen to be Jewish?" And I knew I was dead then. And I said, "Yes." And I said, "You know, you may have a blue filing cabinet or a green filing cabinet in back of you and I may have a gray filing cabinet, but basically it's the same filing cabinet. I never saw a bullet that was labeled." And I got up and walked out. But we were restricted. Medical school was hard to get into. That was another thing. No. No. No. No. No. No. No matter what I did.

KP: You knew that medical school ...

RL: Oh, I mean ...

KP: ... That you were going to face the quotas?

RL: Oh, absolutely. That, oh!

KP: That was known?

RL: Oh, forget it. I mean that, you know. And the more I think about it, I was dead. I was dead in the water. There were schools that you couldn't go to. I was accepted at Rutgers. It was a state university. So that was, I knew I was gonna get in here. But you, sort of, segregated yourself, in a sense, because you were not accepted.

KP: ... Was it surprising for some Southerners that you were Jewish? Because there were people in World War II, people, their jaws almost dropped out, they told me, when they found out...

RL: Well, they thought they had the payus down here, and the black hat, and the horns coming up.

KP: Yes. The real ...

RL: Oh, yes. And I mean, guys would say to me, in the back, "Hey, Ronnie, baby. What we gonna do if we fight Israel?" Well, same thing anybody else was gonna do. I'd fight 'em." But, or they'd say, "You Jew Ronnie." You know, something like that. Yeah, but that's what we had to live with. The banks were excluded. Forget it. The entertainment industry, of course. Who ever realized? I mean, I never even realized there was Jewish control because everybody changed their name. I mean, Hollywood was founded by Jews and a great part of it today is still. I mean, they say that the press and banking, maybe now, is more Jewish than it was before. But the large corporations: Johnson & Johnson, DuPont, General Motors. Forget about it. I mean you just couldn't get there. New England Life started with my brother-in-law in sales. You couldn't get into the New York office. Thank God! Because he made twice as much in sales as otherwise. Today it's a different story. fifty-seven percent of the Jews intermarry. My daughter's boyfriend's name is Italian, Bartolomeo, who's really Dutch 'cause he's adopted. And that's an interesting story in his own.

KP: It must have been very tempting just to pass. To change your name. I mean ...

RL: I wanted to do that.

KP: Yes.

RL: But my ... It was a horror. It would have been horrific for my family. But, the way I am, when somebody would say something and I'd deck 'em. I mean, I really, I think that that's what I would do. I never, even in the corporate structure, even in the military, I've always met something face on. I've always said what I've thought. And that is not the best approach to take, at any time. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor. But I'm incapable of doing that. Maybe it's 'cause I'm just that little guy with that Napoleonic complex.

KP: What did you think of your training at Bragg?

RL: It was okay. You know, I mean, I did everything I was suppose to do.

KP: You showed us the pictures of the combat training. I think that was ...

RL: Oh, no. That was at Benning. And that ...

KP: That was at Benning. Excuse me.

RL: And that was in North Georgia. At Dahlonge, for mountain training.

KP: Yeah. No.

RL: And then we were at Elgin Air Force base where Jim Doolittle trained his flyers for the first bombing run on Tokyo. And we went through, into the swamps, which was pretty tough. And I was doing fine. And then I hit a captain who was in training with me. And they didn't give me my tab. And I'll tell ya I never forgot that. And when I went back in the service in 1991 I wrote 'em and I said, "I want it." And they said, "No problem." And then a colonel said, "No. We can't give it to you." And it really ticked me off because I really earned that. I just hit him once.

KP: Well, I mean hitting a superior officer ...

RL: But he had no rank. He had the same rank as I do. Zero. Because when you're in Ranger training the first thing the sergeant said to me, I think I said something. And the next thing I knew I was looking up at him 'cause he hit me. And he took me into the latrine. And it was a lieutenant colonel who had no rank. I mean that's what I am now. And he was cleaning out the hairs in the john. And he said, "You're in charge of them, Lieutenant." So we had no rank. But this guy would do things that he thought he had a license to. And he was pilot. And he had a buddy named Wilson. His name was Devlin. And he had a buddy, named Wilson, who was a West Pointer. And when we were all trekking through the boonies he would hire a cab and do it. And he thought that he was just special and apart. And he was always breaking my chops. And I said, "Devlin, if you open your mouth one more time I'm gonna hit you." And he said, "No, you're not." And I hit him.

KP: And then, you know, ... you got a certificate but not your tabs. I mean what happened? What were the...

RL: Oh, broke my heart to this day. It's the one thing that I still covet. But I have that up on my wall, that I attended. And I think I even sewed a tab on, on a jacket that I never wear outside. Just so I could see what it looks like.

KP: After finishing your training at Benning where did ... the Army send you next?

RL: I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. And I stayed there for two years. Basic training command. And for some reason, they thought I was a lawyer. I put pre-law, you know, history major, pre-law. So I used to defend everybody. Never prosecuted, but defended. And we had a situation once where a sergeant had borrowed like a, was it a sergeant, borrowed a twenty dollar bill from a trainee. And he was brought up on charges. And I beat the case. And, you know, I got up there and I remembered talking. And I'd say, "Is this a twenty dollar bill?" I said to the, he said, "Yes." And I said, "How was it?" And he said, "It was folded." So I folded it. In fact, I didn't show him what the denomination was. And I did exactly what he told me. And then I said, "What's the denomination of the bill?" And he didn't know. And, you know, I sort of said it was a kangaroo court. And I beat. I mean, the sergeant was guilty as hell. But if you can't prove it in a court of law. It's just like O.J. Simpson or whatever. He's innocent according to the judicial system, you know. It's like McKinney. I believe he's guilty. But how in God's name could he be innocent of sexual harassment and then be guilty of obstruction of justice. And a very famous law professor has just said that. How can he be? Guilty of what? He was found innocent. He didn't do anything.

I mean, I think he's guilty. I think he's a disgrace to the military. And we just have a general now who ...

KP: Yes.

RL: Ugh! I mean this guy should go to jail. Permanently! I mean that's rape. However, ...but I stayed there.

KP: Just before you leave the ... I mean, what other cases would you do? ... 'Cause that's actually a fairly serious military charge. You know, that's...

RL: Yes. I mean borrowing, I mean, you know, you just... And I remember that I said, you know, "What is this kangaroo court?" And here this stiff neck Army officer's, you know, sitting there. And a non-commissioned officer judged by a group of his peers. And I didn't make too many friends. And I, I mean, every time you got a bum up there they'd say, "All right, Lieutenant." That was my responsibility, to get 'em off. I mean, and if they couldn't prove it I got 'em off.

KP: So what other cases were there?

RL: I don't remember. But I remember that that case sticks in my mind. And I wound up as a Club Officer, as a punishment, which destroyed your career. I mean, you know, you were dead. And I served under Colonel John F. Trude, who was an executive with Exxon. He had been a Club Officer and a courier during World War II. Became a Lieutenant Colonel in the California National Guard. I wouldn't follow him to the latrine if I was tied up on roller skates, and blind folded, if I hadn't gone to the bathroom in six months, 'cause he was a bad officer. And he was married to an ex-movie actress by the name of Geneva Jackson, who played in Stagecoach with Marlena Dietrich. Claire Trevor was her name, that I was trying to think of before. And he came home one day and he found his wife in the sack with his commanding officer. And he sort of went loony. And not much happened to him during World War II. He went back to Exxon or Esso, at the time. And when the Korean War started he was activated and he went to Korea. And he was relieved of his command for ordering his troops into enemy fire. But that's what the Israelis do, you know. You bracket fire, you know, your troops advance and you lift fire. Well, the Israelis didn't do that. They go right through their fire 'cause the enemy keeps their head down. And they feel that way you don't lose as many casualties. And as an offensive tactic it works very, very well. So they sent him to Japan and Tokyo. And he had a big fight with the general's wife about who was gonna get responsibility for redecorating the green room or the blue room. And he sort of went a little Loony Tunes. So they moved him back to Fort Jackson. His career was over. They were gonna relieve him from the Army. Probably didn't have enough years to retire. He was gonna go back to an enlisted status. And one of the things that he had me do was take care of his wife. And she was very tall I remember. I would take her dancing. And I would go shopping with her. And I worked as a Club Officer.

KP: So you literally would like take her shopping and ...

RL: Oh, yes. Yes. And we would go dancing. And I would come up to about waist high with her. And it was really ridiculous. And he was really a fruitcake. I mean, he reminded me of the Cain Mutiny. And he was Captain (Queeg?), except he was a lieutenant colonel. And eventually he left the military. And then I went to my career as an executive with W.T. Grant. And I stayed with them through 1968, I guess. And I went on to other things.

KP: What made someone, I mean, you've made broad brushes with certain figures, like Captain

Van strikes me as a good officer, and you've described this Colonel and some of his traits. What made the good and bad officers that you could see in your two years, '55-'57? And roughly what was the percentage of good officers that you've encountered and bad officers that you've encountered?

RL: Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

KP: What about personal experience?

RL: You'd have to take that on an ... Well, I got a Captain Angel A. Irrizarry, who had been with the 65th Division or Regiment out of Puerto Rico. I don't remember. He was a bad officer.

KP: What was so bad about him? I mean ...

RL: He was a political appointment if I remember. He was probably a National Guard officer, maybe, a reservist. Came on active duty from the Korean War. I think they lost their colors in Korea. He was more interested in pomp and circumstance and I wouldn't follow him to the latrine. Colonel Trude was a bad officer. I thought they were yellow.

KP: What about the officers at Jackson? Were there any you respected or thought really did a good job?

RL: Yes. There was an officer who was an M-1 training instructor. I do not remember his name. I respected him. He was a combat vet. When I was training at Fort Benning, Georgia there was one officer there who had polio. He was a Ranger officer and he was still on active duty. There was one officer there who given the Medal of Honor. One leg, one arm, blown away. My tach officer had his calf blown away on one leg. Limp. Still on active duty. You know, we began to do the same thing the European armies did. If you were blind in one eye or you had one arm or one leg, you still functioned. I think somewhere around 1965 you had a Navy pilot who had his leg amputated because he landed on an electric wire. There was an article in Life magazine. And he fought to stay on active duty as a pilot. There is that, "What is a man?" The uniform doesn't make the man. You know, the man makes the uniform. I mean, you're either a good professor or a bad professor. How you dress and who you know doesn't mean squat. ... Whether you can give inspiration and lead your troops or your students. It's what's in here that counts.

KP: What did you think of the people you were training? Your men that ...

RL: Well, originally I was on an M-1 rifle committee. And then I was a company commander. Until I won too many cases. Then I went up as a Club officer, which, they didn't do that anymore. It's run by civilians now. And this kid, Ferdinand Bagan Batista, was a bad kid. And one day he came up to me and he said he wanted to do me. I said, "I hope you do." I told him where I lived. I said, "I'm gonna kill ya." I mean, if I woulda done that. And he stole a field jacket. And I went to the barracks where he was billeted. And he was so bad I used to have him sleep with a sergeant who was also Puerto Rican. A very good man. Did you ever feel like somebody's in back of you? And he was comin' for me. And I flipped around. I shoved a loaded .45 in his guts. Now at this range I woulda blown him in half. And I had him incarcerated. And he was just a bad kid.

KP: What ever happened to him? Did you ...

RL: Well, I remember he pulled his pants down for one of my acting non-commissioned officers. His first name was Todd. Who, himself, you know, wasn't a regular sergeant. But he was an acting sergeant. He had a blue armband on. And he threw him between the steps. And when we had him incarcerated they said that this kid wanted to talk to me. And I remember, remember I was only twenty-one years old, and I went down. And he said that the guys there wanted him to perform an unnatural act. And I said, "Well, you realize..." Stupid me. I said, "You realize it's immoral. It's not right. It's against God and mankind." I went into a whole litany. And he said, "No." He says, "I'd do you Lieutenant...", he said, "...but I don't want to spend the rest of my life in Leavenworth." And with that I left. But he was just a kid who had been... I guess nobody knew how to love him. And I don't mean that in a vulgar sense. Nobody cared about this kid.

KP: Yes.

RL: He was just a throw away kid. And when his parents died he was all alone out there. And they had been dead like ten years. So he must have been like eight or nine and they probably just threw him in the street. And he survived the only way he knew how to survive. It's too bad they couldn't save him. Because, I mean, you save a kid you save the world.

KP: You mentioned this basically bad kid. I mean he ... thought he could basically get off by a homosexual act. ... Did you ever encounter any cases of this? Any court-martials of someone being ...

RL: I don't think ... that he ever performed a homosexual act. I think that he was just being a wiseacre. I ...

KP: You think that's what it was ?

RL: Oh, no. I think he was probably as straight as you or I. I mean, I don't think that he... I mean, and I gotta tell ya, at that point in time I wasn't even sure what that word meant. To be honest with you. I mean, I had a very provincial life. Army officer. I never gambled in the service. I don't even gamble to this day. I don't smoke. Doesn't mean I didn't, but I don't.

KP: I just did an interview yesterday and he was in the Air Force. And ... one of his distinct memories as a medical officer is how much drinking went on. With the group he was with, with both pilots and non-pilots...

RL: I drank. I mean, I did drink.

KP: What about others around you? I mean, how common ...

RL: Oh, I mean, oh, listen. I had this, what was his name? God. He had been, he was a graduate of the University of Virginia. He had been with the State Department before the war. And he was a Lieutenant Colonel. He served in the Pacific. He served in France. Married a Frenchy. She cheated on him. He lost it. He drank pretty heavy. His name was McCabe. He used to come into the club, and he was very Ivy: gray flannel slacks, wing-tips, type of shirt, you know, where you put

that little gold rod through, rep tie, blue blazer, white-blue shirt. Start drinking right after dinner or before dinner. Six o'clock. After six o'clock. And he would stay there and drink until eleven o'clock at night. And he said, "You know Lieutenant, if you're gonna drink, just make sure you can walk a straight line." And he was an alcoholic, really bad. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know whether he ever made full colonel. I don't think so. But he, there was a lot of hard drinking.

KP: Yes.

RL: I mean a lot of hard drinking. I remember going into the officers club and there was one guy, there were two guys. One guy's name was Kooney. He was a captain. Was gonna revert back to sergeant. And his buddy. And they had been enlisted. And the Army was their whole life. And they were captains now. Officers and gentlemen. And when the riff came, I don't know whether they drank before, but they drank a hell of a lot after. And I remember walking into the club. It was a Saturday afternoon. And this one guy was sitting in the lounge watching television. And it was Crusade in Europe. And he was drunk as a skunk. And he kept saying, "I love it, I love it, I love it." The war he loved. They weren't paper people. They weren't educated. They were combat infantry men. And the military was a way of life. Killing was a way of life. ...War was how they got promoted. The military man today hates war because we're the ones that have to die in it. Think about it.

KP: Were these guys, these guys, they missed it. They really ...

RL: They missed it.

KP: They genuinely missed it.

RL: They missed the action. I mean, you have guys who really liked it. I mean, it's like being a professional killer. You really like it. And the adrenaline, you know, pump. It's like a guy who jumps out of a plane.

KP: You talked earlier about the concerns about the preparedness of the military today. But what about, and admittedly you were a young lieutenant, but what did you...

RL: I was cherry. I was a virgin.

KP: But what did you think of the military which has now been through World War II, been through Korea, what was the state of military readiness?

RL: God! I mean we were about as worthless as the nipples on a bear's butt. I mean we were ...

KP: You sensed this even as a lieutenant that ...

RL: Yeah. I mean, we were ... Nothing really changes. You know, we don't learn from history at all. I was reading an article ... Before I forget. About Face. Hackworth. I have that book. He did Borda in. But Borda musta flipped out. 'Cause he didn't do anything wrong. But getting back to what your question was. I was reading an article in the Army Times last week or two weeks ago.

Mrs. Kid, whose husband was a previous sergeant major, and his son just enlisted in the Army. College grad. Wants to go to officer candidate school. And she said, "No way." There was another article where non-commissioned officers of all branches of the service are talking about, "How do we stand right now?" And they say that we're losing it. Nobody wants to stay in. Pilots are getting out. Sergeants are getting out. You're not taking care of your own. Young GIs are living on food stamps. Why doesn't the government pay them a decent salary? How can they say to Sean over here, goes through ROTC, and they say, "Look. You're bright. You're intelligent. You're articulate. I want you to make the Army your career." When he knows damn well, in eight to ten years, they're going to throw him out on the street with nothing. Or, if he's dumb enough to stay, they just cut his retirement from fifty to forty percent. When he hits sixty-five when, when you're a Congressman or a Senator, and you serve five years in Congress, you get life-time medical benefits. We're the only group of Federal or Civil Servants that lose our medical insurance. You have women now who are widowed in their late seventies or eighties and they have no medical insurance. 30,000 veterans of World War II are dying every month. What do we say to them? What about the promises that they made? There are people that won 'Nam that, and we did win the war in 'Nam, we really did. We won the military victory. We didn't win the political victory. And there was Korea. And we really won the Cold War and World War II. What do we say to these people? What, do we just let them die? We are totally unprepared. ... And it's gonna be a different type of war now. It's not gonna be where massive armies are massing one against the other. Let me tell you what's gonna happen. Twelve guys ...

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

KP: You were ... Please go on.

RL: All right. Twelve men who have been immunized against anthrax are going to go to the tallest building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and they're going to drop a three or four pound bag of anthrax. And 200,000 people are gonna die. That same bag will wipe out half the population of Washington D.C. You can get a small cargo ship with an atomic device that will take out New York City. There are three groups in the United States today, Arab terrorist groups. There's (Hamas?), which is Palestinian. You have an Iranian group, which is part of the Rafsan Jani Khomeini group, which is Hitzbollah. They're in this country. And then there's another group, which I think is an Egyptian, and I think it's Islamic Jihad. I may be wrong on the pronunciation of that. And what is happening, they're bringing in people who are gathering intelligence. That's low class intelligence. And they're doing fund raising because they're coming through thirty-six countries that this wonderful government of ours is saying that you don't need any security clearance. And they're coming through as students. And the FBI is allegedly following these people. But you know what a security person once told me? They said, "Locks are made for honest people, not dishonest people." If somebody wants to knock you off, they're gonna knock you off. If somebody wants to rob your house tonight, or break into this office, they're gonna be able to do it. 'Cause the chances that you're gonna be able to stop it: forget about it. You're not gonna be able to do it. The Russians have now developed a virus that is a cross between e-bola and anthrax. You can't ... do anything. In Oblentz, Russia right now there's a manufacturing facility where they have manufactured viruses that can wipe out the world twice over. What are we going to do? Are we going to continue to dump our bacteriological and chemical weapons program? I don't think that we should. The only way that we can do anything is we have to incinerate what they have. Now I have to ask you something. You're married. I see you have a picture of your kids there. Their kids

or your kids?

KP: Actually, they're ... my sister's son. I don't have children at this point.

RL: No. But I'm saying. Your wife ... If I came and said, "Look. His wife or your wife?" Who you gonna kill? It's not that you wanna do that, but you have to make the punishment so horrific that they'll never do it again. And today we have a major problem. China's probably our greatest problem. The mistakes that we made during Desert Storm. And you really can't fault Bush for it because he felt that the enemy we knew was better than the enemy that we didn't know. That if he took out Saddam Hussein a vacuum would have been created and the Rafsan Jani Khonmeini group from Iran or the Hafez Assad group from Syria would have moved in. And we would have had a guerilla war. And then 'Nam all over again. And we have a very big problem with the military today. Women in the military. And I don't say this as a chauvinist pig. Just tell me how many American men and fathers and mothers are willing for the body bags to come back with their daughters? I don't think anybody is. And the Americans have been so programmed since Desert Storm to that war is apple pie, ice cream, and Chevrolet. And nobody gets killed. Now I brought back the dead during Desert Storm. You know how many were killed? Three-hundred seventy-eight. And somebody says, "Well, I didn't know anybody was killed." And that's not a lot. It's not a lot. Unless you're the mother, the father, the son or the brother.

KP: ... I wanna just go back a little bit and bring you up, and definitely ask you about Desert Storm. Did you think of staying in the military?

RL: Yes.

KP: What happened? Why didn't you stay in? What happened that led you to go off active duty and in the reserves and go back to retail?

RL: My brother-in-law wrote me that letter, who was my mentor.

KP: And the letter you showed us earlier, where he basically said, "You shouldn't do it."

RL: Right. I shouldn't do it. And then my father was sick. He had asthma. And they needed me home. So I got out. But going back, I was twenty-two years old again, and it was a dream fulfilled. And I proved to everybody that here I was at fifty-seven. And to myself was that they made a mistake. 'Cause they took me. And I was one of one-hundred seventy-five officers and enlisted men. I think there were seventeen officers. That's from the entire country. From the entire world. Officers living overseas. Whatever. I was the one that was selected. So how bad was I?

SH: So you felt, as a young officer, that you, since you really didn't have a chance to use your combat skills, that you really wanted to have that chance. To go to war and do what you were trained to do.?

RL: Well I guess that was part of it. But it was an adventure. And like I said, I wasn't fifty-seven anymore. I was twenty-two years old. And it was the thrill of it, the excitement. The adrenaline was flowing. The unknown. And, I mean, it's not that I'm a war monger, but, I mean, it was an exciting thing to do.

KP: I mean, there were a number of reservists. Very few were called up. And ...

RL: I volunteered.

KP: You volunteered. And you had said earlier that you had to fight to get accepted. That you weren't on their first list. Or were you?

RL: No. I applied, I guess, in August. And I got ... I forgot about it. And I was in Louisville, Kentucky, where I had one of my banking operations. And, let me just take one. [take a breath mint] I'm getting some pains. And I got a phone call from my lawyer for some reason. I was pretty sure it was Allen. And he said, "I got this letter." And then he said that it was Dover Escort. And I thought it was an escort service. I didn't know what it was. I mean a real ..., you know what I mean by an escort service?

KP: Yes.

RL: And they said that I was being considered. And on January 10th I went down to Fort Mead, Maryland. I took my physical. Now mind you I had a twenty percent disability 'cause I had been injured at Indian Town Gap when we brought the Marielitos in. And I got hurt. And I wound up with a ten percent disability. And then it was raised to a twenty percent. And I went down there and I passed the physical. And I told them I was twenty percent. And, of course, mind you, I had just gone through a divorce. And I said, "Wow." I mean, you gotta understand the mind set. And this was something that I had been trained for, God, how many years before? Almost forty years before it all started. In fact, it was forty years. And it was an exciting time for me. And I remember calling this lady sergeant in Atlanta, Georgia at Fort McPheerson. And I said to her, "Did you call anybody up?" And she said, "Yes." They had the first contingent January 10th. And I said, "Why wasn't I called?" And she didn't say anything. I said, "Let me tell you something, sergeant. Your soul may belong to God, but your ass belongs to me if I'm not called." And I was emphatic. And I had no right to say that. But it shook her up. And I got called. And I went.

KP: So ... when did you report and where did you report and where did you...

RL: Well, I reported at Fort Mead, Maryland. And I was assigned to the Dover Escort Unit. And we brought the dead home.

SH: What other duties did you have besides that? I mean, that seems...

RL: That was enough.

KP: So where were you based? I take it you were based in Dover, Delaware.

RL: No. We were based at Fort Mead, Maryland.

KP: Fort Mead.

RL: And they couldn't billet us there. So we lived at Fort Mead. And our functions were out of

Dover, Delaware.

KP: Okay. So you would be flying back and forth between ...

RL: No. We didn't fly. I mean it was a short hop, skip and a jump.

KP: Oh. Are you okay? Is everything ...

RL: I'll be all right.

KP: How long did you stay in active?

RL: Until March 14th. And I had an accident during that period of time. And my discs were ruptured. I ruptured three to four, four to five, and a bulge down five-one. Had to walk with a cane. Braces on both legs. Plate on my back. I still have that. It's hard for me to sit for a lot. So ... 'Cause everything goes numb. And I'm in pain all the time. And I can't take anything for the pain because they gave me drugs and they burnt the lining of my esophagus. So I'm now pre-cancerous. And I take forty milligrams of a drug called Prilosec. And they were afraid initially that drug in itself caused cancer. At least in laboratory animals. So I switch to Pepcid for the last ten days of each month, then back to Prilosec. I take a drug to bring the food down. And I get these severe pains in the chest. And I'm like in a catch twenty-two because I can't lay down because of the ... I'm suppose to lay down flat because of the back. But because of the Barrett's I'm suppose to sit up. Which means that my weight fluctuates. I'll be one-fifty-two. I'll be one-fifty. I have a hard time ... I didn't do too bad. I was able to eat today, but I really didn't eat too much for breakfast. And I don't eat late at night. I can't handle alcohol 'cause it irritates it. Or bubbles, which I shouldn't have, but I cheat once in a while, and I pray that the drugs will take it. No tomatoes. No citrates. I get ... And the problem with severe pains, like I'm having now, is that you don't know whether it's a heart attack at my age. So, but, I was unable to walk. And I learned how to walk again. And there have been occasions where my vital signs dropped. And I was at Walter Reed in March of '91 and May of, I guess, about '96, where that's exactly what happened. And a buddy of mine, Chaplain Eastman, Church of Christ, who was a captain. A chaplain, and Father Rolin, who was a former colonel, Catholic priest, was there, and Father Kenny, who's my Irish buddy, who's a priest. And a Jewish chaplain, Sandy Drezin, who's a full colonel and was the chief chaplain at that time. They switched back anyway. Couldn't find him. And I was wired for sound. And I decided I wasn't going. And I learned how to walk again. And I do, so far, since a week ago Sunday, I'm on thirty-two miles. And I should do, probably about thirty miles this week. And I ...

KP: Which is quite a bit. Most people who don't have any problems are lucky to do that kind of walking. Some people are lucky to walk far in the parking lot.

RL: Oh, yes. Yes. I was one-hundred ten pounds in a Ranger unit and I was one-fifty at Rutgers. And I dance. And I have a very positive attitude. Life is: glass is always half full instead of half empty. And what I said about Kirkwood. There's no shades of gray. Because even with that I made it. I got three great kids. And I'm just lousy when it comes to getting married.

KP: ... I mean you're the first Persian Gulf Veteran I've interviewed. And I've interviewed a

number of Vietnam and people who stayed in. I just interviewed General Kroesen ...

RL: ... That doesn't ring a bell.

KP: ... He retired in the early '80s. But he ended up retiring ... commander of American troops in NATO. ... How was the Persian Gulf War different from the other wars? You had been in the reserves during Vietnam and you were and ROTC cadet during Korea. What was your take on the Persian Gulf War? And you have probably in many ways, had a very difficult job emotionally because you were transporting the dead. What was your take on the war? 'Cause on the surface it was a very successful war. In a lot of ways. I mean we liberated Kuwait. The American military, from what I've read, performed splendidly. The country was fairly united behind the effort once the fighting started. Is all that wrong?

RL: It was a war that we should have finished. In my judgement. I really think we oughta leave the Israelis alone. How we could ask anybody to take one missile hit after another and not defend themselves is beyond my comprehension. Every time the Israelis, and not because I'm a Jew, but I'm an American first, they don't want our men. They just ... need our money. They don't even need our technology. The Israelis developed a projectile that penetrated the T-73, the Russian tank. They developed a robot that faked out the Iraqi radar. If they hadn't taken out that atomic reactor in 1980 we woulda been facing an atomic war. I think that we should've gone in there and finished the job. And the sad thing is that there was a faction there that was ready to overthrow Saddam Hussein. And we just didn't do it. We were waiting for U. N. approval. The Arabs, in my judgement, are gonna let us swing. They only do what's good for them. The Israelis are the only democracy, so to speak, in the Middle East. And I only say that we should help them because it means that our boys don't have to die. It was a push button war, but I have to tell you that air power alone is not gonna do it. In order to win a war you have to go in and take the ground. And you have to destroy the will of the people to resist. And cut their supply lines. If we go in with air power now it's gonna be the same thing. Now Colin Powell made a big mistake. He wanted to, number one, to have the support of Congress, the press, the America people. And then he would have gone in with both feet. We had the support of the American people. We have to make these people realize that if they're gonna mess with us we gotta stop 'em. Because it's like when you run across a field, and the artillery is coming in. ... What you wanna do is lay down and hug the ground, I guess, or dig a hole. And that's how you die. You gotta keep moving. And that doesn't sound logical to somebody who doesn't understand it, but ... you gotta get through it really quick. And we have to get through it real quick. During the war there were sixty-eight percent of the women in the military pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant, one or the other. When you have a man and a woman who are both in the military, I don't care who gets out, but one of those parents, when they have children, should get out of the service. 'Cause in many instances they just left the kids. And women, in my judgement, are too emotional to be in combat. And, as I said before, when you look at a woman you look at your mother, your sister, your brother, your aunt, your grandmother. And you just don't think clearly. Seventy percent of the women who have been interviewed, who are in the military today, don't want a combat function. It's these women who do it for the sake of promotion. We can no longer afford to be gender and politically correct. Our main job is to protect the American people and to protect the Constitution. And all this other garbage that they want the military to do now, like the borders, that's not our function. We're not a police state. And the Army is vehemently, and the military is vehemently, opposed to that 'cause we say that's how Adolph Hitler started. We don't want that. And the military personnel today,

and you've got, please... If the only thing you walk away from, when I walk away, is to know that the military hates war 'cause we're the guys who die in it. How do you feel ... when you have to open up a coffin and you have to see what's in there? ... To see if the uniform is correct. Maybe there's no head. Maybe there's half a body. Maybe there's nothing but a uniform. Our job was to escort the body home. Flew out of Philadelphia. You would meet a hearse at the tarmac. And you either drive in the hearse or in back of them. This was general, standard operating procedure. I'm not saying that I did this, but this is what the rules were. And you would go to the funeral home. And there was a casualty assistance officer who actually met with the parents. And you used to pray to God that they weren't gonna ask you to attend the funeral. Because when you hit that door and knock on the door the father, the mother, the sister, would come and say, "Why is he in the ground and why are you here?" So it was a very difficult and very traumatic time. And I remember a friend of mine had been a combat Marine during Korea. And then he became a chaplain. And he was a reservist. And before he came on I guess he was retired. He had long hair and a beard and a mustache. I don't remember his last name. But I have a list of the officers I served with. And I said, "Don," when it was over I said, "Can I cry?" And I did.

KP: ... You didn't actually go out to people's houses?

RL: No.

KP: No.

RL: No. I was ...

KP: What was your day to day job? During the Persian Gulf War, what was a typical day?

RL: Well, we were billeted at Fort Mead. And if it was necessary for us to go, we escorted a body home. And I would, at my rank, I escorted anybody from lieutenant colonel on down. If you were a general officer, I guess ... you need a general officer. You need a colonel to do that. And there was only one colonel. There was a couple of lieutenant colonels. And there was seventeen officers and one-hundred fifty-eight enlisted men. And I was relieved from active duty on March 14th. And, interesting, probably the only case going. I was on my way back to Macy's and I was sick. And I stopped at Fort Monmouth. And I saw Mrs. Monroe, who is a patient representative, who handled me when I was injured during the Mariel Boat Lift Crisis, when I was at Indian Town Gap. And that is a very interesting episode, I think, that I should discuss also, in 1980, as to what happened there. I think the American people are really uninformed about the conditions in the camp. Back to 1991, I told Mrs. Monroe I was sick. And she referred me to a Major Williams. And he looked at my record and he said, "You know, Colonel," he said, "You're still in the Army." I said, "I can't be. I've been give a two-fourteen and I've been transferred back to retired status." He said, "No, sir." He said, "We made a mistake." He said, "You're still in the Army, but I don't know how to bring you back on active duty." So at that point I took on the whole United States government. And on June 25th I was brought back in active duty, retroactive to the day that I got out. Back pain and all that stuff. And they brought me into Fort Monmouth. And I was a patient there until November 25th. And my condition had deteriorated so. And there're some things that I'm not gonna discuss with you for various reasons. So this'll sort of be a broad brush, okay? I was sent to Walter Reed. And I was there as a bed patient until March. And then there was nothing more that they could do for me. They were going to operate on my spine. And as a colonel I had a private

room. But the casualties were so high, contrary to popular belief, that they asked me if I would mind going into a room with three other officers. And there were four men, three in that room who had spine injuries. And within two to four weeks of being operated on they were impotent. So I spoke to Captain Grasso, who is now a major, and my orthopedic surgeon, and I said, "You know, Nick," I said, "I don't mind the pain. I don't mind losing the use of my legs." And when I tell you I'm in pain I'm in pain twenty-four hours a day. And sometimes it gets to be pretty bad. I just turn it off with my brain. And there's no drugs that I can take because of the situation here So eventually it will probably kill me. So I said, "I don't mind the pain. And I don't mind losing the use of my legs." I said, "But I'm getting married in six months and I don't want you to lose anything else." And he said that if we both had the same condition and they operated on him and didn't operate on me, we'd both be in the same spot in five years. So I went home still in the Army. And I didn't have to wear a uniform. I didn't report for any duty. And I stayed that way, 'cause I freed up a bed, until June 22 of 1993. And I was retired from active duty. And in January 1993, I went before a medical board at Walter Reed. Now when I initially applied for retirement they turned me down. So I appealed it. And they turned me down. And then I got a lawyer by the name of Gary Myers. Now I don't know whether you remember that there was a Navy justice scandal written up, it was on "60 Minutes" and U. S. News and World Report, that was the lawyer Gary Myers. Also at Earl there were two Marines on guard duty and they were playing Russian roulette. And this one guard, or sentry, killed his buddy. That was the lawyer. And I got him as my lawyer. And I did a lot of the work myself. He was never available. He was very bad on getting back phone calls. And I went before a medical board on January of 1993. And I was awarded fifty percent disability. Which, if it's a medical retirement, and you were in the service prior to September 25, 1975, it's tax-free. And mine is tax-free. They made a mistake and I am appealing that. And they've given me a hard time. But I went from running a \$2,600,000,000 dollar banking operation and everything that went with it, to being a pensioner. And I'm rated a 100% disabled by the VA and 100% by Social Security. Now with the VA, I've been awarded like twenty-four thousand a year. But you can't double dip. You can't take two pensions. They've been trying for years to get that through Congress. 'Cause they say if you work for the Postal Service, and you're disabled, you can draw two pensions, or if you work for a large corporation. The saddest thing, though, with Macy's, was that my lady vice-president, when I went on active duty, she said, "Where are your orders?" I said, "They are VOCO" Means they came over the phone. . . . She says, "You volunteered?" I said, "That is correct." She said, "Since you volunteered, and we don't have any paper, if you leave you're AWOL from Macy's." And I was. And I asked about insurance. She said, "Well, nothing's going to happen to you." And within thirty days I was injured.

KP: So in some sense you had burned your bridges with Macy's? Macy's was going . . .

RL: . . . I will retire. I will get a pension from Macy's . . . on October 1st. But it's not going to be very much. I was only with them for twelve years. But, you know, working for a large corporation like that is like working in a house of ill repute. . . . The vice-president stole everything I ever did, you know. And he would take my reports and put "I" instead of "me", "you" instead of "thee", put a comma, and it was his. And every time I had to meet with the chairman of the board he would write on his cuff, you know, what I would give him. But I used to leave at three o'clock in the morning on Saturday for the airport and fly to Louisville, Kentucky. And work 'til, I don't know, one/two o'clock in the morning. And come back the next day. Make sure they were processing our money instead of AT&T, or American Express, or American Airlines, or Continental. And in the weekend I was there, I'd push through another \$17,000,000. And I was responsible for

five million dollars worth of contracts. And I produced the statements. And then I would fly to Phoenix and I would meet, at the highest levels of government, with the Postal Service. The national Postal Service. I was raped. Incredible. But that's the corporate structure.

KP: You spent a lot of time with Grant, which now, I mean ...

RL: Is gone.

KP: Is gone. I remember it going bankrupt in the early '70s.

RL: Right. Late 1978. That is correct. Because they never knew what they really wanted to be. And ...

KP: You sensed that when you were there? That they ...

RL: Well, the this is, I mean, you know. I always had that military mind set where, you know, loyalty and dedication to a structure, to a company. You know, as a kid you want to work for a company. You work for 'em all your life. You got a gold watch and that was it. And loyalty was really something. When I took my last store over, 'cause I had done pretty well, but they sent me to the hell holes expecting me, I guess, to fail. Jersey City, Jackson Avenue, in the heart of the African-American section there, which was worse, at that time, than 125th Street in Harlem. They used to come in and come in with a razor or a knife, and, you know, steal stuff right off the counters. It was a terrible, terrible time. And I remember that the Woolworth's store was run by a guy who had been a Ranger during World War II. And he used to, he basically used to fight for his life. It was a terrible, terrible time. And then you'd fake 'em out and you'd do well. And then you'd go to Union City. I even joined the police force in Union City, as a reservist, so I could arrest people in the store. And you worked six days a week, six nights just about. It was terrible, I mean, terrible. And ... they gave you a five-dollar raise every year. And then I finally got promoted to Old Bridge and really knocked 'em dead. And then I went to Neptune. And the manager who would work there was an alcoholic. And he sold merchandise below cost, I mean, below retail and even below cost and never take a mark down, just to get the sales. And my boss said, "Cover it." Well, you got an order. It was like, you know, in the German Army. Orders are orders. And it killed me. And I was there for thirteen years. And then I went to work for Almart. And my boss, vice-president, stole every ... I wrote a manual. He stole it. I left. And then I went to work for S. Klein Department Stores. And I did well there. I was in personnel there. And then I went into internal audit. I had set up and interviewing procedure where we dealt with the agencies. And I controlled that. And there was no more stealing. And there were no more kick-backs and, you know, I coulda made a fortune. I probably, in those years, coulda made a hundred thousand dollars, you know. I never took a dime, never, not even a pencil. And an auditor came in and he wrote me up. And I was as honest as the day is long. But the way he wrote it, it looked like I committed murder. And I said, "You know, that's what I wanna do." And I became an auditor. And they used to call us "the untouchables." And then that company, there was a strike, and we said, "One more strike and we're out." And we were. I was part of Rapid American. Mr. Rickless. I'm sure you've heard of him, The Magic of Mergers, who is married to Piasadora. Owned Schenley Whiskey, BVD, Botany, Timely, Alligator Clothes, The Mullin Shops, McCrory, McClellen, and Green, Newberry's. Not a very honorable guy, an Israeli. Wrote this book called The Magic of Mergers and passed it out to all the sixth grade classes in the United States. Very, very wealthy man today, I

guess. And then they went down the tube. I went to work for my brother-in-law, Bill, in the food business. Then went back to work for McCrory, McClellan, and Green. Traveled from Maine to Florida, as far west as Skieston, Missouri. They stuck me on my pension. I left and I went to work for Macy's. And was with them until they sold the receivables to General Electric Credit Corporation. And that company was the greatest company in the world. Working for them was like graduating from Yale and Harvard. It was just incredible.

KP: Working for ...

RL: Macy's.

KP: Macy's.

RL: Macy's.

KP: Despite all the ...

RL: Oh, I mean, you, it was really great, I mean, and I loved it. And I was an auditor. And I became aware of a situation where they were over-reserving on workman's comp. I wrote a report. My boss buried it. So when an opportunity came to travel to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where we produced our statements, I took it. That meant I drove eighty-five miles each way from my home. But outta sight, outta mind. I wasn't in the office all the time. That was one-hundred seventy miles a day in my own car. When I went to Cranford it was two-ten. And that lasted for a couple of years. And then we moved to Hillside. And then I got involved with the Postal Service. And I became the comptroller, that's the card there that you can have, for Macy's. And I not only produced the statements at Hillside, I did the budgets, I handled the contracts. And I spent five to ten days every month in Louisville, Kentucky. And we processed the money there. About 45,000,000 statements a year. Produced about sixty. When we bought I. Magnum in Bullock's, we sent those two divisions plus Macy's California to Phoenix. And I had a suite in each of those two places. And I interfaced, as I said before, on at highest levels of government, with the Postal Service. When I got married in 1992 the assistant Postmaster General, one of them, was at my wedding. Who became a very good friend of mine.

KP: You were, in many ways, very successful ... I mean, what you say about retail is ...

RL: Well, I have to tell ya, I mean, I never made the money that I thought that, you know, I should've. My boss left much to be desired as a man. And I hope that goes down in posterity. He was really a thief. And I remember when he rated me. He said that I was great, the best thing that ever happened, but it would be a disservice to Macy's and myself if they promoted me. So here all I needed to get up to the next level was ten or fifteen grand. And I never really made the money. I mean, people thought I was making a quarter of a million dollars when I was makin' fifty or when I was makin' fifty-six, as an example. It was pretty tough.

KP: Well, in many ways I'm not surprised. 'Cause my parents were in retail. And much of what you say about retail is in fact ...

RL: Oh, yeah. It's like being a prostitute. It really was. And Eddie Finklestein, for sheer greed, he

took the most successful retailing company in the world. We own our own warehouses, our own shopping centers. We own the property that we were on. There was nobody more successful than us. And he wanted his own corporation. So what he said was this, "Look, guys," he says, "tell ya what we're gonna do." And he was afraid of Campo because Campo had just bought Allied Stores. And he would call in an executive and give them an opportunity to invest in the buyout. I mean, that was it. And he'd say that investment was gonna be worth a lot of money. I mean, I was not at that level so I could not participate. ... And I don't care what you are, but to have that nepotism, or to do, it's the wrong thing to do. And they destroyed the company. And they went private. And they took us down the tube.

KP: Well, it's striking because, retail is very ... Unlike a lot of businesses, retail, if you, eventually this really does catch up to you. It's a very competitive world.

RL: Well, you know, I have to tell you. What happened is that when Campo went after Federated, Eddie Finklestein said, "Oh, no. You can't have it." 'Cause they were gonna buy it for four million six. Four billion, I'm sorry. And Finklestein said, "No. We'll give you six billion six." Or six billion nine. Campo came up with eight billion nine, so Finklestein said, "Okay. We'll take I. Magnum and Bullock's for a billion one." Now what that did, that took ... Originally, when we went private, we were \$3,400,000,000.00 in hock. And in six months, we paid off four-hundred million, 'cause my division was the greatest thing since sliced bread. And then what happened, I'm trying to think now, is that we went from three-billion-four down to three billion. And then we wound up in the hole for five-billion-one. And we were paying a billion-one in interest. So we had junk bonds that had buried us. And it destroyed the lives of many, many of us. And I know with this lady, she was VP Personnel. Her husband was a lawyer for Macy's. And she had been a manager at Federated. And the Senior VP of Personnel was the godfather of her kid, brought them in. And she was really a dip. I mean, and it was all nepotism. And people were brought into the corporation. I'm just looking at it very objectively. We brought in one guy, who worked for Governor Byrne. He was an idiot. And we paid him forty-thousand dollars for a fifteen or fourteen thousand dollar job. And we couldn't fire him. Okay. It was no different with the president of Macy's Corp. We had a chairman of the board who was the merchant and a president who was the operations guy. And he brought in his sister-in-law, for God sakes, because she was his sister-in-law. So they had these cliques.

KP: So it sounds like it was very balkanized. There were ...

RL: Yes. I mean, yes. And ... if you write a book on this, I'm dead, because I can't afford the lawsuit. Wait 'til I die, will ya? It will be soon enough.

KP: I'm going to recommend sealing this part of the interview when you get it. That ...

RL: Well, look. You know already what I want to seal.

KP: Yes.

RL: All right. But it was really ... a sad commentary, where it was like committing murder. They killed a great corporation. I mean I used to be able to go to Macy's and I could buy a Hart, Shattner & Max suit, with my discount that was \$495.00, for two-forty. They'd have a forty percent sale.

I'd get twenty or thirty percent off. Now my boss, who, trying to brown the apple, or rubbed the nose in it, explained to Finklestein that at Macy's, which is now Bamberger's, Macy's New Jersey, that if I owed three-thousand dollars and I paid a third of my debt each month there was no interest. So I paid a thousand and I could charge another thousand. There was just no interest. And he showed how much we lost. So we lost that benefit. And then with Regan we lost the thirty percent. And the top executives got fifty percent. And if they had a conference though he would go to Paris, France. He had an apartment in New York. It was incredible. You have no idea. If you talk about wasted money, like a seventy-six dollar screw for the Army or a toilet seat that four-thirty. Same thing.

KP: No. In fact, some of this has been in fact reported. Some of Macy's really colossal blunders.

RL: But I'll tell you what I have. I have the reports. I have it all. It would blow your mind. I have the books. I have the reports that I wrote. I have the figures.

KP: Well, if you ever need to find a home for them the Special Collections would welcome them at Rutgers.

RL: There's probably gonna come a time ... I mean, I'm getting to a point where I've been a bum for a long time now. I'm sixty-five, but I don't know whether I look sixty-five or I feel sixty-five. I still feel that I'm a young man. And I think I wanna do something. I don't know whether I wanna work, because [Laughter], you know, I would jeopardize my Social Security, I guess. And that's fifteen grand. And I can't do that right now. But I would like to do something. I want interaction with people.

KP: Right.

RL: And there's, I guess, a lot that I could tell. There's some things I can't tell you. And there's a side of me I can't discuss.

SH: There were all these things that were completely buried while you were at Macy's? I mean, they didn't ...

RL: I never buried 'em.

SH: But there were things that they didn't want to come to the surface?

RL: Well, when they started destroying my reports I always kept a copy. I have a copy, for a copy, for a copy. [Laughter] I have things about the military that, I mean, that I could tell you that would probably be better than Lady Chatterly's Lover.

KP: Well, I ... We've heard a full range. It's been interesting the stories we've told. I mean, the American military has often been a very good outfit, but it's been striking to me, it's a big organization, not everything runs smoothly.

RL: The thing that ... Now what do you teach, Kurt?

KP: My main course is actually this course: the Oral Histories of World War II. This is my prime reason for being here.

RL: You have to, I just want to focus on this, that right now, we are in a situation where we are putting, in my judgement, this country into jeopardy. We can no longer recruit good people for the military because of what we're doing to those people who are in the military now. And the thing that we try to explain to people is that those of us who have served our country are telling our children and our grandchildren, "Don't serve because they're not gonna take care of you." And there was a poem by Rudyard Kipling, "Tommy Atkins." Something like, "Tommy this and Tommy that, in a time of war, but in peace time nobody needs Tommy." And they just throw us away like we were a piece of garbage. And they look at us that for us to serve we have to be stupid. And that we're almost like sub-human.

SH: So you feel that, really, the military hasn't learned anything down through the years?

RL: That the military hasn't?

SH: Has not learned.

RL: Oh, no. I think that the military, that the generals who were field grade officers like myself during 'Nam, who are now the generals, brought the Army back to the point that they are now. But I think that many of these generals should now get out of the service because they still have the Cold War mentality. Where there's gonna be massive armies, one facing another. And that's not the case. It's gonna be a highly mobilized, quick response, type of war. But the American people have to realize, and they don't. And the members of Congress don't realize, because only about thirty or forty percent of the people in Congress now have served in the military, and they have no comprehension as to what's going on. And, as I said, we don't have the equipment. We're not training our people... How are you gonna fly a plane if you don't have the pilots? How are you gonna fly a plane if you don't have the spare parts or send the ships out? And how are you gonna recruit people if they know, when you're twenty-eight or twenty-nine, after you've given them the best years of your life, are gonna just throw you out in the street like a piece of garbage. And that if you get hurt they're gonna deny something like Agent Orange. According to the news, at Khazimiyah, there were twenty-thousand that were exposed. And at Ukhaydhir there were one-hundred by chemical and biological warfare. There was an ammunition dumped there that was blown and there were between a hundred and seven hundred warheads that were damaged and those gases exploded. Saddam Hussein, in my judgement, didn't want to kill anybody. He just wanted to make 'em sick. I mean kids are coming home and they're having children that have major physical defects. Women are getting cancer. Guys are dying from cancer. We didn't have those problems. What do you tell me?

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

RL: ... I'm not. I don't know why. I mean, I know why. 'Cause it's not what I remember of the military. I went to the Jewish War Veterans. And, in fact, when I joined, a guy came over, he was a lieutenant colonel, reservist, worked at Fort Monmouth. He wanted to find out that I was real. When he found out I was, I was allowed to join. I joined because my brother-in-law's brother was active in the organization. I went to a meeting and they were screaming and yelling and fighting

about who was gonna get elected to some stupid office. So I left. I went again and there was a guy who was a National Guard lieutenant colonel. Guy probably got up in the morning and kissed his own belly button. I'm not a... I don't like being a political person. I see people who are in the Guard, or generals, and it's a political appointment. Those are the things that bothered me. But I think an organization like the Reserve Officers Association, the Retired Officers Association, and the veterans organizations there is the work force of people that are paid functionaries. And the people who lead these organizations are trying to do things for us like our medical, our hospitalization. We are asking the government for subvension. Which means that Medicare will reimburse the Department of Defense and the Department of Defense is saying, "No, we can't do that. It's going to take away from weapons." As an example, we're then saying to them, "Well, what about TriCare?" Which is like an HMO, but once you're sixty-five you can't get into that. So we're saying, "Hey, look, during the Cold War the budget for the military was four-hundred billion dollars. Now it's only two-hundred fifty billion. We've saved a hundred and fifty billion. Let us join the Federal Employees Health Care Program." Where if you're in Congress, Senator or Congressman, after five years you get life-time health care benefits. "And we'll pay for it just like everybody else." And they're saying, "No." They can't do that. But they're willing to spend millions for illegal immigrants who have children, for child care and for medical health. And ... eleven billion for health care for people who have a green card and that type of stuff. What about us? We won the Cold War. I mean, that's why we're sitting here able to do whatever the heck we want now. What about us? We earned it. People look at us and they say, "Oh, you're retired from the Army?" They think I'm on welfare. I spent thirty-seven years, ten months, eighteen days. I never took a vacation. Any time the bell rang I went. I was there. I deserve that.

SH: So you feel really shafted by the government? Like, they haven't given you what you deserve for ...

RL: I don't know whether they're ... I'm very grateful for what I have. But what about the enlisted person who doesn't know the system? Who doesn't have the financial means to fight the system. What about him? What about the World War II veterans who are dying at thirty-thousand a month? What about them? I have a friend of mine by the name of John Borneo. You wanna know about a POW? He was blown out of a plane. He was in Germany for eighteen months. He was on a death march. He went to a reunion for the 8th Air Force in Arizona this summer. He's eighty-one years old. He's suppose to be getting \$2500.00 a month. They probably owe him a quarter of a million dollars. But do they tell anybody? And you know what they're waiting for? They're waiting for him to die. Then they won't have to do anything. And my Army doctor tells me the same thing. I'm not gonna tell ya which one. They're waiting for me to die. They won't have to do anything.

KP: You mentioned coming back for reunion. ... And so you've been back to reunions at Rutgers. Do you stay in touch with anyone you served with in the military? And who are they?

R.L: ...I belong to the Officers Club at Fort Monmouth. And there are guys who were with me in the 78th Division. And I see them there. And there's a closeness and a camaraderie that goes back to forty years. My best buddy Harry, A. Harrison Brennan, died of Amatrophic Lateral Schlorosis. And I have a Christmas tree in my office which is about yea high [Demonstrates] two and a half feet. And it's Harry's tree. And in the Jewish religion, if you keep somebody in your heart, they never die. So I have, it's my tree, my tinsel, and Harry's decorations from his family that probably

go back seventy years. So Harry is always with me. And that may seem a little maudlin, but I loved him dearly. And he was a Lieutenant Colonel when I was, I guess, a second or first Lieutenant. But I do ... A great part of my life revolves around that. I shop at the commissary. I go to the PX. I was married the second time at the Officers Club. My mother and father in '73 or '72 had their Fiftieth wedding anniversary there. My two sisters had theirs in '68 at their Twenty-fifth. Then ... one of my brother-in-laws died in '69. My daughter was bat mitzvahed there. My son was bar mitzvahed there. My step-son had his graduation. My daughter had her graduation party. So a great part of my life. I am very proud. Proudest thing I've ever done, that I was an Army officer. And it was payback time. And I gave a little bit more. And I know that somewhere, I mean, I'll always be on the rolls. And again, with everything, the corporate structure, the Army, they stuck it. The greatest country in the world. Where else but in America? And ... I think that ... as you leave this life you think as a wonderment of it. And I think that 1951 to 1998 is forty-seven years. Is that it? And this University is still standing. And basically, I said to you, [Sean] you all look the same.

SH: Yes.

RL: So how lucky are we? Very. No shades of gray.

KP: Well, thank you very much. Is there anything that we forgot to ask you?

RL: Well, I mean, I'll tell you what I have and you tell me if you want it. I have this stuff from Desert Storm. I have some of the things that the general wrote. I have a picture of probably the most famous unit in the United States Army, which is my Ranger Unit. They made a movie about us called Derby's Rangers. I have that. I have memorabilia that goes back to my time in the military: steel pots, an ammunition can. I don't know whether you wanna see that. And I don't know whether you wanna know, you know, about my kids, my marriages, or whatever,

KP: Well, I guess. You weren't called up for Vietnam. I guess one question I have ...

RL: We were called up for the Berlin crisis. And then it passed. Khrushchev backed off. We ...

KP: How long were you called up for? 'Cause you're not the only reserved officer that I've interviewed ...

RL: No. It never happened. I was managing a store in Jersey City, for W.T. Grant. We were suppose to be called up that weekend [Claps] And it ended.

KP: Oh. You never actually got a call, then?

RL: No. We never went. And, I guess, when Desert Storm came it was my shot. I wasn't gonna die without going or at least fighting to go. And I did. And I'm glad I did, even with what happened to me, 'cause my whole life changed. But I did okay. I had been divorced at that time, and got cleaned out, but I came back. And I'm in pretty good shape. It's that, you know, that bouncing back, it's that Depression mentality.

KP: ... The military has been very important to your life.

RL: Oh, yes.

KP: None of your children have served in the military?

RL: No. They said one colonel in the Army was enough, in the family was enough. My daughter, the one who's a lawyer, had the opportunity, if I remember, to at least apply for or get into the Air Force Academy. And she absolutely refused. No, they didn't want any part of it. I remember once, I must've done it as a joke. Remember that movie ... The Great Santini with Robert Duvall? He was a Marine Corp fighter pilot. I remember sitting my kids in the den and saying, "I want you to watch this." Or that's what they tell me anyway. I said, "That's your father." And maybe that's the way I was. But, yes, I'm very proud of that.

KP: It sounds like you're very proud of your children.

RL: I am.

KP: Yes. You ...

RL: I mean, my kids ... I mean, I even like my ex-wives. I mean, I was married for six weeks. And then I was married for twenty-seven years. And my wife, we're still friends. And when there's a function, you know, so my kids don't have to choose where they're gonna go, I always invite her. And she was operated on, and she wouldn't get cut unless I was there. And even when I was married, and we'd have a function, she would, you know, come to the house. And the saddest thing is that, not an indictment, but I finally figured out what it was. I was watching The Today Show. And they said when you're premenstrual, women go through mood swings and erratic behavior. And that sort of got me out of it. And, yes, I... You can't be angry about anything because then it kills ya. Destroys you and destroys your kids. And it's hard for kids when you have a divorce. I guess, no matter what you say, you still have a dysfunctional family. And the only thing you gotta make sure you do is that you love your kids. And my son, at thirty, just came back. And he's there. And I'm glad he's there. And it's nice bring a parent again. Yes. I like my kids.

KP: So your son's living with you right now?

RL: Yes. Yes. Michael Andrew, the first. Yes. Yes. He just took an interview, I hope his interview goes as well as this, with a pharmaceutical. But, can I digress a minute?

KP: Yes.

RL: When he was born he was born with the umbilical cord around his throat. He didn't breathe for a while. And we noticed when he was a youngster that he had a short attention span, hyper-active, and poorly coordinated. I used to fly in from God-knows-where to watch him play baseball, always sat on the bench. And I used to tell him, "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game." I used to tell him, when I was a kid it was the same thing. That football suit didn't mean anything. I couldn't carry. I didn't know how to catch the ball. And, but if you keep trying, you gotta, eventually you're gonna win. And Michael had the Special Ed label taken off him. He went to Brookdale. And he really didn't know what was the matter with him. And when he was a

kid, when it came to doing a puzzle or something, he'd say to Wendi, who is absolutely brilliant, "You do it, Wendi. You know, you know this better than I do." And he could never pass the math and the science. So after five years he left. And he had various jobs and couldn't seem to hold a job. And the one day he took an insurance test. And he passed it. And he went to work for Prudential. He did very well. But he figured if he could pass that insurance test he could go down to Life Chiropractic. Now he made a mistake, 'cause they told him that they had special class[es], and they lied and they didn't. But he went down there and he passed the algebra, organic chemistry one and two, and the physics, and all that stuff. There was just one course, a biology course that he took twice, and he was having a tough time with. And I said, "Look, son. You're now twenty-eight. You're twenty-four thousand dollars in hock. And you can't do eight courses a semester. You wanna do four. So you can't do it in three and a half years. You'll do it in seven. You'll be about a hundred and fifty thousand in hock. You gotta do what you know best. You capitalize on your strength and you minimize your weaknesses." And while he was down there he became a T. V. actor. He worked on Savannah, while he was going to school. And he said to me, "Dad," he said, "Can I come home?" And I said, "Sure." And, but this is a nice kid. I mean, the nicest kid. He's got a gift of gab. I don't mean that in a negative sense. Today Michael is a Marketing Director of Franchise Sales for Coldwell Bankers, a division of the Cendant Corporation.

KP: Right.

RL: He's just wonderful with people. I never met a kid who has more women friends, plus regular girl friends. Somebody who went to college with him went down with her father to visit him in Atlanta. And she's going with a police officer. And she has his picture in their bedroom. But they're just friends, like brother and sister. And she took him out to dinner. ... Musta spent a couple of hundred bucks. Her boyfriend can't understand it. But Michael's like this with everybody. I called Brookdale and I spoke with his advisor, and they gave him his degree. His degree is in my living room with all my art work, because for me, and for him, it's as important as his sister Wendi's LLB. So he's really good. And the baby, Karen, is with a division of American Home Products, as a pharmaceutical representative. She has a degree in Anthropology and Sociology. She's gorgeous, beautiful. But she's going with somebody. And my daughter who is a lawyer, Wendi, unfortunately, fell down a flight of stairs in December. I think I told you at lunch, when she was hired by a lawyer who was suppose to start her off at twenty-eight or thirty thousand. And she was paying her less than six-hundred a month. And she kept telling her from June, when she hired her, that, you know, "Wait 'til you pass the bar." And first she said she didn't have to, you know, wait for the results. And she passed it in December. And she said to her, "Well," she said, "I thought you graduated from Georgetown and that you had courtroom experience." And my daughter said, "I told you where I went. It was on my resume." Which was American. "And how could I have courtroom experience when you just hired me the day I got out of school?" And she left. And she baby-sat, and she waited tables, and she was then hired by a law firm, which gave her three raises. Later she was hired by an environmental firm. And it's killin' her. And she wants to give up the law now. She's going in at two in the morning, many times staying 'til four in the morning. So when she gets better I think she's gonna quit. But she shouldn't, 'cause you should only quit when you're up, not when you're down. But she'd make a great teacher. She's very, very good. But too sensitive to be in that field. Today Wendi is in her own business and doing very well.

KP: Right.

RL: So that's it.

KP: Well, I think that it is at such an up-beat point this might be a good place to stop.

RL: Okay.

KP: Unless there's more that you wanna ...

RL: I don't know. I mean you have to tell me what you ...

KP: I often go until the person really runs out of stories about his life and... Although the people transcribing can stop at tape number three, and I'll have somebody else transcribe after that.

RL: Let me ask you a question.

KP: Yes.

RL: I mean, here we talked ... we started at, I don't know, probably about a quarter after one or so, it's now quarter to six.

KP: Yes.

RL: So we've had about four and a half hours. How was it? I mean, I'm just curious.

KP: It's ...

RL: Straight. You know.

KP: ... In my view there's never a bad interview. It's hard to say what ... I guess, the only bad interview is someone who really doesn't want to tell us anything. And there have been a few people who really have not wanted to tell us anything. But your interview has been very good. And it's very useful, both for what you've told about Long Branch during the war, and Rutgers, and business. I mean, actually, it's ultimately the scholars who use the interview who will be the ultimate judges. And the students who use it, so actually, Sean is probably a better person to ask.

SH: I thought it was fascinating. Actually, yes. I mean, it's been interesting to read the interviews, but you really don't get ... it until you listen to the person talk. 'Cause there's so much just lost by paper. You know?

RL: Yes.

SH: You don't that ... The voices, you know, you don't hear the intonations of the voice. And that's what is important. You know, I mean, the information is, of course, important historically, but as far as really understanding what's going on I think that hearing the person's voice is very important.

RL: I mean, there are things that I didn't talk about. Like my great-uncle's the first guy to break out of the Long Branch jail ... Or that my first wife's grandfather was the first person who was pardoned under the Volstead Act. [Laughter] And my second wife's grandfather was a bootlegger. And, you know, there are stories that I, you know, that I remember. I can tell you stories about the mob.

SH: Your family was involved in making liquor during Prohibition?

RL: No. Well, it was not on my side, but on two of my wives side, you know, two of my wives. But my father was a very close friend of my first wife's grandfather, and my mother would never let him get involved. My father was too honest, you know, [Laughter] to get involved. But it was a wondrous time.

KP: Well, there was a lot of rum running. I mean, you were not ... even born yet. But there was ... a lot of bootlegging on the Jersey shore.

RL: Oh, yes.

KP: It's a big shore. And it's right close to New York and Philadelphia.

SH: And there was a lot of drinking, I mean, it is said, as far as, there was a lot of drinking going on in Long Branch at the time. I mean, there were a lot of actors and actresses there. I'm sure with gambling there almost always goes a little bit of drinking, whether it's legal or not.

RL: Well, I remember my brother-in-law... Maxie and Buddy Baer used to box at what is now Monmouth University. And my brother-in-law went to watch it one day. And he slipped off the fence and he broke his arm. And he told me that Buddy and Maxie Baer came to visit him. And my brother-in-law who passed on, he was a real hellion, and I remember he was walking on a picket fence and slipped, and it went right up. Or the time that he got stuck in cement and they had to chop him out. [Laughter] You know, that type of thing. Or the mob picking up my uncle and giving him twenty-four hours to come up with the cash that he owed 'em, or he would swim with the fish. [Laughter] And this was in New York. So. Well, I thank you very much.

KP: Thank you.

RL: Let me ask you something.

KP: Yes. This concludes an interview with Ronald Ledwitz on March 30, 1998 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and...

SH: ... Sean D. Harvey.

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

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