

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EMIL PIEL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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WEST CALDWELL, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Colonel Emil “Joe” Piel on April 29, 2005, in West Caldwell, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

David Whitman: David Whitman.

SI: Colonel Piel, thank you very much for having us in your home today.

EP: Oh, you’re welcome.

DW: The first thing I would like to ask you is, when and where were you born?

EP: I was born in Fairview, New Jersey, in 1918, April the 17th, and I lived there for the first five years of my life. Then, I moved to Edgewater, New Jersey, and then, to Fort Lee, and then, I was in the service.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your father? What was his name? Where did he come from?

EP: Yes, my father’s name was Harry and ... he was born in the United States, in New York City, actually, and he was an engineer with the Alcoa Aluminum Company in Edgewater, New Jersey. ... He was born in 1892, so, about the time of World War I, he was ... originally too young, I guess. Anyway, then, he was married and he had children and I was the third child born. ... Other than that, he got his degree by going to International Correspondence School, which is the hard way. [laughter] I remember that, because he spent most of his evenings studying and answering questions, and then, corresponding with the ICS. I was rather proud of the fact that he was able to do that while working and raising a family and doing it all. The way you do it now, with the computer and TV, is a lot different, yes.

DW: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother?

EP: Yes. My mother was born in Cheshire, Connecticut, and she was married when she was sixteen and she was a teenage mother. As a matter-of-fact, ... I was the third one born and she was just twenty years old when I was born. ... Essentially, she didn’t finish high school. She went to elementary school in Fairview.

DW: Was your father working at Alcoa during World War I?

EP: No, no. ... He had another job as a machinist during World War I and I don’t know where he was working, but, at the beginning of World War II, ... when we were involved in World War II, but not in the war yet, we were furnishing airplanes and destroyers, as you recall. He was sent from Edgewater, where he was working, to Suriname, in Dutch Guyana, to open up, to reopen, a bauxite mine that they had in Dutch Guyana, that they had had before or after World War I, and then, had closed it, of course. ... He had to train all the natives ... that they hired in Dutch Guyana to be machinists. ... They would train one person how to cut a gear and that’s all he did, and then, another person how to work on the lathe and that’s what he did and they finally got the ... mine reopened and working, and so, he was there when World War II started.

SI: He had moved up to a management position.

EP: Yes, and then, when he came back, he was ... in management in Edgewater; no, he was in management in Spokane, Washington, because they were opening up a new factory in Spokane, Washington. ... So, he was in charge of getting that plant operating. As he had gotten the mine operating down in South America, now, he was getting a fabricating plant going in Spokane, Washington, and then, he went on to Alcoa, Tennessee, where they were also opening up a new plant. ...

DW: Do you know anything about your family history prior to your parents?

EP: ... Well, one grandfather came from Germany, the Alsace-Lorraine area. The other grandfather came from further north in Germany, but that was, oh, in the 1860s or something like that, but my mother tells me an interesting story, that her two uncles were killed by Indians as they were building the cross-continental railroad. So, they were hiring German immigrants to work ... on the railroad, and so, they were working on the railroad. This was before she was born. ...

SI: You began your education in Edgewater.

EP: Yes, elementary school, [the] Eleanor Van Gelder School, I still remember it. [laughter] ... Having moved from Fairview to Edgewater, in Fairview, they didn't have any kindergarten, and so, they put me in first grade right away. So, when I got to Edgewater, I had already skipped a grade. ... The one thing I do remember from the elementary school was, ... my second grade teacher took the pencil out of my left hand and put it in my right hand and said, "You're writing with the wrong hand," [laughter] and I went home and told my mother and my mother said, "Well, if that's what the teacher said, that's what it is." ... So, from then on, I wrote rather poorly with my right hand, and so, I was glad when ... I went in the Navy flight training. Even through college, I had very poor handwriting and, when I got in flight school, they were teaching us how to record Morse code and they were teaching us the most efficient way to make each letter, printing it, and that's the way I learned. ... Now, my handwriting is, as you may have noticed there [on the pre-interview survey], ... half printing and half handwriting. [laughter]

SI: Can you describe your neighborhoods in Edgewater and Fort Lee?

EP: In Edgewater, the neighborhood was (Undercliff?) Avenue and it was all working-class families and those people who had cars, very few of them, probably had ... to park their car in the street, of course. ... Again, another thing that my father did was, he essentially repaired the cars, because he was a mechanic and he was an engineer, and so, we had a lot of friends who had cars and cars always had problems. ... I was nine years old, I guess, when my uncle taught me how to drive a Model T Ford, with the three pedals on the floor, you know, the gas and the brake and the reverse. The middle pedal stuck up higher than the other two and you'd push on that to go in reverse, which obviously was illegal; [laughter] learning it at nine years old was illegal, not the reverse.

DW: Do you recall being involved in any youth groups, such as the Boy Scouts or sports clubs?

EP: Yes, I was in Boy Scouts, when I lived in Fort Lee, yes, and I was a Life Scout and I was the assistant Scoutmaster. ... Then, church groups, the YPF, the Young People's Fellowship, I was in that group, yes.

DW: Were you a fairly religious child?

EP: Well, I went to church. I don't know if I was that religious, but, ... yes, and I was an acolyte in ... the Episcopal Church and the Church of the Good Shepherd, ... where my parents' ashes are now buried, just outside, in a little crypt outside.

SI: You went to junior high school and high school in Fort Lee.

EP: In Fort Lee, yes, yes.

SI: What were your favorite subjects?

EP: Well, my favorite subjects were science and math. ... Back then, they had a general curriculum, an academic curriculum and a scientific curriculum and it was interesting. So, I was in the scientific curriculum.

SI: Was that a college prep course?

EP: ... That was college prep, yes. Theoretically, that was one step above academic, but, then, those ... people in science, ... they're always smart alecks. [laughter] They always make believe that they're better than anybody else, which is probably true.

DW: Was it a more demanding curriculum?

EP: Oh, yes.

DW: What kind of courses did you have to take?

EP: ... It was demanding then. Of course, that was in the 1930s and we had all the math, up through solid geometry, and the science, of course, was biology, chemistry and physics. We didn't have any of those fancy courses that they have now, but that was it, yes.

SI: What did you think of the quality of your teachers at Fort Lee?

EP: Oh, they were very good, very good. ... It was a junior/senior high school, so, we had grades seven through twelve. So, I was there for six years. ... I remember, [in] the eighth grade, our eighth grade math teacher, gee, I usually know what her name is, I've forgotten, but she started, one day a week, the radio program *Amos and Andy* was on the radio, and ... the morning after *Amos and Andy*, we had about a ten-minute discussion of that comedy show in math class, but they were good. They were good teachers. ... When I graduated from Fort Lee, I was

offered a scholarship at Stevens, but it wasn't enough money for the whole tuition and I didn't have enough money for the whole tuition. So, I went to work at Alcoa and I was just a laborer. I made boxes to pack the aluminum in and I worked in the rolling mills, where we rolled ingots, and there would be one man on each side of the ingot coming through. It was three hundred pounds and we would lift that up and send it back through and lift it up and send it back through, until it came out to be a rather long slab, and then, it went to another rolling mill where that slab was rolled into thin sheets of aluminum and that's what the aluminum foil is that you get now. ... One of my father's contributions was to develop a system for continually polishing the rolls, so that there were no pits in the rolls, so that the foil came out plain and ... would not rip and was a lot stronger.

SI: When did you graduate from high school and take this job at Alcoa?

EP: I graduated in 1935, and then, I worked in Alcoa. ... In high school, in my freshman year, I went out for football and, after that, they cancelled football, because we only had twelve people out for football [laughter] and that doesn't give you too many substitutes. So, I was in the band and I was the student director of the orchestra and the drum major of the band and, at that time, I was the twirler. You see [now] that all the girls are twirlers; I was *the* twirler, [laughter] and so, we didn't have football games, but we marched in Memorial Day and Fourth of July [parades] and that sort of thing.

DW: I have always been fascinated with the time period of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Obviously, there were many economic hardships at that time.

EP: Yes.

DW: What was it like to grow up during the Great Depression? How did that affect you?

EP: No, ... growing up in the Depression, my father had a job. He never lost his job, but we never had much money, and so, we learned to eat everything on our plate, as an example, and we didn't know we were poor. ... When I went to college, he was making two thousand, five hundred dollars a year and that was a pretty good salary at that time. ... I still remember that, because that's what my college professors were making, [laughter] but, growing up in the Depression, we were all in the same boat, so, nobody knew that we weren't wealthy and we didn't know anybody that was wealthy. Oh, my uncle, who had the same name that I have, was in the stock market, ... but we didn't know much about him. I don't even know if he had much money even then, yes.

SI: Were your father's hours at Alcoa ever cut?

EP: Not that I remember, no.

SI: Do you remember anything about Prohibition?

EP: Yes. I remember, my father used to say, "Breathes there a man with a soul so dead who never to himself has said, 'That son-of-a-gun Volstead?'" [laughter] ... It was the Volstead Act

that brought on Prohibition. So, that's what [I remember] and I remember, also, when it was [repealed]. I forget what amendment was passed that defeated Prohibition, [the Twenty-First Amendment]. Yes, I remember that. ... We made beer in the cellar. We made wine in the cellar from elderberries that we had in our backyard. This is when I was in Fort Lee.

DW: Prohibition was not too popular in the Piel family.

EP: No. Actually, you know, you've heard of Piel's Beer or not? Anyway, that's a famous beer that had ... two guys, Bert and Harry, [who] were the comedians, and my father sent them a letter saying that, you know, people are making fun of him because of this. He wanted [the Piel's Beer Company] to acknowledge that he was not the Harry Piel of the commercial. So, they sent him a box of three hundred cards that said, "Harry J. Piel, not of the Piel brothers." [laughter] [Editor's Note: Bert and Harry Piel were animated characters voiced by Bob Elliot and Ray Goulding that appeared in advertisements for Piel's Beer in the 1950s and 1960s.]

SI: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

EP: I didn't know much about that at the time, except that they were Republicans. ... They were people in industry, blue-collar workers, but they were Republicans, and so, Republicans then felt about Roosevelt about the same way Democrats feel about [George W.] Bush. ... The Social Security that we're dealing with at the present time, you know, ... we never talked about it. We never talked politics at home. ... If we did, I don't remember it.

DW: Do you remember anything about Hitler coming to power?

EP: Oh, yes. I remember, well, not Hitler so much as; I have to tell you about when I was growing up. ... My grandfather, not the Piel grandfather, the Decker grandfather, had come over during just before World War I and essentially to avoid the draft in Germany. ... Then, when the war was over, ... of course, this was, now, I was about ten years old and my grandfather was living with us, ... I can still remember playing dominoes with him and having him say, "If it *vasn't* for *Vilson*, *ve'd* have *von* the *var*," and I thought we had, of course. [laughter] ... So, he was still a German, even though he was living here and earning a living here, but, [in] World War II, of course, there was all the stuff about Hitler and we made fun of Hitler all the time, ... when I was in high school, yes.

DW: Were you aware of what his goals were before the war started?

EP: No. ... As far as we were concerned, his goal was to conquer the world, conquer Europe first, and then, the rest of the world, but I wasn't much involved with politics and that sort of thing, because I was involved with science, you know. I was more concerned about that, ... worrying about the Bohr atom and that sort of thing, which was brand-new at that time, in '35, yes.

SI: Did your parents encourage you to make college your goal?

EP: Yes. ... As I say, I had two older sisters who went to work right after graduation from high

school, but, no, my parents wanted me to go to college. ... I couldn't go to college, even though I had the scholarship; we just didn't have the money for me to go to [college], especially to Stevens, where it was expensive. Well, I was invited by the, not the music director, but the band director at Montclair State, [who] knew the band director from Fort Lee High School, and he said, "We have a band, but we don't have anybody to lead the band. We don't have a drum major. We don't have the twirler," and this fellow, Charlie (Grohl?), said, "Oh, I know somebody," and I was working in the factory at the time. ... So, he encouraged me to go to Montclair to lead the band, even though I was working in the factory. ... I didn't get paid. I have to get that on the record, [laughter] but it was interesting, because, to get to Montclair, then, I went to New York and took a train to Montclair, and then, from downtown Montclair, I took a bus up to the college, and so, I got introduced to Montclair State at that time. ... This band director said, "Gee," he said, "would you like to come to Montclair?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well, I'll see if I can get you a scholarship." So, we met with the director of music at Montclair State, Dr. (McKeeken?), a very large and imposing woman, and he brought me into her office and he said that I'd been leading the band and I was going to come to Montclair and he wondered if I might get a music scholarship. ... So, she looked at me and she waved her arm imperiously ... toward the piano and said, "Play," and I said, "I don't play the piano." [laughter] I said, "I play the drums," and she never said another word to me, but she ate him out right in front of me, saying, "What are you doing, bringing this idiot here for a scholarship?" but I went anyway, [laughter] because I enjoyed science and they had an outstanding science department.

DW: You began studying science at Montclair immediately.

EP: ... Yes, I started the next fall. ... During the time that I was working in the factory, I was working at night and I went back to Fort Lee High School as a post-graduate student and studied ... analytical chemistry with the head of the science department, who was very nice. ... He let me in during the day and after school at Fort Lee. Then, I'd do all sorts of things in the labs, and so, I learned. I got a sort of head start. It was AP, [advanced placement], the Fort Lee High School version of it, and so, I got there and I was interested in science and that took a lot of time. So, my freshman year, I was leading the band, and then, I went out for track. We never had track at Fort Lee and I went out for track and I was running the hurdles and I still remember, I tripped on the first hurdle and kept going. I knocked all ten hurdles down. [laughter] By the time I got to the finish line, and the assistant football coach was the track coach, ... he said, "You're dumb enough, you can play football." [laughter] ... So, I started playing football in my sophomore year at Montclair State.

DW: What year did you enter Montclair State?

EP: '36.

SI: Which schools did Montclair play in football?

EP: Oh, at Montclair, we played East Stroudsburg, Trenton, Paterson didn't have any football, and we played other Pennsylvania schools. It's funny, ... if you didn't ask me, I could have named them all. [laughter] There was a school in Kutztown ... and New Britain, Connecticut. We played against New Britain, Connecticut, in the Yale Bowl, interestingly enough. So, I

played at Yale. [laughter]

DW: Which position did you play?

EP: I played tackle. After all, I was 175 pounds and that was ... not heavy, but soaking wet, I guess, with the uniform on, because [laughter] I was six-foot-two and rather thin.

SI: You mentioned that you played the drums. How did you get involved with the drums? Was it through the high school?

EP: ... No, I got involved with the drums because of friends of ours from Fort Lee. ... Their house burned down and they ... had no place to live, and so, they moved in with us in Fort Lee and they brought their son's set of drums, and so, I played the drums and, when they finally got a new house and moved out, they left the drums behind, and so, from that point on, I was a drummer and I played in the dance band. ... Actually, going through college, I earned some money. I didn't work my way through, but I earned money playing. We had a trio, that we would go up to the Catskills and play. When the regular band was taking ten or fifteen minutes off, we would play then. ... So, that's where I got started in the drums. ...

SI: Was it Big Band style music?

EP: Yes, it was all Big Band music. ... The Meadowbrook, you know ... what the Meadowbrook is? The Meadowbrook was the big dance hall in New Jersey, right on Route 23, over here in Cedar Grove, and all the Big Bands played there and we could go there and it's right close to Montclair State, and so, you could go there. ... On a Sunday afternoon, you could go there and, for a dollar-and-a-half, you could get a Coke and a sandwich and you could nurse that all afternoon and dance to the Big Bands, which is what we did, yes.

DW: Do you remember any other social events that you took part in during high school and college?

EP: No. Our ... dance band at Fort Lee played for the prom, so, I didn't get to dance at the prom, because I'm playing in the band. [laughter]

SI: How big was your high school in Fort Lee?

EP: Seven hundred and twenty students, which was interesting. That was six years and that's what Montclair State was, four years, when I went to Montclair State. ... So, I had the same people in class in physics that I had in social studies that I had in English. ... The science majors were a group and we just went from class-to-class, the same as it would be in high school, yes.

SI: Did you commute or did you live on campus?

EP: No, I commuted. I had a car, a 1936 Nash Lafayette, it was called, and I picked up people on the way. I bought it with the money I was earning in the factory, and then, I would pick up people on the way and they would pay me to drive them to college. So, I was there. ... In my

senior year, I lived in a boarding house on Valley Road, ... right near the college.

SI: Many of the Rutgers alumni from the 1930s and 1940s that I have interviewed recalled freshman hazing rituals. For instance, they had to wear a special hat. Did they have anything like that at Montclair?

EP: Oh, yes, we had to wear a special hat and that, but it was nothing serious, the way the hazing is now, no.

SI: What kind of things did you have to do?

EP: I don't even remember, so, therefore, they weren't very traumatic. [laughter]

SI: During the year that you worked at Alcoa, were you in a union?

EP: ... No. There was no union at Alcoa and, actually, I worked in the box division for a while and that's when I worked at night, yes, and I actually worked in the rolling mills at night, too. No, the only reason I was working there was, my father had a job [there] and he had a managerial job, and so, he got me the job.

SI: Did going from high school to the factory teach you anything about different types of people?

EP: No, yes, they were pretty much like the parents of the kids that I knew in high school, yes. So, I didn't notice anything. I don't remember anything different.

SI: Was your job at the rolling mill considered a hazardous job? Was it dangerous?

EP: Well, it was ... tiring, I tell you that, and it was a very hot job and I can remember, ... for lunch, I brought a big can of grapefruit juice and I would drink that while I ... [would] take a little break, but, no, it was a job in which the aluminum came out, the rolls [went] in one direction; see, there were three rolls, and so, ... the middle roll was always rolling in the right direction, no matter which direction you were going, and so, you just went from one set of rolls to the other set of rolls, back and forth. ... The only thing [was], they were impressed because I knew how to ... use a micrometer. ... I was told, if I'd stayed there, I'd move right on up, because I knew how to use a micrometer, which I learned to do in that post-graduate course that I was taking at Fort Lee High School and my father taught me how to do that.

DW: Can you explain what a micrometer is?

EP: Yes, a micrometer is like a little clamp and you put it on either side of a piece of metal, and then, the dial will tell you ... what the thickness of the metal is, but you had to read this little dial that rolled around on one arm of the micrometer and it was hard to do. ... You had to be very accurate in your readings, because, otherwise, ... whatever you're sending through the rolls, you would send it through too often or you'd say that the rolls had to be squeezed down too much or not enough, and so, it was most efficient. ... Now, of course, it's done with lasers. ... There's

nobody catching the ingots as they're moved back and forth, either, you know. That's all mechanical, automated.

SI: What year did you graduate from Montclair?

EP: 1940.

DW: During your college years, what was your opinion about the war in Europe? Were you thinking that America was going to get involved as well?

EP: Yes, we assumed that America was going to get involved. As a matter-of-fact, ... [at] the end of my junior year and the beginning of my senior year, they had a program and I'm trying to think of the name of the program, ... it was a federal program, which trained people [to be pilots]. You could learn how to fly. We learned how to fly right here at Caldwell Airport, and so, it was during school. We would take the time off to drive over the hill, over to Caldwell Airport, and flew and I got my private pilot's license right here, before I graduated from college. ... Civil Pilot Training Program, CPT, I could remember that, and then, after the war, I taught some aviation at Montclair State and ... I taught aviation in high schools, after the war, too, but that's how I got involved [with] flying, was through the government program. Then, when I graduated, I got involved in the secondary program. That was the primary program, and then, [through] the secondary program, I got a commercial pilot's license and, there, I did my flying at Teterboro [Airport] and at Roosevelt Field on Long Island, which is the same field that Lindbergh took off from on his way to Paris. ... That was in 1927 and this was about ten years later, ... so that puts you in the timeframe of when it was, yes.

SI: What attracted you to aviation?

EP: When I was a kid, I made model airplanes, [the kind] that ... you wound the propeller up with a rubber band, and I could stand on my porch, the railing of the porch, and launch the plane and see how long it would stay in the air and that sort of thing, and so, I was involved. I read all the stories I could about airplanes and I would ride my bike down to Teterboro Airport from Fort Lee and watch airplanes and do that sort of thing and that's where I met Lindbergh, down there.

SI: Really?

EP: ... He said, "Kid, you want a ride?" and I said, "Oh, boy," you know, this was it and some guy, some old guy, thirty years old, [laughter] came along, a friend of his, and so, Lindbergh said, "I'm sorry, kid. Maybe next time." ... So, I never got to fly [with him], but I did get to talk to him and it's interesting, because I also got to talk to him, again, during the war.

SI: Really?

EP: Yes.

SI: We can jump ahead, if you would like to talk about it now.

EP: ... Whatever you say. [laughter]

DW: It is not every day that we speak with someone who met Lindbergh.

EP: ... Well, the whole war story is a long one. You may need another tape. [laughter]

SI: Definitely.

EP: ... Well, I was leading up to it, because, actually I had that secondary course and I got my pilot's license, my commercial pilot's license, and then, I was flying for ... about three months or so to get my instructor's rating. ... My last flight to get my instructor's rating was to fly from Roosevelt Field on Long Island to Richmond, Virginia, and I was flying a Curtiss Fledgling. It was ... a big bi-plane and it had a six-cylinder engine, two banks of three. I don't know if you know anything about airplanes or airplane engines, but, [in] airplane engines, ... the rotary engines all had odd numbers of cylinders, because of the arrangement inside the engine. ... What I flew during the war, of course, was fourteen-cylinder. It was two sevens, you know, [that] were back-to-back and this was two threes back-to-back, a six-cylinder engine. ... You had to grind an inertia wheel to get it [started], and then, when you got that flywheel going, then, you pulled the lever and that hooked to the propeller and that got the propeller going, and so, anyway, I was flying this plane to Richmond, but I had to go ... land at Washington. Coming into Washington National, I saw coming toward me there were Eastern Airlines planes taking off from Washington. ... I didn't have a radio and I knew I had to land facing north, and so, [I had] to fly around the city, coming down from the north, fly around the city, and then, come in and land. ... I had a map which had the various places you weren't supposed to fly over in the city and it had a circle for the Washington Monument and a circle for the Capitol and you weren't supposed to fly over the Capitol or Washington Monument. So, I flew between them and that ... turned out to be over the White House. I landed at Washington and got fueled up and started up, went to Richmond, stayed overnight in Richmond and flew on back. When I got back, there was a telegram wanting to know why I shouldn't have my license revoked, because there were FBI on the roof of the White House [laughter] and they saw [me]. ... Of course, they got the number of the airplane and I had ... already checked in with the tower and the weather ... at Washington, at the tower, and nobody said anything to me then, but they did send it up to the flight school that I was flying from, and so, ... I lost my license and that was in September [that] I flew over the White House. ... Early November, I got a letter saying that my license had been revoked and, late in November, I got a telegram saying I'd just been appointed as an assistant airway traffic controller in Jacksonville, Florida. The same group that took my license away from me and they were just as bad then as they are now. They weren't talking to each other [laughter] in the same building. ... I had applied as an airway traffic controller when I was in college. So, I ended up as an airway traffic controller in Jacksonville, Florida. I went there on December the 1st and the war started on December the 7th and it took me six months to get out of airway traffic control. ... The way I got out, I didn't mean to do it this way, but I was working nights and we were paid by the airway traffic center in Atlanta, Georgia, and that was for ... that whole general area. ... Fooling around at night, having not too much to do, I wrote a message, as we did, leaving out all the vowels and so forth, and gave it to the Teletype writer to read. It was a fun letter, you know. ... It's saying, "When the hell are the paychecks coming?" because we were late getting paychecks. Well, I didn't know [that] this Teletype writer, the Teletype operator, who had been

chewed out the night before, because somebody gave him a message and he had questioned the message. That's how we communicated, airway traffic control, by the way, and so, he sent this message to Atlanta and, very soon after that, [laughter] I had a chance to ... get back into flying, because I was no longer [needed] for airway traffic control. They checked that down. So, then, ... I got in the Navy, Navy flight training, and, because of the fact that I had a pilot's license to begin with, they wanted me to be an instructor and I didn't want to be an instructor. I wanted to be a combat pilot, and so, I had to go through pre-flight instruction, which was essentially muscle building ... and that sort of thing, in Athens, Georgia, pre-flight school. If you've seen the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*, ... that was in Seattle, but this was in [Georgia] and that's the same sort of training we got. ... That's where I had the two roommates who questioned me, because they said, "What's your name?" and I said, "Emil," and they said, "We're fighting guys named Emil. What's your other name?" and I told them, "Joe," and so, from that point on, I was Joe all through the war. My mother had a lot of trouble, later, calling me Joe, because she had named me Emil. [laughter] ... I went through flight school. I flew at Anacostia in the Yellow Peril, the Stearman bi-plane, and, from there, I went to Pensacola. ... When I graduated from Pensacola, ... a percentage of us were given the opportunity to join the Marine Corps. You could fly as a Navy pilot or a Marine pilot, and ... I wanted to be in the Marines. So, I flew as a Marine pilot. ... We then went from Pensacola to Jacksonville, Florida, where ... we learned to be dive-bombers. You could be a dive-bomber pilot or a torpedo-bomber pilot or a fighter pilot and I chose dive-bombing, because, in Pensacola, I enjoyed that more than the others, and so, we learned to be dive-bomber pilots in Jacksonville, Florida, which was interesting. This was way back to where I was an airway traffic controller. ... We flew there, and then, from there, we got on a train and I had time off. ... My father was then operating the Alcoa plant in Spokane, so, I got a train to Spokane and it was a coal-fired train, ... lots of smoke, and we went through tunnels and we ... came out black from the tunnels, and then, I went from there, from Spokane, down to [San Diego]. ...

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

SI: I think the tape cut you off. You went to San Diego

EP: ... We went to San Diego and, from there, we got on the ship to go to the South Pacific and we took three weeks to get there. ... It was an interesting trip, because the ship had square funnels. It was a diesel-powered ship, had been a luxury liner that the French had owned and, when Germany took over France, ... America got that ship before the Germans could get it. ... There were two ships and the Japanese got the other one, the sister ship, and so, now, we were on this ship in the Pacific. ... The American pilots knew what the ship was and the Japanese pilots knew what the ship was, because the American pilots were supposed to bomb the Japanese ship and vice versa, but nobody knew who was who, but it would go ... thirty knots. It was a real luxury liner, and so, ... we never had any problems. We worried about having problems. ... I didn't, because, "What the hell?" I was a second lieutenant and I didn't know anything about this or about the two ships. All I knew was that it was a diesel ship and it had the square funnels. ... So, we got to New Caledonia, and then, stayed there for a week or so, and then, went up to Efate, which was in the [New] Hebrides Islands, and stayed there. ... I was in the pilot pool and, finally, I was pulled into this squadron, [the] 236th, that I flew in. ... Guadalcanal had been taken by that time, and so, we went to Guadalcanal and we flew from Guadalcanal on missions

as we were taking the other Solomon Islands. ... Then, I ended up in Bougainville. In Bougainville, I was a section leader, but we had three-plane sections, three planes; ... anyway, three planes became a section. How can I forget? ...

SI: A flight?

EP: ... Yes, it's a flight, maybe; it was a three-plane flight. Anyway, I led six planes, and then, we were there. We bombed Rabaul, which was an interesting part of the war, because we had been island-hopping, sending Marines from one island to another and losing Marines ... and winning the islands. ... Rabaul was a city on the island of New Britain and it had five airfields and the Japanese were going to [hold it at all costs]. That was going to be their last stand of planes, because they could get there rather quickly from the Philippines. They could get there, they could get to Rabaul, and the strategy was that rather than have another invasion of Rabaul, of New Britain, New Georgia, I guess, and lose a lot more troops, ... they decided [that] they would just keep all of those airfields inoperative. ... So, if they were inoperative, then, the Japanese couldn't interdict us as we went farther north to the Philippines, and so, our job, ... we lived on Bougainville, was to fly ninety miles to Rabaul and bomb those airfields. ... [Each day], we would destroy a different airfield. In five days, you're back to the first airfield that you destroyed, because they had repaired it. ... The way we did it was, the dive-bombers would bomb the antiaircraft installations, and then, the torpedo-bombers, the TBFs, carried a much heavier load and they carried bombs instead of torpedoes and they would bomb the airstrip. ... So, our job was to see to it that no antiaircraft was firing while they were trying to bomb the field, and so, we're dive-bombing. We started at seventeen thousand feet and we did evasive maneuvers, and then, at ten thousand feet, we pushed over, straight down, and opened our dive flaps that you can see on this picture. [Editor's Note: Colonel Piel is referring to a painting depicting various types of Marine Corps aircraft in flight over Midway.] ... Then, we dove straight down, and you can see some of those planes in the picture going down, and we went straight down to twenty-five hundred feet and released the bomb and pulled out of the dive and we did that every other day. ... Somebody else did it on the day that my squadron wasn't doing that. Some other squadrons were [there] and we had sixty planes at a time doing this. Then, on our day off, we flew submarine patrols and we flew out a distance, about a hundred miles, on a very short distance across and made a triangle, and then, flew back. ... If you're [doing] navigation, there was no radio communication, no radio navigation; it was, all you saw was water and waves, and so, we learned to gauge the speed of the wind by the number of white caps you saw, the density of the white caps and you knew the position, the direction of the wind, because it made streaks on the water. Now, you knew the direction within 180 degrees. You know the streaks were either being made this way or being made this way, but ... you didn't know which was the beginning of the streak and which was the end, and so, you had to be pretty smart in navigation to get out there and make your turn. All the while, you went out in two-plane sections and one fellow did the navigating on the way out, while the other one was very carefully looking through all these white caps ... for periscopes and for submarines. Then, you made the short turn, and then, you came on back and, if your navigation was pretty reasonable, you got back to the island and, if it wasn't reasonable, you got back and there wasn't any island there. ... Two of the guys in the squadron, that I had gone through flight school with, got back and there wasn't any island, and so, then did what was called a square search. In other words, you flew in one direction a distance of about twice the visibility, and then, you made a left turn

and you flew twice the visibility again, and then, finally, your squares kept getting bigger and bigger and, sooner or later, you're going to find something. You know, you're going to find the aircraft carrier, if you were flying from an aircraft carrier, or you'll find the island. Well, these two guys, they didn't find that island, but they found another island and ... they were about to land on that island, but there was no airstrip. There was just a beach, and so, they said, well, they would land wheels up, but the SBD has a gunner in the backseat with a machine gun, see. ... He's supposed to be keeping any airplanes on [you] from getting you from behind, and so, they told their gunners to throw the machine guns overboard, because they'd hit you in the back of the head and that could ruin your whole afternoon. [laughter] ... So, they were just [about] ready to land when they saw a transport flying overhead, and so, they joined up on the transport and the transport, fortunately, was going to ... Bougainville, and so, they got back there. ... When they got back, they had an interesting discussion with the Colonel, [who was] saying, "What happened?" and they explained it and [the Colonel said], "How the hell did you ever pass navigation?" and they said, "Oh, we copied from Joe Piel in school," [laughter] because I had been a teacher before ... the war. ... So, he called me in and he said, "Is that true?" and I said, "Gee, I don't know. I didn't know they were copying, you know. I didn't know. I didn't know nothing," and he said, "Well, you know something now. You're going to be teaching navigation every afternoon," and so, every afternoon for a month, I taught classes in navigation, until the entire squadron was brought up on navigation and there's a few tricks in navigation and one of them is, when you make ... a point, ... you do it with the very sharp end of the pencil and it's such a small point [that] you can't see it, but you draw a circle around it, so [that] you know the point's somewhere in that circle. ... So, the points connected, then, in your flight and, if you ... smudge that point, the point could be the whole size of an island. ... I learned how to do that because I took mechanical drawing in high school and I learned from that teacher, Mr. (Bridenburg?), that you make little points, and so, it worked out well for me and it worked out well [for the squadron]. I ended up teaching again, for a little while; anything else? ...

SI: Can we go back?

EP: Sure.

SI: I wanted to ask you about your experiences as an air traffic controller. From what I have learned about air traffic controllers today, it seems as though they need nerves of steel to do their job. Was it the same way back then?

EP: It was the same way back then, but it wasn't nearly as much pressure, because there weren't that many airplanes flying and our big problem, at that time, was keeping the civilian transports out of the way of the military transports, of the military planes, because MacDill Field was in Tampa, Florida. ... Of course, the military never wanted to tell the civilians what was going on and that was always a bit of a problem, because, then, you know, we'd clear Eastern Airlines from Jacksonville over to Mobile, or wherever they were flying, and they'd call and say, "Hey, there's a whole bunch ... of these little fighter planes bothering us." ... We always had arguments with the military. ... We had arguments with the Navy as well, particularly in Jacksonville, because Jacksonville had the air station right there. ... One time, an Eastern Airlines pilot announced to us, reported to us, when he landed, that ... he saw what he thought was a submarine in (St. Mary's?) River, which is right off Jacksonville, and he said he saw this

and the Navy said, "That's impossible, because that river is too shallow. No submarine could be in there," and, that night, two ships were torpedoed by submarines. So, the Navy went out and looked and the Navy found marks in the sand in the bottom of the river where this ... submarine had actually been sitting in the sand. ... That was a problem we had. Airway traffic control was reasonably simple. What you did was, you got a strip of paper and you marked on the strip of paper where the plane was starting from, where it was going and you got this from their flight plan, and then, we didn't check [with the planes], the airline itself checked and told us where the plane was. ... We kept a board then and we knew where all the planes were, what direction they were going and what was the last point that they had seen and that's the way we controlled them, then. Then, we would tell the airlines, "You can't go in that particular direction at that altitude," and so, they'd have to change their altitude and/or change the direction. ... What we did have was radio signals, that they could tell from the radio signal which direction they were going when they were flying on instruments, because it was; ... isn't that awful? I forget the two letters, but there were two letters that, when they merged, it was the dot-dashes, one was dot-dash and the other was dash-dot. ... When they merged, you got a steady tone and, when you got the steady tone, then, you knew you were on the right direction. ...

DW: You began working in Jacksonville on December 1st. What exactly do you remember about the Pearl Harbor attack later that week? Where were you?

EP: I was listening to ... a New York Giants football game on the radio and I don't know how we got [that game]. They weren't playing Jacksonville, because Jacksonville didn't have a team at the time, but, anyway, I know the Giants were playing and there were that few of football teams that [we heard them] even in Jacksonville, whatever radio [station] we had, and that's when [I heard]. They broke into that broadcast and said that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, and then, I immediately went to the boss, ... who was a Marine captain, by the way, and said I wanted out. [laughter] ... He said, "You want out?" He said, "I'm in the Marine Corps and they won't let me out of airway traffic control." ... He finally did get out, but they said, "One airway traffic controller is a lot more valuable to us right now than one pilot," and so, they wanted to keep us in there, but they were willing to let me go after my message to Atlanta. That was an interesting [occurrence], because people from Atlanta were down, people from Washington were down, because they got the message and they said, "What the hell is going on in Jacksonville?" ... So, I said, "We know who CJX95 [is]." I still remember that. [laughter] ... That was the number of the message.

SI: After Pearl Harbor, was there an immediate reaction with regards to changing procedures?

EP: Yes, ... because, right after Pearl Harbor, that's when the Army at MacDill, the Army Air Force at MacDill, and the Navy flying from Pensacola and the Navy flying from Jacksonville, and there were five satellite airfields around Jacksonville and there were a couple of satellite airfields around Pensacola, ... from now on, anything they did was secret. ... They wouldn't tell the civilian airway traffic [control], even [though] the airway traffic control was a government agency and we were supposed to be, obviously, controlling all flights. We didn't control the squadrons out of MacDill and the squadrons out of Pensacola or the squadrons out of Jacksonville. We didn't control them. They wouldn't let us control them. They would tell us, "We have a flight of ... twelve airplanes [that] will be flying from MacDill," and that's all. They

didn't tell us where they were going, what direction they were going in, and so, ... a lot of it got to be VFR, Visual Flight Rules, but, at night, of course, [that does not work well], you know. It didn't shut down the airlines, but it made them a lot more aware of what was going on. It was tough. ... That made it tough for us, because we had to find out, one way or another, where those airplanes were ... and how they were flying and that sort of thing.

SI: Were there any accidents while you were there?

EP: There were no planes running into [each other], no. There were a lot of accidents at Jacksonville, when we were [doing our] dive-bombing practice. People got fascinated by the target. It was a two-hundred-foot target and you're supposed to start from ten thousand feet and point [straight down] and, see, when a plane is pointed straight down, it's not going straight down, because the lift on the wings is pulling it slightly forward. ... Actually, you're going down pointed straight down, but you're going at a seventy degree angle, okay. Now, if you're pointing it at the target and you're being pulled beyond the target, your target is back here, you have a tendency to keep pointing the airplane at the target. Well, then, when you get to your twenty-five hundred feet, you don't have enough room to pull out from being almost upside down, and so, they lost planes diving into the target, yes. ... That was more dangerous, learning to do it. It was more dangerous than, actually, when you finally knew how to do it. It worked out. So, I survived. [If] you survive flight training, then, ... it's easy and the ground troops will tell you the same thing. [laughter] [If] you survive basic training, then, you can survive anything. By the way, you've got an ROTC unit and ... I give a scholarship to one ROTC student every year, from our Military Officers' Association. We meet in Picatinny and I send it ... to Rutgers in March and they will ... recommend somebody by May and we'll give the scholarship out. It's a two-thousand-dollar scholarship.

SI: That is great. Earlier, you compared your pre-flight training to the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*. Could you elaborate on that?

EP: Yes. ... The first thing [is], obviously, you get up and you had to muster and get in line and you had very little time to do this, obviously, and then, you had, essentially, physical training things to do and you climbed walls, and then, you played soccer, for example, but it was all very strictly to get your mind and your coordination down. We had skeet shooting, for example. ... That's when you learned how to track [targets], you know, you fire ahead of the plane, so that when your bullets get there, the plane and the bullets meet. You point the gun at the plane and you'll never hit him. ... We did skeet shooting and we did rifle work and school and, if you fell asleep during school, you were washed out and you went up to Chicago, to naval training, and you were now a midshipman in the Navy. ... You were a midshipman to begin with. That's what we were, and then, you were shipped out and, the next thing you knew, you were on a destroyer or something else. ... Of course, when was school? Right after lunch, after you'd had all this physical activity in the morning and a big lunch, and then, you go to school and the way you stayed awake was, you stood up. You were allowed to stand up in class. ... You [were] also allowed to lean against the wall and ... two guys standing next to each other would give each other the elbow, to keep the other one awake, so that they wouldn't [wash out], but ... that's the sort of thing it was. ... It was every day and it was six weeks and I guess we got weekends off. We might have gotten Sunday off. ... Well, you got Sunday off to go to church, but I can't think

of anything else. It was physical training, oh, and marches, yes, ten miles, five-mile and ten-mile marches. ... Then, somebody'd fall down and the DI that was instructing would say, "Don't just lay there, do push-ups," and that sort of thing, but it was rough. ... What they were doing was, what the Navy said they were doing [was], they were getting you ready for when you were shot down and you were ... in a boat and so forth. We had guys shot down. One of ... the pilots [who] was in our squadron was eighteen years old. He had gotten in early. He was a Baptist minister, but he couldn't be a chaplain, because you had to be twenty-one, and so, he went into flight school instead. ... Obviously, we called him "the Preacher" and this is a true story. ... He was shot down on Good Friday and picked up on Easter Sunday, in his boat. ... It was his little boat out there, because you sat on a raft, you know, a raft all folded up, and then, ... when you bailed out, we didn't have the ejection seats at the beginning, and then, we had ejection seats that would shoot you out of the airplane, but all of this pre-flight training was for exactly that purpose, ... well, and to get you in good shape, because, you know, some of the guys [were not]. ... By the time I was going through, a lot of the people in flight school were high school graduates. They were not college graduates, and so, they hadn't had any college physical education, the college sports. You know, I ran track and I played football in college, and so, I was in pretty fair shape, even though I was older than most of the guys, because I was twenty-two when I graduated from college and I was twenty-four by the time I was in flight school and the others, the kids, were eighteen.

SI: Had any of the other flight cadets had any civilian flight training?

EP: Yes, some of them had been through the same Civil Pilot Training Program, but, once the war started, then, that Civil Pilot Training Program was no longer necessary, because, now, we had real flight training. So, some of the people ... had been in college. People that I went through Pensacola with were college-[educated]. Most of them were college graduates, but the ones that were in my squadron, who were not with me in flight school, a lot of them were younger ... than I was. ... Another thing we had to do [was], we had recognition training. We had to recognize all sorts of ships and planes and so forth, so that, when we were in combat, we would know an American ship from a Japanese ship.

SI: What do you remember about your pre-flight drill instructors? Were they particularly tough? Were they Marines or Navy men?

EP: They were Navy and they were Marines, both. They were both, yes. No, except that; that was not pre-flight, but it was in Jacksonville, when we were learning to land on carriers, but we didn't have any carriers, so, you did it on a field. You did field carrier landings and I remember this one Marine captain who was giving a friend of mine a hard time about something, I don't know [what], and I spoke to him about this, saying, I don't know what, [I] forget, but I was a second lieutenant and second lieutenants don't talk to captains the way I talked to him, and so, this other captain pulled me away. [laughter] ... He said, "We have problems with him." He said, "You know, no matter how [well] you train them and you pick them, you always have to allow for ten percent who don't get the word." This captain, supposedly, didn't get the word. He used other words that I won't have put on the tape, because it will go worldwide, [laughter] but ... we were all anxious to get into combat, you know. That's why we were there, and so, all of these other [things], we felt it was "Mickey Mouse," the pre-flight stuff, you know, the six

weeks that we did there, because we said, “What’s it got to do with flying?” you know, and, “We’re going to be so muscle-bound, we won’t have good coordination.” ... Well, they gave us enough things to do that we managed to keep our coordination, too, but there was concern that pre-flight was so much physical training that ... you would have pilots, now, who were physically trained, but not as alert and didn’t have as good reaction time as when they started, but I think it was mostly scuttlebutt. I think it was mostly [that] we felt that this was important, to get into an airplane and fly, because that’s ... what it was all about. ... Of course, you made friendships, too, you know, and buddies, particularly in flight school. I had a lot of buddies that I flew with that I knew from the time I started in pre-flight school. They just went along with me, you know, all the way through, and stayed in the Marine Corps and so on, but a number of them are no longer around.

SI: Why did you choose to become a Marine, as opposed to staying in the Navy Air Corps?

EP: I guess one thing was this Marine that was my boss when I was in airway traffic control. ... He was a straight arrow and he was a good guy and he was firm. ... He demanded perfection and I thought that was important and I don’t think that the Navy was any less perfect, but we always thought [we were more perfect], Marines always [do], you know. You see the things around the walls [in Colonel Piel’s home] [laughter] and I have a hat that says, “Once a Marine, always a Marine,” and my wife used to say, “Once a Marine, always a leatherhead.” [laughter] ... Marines, they’re a different breed. They really are. ... When I came back from combat, they said [that] we hadn’t had enough time ... to learn how to be Marines, and so, they sent us through Quantico while we were waiting to go back for the second tour. They sent us through Marine air training and that was an interesting experience, too, because ... they were trying to do to us what they did to Marines who were going through officer’s training. The difference was, we’d all been in combat and we took a different view of what was going on than they did, you know, because ... they really didn’t know how to handle people who had been in combat. ... For example, we had swimming instruction and you had to swim, I forget how many laps in the pool, and this guy wouldn’t swim at all. He said, “I’m not going in the water,” and they said, “You have to go to pass this.” [laughter] ... He said, “What are you going to do, you going to flunk me out of the course?” and he got in a big argument and he was a second lieutenant and I guess this guy was either a first lieutenant or [higher] and he said to him, finally, he said, “I was shot down and I spent more time in a raft than you’ve been in the Navy or in the Marine Corps,” he said, “so, don’t talk to me about [swimming].” [laughter] So, he never got in the pool. So, that was an interesting [thing]; going through that school after being in combat was an interesting thing, because they took us on night marches, you know, and then, we were supposed to be real quiet. ... You know, we knew about being real quiet. On Bougainville, the Japanese lived on the island with us. The Japanese were still living on Bougainville when the war ended, and so, we knew all about being quiet at night or watching out for other troops at night or enemy troops at night, and so, we didn’t really appreciate going on these night marches. When we had night marches in pre-flight school, that was different. We didn’t know what we had known, what we’d learned from being in combat. ...

SI: I have interviewed a number of Marines and they almost all say the same thing, “Once a Marine, always a Marine.” However, most of them relate their *esprit de corps* back to their initial experiences at Parris Island. How did you develop that Marine attitude without going

through the traditional route?

EP: Well, it was through pre-flight school, because we had Marine DIs in pre-flight school and I appreciated what they did. I got in a tussle with a guy ... playing soccer down in Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia, in pre-flight school. ... I was called up. This guy, I don't know what he did to me, but I decked him, and so, I got called in and they said, "What happened?" and I said, you know, "I didn't think ... what he did was fair, so," I said, "I thought I'd teach him what was fair," and they said, "Good. You're the soccer instructor from now on." [laughter] So, you know, it was that sort of thing that we got ... that they got some of that at Parris Island. ... Of course, I was older than the other guys, too. ...

DW: Did that affect your experience?

EP: Yes. They called me "Uncle Joe." [laughter] ... That was because I was older and because I'd been a teacher. That was another thing that I didn't mention about pre-flight school. We also had people who were having difficulty, particularly with physics and with celestial navigation, and we had a busy day at pre-flight school, but those who were having difficulty and it looked like they were good specimens, they were good people, but they might not pass the ground school, then, I taught them at night. They said, "You're a teacher," you know. So, we had an upstairs in the barracks [where] we had lessons, in mathematics and physics, mostly.

DW: Do you remember any of the social activities that you participated in during flight training?

EP: ... Social activities?

DW: Yes, such as playing cards.

EP: No. It's interesting, you know, people tell me about or they talk about going ashore when they were in Pensacola; I was there in the barracks all the time. I don't remember any social activities, then. Now, when I was at El Toro, waiting to go overseas, then, we could go on up into Los Angeles, and then, ... one guy I went with, (Dig Thompson?), had a girlfriend. Isn't that awful? I can't think of her name, now. She was an actress, and so, we double dated a couple of times, and so, those social activities we had ... were interesting. It was particularly interesting when we were overseas, then, and he was getting mail from this girl, and then, for a while, he wasn't getting any mail from the girl, and then, we were getting magazines and we got a *Life* Magazine and, here, this girl was marrying a Marine captain and Shirley Temple was her bridesmaid and that was the first time he knew that. So, it took a little while to calm him down. His name was Dink Thompson. He was from Moscow, Idaho, believe it or not. [laughter]

SI: I have been told that "Dear John" letters can be pretty difficult to deal with in the field.

EP: Yes, yes.

SI: That must have been even worse.

EP: Well, I got one, yes, from a girl I went to college with, went with in college, and she was

getting married. ... She was in the Navy. My wife was in the Navy, too, yes. ... We've only been married three years, because my wife died in '95 and my wife's husband died in '95, too, but we were in the same church, St. Peter's Church, in Essex Fells. ... We had known each other, so, we started going out together and got married three years ago, ... three days after 9/11, 9/15. ...

SI: You mentioned earlier that many pilot trainees crashed into their targets. How often did you see other types of accidents?

EP: Well, another type of accident that happened was in night flying, when you're [in] night flying training, because what you do in night flying is, ... in squadron flying, you take off, and then, you join up ... on the lead plane. Well, the lead plane, all he has on is ... one light on the tail and a red light on the port side and a green light on the starboard side. ... He took off before you did. You take off, and then, you find him and you join up on him and you join up by turning, because you turn on the inside, you know. The one on the inside, going the same speed as the one on the outside, will catch up, because he has a shorter distance to go, and so, joining up on him, you would look for ... the light on his plane and the light that was brightest, of course, was the taillight, the white light. ... [You] would find that light and you'd start joining up on it, except that, sometimes, it wasn't an airplane, it was a star, and you'd try to join up on a star and that's hard to do, because they're so far away. [laughter] ... So, what would happen is, you'd keep turning and turning and turning and trying to ... get that star, and then, you'd be in real trouble and you'd stall out and go down and some planes crashed. Other times, planes ran together and that was another serious problem, but we used to say, you know, "Night flying training is like parachute jumping; you've got to do it right every time, so, why bother training? [laughter] You're just going to do it and, if you do it wrong, that's the end of you and the training, so, you might just as well not have any night [flying]." That's the way we felt about it and that's [right], you were saying, ... we lost people then. No, ... the only person I lost in my squadron while I was with them was one fellow that was trying to do an outside loop, ... in which, instead of going this way, you go this way. ... He had always wanted to do that in an SBD and you can't do it in an SBD, because you don't have the power, and he stalled out and ended up diving into the island, ... we had other planes that got shot down ... in flights that we were with. ... There was one squadron that joined us. They'd been on Samoa for a long time, waiting to get into combat, and so, they finally came and they joined us at Bougainville and they had been there long enough and ... I don't know why, but they outranked us. ... They outranked those of us who were [flying]; they didn't outrank our colonel. ... So, they were the flight leaders for one of our sixty-plane flights, but they had been watching too many of these movies from Hollywood that showed, ... you won't get this on the tape now, [laughter] pilots climbing up and turning upside down, like this, and then, diving. ... If you see those planes there [in the painting], you notice what they're doing; ... the ones on the far right, they're flying straight and level, and then, the others are gliding, gliding, and, finally, turning, the last plane you see there. ... That's actually the Battle of Midway. ... I wasn't there, but that's a picture and they just go straight down. They didn't do this up and over [maneuver], because that's real fancy and it looks beautiful, but, when they got up on the top there, they're practically standing still, as far as the antiaircraft guns are concerned, and they got shot down, one, two and three, the commanding officer, the flight officer and the second-in-command. ... So, from that point on, they had us [lead]. I led a flight of sixty planes, because I had the experience, and we didn't lose any more.

We had a long conversation with the guys that got back; ... they were ready to listen, you know. They had learned. ... A lot of the accidents in training, whether it was in flight training or, really, in ground training, was the same thing, and that is, it was not really paying attention and not using your head and I saw this in flight training all the time. ...

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

SI: This continues an interview with Colonel Emil "Joe" Piel on April 29, 2005, in West Caldwell, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

DW: David Whitman.

SI: Please, continue.

EP: ... and Joe Piel. [laughter]

SI: You said that many accidents could have been prevented with more attentiveness.

EP: Yes, this [was] ... what I was telling you about, these guys losing the island on this submarine scouting [mission], coming back, you know, not being able to find the island. It was really because they hadn't paid real careful attention to navigation when they were in flight school. ... You know, you see it in sports all the time and you certainly see it with ground troops, when they're doing the live-fire [exercises], you know, and we saw it, because, ... in Pensacola, we did fighter tactics, dive-bomber tactics and torpedo-bomber tactics. We had all of that, and then, again, in fighter tactics, again, if you didn't know how to join up, just joining up, if you didn't know how to do this, you ran into another airplane, even in broad daylight, you know. You had to have the reflexes. The reflexes were important, but ... I guess it's experience and it's also paying attention. I guess that's what it was, more than anything else, at least from my point of view, and the Marines always were far superior to the Army and the Navy, you understand that, [laughter] and, if this [recording] goes to any Army bases, that's right, just accept it. [laughter]

SI: Almost every Marine I have interviewed says the same thing, in one form or another.

EP: Yes.

SI: What did you think of the SBD Dauntless, as a pilot?

EP: It was a great airplane. It was easy to fly and it would suffer a tremendous amount of damage and still fly, you know. I came back with holes in the wing and holes from antiaircraft, ... never been attacked by the Zeros, actually, because we had fighter planes above us, protecting us from those [fighters], and then, we had our own gunners that would protect us and they were also radar operators. Radar was horrible. ... Oh, back then, it was impossible. All you got was ... what was called "grass," you know, little flickers, green flickers, on the bottom of the screen, but we used it [in] trying to find submarines. You know, that was about it. Did I answer your question?

SI: Yes. I did not realize that they could put radar sets in the Dauntless at that point.

EP: Yes. Oh, you were asking me about the Dauntless, yes. It had a radar and it had; I don't know if you can see it in this; of course, you won't be able to see this on the tape. ... We had a small antenna with about four fingers that stuck out. That was our radar antenna. This is our radio; that's a mast with a line going back here.

SI: It was just a two-man crew.

EP: A two-man crew, that's two, yes.

SI: Was your enlisted man also a flight engineer?

EP: No. He was an enlisted man, ... usually a sergeant, yes, and we had the same gunner for a long time. We didn't have the same gunner throughout, because they came aboard and ... they were shipped in and shipped out. ... I had one gunner that ... had been a student at East Orange High School before the war. ... When I was back teaching after the war, I taught in Caldwell, and then, I taught in East Orange and he heard that I was in East Orange, so, he came and visited with me there, in school, but, no, they went through a different [school]. They didn't go through pre-flight the way we did, because we went through as potential officers and they were enlisted and they went [elsewhere], as they do now. ...

SI: Was the line between officer and enlisted man strictly enforced?

EP: Pretty much, yes, pretty much. ... Officers played cards together. ... Of course, a number of times, ... we didn't have any club, officers' club, on Bougainville, ... because it was a combat area, you know, and so, we would get together, ... but it was just officers and we got to be friendly. You got to be friendly with your gunner, you know; that was a personal thing. ... I'll show you a thing I have out in the other room. We also had ... Fiji on Bougainville. ... I don't know if you know much about the geography [of the South Pacific], but the Solomon Islands are right near the Fiji Islands, okay, and so, we had a Fiji scout in our camp ... who would sneak into the Japanese camp and do terrible things to them, and then, he would be back before morning. He'd be back with us and the Japanese who remained alive didn't even know he had been there. He was *that* good. Well, he and I got to be real good friends and I don't know what he was. He wasn't an officer, he wasn't an enlisted man, he was a Fiji. [laughter] He was a scout, but we got to be good friends. ... He went to Fiji for R&R and he came back and he brought me a gift and I'll show it to you. It's on the wall in the other room. ...

SI: That was on Bougainville.

EP: Bougainville, yes.

SI: Were the remaining Japanese still organized in an actual unit there?

EP: Yes, it was a Japanese unit.

SI: They were more than just snipers or guys living in caves.

EP: No, no, no. ... They had a camp and they were living there and they had been chased from where our airfield was, you know. They had had the whole island to begin with, and then, we chased them up into the hills and ... they were living up in the hills. They were growing their own food, because they ... weren't being re-supplied, because ... our airfields were on the bottom of the southern end of Bougainville, and then, we had another field up on the northern end of Bougainville, and so, the Japanese ... couldn't get any ships in. So, they were living off the land and what we would do is, then, periodically, we would go in and drop gasoline on their fields, and then, come in with incendiary bombs and set the gasoline on fire and burn their fields up, so that ... they were interdicted, but they never came down to attack us. ... There was the 24th Division of the Army ... between our field and the Japanese and our gunners, again, had told the Army that, "If the Japanese ever start coming through, we're going to start firing at them and you're going to be in-between. So, don't let them come." [laughter] That seemed to work out. ... No, we never had them attack us.

DW: Your combat experience came towards the end of the war.

EP: No. ... Well, the end of the war was in '45, yes, and I was there in '43 and '44. So, it was ... before the invasion. ... My squadron went to the Philippines to retake the Philippines and I didn't go with them, because my time was up for that time. If you stayed in a combat area for a certain length of time and if you weren't needed then, then, you went home. You came home, you got a new airplane and you got a new squadron, and then, you went back out and what happened was, we were all set to go ... up to the Philippines. That part of the war, the Solomon Islands part of the war, was over. You're right, ... but we were ready, now, to go into the Philippines and I was in my plane, warming up to go. All my stuff had been shipped. It was on a ship on its way and we were going to be ... up on an island close to the Philippines, ... to help retake the Philippines, when a sergeant jumped up on the wing of my airplane and he said, ... "Lieutenant, I've got orders for you to go home," and so, I never even shut off the engine. I got out of the airplane; it's still running, as far as I know. [laughter] So, that part about being near [the end], that was the end of our war in the Solomons, you're right. Then, the war of the Philippines took place, and then, ... the whole thing of Iwo Jima and all that, that was north of the Equator. We were just south of the Equator and that was north of the Equator. ... That went on, you know. Of course, Iwo Jima was taken so that they would have an airfield to launch large planes to bomb Japan. ...

SI: Can you tell us about your first mission or your first few missions? What was going through your mind? You seemed anxious to get into combat; now, you were there.

EP: Yes. Well, the first mission, ... the first dive-bombing mission at Rabaul, was interesting, because that was the first time I was in a group of that many airplanes. ... Of course, the big thing there was to know where other airplanes were and to be sure that you ... knew where your target was. Now, the problem with the targets were that the anti-aircraft guns were hidden in the jungles around the airfield, and so, they were pointed out to us from intelligence they got from previous flights, "We know there's an anti-aircraft gun at this particular spot on the map," and so

forth. ... On my first mission, I still remember, you know, flying there and looking at that spot and getting my bearings, from where the airfield was and from where other landmarks were, but I couldn't find the gun, you know, and that was when I said, "Shoot, you son-of-a-bitch, shoot, so [that] I can find you." [laughter] So, they shot, so [that] I could find them, and so, I dove on them, but that's one thing and I remember, coming back, saying, "Hey, that was pretty stupid." Another guy said, "No, that happens to you all the time," because they were concealed, but, then, there were other things that we were supposed to do, because we bombed bridges and other things in the area, so that they could not re-supply the airfield, because we bombed the airfield, and then, they took five days to repair all the holes and, by that time, we bombed it again. ... That's the first interesting thing and that was on my first dive-bombing mission. Then, I'd had some other missions of close air support and ... the big worry there [was], and I didn't have many of those; that was on our way up to Bougainville. I didn't have many there, but what my concern, then, was that I not fire on our own troops, but fire close enough to the enemy and that was ... a little hairy, but we'd done a lot of that in flight training. ... Then, my first antisubmarine trip, again, [I] was concerned about, "Was I navigating right? Did I count the right number of white caps and the right direction? ... Did I know how far I was ... off my course, so that when I turned around and came back, was I going to be able to find the island?" ... Having done it once, I figured, "Well, now, I know." [laughter] You're not sure that you know, but I figured [I did], but those are first mission remembrances that I have.

SI: During close air support missions, were you in constant contact with a forward air observer?

EP: ... Forward air controller, yes.

SI: Would they also put out white markers where our troops were?

EP: Yes, yes, sometimes flares, sometimes smoke, yes.

SI: What are your most vivid memories of combat?

EP: Well, another thing, the Japanese ... were very shrewd and they would anchor a barge; ... see, when you pulled out of the dive, then, you headed for the water as quickly as possible, so that you wouldn't be shot at, and then, they would anchor a barge out here and that would look very exciting, you know, "Oh, I can strafe the barge." Well, they had machine guns at shore that were zeroed in on that barge. ... If you flew down, you were low anyway, ... you could fly right through those, that machine gun fire. So, we were warned early, you know, "As tempting as it is, don't do that." ... Then, another time, ... having dropped my bomb; ... you drop the bomb at twenty-five hundred feet and, if you were married, it was probably three thousand feet [laughter] and another five hundred feet for each child you had. Us single guys [dropped from twenty-five hundred feet], [laughter] but, then, you would sometimes fly right over the airfield and, one time, there was a plane taxiing to take off and I was able to strafe it and stop it. ... That was targets of opportunity, you know, you had. Another time, my bomb hung up. It didn't release and I did all the things you're supposed to do to release the bomb and it still didn't release. ... So, flying back to Bougainville, there were some islands, small islands, and there was one island there that I had seen before that seemed to have things piled on it and it wasn't ours, and so, I assumed that it was bombs. You always do, [laughter] whatever it was, you assume it was [bombs]. So, I

said, "Oh, let's see if I can drop my bomb on that island," and so, I left. ... I was flying division leader, with five other airplanes behind me, and I just waved and said [that] I was going down there, and so, they circled and I'm still trying to release the damn bomb. ... I was not dive-bombing then, of course. I wasn't at ten thousand feet. I was glide-bombing, which was at about a forty-five degree angle, still trying to release it, and, finally, it released. ... I still say that this was ... a religious experience, really; I was told by the Lord to pull that stick back and I pulled it back, but the end of the propeller hit the water and bent the tips of the propeller and sent up a big splash, of course, because all the guys up there, ... they had said, "Well, there goes Joe," and there was this same (Cortez?), this gunner that was from East Orange High School. He was with me that day. He never flew again. [laughter] He said, "That's too much for me," and so, ... it was about ready for him to go home anyway and he went to the flight surgeon and he said, "I can't fly. I can't fly with him anymore." [laughter] ... They found other things for him to do, but that was a stupid thing to do, by the way. ... I missed the island, which was good. The bomb missed the island, because, if that had been an ammunition dump and if I had hit it, then, I'd have been hit, too. ...

SI: How often would that happen?

EP: ... We called them targets of opportunity and, if your ... bomb hung up, then, you [went after them], or if, for some reason, clouds or something else got in the way and you couldn't bomb your target, then, you picked a target of opportunity and there were a number of them, actually, marked. You know, "We're not sending a whole squadron in to get this, but you pick it, pick your own target of opportunity," and people did that.

SI: How long would an average mission last, aside from the antisubmarine patrols?

EP: ... It took us about an hour-and-a-half to get there, no, less than an hour-and-a-half, maybe an hour to get there, and then, the short time, that's ... only forty seconds, the mission, and then, it took about the same length of time to come back. It took less time to get back, because you were climbing all the while. ... SBDs were slow airplanes. We called SBDs, "Slow But Deadly," ... because they were slow. ... You know, the only time you really got any speed was when you're going straight down and that's because you had ... those flaps open. That was to keep you from going any faster than about 245 miles an hour, straight down. ...

SI: In addition to the stress of combat, airmen also had to cope with physical problems, such as subzero temperatures at high altitudes, noise and cramped conditions. What were the actual conditions of flying the Dauntless like? Was it difficult or stressful?

EP: No. Well, we had been trained, ... you've probably heard about this, by getting into a chamber, a high-altitude chamber, on the ground when they took out the air. ... At eighteen thousand feet, ... you have half as much air pressure as you have at the ground [level] and, therefore, half as much oxygen and, therefore, you can ... get anoxia. I forget, I think that's the term; anyway, you feel very happy about everything that's going on for a while, and then, you can't ... control yourself. You can't ... write a sentence and that sort of thing. Well, we had that because we went to ... seventeen, eighteen thousand feet, and so, we wore oxygen masks all the while and we were cold, you're right. We wore, ... sometimes, leather jackets, and I have one

hanging in the closet, or we wore [heated suits]. That's a picture of me with a lighter and, of course, the cockpit was closed and you had cockpit heat on, and so, we never really got cold, but it was interesting, because the four-engine bombers, the strategic bombers, they were on our island, also. ... The mess hall would give them the ingredients and they would make ice cream up there. I don't know if these guys told you about that or not.

SI: I have heard about that, yes. You could also cool down cases of beer that way.

EP: Yes, yes. [laughter] ... Then, of course, you had the problem of taking off the oxygen mask. You had seventeen different things you had to do and, I don't remember, maybe three or four of them that you had to do before you were pointed straight down. ... You had to change the pitch of the propeller, so that you had full pitch when you were pulling out of the dive. You had to get rid of the oxygen mask. You had to check your guns, to be sure that they were right, check all your meters and that sort of thing, and so, you were very busy between eighteen thousand feet and ten thousand feet and you were also, at the same time, flying evasive maneuvers, so that they couldn't pick you up with their antiaircraft. See, that's when you got shot down. ... I never knew of anybody that got shot down as he was diving straight down. ... Another thing that did make us nervous was, one time, when they sent word to the Japanese on Rabaul that, ... "We will bomb you tomorrow, at high noon," and I said to the Colonel, I said, "Why are you telling them when we're coming?" and he said, "It's to breakdown their morale." I said, "It's not doing a hell of a lot for ours, either." [laughter] ... As it turned out, dive-bombing at high noon, they can't see you. They're looking right up at the sun, and so, ... everything was nicely lit up down at the bottom. ... The problem of the high altitude and that sort of thing didn't bother us and I don't know whether it bothered the fighter pilots, because they were at a higher altitude. ... The fighter pilots were in a single-engine plane, all by themselves, with a warm cockpit, you know. If you had the cockpit heater on, that was fine, and so, that was another thing. We had to have carburetor heat on, because, if you didn't have the carburetor heat on, ... [with] the air rushing through, the carburetor could freeze, the moist air could freeze, and then, your engine wasn't running and that happened to me in flight training in Jacksonville.

SI: How do you fix that?

EP: Well, it was a really humid day and ... that was at seventeen thousand feet in a trainer, an SNJ, and the carburetor froze and the engine went, "Click, click, click," and so, I called one field, Barin Field, and told them my problem and they said, "Well, we're closed in by thunderstorms. You can't land here. Try Bronson Field." So, I called Bronson Field and [they said], "We're closed in by thunderstorms. You can't land here," and so, I said, [laughter] "Well, I have two choices. I've got to find someplace to land or bail out," and I found a field, not an airfield, just an empty field, and so, I landed there and I just made it over a fence. Of course, when the plane landed, it banged down. That broke the ice in the carburetor and the engine started right up, but I had already called [in]. They already knew at Jacksonville where I was and where I was landing. ... I said, "The engine's running," and they said, "Stay right in the airplane, stay right where you are," and then, they sent an instructor to fly the plane out of the field and he said, "How the hell did you get in here?" He said, "You don't have enough room," and I said, "Well, I did," because, when I landed, I didn't roll very far, because, ... you know,

the field was not an airfield, and he said, "Yes, but ... how am I going to get it out?" I said, "I'll fly it out for you," and he said, "No, you won't." [laughter] He said, "You've done enough for us," but that sort of thing ... would happen. ... That taught me to keep the carburetor heat on ... as I was climbing. See, you don't have as much power then, with the carburetor heat, because you're not getting the right mixture of air and gasoline.

SI: Did you find that your training got you through what you had to do in combat or was there a lot of on-the-job training?

EP: Oh, it was a lot of on-the-job training, except that the training of hitting that two-hundred-foot target and doing that day after day, that was good. ... That helped a lot, but ... the on-the-job was all the other things you had to do that I was telling you about, you know, and the other things of, "Don't strafe that barge." Those things, that was on-the-job and joining up after the bombing, you know, ... finding the right airplanes, so [that] each section of planes had its own section to bomb. ... We were told ... which direction to go to join up, and then, the division leader was told which direction to go to find the rest of the airplanes, but it wasn't that vital that you be in the sixty-plane formation getting back. The big thing on getting back was getting to the field in time to land. Now, ... there's a little island ... just north of Bougainville called Green Island and that's all it was; it was an airstrip and it was three hundred feet above sea level at one end and it was at sea level at the other end, because it was an atoll, a coral atoll, and so, you wanted to get there and land first. ... One of the things you did was, you got back home as fast as possible, because all the other airplanes, a lot of the other airplanes, were going to the same field, especially the New Zealand fighter planes. ... Those guys were crazy and they would come in and they would always get there first or call in, say, "Low petrol," and so, they'd be allowed to land before we did, because we had enough gas, and then, it turned out that they didn't have low petrol, and so, the next time, they would dump their gas at sea, so [that] they really had low petrol, because they wanted to [get to] "the O club" [officers' club] before we did. ... This was on-the-job. I didn't learn that in Pensacola. [laughter] ... Another thing you learned was how to steal the distributor from the jeep, so that you could take your own distributor off the jeep when you went any place in your jeep, because, otherwise, it'd be stolen.

SI: Did you have much interaction with other Allied forces?

EP: Yes, ... not with the other Allied forces, other than the fighter protection we got from the New Zealanders and Australians.

SI: They were the ones that flew fighter cover.

EP: They flew fighter force, yes, ... but we had interaction with the artillery, because we would fly artillery spotters, ... sitting in the backseat without the gun, that we would fly and they would do the artillery spotting. ... I don't know if you've talked to any artillery people, but ... they'd spot; one shell hits here, the target is over here, and so, then, they move. They worked their way in. ... So, they would call, from my plane, where the artillery had hit, and so, ... we worked with them, ... until one guy. ... We had to sign their logbook and he said, "Gee, this will be great. This is my fifth flight," and I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "That means I get an Air Medal." I said, "You get an Air Medal? You're in artillery and you get an Air Medal for riding

in my backseat for five times?” [laughter] You know, I got seven Air Medals, but not for riding in somebody else’s backseat and I said, “You’re going to earn your Air Medal,” and so, we did artillery spotting on the side, [sideways], so [that] he could look this way, and then, we did artillery spotting on this side and he got sick, really sick. [laughter] When we got back, he was a captain, I was a second lieutenant, ... he started to get out of the airplane. I said, “No, you can’t get out of the airplane, yet,” and he said, “Why not?” I said, “Because it’s my airplane and I’m in charge,” and I said, “You don’t get out of the airplane and you don’t leave this area until you wash out that cockpit, because,” I said, “my gunner has to fly in there tomorrow,” and I said, “You wash [it] up.” He said, “Lieutenant, I’m not going to do it.” I said, “Captain, I’ve got a lot of Marines around here [laughter] who ... [are] going to be sure that you don’t leave the airplane,” and he stayed and he washed out the airplane and he earned his Air Medal.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: From what I have read, it was a common practice in the Army Air Forces to award an airman the Air Medal after every five or ten missions and the Distinguished Flying Cross once his tour was complete. Were each of your Air Medals awarded to you for a specific action?

EP: Some of them. ... Then, near the end, I got them for missions. The Marine Corps didn’t do that, originally, but the DFC, I got for destroying a bridge, yes, and I got one of the Air Medals for destroying that airplane I told you about, yes.

SI: Can you tell us about that bridge mission?

EP: ... The bridge I got was a target of opportunity, because, it [the primary target] was clouded over or something, and then, I saw this bridge on my way down off from where the cloud was, and so, I flew over to that and got the bridge. ... The way they did this [was], to prove that you had done something worthwhile, you had a camera pointing out the back of your airplane, see, and ... you would get the flight. There was one in front of the airplane, and then, one behind, one camera pointing forward and one pointing back, at a forty-five [degree angle], and so, ... intelligence knew where your bomb hit and they saw my bomb hit this bridge, and so, that’s how I got the DFC. Yes, ... I guess we heard [that] the Air Force was getting those for every five missions, and then, we started putting in for that. So, maybe four or five of those might be that and [the] others are for specific targets that I had actually hit, yes.

SI: Was the artillery unit that you worked with a Marine or Army artillery unit?

EP: It was Army artillery, yes, and we weren’t with them. ... Yes, they were on the same island, because, see, the Japanese also had another island right near us. They were still on that island and we never took that island. We just let them stay there, because they couldn’t get any supplies in and ... they didn’t have any airplanes, couldn’t get them out. ... You know, to save troops, why invade an island that nobody can get to and it wouldn’t do you any good? It wasn’t like the Coastwatchers that we had on [Bougainville]. You might have read about the Coastwatchers. ... We had some left over from when we invaded Bougainville, and then, there ... [was] one Army artillery battery, or whatever they call it, and their job, again, was to interdict the Japanese that were north of us, still on the island.

SI: You mentioned that the gunner from East Orange requested to be grounded. How often did that happen, where somebody either requested it or the flight surgeon would say, "We cannot send this guy up again?"

EP: ... They all had these little bottles of whiskey and they'd all have enough of that so that they were not in any condition to fly the next day, and then, the day after that, they were flying. See, another job I had, since I had ... a degree in physics, they made me the assistant engineering officer. Now, the engineering officer was in charge of the group that kept the airplanes flying, see, and, as assistant engineering officer, when a plane came back and the pilot said, "I had a problem with this," or, "I had a problem with that thing," it was my job to fly the airplane and see what the problem was. ... Once we had spotted the problem, then, I could report it to the flight engineer, the squadron engineer, and he would see to it that it got fixed, and so, that was another job. ... Then, I had the job of flying planes ... from Bougainville back to Espirito Santo, which was in ... the New Hebrides, for repairs. ... So, if the plane wasn't so badly shot up that it wouldn't fly again, then, as assistant engineering officer, I got to fly it back to Espirito Santo. I flew torpedo-bombers, everything. ... You said there was a crew of three in a torpedo bomber. Well, guys, enlisted men that wanted to get their flight time in, they would often go back with me, and then, I would drop that airplane off and I'd pick up a new airplane and bring it back up to where the squadron was. ... That was added fun that I had. ... You got to fly down and look at all the islands that we had taken, you know, [that] the Japanese were no longer on, and that's fun.

SI: Overall, do you think that you were well supplied with everything, from food to fuel?

EP: Yes. The food wasn't too good for a while, you know, ... but it was edible, but, then, when we went on R&R down to Australia, we got a week off and went down to Australia for rest and rehabilitation, ... we stopped at towns in Australia and picked up a case of eggs. ... We bartered toilet paper or cigarettes with the Australians and we would get a case of eggs and bring that back to the mess hall, and so, we'd have fresh eggs for a week or a couple of days, but, otherwise, ... we had ersatz eggs and everything, dried food, and we didn't have nearly the good food that they got aboard aircraft carriers.

MF: It is interesting that you brought up cigarettes. In almost every interview that I have read, men discuss taking up the habit of smoking or drinking coffee or alcohol. Did you smoke when you were in the military?

EP: ... No, I quit smoking when I was five years old, [laughter] because, ... in Edgewater, New Jersey, a friend of mine and I had gone picking up cigarette butts in the gutters and smoking them and I got sick. [laughter] I never smoked again, and then, ... I have a picture someplace of me smoking a cigar, but I never smoked. Drank, yes, we drank, if we could get it.

SI: Did you make your own alcohol?

EP: Liquor?

SI: Yes.

EP: No, but we know some people who did and went blind, because they had put something in [it]; see, they used alcohol. The F4Us had an injection system. They could inject water in with the gasoline at high RPM and high power and it kept the gas burning slowly enough so [that] it wouldn't detonate, because you didn't get a ping, and some people drank that alcohol and they had something in it so [that] you wouldn't drink the alcohol, but we never had that. ... No, we had a supply, because, one time, I flew a torpedo-bomber down to Espirito Santo, because that was the Navy supply depot for the area, and, for Christmas, ... we picked up cases of booze and beer and wine and flew it back home, because they had more room in the bottom of a torpedo-bomber than we had in a SBD, ... because we didn't have any bomb bay. They had bomb bays. ... No, we never [did]. We complained about the food, but, hell, I complain about the food here, sometimes, [laughter] and it's wonderful.

SI: What happened to you after that sergeant jumped on your wing and you left the plane running?

EP: Yes, from that point, I got on a transport to fly me and about five other guys back home and we flew to, I forget where we flew first, and then, we flew to Wake Island and we flew to ... the Hawaiian Islands.

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

EP: It took me three weeks to get into combat on the ship and it only took me three days to get back home after combat. [laughter] ... Then, we had SB2Cs that I was flying at Cherry Point, waiting to go back, when the war ended.

DW: I actually just read about someone who also stopped at the Hawaiian Islands on their way home. They recalled some pretty wild experiences. Do you remember anything like that?

EP: No, the interesting thing was that none of us did. I guess we were so tired, ... because we'd been flying every day and, at least ... the guys I was with, we went to the clubs. ... One interesting experience, social experience, we had down in Australia was funny, though, because we got there and, obviously, we could always find some girls and go to a bar, ... wearing our wings, you know, and they were telling us of the experience they had with Navy pilots. ... The first time they met these Navy pilots and they saw them wearing these same wings, they said, "What are you doing with Marine wings?" which, of course, they're Navy wings, [laughter] they're not Marine wings, but the Marines had landed first. [laughter] They got that word, those things. ... In Australia, one thing, we noticed that the girls were always impressed because we held the door for them and Australians don't hold the door open for women.

DW: You had the upper hand.

EP: ... They couldn't get over how polite we were and that worked out. [laughter]

SI: Did you come back in mid-1944?

EP: No, at the end of '44, December '44.

SI: You came back. Then, they sent you to Quantico, and then, you were sent to Cherry Point.

EP: Right, and then, I went to Cherry Point and I picked up ... SB2Cs and ... we were forming a squadron, and then, we were just getting ready to go back to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan.

SI: Would that have been another land-based squadron or a carrier-based squadron?

EP: No. ... Then, we'd have gotten ... carrier training on the way. We were supposed to get carrier training on the way. In other words, we were supposed to fly our airplanes to a carrier, and then, ... we would go aboard a carrier for the invasion of Japan.

SI: Did you make any practice carrier landings?

EP: No, no. We never got to that stage of the training and all I did was "land carrier." I landed on a carrier laid out on a field. ... Guys that flew from carriers said that was harder than what they did, because the carrier sticks up ... out of the water. This was settled in, with trees around it, and so, it's harder to fly low and slow when you've got trees there to get in, but, no, I never did the carrier.

SI: What did you think of the SB2C?

EP: The SB2C was a dog, as far as I was concerned. It was nothing like [the SBD]. This [the SBD] was a beautiful airplane to fly, but that [the SB2C] was heavy. It had a lot more power, but it had a lot more weight, and so, ... it would go faster, because ... we went about 120 knots [in an SBD], most of the time, except when we were diving, and the SB2C would go faster than that and its wings folded. ... The wings don't fold on the SBD.

SI: How did you react to the news of the end of the war and the dropping of the atomic bomb?

EP: Oh, I was very happy. We were very happy and I was flying radio check, actually, when I got the word, on the civilian radio, that the bomb had been dropped and it was good. We didn't have to go and we were ready to go. ... We knew what we were looking forward to, which was not very pleasant, bombing Japan, because, there, you didn't have any place to go back to, you know. You had the carrier, but you didn't know what was going to be happening on the carrier if you did get [in trouble] and you had the Philippines to go back to, because you could bomb from the Philippines.

DW: As someone who had studied science, how aware were you of the strength of the atomic bomb and the impact it would have?

EP: ... As soon as I read about it, I knew what it was. I knew what the situation was, but the rest of the politics of it, ... [there were] no politics, you know. It ended the war and that's all we [wanted] and I still feel that way, you know. People who get upset about our having bombed

Hiroshima, ... I have no worry about that at all. After all, they had bombed Pearl Harbor, you know, without reason. We bombed Hiroshima for a reason and, essentially, it was to [end the war] and Truman said it when he did it, it was to end the war. ... I feel no national guilt about that at all. Marines have a lot of trouble feeling guilty about anything. [laughter]

SI: You decided to stay in the Marines as a Reservist.

EP: Right.

SI: Why did you decided to not take your discharge then?

EP: Well, I enjoyed the last six months or so of what I was doing. Actually, it was playing football, because it was fall, and then, I got out and I just wanted to stay in the Marine Corps and there were jobs to be done and staying in the Reserve was important. ... Korea came along and there was a chance I was going to be going back and, when I didn't go back, then, I stayed in because I ... stayed in touch with the same guys, you know, the same guys that were in the Reserves with me. ... I went to school, and then, participated in training other Marines. That's the other thing we did. We trained, mostly, as an air traffic controller. Then, I was training other Marines in flight training, ground Marines and pilots in how to conduct air-ground work and that was interesting.

DW: This was during the 1950s.

EP: Yes, yes, and we used the lighter-than-air field.

SI: Lakehurst?

EP: ... Lakehurst. We used Lakehurst because they had a training area out there. We did training there. ... West Point let us have training [there] and we trained Reserve units, communications units and ground troop units in this whole area.

SI: You were very active in the Reserves. It was not like the inactive Reserves.

EP: ... Oh, no, no. It was active. It was active in that we planned training missions, and then, we ran them, yes. ... Then, I would spend two weeks on active duty at Cherry Point or El Toro or wherever. ...

DW: In the 1950s, you made use of your GI Bill benefits. Can you tell us about your graduate education?

EP: ... One thing, I went ... back to Montclair to get a Master's degree and they accepted as college credit a number of the courses that I had taken in flight school and they were accepted as ... physical science courses or as math courses, and so, I got my Master's degree in physical science from Montclair. ... So, because of that, because they had accepted all those [credits], I had a lot of time left on the GI Bill and I had planned to go to Harvard to study more, but I got a job. As soon as the war was over, I got a job. As soon as I got home from the service, I had a

job, when all I had was my uniform to wear. ... I got a job teaching school, teaching physics at Fort Lee, where I had gone to school, and so, I said, "Well, why go to Harvard, then?" you know, and I had a chance to go to Rutgers part-time, and so, I could teach and go part-time, and then, I had to take some full-time work, summers, in the College of Education and I got my Doctor's degree in supervision and curriculum, but I did it on physics. ... My thesis was the re-education of physics teachers in New Jersey and it was at a time when we needed that and, now, it's even worse, because, now, all those people that went through the program that I recommended, and that was used at a number of different schools, they're all retiring now and there's nobody to take their place. We're going to have real problems in education, science, particularly. Science and math, it's terrible. ... I've been very active in [the] New Jersey Science Teachers Association and running programs and that sort of thing.

DW: Can you explain what it was like being a Rutgers student in late 1950s?

EP: ... A Rutgers student? ... I was going to class with other guys who'd been in the service, pretty much. ... We went to school at the School of Pharmacy, the Rutgers School of Pharmacy in Newark, and we had classes there and ... to another school in Rutgers, too. I think the law school had classrooms available and we took courses there. ... The courses were education courses, which was interesting, because, at Montclair, I didn't have any education courses to speak of and I got a little tired of administration courses and that sort of thing. ... Curriculum was the thing that I was interested in, and then, I got my degree in 1960, that was supervision and curriculum, and I did curriculum writing after that and I was involved with a course which we wrote called, "The Man-Made World," which was a course in systems analysis and decision making and that sort of thing for high schools. It was ... a technology/society course and it was pretty widespread and we wrote the book, [*The Man-Made World*, which Colonel Piel co-authored with E. E. David, Jr., and J. G. Truxal]. ... Then, I was involved with training teachers all over the country. So, my experience in curriculum courses at Rutgers was very good.

DW: Which degree did you earn from Rutgers?

EP: Montclair was Master of Arts, because they gave MAs and MSs, but, if you had foreign language, you got an MA, [laughter] and so, I got the MA in physical science there. An MS would have meant I had physical science, but no foreign language, which was interesting. ... The courses at Rutgers were very good and my thesis was, I had written one thesis and, when I got ... just ready for the oral, ... my adviser said, "You know, I've passed your thesis around to a lot of people," which they do, and he said, "They all came to the conclusion that you didn't have a thesis here. What you had was a career," and what I was planning to do would have been a career, not just a thesis, and so, my name was on the program, you know, the whole thing, but I didn't get the degree, and so, it took me a year, and then, I did this study to get ... background, which I already knew. ... It was one of those things, you know, chapter three, you've got to really prove why it's necessary for you to do all the rest of the chapters. [laughter] I knew why, but that wasn't good [enough]. I had to go through the literature and find out why [laughter] and the literature was written by a lot of people I knew, and so, I got that squared away, and then, wrote this system for re-educating physics teachers, and then, my doctoral exam was very interesting, because it was three people from the Physics Department and three people from the Education Department and Education and Physics didn't get along too well at Rutgers at the time

and it got to be interesting. They asked me a question and I answered it, and then, somebody from Education was concerned about the kind of paper I used to write the thesis on, you know, [laughter] and somebody from Physics said, “What the hell has this got to do with what he wrote?” [laughter] and so, then, ... there was a little difference of opinion, discussions of physics education and education education, and I was there mostly as a moderator [laughter] and it was really funny. I got finished. ... You go out of the room. Now, you sit in the hall on the bench and I sat on the bench and I was there about two minutes and they called me back in. They said, “Congratulations,” and that was the end of my oral exam. So, I’d picked a good topic. [laughter]

SI: The other day, I read an interview with a man who spent his career as a reading teacher, but he had also taught reading in the Army. He said that that experience really influenced his later career. Do you think that your military experience affected your career?

EP: Well, of course, teaching physics and having been a pilot, I used engines as the basis of my physics teaching. As a matter-of-fact, I taught a whole course, a whole physics course, around the automobile, because [of] the engine training that I had had in the Marine Corps, in the flight school, and so, I knew a lot about engines. As a matter-of-fact, right after the war, you could get an engine for fifty dollars. You could get an airplane for one hundred dollars, plus, one hundred dollars more for each engine that it had, and you had to fly it out of [the field]. Yes, they were getting rid of them that way, and so, I got an engine from a helicopter. ... I was teaching in Fort Lee at the time and I had it shipped to Fort Lee and I had it right there in the classroom, and so, I could teach the whole physics course [around it]. Everything you needed to know in physics, you could teach ... around the engine, especially ... around the automobile. The whole thing with light and all the business of focusing light and ... that whole business, that’s all the ... automobile headlights, just as Archimedes’ Principle is the basis of the carburetor, ... the Archimedes’ Principle, and so, I taught the whole course. ... At a convention, I would talk about this, you know, science teachers’ convention, and people would say, “You know, that’s very interesting, but can you ever get a kid in college [by] teaching that kind of a physics course?” and I’d say, “Well, I’ll tell you about one. I had a kid named Paul Gray in my physics course at Caldwell High School here,” and I said, “In spite of my teaching ... about the automobile, he was able to go to MIT,” I said, “but he had a lot of trouble, because he couldn’t get out of MIT. He finally ended up as president.” [laughter] So, that stopped all arguments about, “Can you teach physics around the automobile?” ... Then, that course, “The Man-Made World,” that we wrote, I’ll show you a book of that before you go, and so, that was my military training. ... Of course, the whole business of flying, you know, the lift on the airplane, that whole thing, that’s all Bernoulli’s Principle. ...

DW: You had real experiences to go along with what you were interested in. The connection made it natural for you to teach.

EP: Oh, yes. I get invited back to all the fiftieth reunions now and the kids, now who are seventy-five years old, [laughter] all remember that I was teaching about the airplane and ... a lot of them are engineers, now. ... Physics was difficult, if you taught it the wrong way, and, ... really, that’s why I wrote that thesis on how to re-educate physics teachers. The first thing I said was, “You’ve got to send them into industry,” and we had a program at Montclair State, a

summer program of science and industry, and we took people on field trips to industries, and then, I encouraged, and my thesis encouraged, people to get a job in industry and I had a job at Bell Labs while I was teaching, a summer job at Bell Labs.

SI: What did you do at Bell Labs?

EP: I was in the systems system and the physics group and I worked with a physics teacher there, a physics scientist there, and I talked so much about teaching that, when he retired, he got a job teaching down at this, what's the women's college in Lakewood, a Catholic college?

SI: Georgian Court.

EP: Georgian Court. He got a job at Georgian Court teaching physics, because I talked [about it so much], you know. It was interesting working at Bell Labs. Everybody was a doctor, so, having a Doctor's degree didn't mean a damned thing, but professor was something else and, if you were a professor, ... you were looked on higher, with higher authority, than if you were a doctor, you know. [laughter] All these guys with PhDs in engineering and physics and so forth, but I had mine in education and I was a professor. So, I worked summers there.

SI: You went on to become a professor. Where?

EP: At [the] State University of New York-Stony Brook. ... I was at Brooklyn Poly first, and then, a group of us from Brooklyn Poly formed the Department of Technology and Society at Stony Brook. ... I was in the Electrical Engineering Department at Brooklyn Poly and the head of the Electrical Engineering Department at Poly became Dean of Engineering at Stony Brook, and so, six of us went with him and we were known at Stony Brook as the "Brooklyn Mafia," [laughter] because we turned things around in the engineering college at Stony Brook, because of our experience in writing curriculum for high school kids. ... We started that at Brooklyn Poly. ... There's a lot now; the whole thing of decision-making, when you look at what they are talking about on Social Security, you know, ... the decision-making, basic engineering decision-making, is very important in deciding how this whole business is going to go or should go or whatever. ... I don't know if it's true at Rutgers, but a lot of the engineering graduates went right into med school, because ... the training in engineering was perfect training for med school, ... because so much of medicine these days is engineering anyway.

SI: Is there anything that we skipped over or anything else that you want to put on the tape?

EP: ... I've talked about a lot more than I've thought about in the last fifty years.

SI: Yes, we appreciate that. If there is anything else that you want to add to the transcript later, you may do that.

EP: No, there'll probably be some things I want to subtract. [laughter] It will be kind of long.

SI: Hopefully, you will not. We like long transcripts.

EP: I don't know if anybody's going to listen to this whole [interview].

SI: This concludes our interview with Colonel Emil "Joe" Piel on April 29, 2005, in West Caldwell, New Jersey. Thank you very much.

[TAPE PAUSED]

[Editor's Note: After concluding the interview, Shaun Illingworth and David Whitman realized that they had neglected to revisit Colonel Piel's wartime encounter with Charles A. Lindbergh.]

EP: ... Lindbergh, originally, just before we got involved in World War II, was in trouble because he was saying how great the *Luftwaffe* was, ... and then, he was sort of [in hot water, with people] saying, "Is he a Nazi?" or that sort of thing and, obviously, he wasn't, but he had great admiration for them. ... He was then working for Chance-Vought, Lockheed, and he was sent over to the Pacific to teach the pilots who were flying the Corsair ... the way they could carry bombs heavier than the bomb load that they thought was appropriate. ... So, he was flying over there and he was on the same island, ... one of the islands, that I was on. I think it was on Munda. It was not on Bougainville, anyway, but there were fighter squadrons there and he was training [the men], and so, a bunch of us, obviously, wanted to see Lindbergh again, and so, we got to see him. ... I shook his hand and said, "I saw you at Teterboro Airport," and he smiled and that was the end of that. [laughter] My two seconds of fame, but that's ... essentially it. ... Then, he got in trouble there, because he flew some combat missions that he wasn't supposed to. [laughter] That was in the Corsair.

SI: Thank you very much for adding that to the record.

EP: Okay.

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Reviewed by Monica Valencia 10/4/05
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/24/05
Reviewed by Emil J. Piel 12/05/05