RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM M. PROFT, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on January 12, 2009, in Green Valley, Arizona, with Mr. William (Bill) M. Proft, Jr. Thank you so much, Mr. Proft, for having me here today. To begin, tell me, please, for the record, where and when you were born.

William Proft: Well, first, let me start with saying, please, use Bill; Mr. Proft was my father.

SH: Thank you. [laughter]

WP: I was born in Orange, New Jersey, Orange Memorial Hospital, on March 24, 1924.

SH: Could you tell me then about your father? Let us start with his family and his background.

WP: My father, obviously, William M. Proft, was born in 1895 in Newark, New Jersey. … His father came over from what is now the Czech Republic. … He was a barber who set up a shop on Clinton Street, Newark, and had an evidently good clientele of a lot of the financial people there, because I don't remember the shop, but I do remember photos, seeing all of the shaving mugs along the wall, with the brushes in there, and then, a picture of all of the [staff], my grandfather, Frank, and his helpers, out in front of the shop. … He had lost his first wife and … he married a second time and … this was my father's mother, Minnie Charlotte Mott, who lived in Newark. Her family, of the William Henry Mott Family …

SH: M-O-T-T?

WP: Correct. I don't remember the name of the street they lived on, but it isn't there now, and she had one child, who was my father.

SH: Were there other children from the former marriage?

WP: Yes. There were five children, one girl and four boys. The details on that, I can't give right off the cuff.

SH: That is okay.

WP: But, I could get them.

SH: Your grandfather continued to be a barber.

WP: Until his death, yes, and he died rather early. My father was sixteen, still in high school, and, at that time, he left high school to work, to help support [the family]. One of his, stepbrothers, would it be? was in the dental business and he helped him with delivery of things, [and] so on, and he did other odd jobs. He never finished high school.

SH: What did he do then?

WP: Well, of course, … he was not in the military, because he was supporting [his family]. He was a supporting member of the family, or the supporter of the family.

SH: Did he talk at all about growing up in Newark and what that was like?

WP: … Yes, they lived at, I believe it was on 14th Street, which is near the East Orange border, and it was also there that my mother lived, in her younger years. … Of course, that proximity led to their meeting.

SH: Tell me a little bit about your mother and her background.

WP: My mother was born in 1895 as well, in Bloomfield, New Jersey. Her mother and father came over from Poland, Poznan, Poland, and settled [here]. They weren't married at this time, didn't even know each other, settled in New York, and that's where they met and married. … She had twelve children, four of whom never made it, or died, but she did have a good-sized family with eight, seven girls and one son. [laughter]

SH: What was the maiden name of your mother?

WP: The maiden name, I'm going to give it to you in the changed name, is Palcanis, P-A-L-C-A-N-I-S. The original name was (Polyocnaski?). Her father was an organ repairman and he had a shop in Newark, repairing organs, either at the site or doing work in their shop. … Here, again, I have photos of their second floor shop, someplace in Newark, with the crew standing on the stairs, [on an] outside stairway that led up to their shop, and he did a lot of traveling. He might have gone down to Asbury Park or to Atlantic City or anyplace, to make some corrections on organs and maybe even tune them. … My mother would go along with him, as a child, and do the holding of the keys, so [that] he could do the corrections as he needed it. [laughter]

SH: Did your mother play the organ?

WP: No, she did not. She played the piano.

SH: Was your grandfather …

WP: I have a very vague recollection of … my maternal grandfather. I was probably under five or less when he died.

SH: What about your paternal grandparents? Do you remember them?

WP: Oh, yes. I don't remember my paternal grandfather, because he died when my father was sixteen, but I do remember his mother, who lived with Mom and Pop from the day they were married, in 1919, until 1938, when she passed away, which was not uncommon in those days. … It was a good thing, because, during that time, not only was my father holding down several jobs, my mother was holding down a job, too.

SH: Was she really?

WP: We had to; it was the [Great] Depression. I have one sister who is three-and-a-half years older than I. She passed away in September of '03, and that was our family.

SH: Where did you live, as you remember earliest, growing up?

WP: … At the very early years, … well, when I was born, … we were living on 14th Street, Newark, and not too long after that, maybe a year or so, we moved into a home in West Orange, and my maternal grandfather was there with us as well. My maternal grandmother eventually retreated to, not a convent, but somewhat of an order. There was one on Roseville Avenue, Newark, where she just went back to that religious life and left the family.

SH: Really? very interesting. Was she Roman Catholic?

WP: She was, he wasn't, and neither was my mother or father.

SH: Did they talk of either side of the family still having family members overseas, or did they all immigrate to the United States?

WP: … No, I don't know of any other family members preceding their parents. There's something about my paternal grandmother's history, where we have a family tree that dates back to a Major Mott in the Revolutionary [War] time.

SH: As a young man, growing up, you talked about the one grandmother who was Catholic, but none of the other members of the family were. Was there a church that you were involved with?

WP: Well, … I'm saying that my mother eventually didn't remain in the Catholic religion. I think some of her sisters did. … When I came into the age of going to church and Sunday school, yes, there was a small Presbyterian church in West Orange, New Jersey, Valley Presbyterian Church, where we attended. My father was active, up [to] and including elder, and I attended the Sunday school there. … Then, as time went on, I got into other activities, with [Boy] Scouts, and so on, which led me to the First Presbyterian Church of Orange, New Jersey, on Scotland and Main, a huge facility, and I went with the Christian Endeavor group at that church. [Editor's Note: The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor is an international, nondenominational, Christian youth ministry group.]

SH: What is your earliest memory of the Oranges from when you were growing up?

WP: Well, certainly, it wasn't down in Newark, it was in West Orange, and I remember that [there were] still some dirt roads, occasionally. All of the deliveries were either horse-drawn, with a wagon, from the ragman, well, (Lily?) Laundry, occasionally, no, they had a truck, [to] Alderney milk, [the] iceman, Dugan bread man. They all were the ones that served us, our neighborhood.

SH: What was your neighborhood like? What was it made up of ethnically?

WP: It was [residential], which, at that time, were rather large homes; at this point, when I went back to look at them, were not too big, [laughter] but they're just the standard three-story home, in a lot maybe sixty feet wide, would be 130, 150 feet deep, a few blank, vacant lots. In fact, the lot next to us, we saw the house go up there and new neighbors come in. I had a number of friends on that street, so did my sister, and it was just sort of a big place for us and, as I said, not much as we go back. [laughter]

SH: You talked about your father having to go from job to job because of the Great Depression.

WP: Yes.

SH: What were some of the jobs that he was able to find? As a kid, did you know you were in a depression or was this just considered "the way it was?"

WP: … In the earlier years, I don't think I knew.

SH: You were very young, for one thing.

WP: But, I'm just trying to think of what they were. … I know my mother worked at the Welfare Federation in Orange, New Jersey, as a receptionist and a telephone operator.

SH: Was your grandmother a disciplinarian?

WP: You would say that, yes, [laughter] and … my mother as well, because I don't remember seeing much of my father; he was off. He had night jobs as well, and she is the one that cared for my sister and I. … When we'd come home from school for lunch, [and] so on, she took care of that. … In her background, she was a stern woman, not a lot of [emotion], no "happy happiness," and so on, but kind and … generous, but, in her own way, loving in her own way, yes.

SH: The fact that she had her mother-in-law living with her, did they get along well?

WP: [As] far as I know, there weren't any problems, because it made a big difference to have her there. In fact, one thing I do recall in the earlier days, in our first home in West Orange, … every Friday, my grandmother would bake. … She'd bake bread, she made doughnuts, she made everything you can think of, and we sold it to the neighbors.

SH: Did you really?

WP: Yes. We used it, of course, too, but it was one little source of income. … My maternal grandfather was living up to a point, and I can't, at this point, give the year that he departed. We had other family members that were in trouble, hard times, [who] would come and live with us for awhile. We had a renter who used one of the rooms, and my sister and I shared the bedroom and the bed, when we were small. So, … the various sisters my mother had, … well, at times, they needed a little help and they would live with us, you know.

SH: Were some of them married when they came to live with you?

WP: One of them, … the youngest one. …

SH: Was your mother older or younger?

WP: My mother was the middle one. She was the smallest; they were all of "the Polish stock," if you want to say that, and all six of the girls were big women. My mother was a mite [laughter] and it seemed that they often turned to her when there were problems.

SH: A mighty mite. [laughter]

WP: Yes.

SH: Talk about where you first started going to school.

WP: I started school, … I was five years old in '29, I started at Hazel Avenue Grammar School, which was about, oh, three blocks away, and went through kindergarten on through sixth grade. … If I recall correctly, I repeated fifth grade. You know, you have memories of some of the teachers, … but nothing's really concrete.

SH: Did you have good memories of the teachers?

WP: Oh, yes, some stern and others, you know, different in their own ways. …

SH: Were they mostly women?

WP: They were. … In grammar school, I do not remember a male teacher.

SH: How diverse was the school? Were there African-Americans in your school?

WP: No, there were no African-Americans. There was a heavy Italian element, from the Valley [Road area]. We lived up on the hill above the Valley Road area of West Orange and there was a sort of, you know, [collection of] ethnic areas, and one of them being Italian, and there were a number … from there. They all walked to school from the varying areas, and then, there were a lot of others from; … I would say that the family financial status varied quite a bit. Some of the families on the hill, not us, but others on the hill, some of them were fairly well-off, yes. The only reason we maintained that one home we had there was because my … maternal grandfather was there to help, I guess, yes, and then, the income from the rental, and so on.

SH: Your grandmother's little business, the bakery, [laughter] had to have helped. What were some of the chores that you had as a young man growing up?

WP: Oh, cleaning the furnace, the coal furnace, stoking it, helping to put the garbage out, some of which was bigger than what I could handle. [laughter] We had chores of keeping up our room.

SH: Did you have any paper routes?

WP: Oh, yes, I had *Liberty Magazine*, which went for five cents. [laughter] I had a route with *Liberty Magazine*.

SH: Was it hard to collect during those years?

WP: No. … Considering the price, [laughter] I think even then, they could handle it. …

SH: That is good. Did you do any traveling or go exploring? You talked about being with the Boy Scouts.

WP: Well, that was later on. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

WP: Okay.

SH: All right.

WP: We moved into our first home, well, in West Orange, in 1929, '27, November '27, and, in October 1935, we lost the house and had to move into a rental, also in West Orange, where we stayed until 1938. … That was the year that my paternal grandmother died. Where were we?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: I will put this back on. Are you ready?

WP: Of course, I didn't get into [Boy] Scouts until we moved out of the house, the first house in West Orange, and into a rental in the valley, in West Orange, where we were there for three years, and then, into another rental in West Orange from '38 to '46. So, I got into Scouts once we moved into that rental, and it was Troop 5 of Orange, New Jersey, had a basement room for our meetings, thanks to the First Presbyterian Church of Orange, New Jersey, and I stayed with the Scouting. I got First Class. I don't know if I went any farther than [that], further along than that, but it was a fun time. We loved the hiking that we did and we were not too far from the; oh, I can't think of the name of it right now, the reservation up in the mountains, the First Mountain of Orange, First Orange Mountain. [Editor's Note: First Orange Mountain refers to the First Watchung Mountain, also known as the southeastern ridge of the Watchung Mountains.] It was a reservation where they had a park area, and so on, where the former … CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp was, and we'd hike up there. … It fit perfectly, because it was a fourteen-mile hike, roundtrip, which gave us our Second Class hiking. [Editor's Note: First Class and Second Class are ranks within the Boy Scouting movement, which require Scouts to work on outdoor survival and camping skills.] … We had summer camp up in the Kittatinny Mountains, in the northwest of New Jersey. That was always an enjoyable time.

SH: What were your favorite activities?

WP: Well, swimming, boating, the hiking to the town of Stillwater, which, at that time, was just a little crossroads, but there, again, that qualified for hiking, since it was a set, fourteen-mile roundtrip.

SH: Was that Fairview Lake?

WP: … You mean in the Kittatinnies? It was Lake Wallenpaupack. It was on the Appalachian Trail, south of Route 46, I think.

SH: North of Route 46.

WP: … It was south of Route 46, I believe.

SH: Route 206.

WP: No, [Route] 206 didn't even exist.

SH: Really? [laughter]

WP: No, no. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Can I turn this back on?

WP: Sure. The camp was up on top of the mountain. … Of course, hiking, in order to get to Stillwater, we had to go down the trail, or the roadway, which was strictly a dirt road, with switchbacks, and then, the winding two-lane country road that led into Stillwater. [Editor's Note: If one is traveling up or down a hill, a switchback makes the hiker literally switch sides, back and forth, so that he is not traveling straight up a steep hill.]

SH: Was Route 94 there at that point?

WP: I don't recall now.

SH: That was the north-south route from Route 46 north to …

WP: Okay, it could have been. Now, you said 206. … I was thinking of one of the newer roads.

SH: Route 80 did not exist then.

WP: Yes, no, of course not. 206 might have been there and I'm trying to think of where that fit. I can't redo that right now.

SH: That is okay. How long would you be at camp?

WP: Usually a two-week period.

SH: Did you ever serve as a counselor for the camp?

WP: No, I was never a counselor.

SH: Did you have summer jobs in high school?

WP: Yes, I did. Several of those jobs in high school were, one was in Wallace and Tiernan Pump Company in Belleville, New Jersey. [I] don't recall exactly what we did, but it was an easy [job]. I'd get there by hitchhiking. [Editor's Note: The Wallace and Tiernan Pump Company was a firm that made pumps for handling water, fluids and chemicals.] … Another summer job was at Dugan Bakery, where we worked on the packaging line, taking sticky walnut rings and pecan rings and putting them in boxes, and so on. … For the first couple of weeks, it smelled delicious, but, after that, we didn't really have much of an appetite for it. [laughter] … Here, again, that was in Newark and I did that, commuted, by hitchhiking.

SH: Was it easy to hitchhike?

WP: Yes, it wasn't that bad, and [there was] some of walking; it was all familiar territory.

SH: When you got into junior high school, did you stay in the Hazel Avenue School?

WP: By the time I got to junior high school, we were living in the second rental, which was in West Orange, just up the road from the junior high school, Gaston Street Junior High School, or Middle School, and it was there I attended seventh, eighth [grade]; ninth?

SH: There were some schools that were seventh, eighth and ninth grade.

WP: Yes, and there is where we had men, as well as women, teachers. It was certainly an easy school to get to since it was … not much more than a half a block away.

SH: Really? [laughter]

WP: Yes.

SH: Did you find that it was convenient or tiresome to be that close to school?

WP: Well, it was just a fact, I guess. …

SH: What was your favorite subject before you went into high school?

WP: Mechanical drawing.

SH: Where did you go to high school?

WP: I went to West Orange High School. That was over on Northfield Road and just above Rollinson Road. That facility is now Seton Hall Prep. … That school was caring for West Orange children as well as Livingston [children]. … Of course, the Livingston contingent, they came by bus, because they were a good ways off.

SH: How long of a walk was it for you?

WP: For me, it was probably no more than a mile, but I know other kids had a lot more than a mile to walk. That never seemed to be a problem.

SH: How often was school closed because of snow?

WP: Well, considering the fact that we served the Livingston contingent, who came by bus, we did close maybe more frequently than we would have were that not the case. Getting over the mountain on those busses could have been a real problem.

SH: Were there any extracurricular activities that you were involved with in high school?

WP: I was involved in track as a sport.

SH: In running or field events?

WP: Running, yes.

SH: Were you taking a college prep course?

WP: I was taking; let's see, there was the classical course, which had Latin. Scientific, I guess that would have been the college prep. Was it a commercial course? I don't know. … My schooling years, I don't have much of a memory on.

SH: Was college something that you thought you might go to?

WP: I didn't, at that point. After high school, I graduated in 1943, I went right into the military.

SH: Prior to World War II, had college been something you thought you would like to do?

WP: … I don't think so.

SH: Had your sister gone through high school?

WP: She did. … She graduated in '39, I graduated in '43.

SH: In 1939, when your sister graduated, how aware were you, as a freshman in high school, of world events at that time? Did you keep up with the news? What brought you your news? Was it the newsreels, the newspaper?

WP: … The radio, and I must admit, I didn't have much of an interest in that. … What woke me up, in a way, was, on December 7, '41, I was at a neighbor's house. … They were just down the street from us and, in the backyard, they had a little shack. … The oldest son of that group, much older than I, had a radio ham station. So, we'd all gather in there, along with their father, and just listen, sometimes talk to people on the thing, and we had the radio going. We had the ballgame on that day and we heard, over the radio, not announced to the fans, but over the radio, that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, and I remember that, in Hawaii, yes. I recall going home, probably an hour or so later, and mentioning [it] to my father, who was just sitting down, and he jumped up and went to the radio. He hadn't heard it. … I just remember his reaction, at that time, as being quite dramatic. That was '41. Of course, we became more involved and understanding of what was going on as a kid.

SH: Was your sister working at this point?

WP: My sister, … she was quite artistic. She attended Newark School of Fine and Industrial Arts, which was located on High Street, just south of Market. Whether it's there or not, I don't know, and I can't put together … what she did.

SH: She may have still been a student. That would only have been two years after her graduation from high school.

WP: … She must have worked somewhere. I'm sure she did. She was pretty industrious.

SH: She was still living at home.

SP: Yes.

SH: You spoke briefly about the CCC. Was there evidence of the other New Deal programs, such as the WPA and those types of programs, that you remember as a kid? [Editor's Note: The Works Progress Administration was a New Deal relief program that offered the unemployed work in public works projects.] Did your father work on any of those?

WP: No. I remember the site where the CCC camp was.

SH: When you went to school the next day, on December 8th, what was the reaction in your school?

WP: I have no recollection whatsoever.

SH: I wondered if there had been a convocation.

WP: You know, I guess I was not too [aware].

SH: How hard was it, as a young man, to stay focused on your studies knowing that war had been declared?

WP: You know, we're in an area here where I don't have much recollection of anything.

SH: That is okay. You would have been seventeen; the following year, you would have registered for the draft.

WP: And I knew that I would be drafted, of course, so, I went ahead and signed up for the Aviation Cadet Program. I went down to Newark and took the test and had no problem. I was accepted and that put things on hold until I graduated. I graduated in May of 1943.

SH: From?

WP: Seton Hall Prep; I had gone my final year at Seton Hall Prep.

SH: Why did you make that move?

WP: It's a reflection on my lack of doing the job, I guess. [laughter] … It helped some with my marks, yes, … maybe more conducive to work, schoolwork, than was high school.

SH: That is fair enough.

WP: Enough said. [laughter]

SH: All of us have raised sons. We know. [laughter]

WP: And, come at graduation, I then had to report, which I did, and, on June 15th, we assembled at the post office in Newark, which was about maybe a mile or so, maybe not quite that, south of the Penn Station. … All of us, the recruits, in our varied civvy outfits, were marched up McCarter Highway, right next to the raised railroad tracks and, on the other side of the street, all kinds of pubs and bars. [laughter] … I just do recall a number of the heavy drinkers coming out of the bar and cheering us on and all. [laughter] Well, we assembled up in the station, got onboard a train, a steam-driven train, and, from there, went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, outside of St. Louis.

SH: You reported straight there, not to Fort Dix.

WP: That's right. …

SH: Were any of your friends or classmates with you at this stage?

WP: No. I recall one of my classmates drove me down to the post office where I left. He eventually ended up in the Navy, [laughter] but, no, none of my classmates were there. … That train ride was thirty-six hours, through the mountains of Pennsylvania and the tunnels, a steam-

driven train and an open car, to get fresh air, [laughter] until we went through the tunnel, and then, the windows had to be shut, so [that] we could certainly breathe a little better. … At Jefferson Barracks, I had six weeks of basic training.

SH: Why did you pick the Air Corps?

WP: Well, I knew I would be drafted and I did not want to be in the infantry. I had made … my mind up on that. So, I said, "Well, one way to do that is to see if I can make it to the cadet program," and I did and that was it. So, I ended up there. …

SH: This was in the summer that you were out in Missouri.

WP: Yes, hot summer, yes, for six weeks, and it was strictly a basic training, the KP [kitchen police] and all that [stuff], bivouacs and marching, typical.

SH: Were you taking tests?

WP: Well, not at that point, no. Then, we went to what was called the College Training Detachment, CTD, and different colleges would bring in these cadets, where we got further training and, again, marching and military discipline and all that. [Editor's Note: The US Army Air Forces College Training Detachment was created in early 1943 to provide additional college-level education and basic flight training to Aviation Cadets.] I went, happened to go to Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, couldn't have been a more picturesque and beautiful setting. … I was there for three months. You know, I don't recall the courses we took. We did fly while we were there and I had ten hours in a Taylorcraft plane that flew out of Indianapolis. [Editor's Note: Taylorcraft Aviation produced a small single-engine aircraft used for training and reconnaissance purposes by the US Armed Forces during World War II.]

SH: At that point, did you think you wanted to be a pilot?

WP: I had visions of that. I don't think I was really *gung ho*, like some young guys were. …

SH: In this college training program, what were some of the courses that you took? Were they engineering or math?

WP: I wish I could answer that question, but it's [too long ago].

SH: This was at Butler University.

WP: That was at Butler University.

SH: Were there civilian students at that time?

WP: Well, there were a few men, but most of the men were off doing what I was doing. There were a lot of girls. … A number of the fraternity houses were vacant and I ended up living in one of the fraternity houses.

SH: Did you? Did you march to class? Was it military-like?

WP: … Oh, yes, we did, right, to and from, and wherever we went, it was a march, exactly.

SH: How did the people around Butler treat young cadets such as yourself?

WP: In my recollection, it was fine.

SH: Do you remember cadets working together, as far as studying, or was it really every man for himself?

WP: Pretty much every man for himself. There were two of us in a room and my roommate happened to be a West Orange-ite, but he was considerably older than I.

SH: Do you remember his name?

WP: Yes. Oh, wait a minute now, I did; oh, boy.

SH: That is okay. We can get that later. [laughter]

WP: Yes.

SH: That is interesting, that you wound up …

WP: Yes, with a West Orange-ite.

SH: … With someone else from West Orange. You said you did not recall anybody that you knew on the train ride out.

WP: That's right.

SH: How long was the training again at Butler?

WP: Thirty; oh, from Jefferson Barracks to Butler University, I have no recollection of that trip.

SH: The training there at Butler was …

WP: The training? Well, it was …

SH: Four months?

WP: It was three months.

SH: Three months.

WP: Initially, College Training Detachment had been a five-month course, but they had shortened it to get people through. While … at that university, in one of our recreational activities, I received a pretty good knee injury, which set me back for a little while. … Then, finally, we left there, went to San Antonio for classification, and it was at that classification that they did some pretty serious testing to find out just how fit you were and all. … They uncovered my knee problem with that and I ended up in the hospital with some treatment on the knee, so that it would maybe improve. After that, I came out and [it] was suggested by one of the classification officers, he said, "And, if you're looking for pilot," he said, "in view of your knee," he said, "I would highly recommend that you look for something else." So, I chose navigation and, from there, I went to a pre-flight school in Ellington Field, outside of Houston.

SH: Was there any leave time for you in-between?

WP: Yes. I think my first leave time came after I graduated from [navigation school], through navigation school, which was in October of '44.

SH: That is in San Antonio.

WP: That was in San Marcus.

SH: San Marcus?

WP: San Marcus, Texas, yes.

SH: Was that navigation school?

WP: Yes, that was the Army Air Corps' navigation school. … Well, prior to that, once I left classification and went to Ellington Field for pre-flight, they also took us down to Laredo, Texas, on the border, for six weeks of gunnery training. … I had the six weeks of gunnery, reported back to Ellington, then, from there, into San Marcus for navigation training. That was … a four-month course, where we had navigation courses and we studied navigation, we studied weather, use of the instruments that were, at that time, available for navigation, such as sextants, and all the other paraphernalia that you had for plotting your positions and the shooting of stars. [Editor's Note: A sextant is a navigational tool used for measuring altitudes of celestial bodies, as well as latitude and longitude.] So, we did fly and we learned to direct, say, a search mission over the ocean, and we'd go out to toward the Gulf of Mexico and we'd plot and make sure that the pilot was instructed to fly a search mission. … We flew at night, where we could … take fixes on stars and plot our position and navigate via celestial navigation.

SH: At the time that you were in the school, did you feel that it was comprehensive, that you were getting what you needed?

WP: Yes, I do.

SH: Looking back, after having been a navigator, did you still agree with that assessment, that you had a good, thorough background?

WP: Yes, but I didn't end up as a navigator.

SH: I know. [laughter]

WP: The Air Force had different ideas.

SH: You finished, as you said, in October of 1944.

WP: '44, I graduated.

SH: That was when you got your leave.

WP: That's when I got my first leave.

SH: Did you know when you left on leave where you would be reporting back to?

WP: Yes. … Oh, at that time, they were looking to [make a new bomb wing]. The Air Force was planning and creating the 315th Bomb Wing and they needed radar-bombardiers. … Our class, as well as other navigation classes, whether from Hondo or other fields, were put into this training as radar-bombardiers.

SH: They picked you.

WP: They picked our classes, not individuals, but the class.

SH: Whole classes?

WP: Yes.

SH: All right.

WP: And we went through, and we'll get into that, training on that. In my case, I knew when I left for home leave that I was going back to Victorville, California, which is up on the Mojave [Desert], not too far from Barstow, but Victorville, at that time, contrary to what it is today, was a very small place. They had the big airbase, and I had two months of training there for radar bombing. Following that, I had a month of training in the same [field], of radar bombing, at Boca Raton, Florida, and that was January.

SH: Of 1945.

WP: Yes, and then, … in February, I was assigned to the 315th Bomb Wing, where I joined the team at McCook, Nebraska. My crew, that I was going to be assigned to, were already down at Vernon Field, Jamaica, for training, and the training they did there was [weather acclimation]. Its location would somewhat simulate what the conditions [were that] we might be facing overseas, flying from a tropic area up to a coastal area. So, we would [simulate that]. They

would fly from Jamaica on up the US East Coast, do their practice bombing and fly back again. So, I had to fly down. I hopped onboard a ship that was going there and ended up down in Jamaica with my crew. That's when I first met my crew.

SH: You went on as an individual.

WP: Yes, and I was the radar-bombardier. …

SH: Before we talk more about joining the crew, when you went home on leave in October of 1944, did you notice a change? While you were still in high school, rationing and other programs went into effect.

WP: Yes.

SH: Had anything changed for your father and mother?

WP: Well, my father was in the … Civil Patrol, something like that.

SH: Was he?

WP: And, of course, they had their Victory garden. [Editor's Note: Victory gardens were planted in parks and at private residences during wartime in order to relieve food shortages.] … The Civil Patrol had their; I forget what the word would have been, run tests or …

SH: They would have practice blackouts.

WP: Practice, that's right, exactly. [Editor's Note: Mr. Proft is referring to the Civil Defense system implemented during World War II, which organized air raid drills and implemented light discipline in certain coastal areas. Many Americans volunteered for service as airplane spotters and air raid wardens in the Civil Defense system.] I was there only about a week or so, and then, I left.

SH: How were you treated when you came home? I know you had to stay in uniform.

WP: Yes. Oh, I was treated fine. One of my buddies, one of … the boys that lived where they had the radio ham station, was [in the] Navy and he was home at the same time and we sort of palled around, just doing things together. Then, of course, when we left, again, by train, back through Chicago and on down to Victorville, Union Pacific, or was it the Santa Fe and the Atchison-Topeka [the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway]? I'm not sure, [laughter] but it got us, … got me, to Victorville. I was there alone.

SH: How long did it take you to cross the country like that? It must have been several days.

WP: Yes, it did. I can recall the leg between Newark and New York and Chicago. I ran into a gentleman, and the people would just treat you fine, everybody in [the train]. … I recall this gentleman, we started to chat, and so on. He lived in Evanston, Illinois, just above Chicago. I

had at least a five-hour layover in Chicago and, when he heard that, he said, "You come with me. When we get there, we're going to go up to my house. We're going to have a nice lunch, dinner;" Sunday, I think it was a Sunday, [laughter] and we did. … Then, he made sure I got back to the station in time for my train, but, you know, you were treated royally by people everywhere.

SH: Even in Texas.

WP: Oh, yes, and in California.

SH: The ride from Chicago …

WP: That was a pretty long ride and … sort of boring, in a way.

SH: Had you done any traveling around the country before that?

WP: No.

SH: This was all new.

WP: Yes, this was.

SH: What did you do to pass the time?

WP: I guess read. [laughter]

SH: Did you play cards?

WP: … Well, trying to think, [I] could have played solitaire or something like that. I don't know.

SH: Did GIs talk to each other about where they had been or what they had seen or what they were being trained for?

WP: I suppose. As I said before, my memory is very vague.

SH: That is okay. In June of 1944, the D-Day invasion of Europe took place. Did you keep track of the European Theater and the Pacific at all? You assumed, at some point, when you joined your crew, that you would be going to the Pacific Theater.

WP: Yes, we knew that, [that] we were headed for [the Pacific]. …

SH: This radar-bombardier classification that you have, was this a special type of radar that you were working with?

WP: Absolutely. …

SH: Can you talk about that?

WP: To backtrack one bit.

SH: Please.

WP: I was at gunnery school in Laredo, Texas, in June of '44 when they had the D-Day invasion. We definitely recall that very well and [were] keeping track of that.

SH: What were the GIs told in Texas of what had taken place? Was it in the newspaper or on the radio?

WP: Well, that's where we'd get it, yes. If we were told things, see, we might … well have been, it didn't stick with me.

SH: Okay.

WP: So, where were we?

SH: You were going to tell me about the radar and your specialization.

WP: Yes. It was in November of '40 that the War Department teamed up with MIT laboratories to develop this radar, and it's something that took a long time, because it really didn't come into play until May of '45, but what their idea was was to create a radar … for nighttime, all-weather bombing that would give you the ability to gain the accuracy and the precision that was normally available if you were flying in the daytime and the bombardier had visual contact with the target. [Editor's Note: Massachusetts Institute of Technology established its Radiation Laboratory to help develop radar for the Allies in the Fall of 1940.] Of course, their thinking was, at that time, in the early '40s, "We'd like to get over to use that in Europe, so [that] our people could fly at night instead of daytime, when they're being slaughtered," but, unfortunately, it never came to fruition in time for that. So, obviously, it was a long … development period. When it did come to fruition, … actually, in early '45, they equipped a few of the Flying Fortress B-17s with this radar and sent them over to Europe, but they ran into mechanical problems and repair problems that they couldn't contend with. So, the use of that radar never really materialized [to] … any degree of effectiveness in Europe and it was left for us to use on Japan. … Of course, … having that capability, our missions were to fly at night, regardless of the weather, and help to provide accurate bombing of the targets that we concentrated on, and those targets were oil refineries and storage. … They were all coastal targets, the reason being that Japan was getting their crude oil and petroleum from the fields in Indonesia and other areas that they had conquered and that was the only source they had, because they didn't have any resources on Honshu, in their own homeland. [Editor's Note: Honshu is the main island of the Japanese Archipelago.] So, they'd bring in the crude to the coastal area, to the refineries, and they would take out the refined, to provide for the naval ships and the air force, and, of course, being coastal targets made it that much more effective for us, because radar picks up coastal targets beautifully, but that wasn't all of it. This radar was so sophisticated that it gave you a picture of your target that was very, very

good, very good, not just a blur, [and] so on, but you could pick out different things, like storage tanks, and so on.

SH: Really?

WP: Which helped to lead toward accuracy of bombing.

SH: Where was the training for this radar? Was this when you were in Boca Raton?

WP: Boca Raton and Florida, Boca Raton and Victorville, and then, I joined my crew, as I said, and we were at Jamaica and they had flown a mission or two. Now, we were going to fly a mission with me as the radar [officer] and we took off from Vernam Field and we were maybe out around twenty minutes and we lost an engine. So, we went down at Cuba, landed at Batista Field, where we sat for five days, for an engine change, then, went back to Jamaica, to Vernam Field, packed up and went to McCook [Army Airfield, Nebraska]. So, I never got a practice run.

SH: [laughter] Oh, my word, really? Tell me about being in Jamaica and being in Cuba, what it was like for a kid from Northern New Jersey.

WP: Rum and Coca-Cola, right? [laughter] It was nice. … I don't remember going into town. The base was very nice. It provided a lot of things for activity. In fact, while we were in Cuba, we couldn't get off the base because we were combat crew and combat crews were restricted to the base, no matter where you were, unless, then, [if] you were in the States, you had some leave, occasionally. So, that brings us back to …

SH: What kind of security was there for someone like yourself and the radar that you were using? Was it any different for you?

WP: Well, no, the planes were pretty secure and, if we went down for preflight, … as a crew, we were easily accessed to that area, and each one would go through his preflight exercises.

SH: Before you were assigned, how were the B-29s perceived by the rest of the Air Force, Air Corps, at that time? Was there any trepidation over not being assigned to the B-25s or B-24s?

WP: I don't think so. They all had their individual missions. We knew that the B-29 brought in four big improvements over the Flying Fortress B-17 and the Liberator B-24. The B-29, well, let's start with this; the '17 could … [carry an] average bomb load of three tons, the B-24 Liberator four tons, the B-29, a maximum bomb load of ten tons. That's one big step. Secondly, we were pressurized. So, you had the comfort of pressurization when flying at altitude.

SH: Really?

WP: And a little more freedom. Of course, when you're ready to get over target, you then gear up, so that you have your oxygen ready and all, so [that] there's no fumbling, and get on the flak suit and all, but that pressurization did provide some comfort. Thirdly, we had a range of close to four thousand miles, which was required in order to reach Japan from the closest facility,

closest areas that we had possession of, namely Guam, Tinian and Saipan, and that could not have been accomplished with a '24 or a '17. …

SH: Were you the elite of the Air Force? Is that how you viewed yourself?

WP: Well, that plane had its specific mission, yes. I hate to use the word "elite," because the others were pretty elite themselves. [laughter] So, we had the pressurization, … range, pressurization, bomb load. …

SH: How many were in your crew?

WP: We had ten in a crew. … In the forward cabin, there was a bombardier …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We were talking about the crew.

WP: Yes. We had the crew and, in the forward cabin, we had the bombardier, the aircraft commander, and then, the pilot, the engineer and the navigator, the radio operator and the radar-bombardier. In the mid cabin, we had two scanners, who are observers, and I'll get to that a little later, and, in the tail, we had a tail gunner. We had no other guns than twin fifty-calibers in the tail. As you recall, I said we flew only night missions, so, they figured you don't need the guns. You fly high and fast. [laughter] … We trained at thirty thousand feet, [but] we bombed between twelve and fifteen, because they found out that bombing at the high altitude in that area was very inaccurate, because there's a lot of heavy winds, crosswinds, and so on, and, from thirty thousand feet, you can't tell what you're going to meet and the target could be spared, and that was done before we got over there. … When the first ones started bombing, that's when General [Curtis] LeMay, the head … of the 20th Air Force, said, "Okay, come on down, down more, down more," until they got to an area where the bombing was effective. [Editor's Note: General Curtis LeMay commanded the B-29 Superfortress force based on Guam, Saipan and Tinian from January 1945 through the end of World War II.]

SH: You report to McCook from Jamaica.

WP: … We went back to McCook from Jamaica and we flew … a lot while we were there, because we didn't go over until June. Some of the groups went over before June. The 315th was made up of four bomb groups, the 16th, the 331st, which is the one I was in and Peter [Sarraiocco] was in, the 501st and the 502nd. The 16th was the first group to get over and they were flying out of Guam in May. 501st, I believe, was the second group, the 502nd was the third and the 331st was the last group. I saw only, flew only on, three combat missions. The wing itself did fly on, I think it's eleven missions. I might be wrong. Peter might correct me on that, anyway, but it wasn't much more, … because we weren't there in time to do anymore. [Editor's Note: The 315th Bomb Wing flew fifteen missions between June 26, 1945, and August 14/15, 1945.]

SH: Where were you when the war ended in Europe?

WP: May, I was at McCook, Nebraska, yes. [Editor's Note: V-E Day was declared on May 8, 1945.]

SH: Still at McCook.

WP: Yes.

SH: What were your training routes at McCook? You were right in the middle of the country, so-to-speak.

WP: Yes. We'd go up and fly three-thousand-mile jaunts, maybe do photographic bombing of some places. We were at thirty thousand feet, which is what we were supposed to [fly at], designed to fly at, and we'd take [a flight], maybe the target would be Mobile, Alabama, whatever, and then, fly around and come back after three thousand miles, just to get exposure to that long a time in there, which meant … roughly fifteen hours.

SH: Was McCook a fairly new field?

WP: I can't answer that question.

SH: What kind of housing did you have there?

WP: Barracks, yes, standard barracks.

SH: Was McCook only for B-29s?

WP: I think they had other planes there, but it was basically the 315th. Other … bomb wings trained at different bases. I know, in fact, I think even other bomb groups, like the 502nd or 501st, might have been at a different base. … From McCook, at the time we came to go overseas, we were trained, "choo-choo" train, [laughter] to Henderson Field, Kansas, Henderson, I think it was Henderson, Kansas, where we picked up a brand-new B-29, equipped with our radar and all. [Editor's Note: Mr. Proft may be thinking of Herington Army Airfield, near Herington, Kansas.] We took that plane and, as a crew, we flew that to Mather Field, Sacramento, and, from there, we flew to Hawaii, Hickam Field, from there to … Johnston Island, and from Johnston Island to Guam, where we got into the [base]. Initially, we were in tents and, you know, they had boardwalks, because … it could be a little bit muddy, and so on, but the guys that were there before us lived in those conditions for a lot longer than we did. [laughter] Eventually, they did have prefab barracks that were put up and we lived in those. … Of course, they had the separation, the enlisted men and the officers. … There were six officers, the bombardier, the two pilots, our engineer was an officer, some of them weren't, some of them were tech sergeants, the navigator and myself, and we were in a barracks with another crew of the same makeup, navigator, bomber pilots, and so on.

SH: You always flew with the same crew.

WP: Yes, and we all flew with our same plane, which was not always the case. In some cases, I know people went over there in different groups, different wings, and they were assigned to a different plane each time they went out, but we happened to have our plane, we had our ground crew, and [that] sort of gives you a bit of confidence that they have that.

SH: I was just going to say, was that reassuring?

WP: Oh, yes, absolutely.

SH: If you can, can you tell me where the pilot and the other people were from?

WP: Yes. My pilot, Maury Kershaw, was from Long Island. He was married and I think they had one son. He was a bit older and a bit more mature. [laughter] Our co-pilot was single, from Kansas, George "Pete" (Peterson?), big guy. Our navigator, Warren "Burly" (Burleson?) was from Ojai, California, and he and I, … having had navigation training, we had sort of a common ground. Our bombardier, Herman (Levinson?), was from the Chicago area. We two would have a good relationship, too, because we worked together, and we'll get into that later. … Let me finish the officers; our flight engineer, Tony (Yonan?), interesting guy, never without a coffee cup in his hand, [laughter] but a very demanding engineer. He was, I think, from Illinois, or somewhere. … The radio operator, up in front, Marvin (Harms?), I don't know where he was from; two scanners in the back, and we had scanners because we didn't have guns, but we had those bubbles in the side of the plane. … These fellows could see and report on the engines when they start them up, everything's right, or, if there's a problem, they could report to the pilot. … There was Don (Miller?). I don't remember much of where he was from. There was John (Mauer?) and, interesting enough, we kept in touch with John (Mauer?) for a number of years, with the Christmas cards and little news of the family, and then, it stopped and [I] never could reinvigorate it, and then, the gunner, tail gunner, was a Ray (Provier?). Again, I'm not sure where he came from.

SH: How much of a division was there between enlisted men and officers when you were flying or when you were on the ground?

WP: When you're flying, you're a team, and it was just common interaction between [us], over the intercom, and everybody knew what they had to do, and so, … it was disciplined but straightforward. … I didn't remember socializing with any of our crew after, while at base. … The crew that was in the same barracks that we were in, their flight engineer was a tech sergeant, was pretty high up and he sort of palled around with all of us, and, whether we went down to Tumon Bay for a swim or other things, he was usually part of the gang. … We just had our relationship as it was.

SH: Had all of the radar-bombardiers also had navigation training?

WP: That was the purpose, and the purpose being, this radar, of course, radar provides an excellent instrument for navigation, when you can see things that aren't visible. … I think one of the reasons, maybe, [was that] they were getting … an overabundance of navigators, but I think one of the other reasons was, they're putting these guys into training for bombardier-radar,

navigator-radar-bombardier; these guys have got their navigation training already. "We won't have to bother with anything as far as navigation training. They can pick it up and do it without any problem." So, we concentrated on the bombing, and the radar we had was limited in some [sense], in a way, to navigation, because it only took a picture of sixty degrees dead ahead, thirty degrees each side of dead ahead, because that's where our interest was, the target, and what's behind us didn't matter, or what's on the side. So, that limited you to a degree in navigation, but it was excellent for direct reckoning and dead reckoning, and we could use it in that purpose, but we didn't have to have the training for it. No, I think that might have been a reason for it as well, but, then, there could have been an abundance of us as well. Who knows?

SH: How did having two bombardiers on the crew work?

WP: Well, here again, as I think I said earlier, … they wanted to develop a radar that would provide the accuracy of daylight bombing with visual contact on the target, and they accomplished that, in a degree, so, … what the ultimate goal was [was] to have the radar-bombardier control the bombsight, so that they wouldn't even need a bombardier, but that was not achieved. They did achieve the goal of getting the radar to the point where it would provide the information you needed, but it couldn't have been connected through electronics. So, what transpired was, we had a team, the radar-bombardier and the bombardier, and what the bombardier would normally pick up in a daytime run and what adjustments he would make to that bombsight on the run were all fed to him by the radar-bombardier, so that he was there to make the adjustments. He couldn't see a thing, but we had a system whereby I could control [it]. … In my screen on the radar set, I could bring up a picture that would actually show the angles that the bombardier would get in the daytime, and then, I would read off to him the various angles as we approached them, so [that] he could set that in his bombsight. In other words, as he comes up and he said, "All right, we're going to set it on seventy degrees," okay, now, we get down there and it's a little off, on sixty-eight. See, the bombsight's all set up with the type of bomb, the elevation, the speed and … if you got any wind direction at all, but, then, he has to make adjustments as to how you approached the target. … That bombsight stays on that target and it might be a little adjustment to get that cursor to go faster or slower [as well]. He couldn't do that, we did that for him, and it was through the intercom that we would feed him that information. There was nine checkpoints on this, and we'd usually get through four or five and he'd be on target, … and then, while we were on the run, you still had a condition [in which], essentially, you might drift a little bit. Well, that control was left to the radar man. Once we started on the bomb run, the pilot put it on automatic and I had control on my set with a little knob as to making minor adjustments left or right. The pilot maintained altitude and speed, but, if we had minor adjustments, left or right, I could make them. So, if I'm feeding the bombardier his checkpoints and I see we're drifting, I could make those changes. If, per chance, we ran into a dramatic change, a wind shift or something like that, then, I would give the pilot a reading and he would make that adjustment, to put us back on target, because I didn't have the control for that quick of [an adjustment]. … Once, as I said, we got that information fed to the bombardier, … he had this bombsight, the Norden bombsight, which was a highly secretive piece of equipment then, set to do the work, because the bombsight dropped … the bomb. [Editor's Note: The Norden bombsight, invented by Carl Norden, allowed the bombardier to input data regarding the target and the aircraft into a small computer which would calculate where and how to drop the bomb, enabling precision bombing from attitudes of over twenty thousand feet.] The bombardier

knew, as he got close, he would open up the bomb bays with a switch, but, when the crosshairs meet on the bombsight, they trigger, electrically, the release of the bombs. … They can be triggered salvo, which is all at once, or intermittently, and, of course, you did trigger them equally between the front and the rear bomb bay, because you don't want to get all the weight off in the front, and then, you know, [disrupt the aircraft's flight], [laughter] vice-versa. So, that proved to be very effective and, in the final analysis, that nature of bombing, via the APQ-7 Eagle radar, was ninety-eight percent as effective as daylight bombing where the bombardier had visual contact with the target. Now, the 16th Bomb Group was over there in May and they did have losses. The 501st was the second one. I think they had some losses, too, and I think even the 502nd suffered some. Our bomb group, the 331st, the last to get there, didn't suffer any combat losses, but we did lose the life of two men on the flight line.

SH: Really?

WP: And I think these were guys, who were loading armament, had some mishap.

SH: You talked about having your ground crew with you as well, the same ground crew, same plane. Had they trained with you at McCook?

WP: Well, they were there at McCook, yes, but where they got their preliminary training, I don't know.

SH: I meant, that was the first time you were in contact with them.

WP: Yes, right, yes. They went over by boat. In fact, … they would leave some time before us, and then, we'd follow up.

SH: Did you name your plane?

WP: Name; we never did. We were so late, we never had the time to do it. A lot of them did, and the 315th has something like forty-nine planes that had nose art. Considering getting over there as late as we did, it never materialized, and that was usually something that was generated by the crew themselves. They'd get together and like this [name], and, of course, as you may recall, some of them were pretty sketchy [laughter] and some of them were pretty nice. …

SH: That is right. What was the reaction, both personally and what you saw around you, when you heard that the war had ended in Europe?

WP: Well, when the war ended in Europe, all I recall was, "That's great," you know, and I don't remember having any real great celebration or not.

SH: You had not gotten to Guam yet.

WP: No. … Yes, that was May 5th, or something like that, and we were still … at McCook. [Editor's Note: V-E Day was declared on May 8, 1945.]

SH: You knew that you were going to the Pacific. There have been some who have expressed the idea that perhaps the Pacific Theater had to wait to really get the attention and the supplies until after the war in Europe was won. Was there any talk about that?

WP: I think that was certainly a case in the earlier stages. The concentration was on the ETO [European Theater of Operations] and the Pacific, South Pacific Theater, … was getting the short shrift, but, by the time we got there, no, it was not a factor.

SH: You talked about how primitive it was, and, yet, how much better it was for you, because of the short time that you were there.

WP: Yes.

SH: Was it continually building while you were there, finishing up the North Field and the Northwest Field?

WP: The Northwest Field. The North Field had been opened earlier because the 314th Bomb Wing went into North Field, and I think, in fact, one of our earliest groups that went over, some of … those crews ended up at North Field. … I know they bombed from there, but I don't recall much about it. [Editor's Note: The North Field and the Northwest Field were the two 20th Air Force airbases on the northern end of Guam.]

SH: Could you walk me through a typical day when you were going to do a combat run, and perhaps one when you were not, when you arrived in Guam?

WP: Yes. The normal time, since we were flying night missions and the round trip was roughly fifteen hours, three thousand miles or so, our normal take-off was four-thirty, five o'clock. We'd report back maybe at about eight, or before. We'd be down [at] the flight line to make our preflight checks, and I can recall everybody getting down there and stripping down to your underwear, because, when you got in those planes, it was hot, [laughter] and everybody did their own thing. I don't recall what the engineer did or the pilot, and I know the navigator checked his instruments, I checked out my instruments, and our bombardier did his, the radioman did his. Now, I don't recall, after we did that checkout, did we stay there or did we go back to the barracks for a meal? and then, come down and get in the aircraft, crank it up and taxi out for take-off. There were two runways, side by side. Each was eighty-five hundred feet long and we're talking now about the whole wing, not just the 331st. There were two wings that were flying off of this [base]; two groups flying off of this runway, two groups flying off the adjacent runway.

SH: Simultaneously?

WP: Almost, yes. … Each wing had 180 aircraft; is that right? Well, let's see, you had fifteen crews and planes per squadron, three squadrons per group would give you forty-five planes per group, and forty-five planes per group would give you 180 planes per wing, yes. So, theoretically, you're going to get 180 planes, that's ninety from each. No, you're not going to get that many off, you know, but we would take off at one-minute intervals, this runway, then, that

runway, and then, this runway and that runway. … On the northern tip of Guam, we were at an elevation of five hundred feet above the sea level, and you weren't far airborne for very long when there was a cliff and there was, oh, a lot of airspace. … Every plane took advantage of that to gain airspeed, and then, pick up and continue on. So, what we'd do [was], as I said, once we got on the aircraft, then, we'd taxi on out to the runway and we'd wait our turn, take off, and then, whether they got ninety planes or 120 off, immaterial, but we'd all go to an altitude of a little different than the other, and we'd be in line. So, we'd be … flying at maybe five thousand feet, fifty-one hundred, fifty-two hundred feet, and behind each other, basically, the difference between take-off [times], and that's fine. So, we didn't fly in formation, we flew in line. … By the time you get to the target, theoretically, you'd have the same distance apart, and the first plane over would drop their bombs, the second would drop theirs and the third would drop theirs, and then, down. … That was of concern to General LeMay, because, from the time the first plane went over until the time the last plane went over, you know, the Japanese would say, "Hey, they're still coming. We can line up on them and get them now." So, what he did [was], he had his people introduce a compressibility factor which would bring the planes closer together as they got to the target and [there would] be not that much time between the first and the last. … That was accomplished by, after takeoff, and one's at five thousand feet, the other's at fifty-one hundred, fifty-two, fifty-three, so on, as you go up in altitude, you gain in airspeed, a two-percent factor every thousand feet, I think it's a thousand feet, and that would help those planes in the back to slowly come closer and closer. So, as they reached the target, then, of course, you had to climb to altitude before you got to the target, theoretically, you were all fairly close and, sometimes, too close.

SH: Really?

WP: Yes, yes. I know they had some problems. … It wasn't our group, but I think some of the other wings, … the 16th, when they were flying earlier, they could see planes, you know, that were mighty close to them. I can't speak to that now, because it's slipped my mind; something I could find out.

SH: How long was it from the time you left Guam to when you had to be on your station?

WP: All right. We would probably start our climb not much [more than] maybe several hundred miles, at least several hundred miles, from target, and get to altitude, which, in this case, was twelve thousand feet.

SH: What were some of your targets?

WP: They were all oil refineries and oil storage, and there was Osaka, there was Kobe, there was the final mission of the war, which was Akita. That was on the west coast of Japan, farther north, which led to the longest mission. … [Editor's Note: The 315th Bomb Wing attacked the Nippon Oil Company facility in Tsuchizaki, just outside of Akita, on August 14/15, 1945, flying over 3,650 miles.]

SH: You were on that.

WP: Yes. That was the one interesting mission, because it was so different. The other names just don't come to me.

SH: That is quite all right. We were talking about what a typical day was like. Did you put your flight suit, flak suit, on at some point?

WP: Well, yes, okay; as we climb up to altitude, … as I said, we'd had no guns. So, in the forward cabin, there was a well where the turret would have been for the gun, and, in that well, under the floor boards, we stored our flak suits. It was my job to pull out the flak suits, because I wasn't busy yet. [laughter] That's a good weightlifting job, and I would provide them for the cabin, and they had theirs in the rear and in the tail. Then, as we get up to altitude, I would stay on the radar and I could usually pick out the coast at about 145 to 150 miles out. I didn't get much detail, but I could see a coastline. Then, as we came in closer and closer, I could start to get the landmarks that were necessary to line up with the target, and, of course, that improved the closer we got, so that we'd be on target. Then, when we get close enough, I would [course correct]; the intercom was left clear between the bombardier and me, or, actually, he didn't even bother talking, I did the talking, and brought us into the target. That was the main mission of the 315th.

SH: What kind of flak did you encounter?

WP: I didn't see much, because I had my nose in the scope, [laughter] but I do recall, once or twice, having seen it. There was a window right beside me. I was flying backwards. My set was here and the navigator was right behind me. He was sitting sideways. He had a scope, so, he could see, too, but I controlled it. … I don't recall any real flak of any consequence. I know our tail gunner, at one time, he had a radar … sight, he radioed to the pilot, "I have an aircraft in my sights." Well, the pilot didn't want anybody to fire, because you give away your position. You have tracer bullets that you fired, then, you light that up. So, he just instructed the gunner to hold [his] fire. … I know that … Ray would have loved to take a shot or two, but he didn't have that permission. … It was the last mission of the war where I had a much better picture of everything, because that was [different]. Actually, we didn't have auxiliary tanks and we had, some people dispute this, I thought we had a full bomb load, but, anyway, it was a round trip of 3,740 miles, which is about the longest that we were taking without auxiliary fuel tanks.

SH: Were there some planes equipped with auxiliary fuel tanks?

WP: Oh, you could put auxiliary tanks in a bomb [bay]. … In fact, we did that when we dropped prisoner of war supplies after the war. We had auxiliary tanks to … give us extra fuel.

SH: Talk about the last mission, then, we will talk about the POW missions.

WP: Yes. The last mission of the war was on the 14th, and our missions would be from one date to the next, since we flew from night until morning. Our last mission of the war was scheduled for August 14th, and we would normally take off at about four-thirty or so. We were all on the flight line, ready to go, when we got word, "Hold off." So, we sat there, and we sat there for roughly three-quarters to an hour, waiting to see what was going to happen, and we

finally did get the go-ahead. So, we did proceed and we took off and headed out on our own mission, knowing that this time we were going to have to fly up to a point over the ocean, the Pacific, slightly north of Tokyo, and then, cut across the island of Honshu into the China Sea, or the … Sea of Japan. At that point, there's a small island there, Sado, which was our turning point, and we headed north to the target, which was still, oh, over a hundred miles away. … You usually don't line up that early, but this [time], we did, and we were flying up into [Japan]. … I guess the reason there was a delay [was because] they weren't sure that Japan was going to accept the treaty or the surrender, unconditional surrender. So, they were holding off to see, "Should we go?" Well, as it is, they didn't, and so, we were off. Sometime during our mission, they did, but, at that point, it was too late. We continued on our mission, made our turn over to the Sea of Japan, I think, and then, on up towards the target, Akita, which, again, was an … oil storage and refinery [site]. Well, we must have been pretty far back in the line of planes, because, as we approached target and I was going through the lining up, or even before we got to that point, I could hear them talk about, "Boy, the fires down there, unbelievable," and we were, I think, somewhere about ten thousand feet, if not lower. Well, I took us in and we dropped our bombs and we then hit the turbulence from these fires. It was unbelievable, I mean, to think, you're up there at ten thousand [feet], but [you are affected by] all this smoke and the heat generated from all those fires. It was pretty interesting. [In] fact, the first thought was a little scary, you know, you [think], "What's this?" and you get that smell of oil. Well, there was no problem after that, but we, at that point, … then veer off and take our exit from the area, and then, we continued on out to the Pacific and headed south. As we got in the vicinity of Iwo Jima, our pilot picked up on the radio that Japan had accepted [the] surrender. I don't know what time they did it, but some time between [then and when] we took off. So, of course, … that sort of livened the crew up a little bit, [laughter] and I don't know if many of us slept on the way back after that, … which was often the case. … We got back to the base and, of course, there was a lot of celebration there.

SH: Where were you and what do you remember about when the atomic bombs were dropped? Did you comprehend what an atomic bomb was?

WP: You know, I don't remember much of at that time, on the 6th of August, [Hiroshima], and then, on the 9th of August, [Nagasaki], and we flew two missions after that. We flew one on the 10th and we flew the final mission. In fact, that final mission was an all-out, and I think they were all over the island of Japan.

SH: Really?

WP: … Not only the 315th, but the 314th and the 58th and the 313th and the whatever.

SH: A real show of force.

WP: Oh, yes, absolutely, but I don't recall what our feelings were or whether we knew anything or not.

SH: I was just curious, had it been reported that there had been an attack?

WP: I'm sure there were [reports], … but nothing stuck with me.

SH: The jubilation that you must have felt coming back; how did you celebrate when you got home or back to base? I should not say home.

WP: Of course, the celebrations had been going on for awhile back there. [laughter] It may have died down for awhile, which is probably good, because people were out with their guns shooting, you know. … We went through debriefing, of course, after we got back, then, a critique, and then, we went back and probably went to the club and had some drinks, and so on.

SH: Talk about the briefing and debriefing. What did that entail for you particularly?

WP: Well, we'd get information on the target and the landmarks that would be of interest to us, you know, on centering on the target, whether it be a certain curve in the coastline or what-have-you. … If the radar set had been checked out thoroughly by the ground crew and had that working, then, we had very little airborne maintenance that we could perform. That was still … a very foreign piece of equipment to our people, even the people in the ground crew. … There was a man … named (Ed Sharkey?) from MIT, who's a civilian. He was with us to iron out the problems, [and] so on, on that equipment.

SH: Kind of a tech rep?

WP: Yes, and each one, like, the navigator had his instruments to check out, the pilot certainly had his, and I'm sure he was conferring with the maintenance crew, the ground crew.

SH: Was enemy aircraft a concern at this stage of the war?

WP: Our aircraft were pretty good. At the beginning of the war, or at the beginning of the B-29 action, … the B-29 caused problems. They had problems with engine fires, other mechanical problems to a degree, that just were the cause of a number of losses. … That was the 58th Bomb Wing that were the initial ones to take that plane, and, of course, at that time, when they went in, in March of '44, we did not have possession of the Marianas. So, they went over to India and they flew out of Calcutta area, Bangladesh area, to bomb any of the Japanese occupied areas. Whether it's the rail yards at Rangoon or whether it's the oil fields in Indonesia, whether it's the floating dry dock in Singapore, any of these places were targets … for the B-29s, and then, they set up four forward bases in China. So, they were flying, from India, supplies over the Himalayas, which was known as "Flying the Hump." You may have heard of that, and they would bring in supplies. They would bring in all kinds of needs to support that base there and equip planes with what they need for a "fly" mission, and, from there, they would fly missions over Manchuria, the coast of China, where the Japanese were. To reach Japan was very difficult, even from there. They might have been able to reach the very southwest tip of Japan, whether it be Shikoku or Kyushu, but that was difficult to do, but, then, again, Japanese operated a lot in Manchuria and in other parts of China on the coast. … The supply to China was conducted by a number of cargo aircraft. The main one to contribute to this was the Commando C-46 and, of course, the … C-47, the old Dakota, which was the most common one. They used that as well. However, its performance at altitude was not quite as good, and you had to fly at altitude to get

over the Himalayas. … It would take seven flights, from the base in India over to China, to bring in what was necessary to get one plane off to fly a mission. Logistically, it's not very good, but it was the only way they could do it. They also were bringing in supplies for Chiang Kai-shek and his Chinese, in their attempt to stem the tide. [Editor's Note: Chiang Kai-shek was the military and political leader of China. He led the Chinese National Party for five decades and was head of the Chinese state from 1928 to 1949.]

SH: What were your instructions if you had gone down in enemy territory? What were you told? What was your survival training like?

WP: I know we had a survival kit that we could use if we … ditched in the ocean, and, supposedly, there were submarines posted along the route, [so] that if they did see somebody ditch, they might be able to save the survivors. I don't recall what we were [told]; no, I can't answer that.

SH: From the time you left your target, did you have any place that you could land between there and Guam?

WP: Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima came into play around March of 1945. The battle for Iwo Jima was in February of '45. [Editor's Note: The Battle for Iwo Jima began on February 19, 1945, and lasted until the end of March.]

SH: Did you ever have to land there?

WP: We did once, not on a combat mission, but on a prisoner of war mission. After the war was over, and they had not occupied Honshu yet, there were a number of prisoner of war camps throughout that area and it was the thought that we should give them supplies. Whether that was smart or not, we don't know, but these people were [facing] starvation, [and] so on. We loaded up B-29 bomb bays, jury-rigged these pallets in the bomb bays, and they were dropped with parachutes. Some didn't drop, … some dropped without the chute, you know, and there were obviously some fatalities on the ground with some of these things, and you wonder, too, with these starving people getting these foods, whether they just over did it and did more damage to themselves than if they were nourished back. That was a problem, I know, [that occurred] in Europe, where they had to be very careful to not let them just gorge themselves, which they wanted to do.

SH: Did you ever get to meet any of those men that you dropped supplies for?

WP: No, no, I didn't. We only flew one mission. There were several of them flown and we'd fly up to … Saipan, where they … were equipped to do this loading. Then, from there, we flew our mission, but you were flying low and you were … finding [your way] and you're losing [fuel efficiency]. You're not really getting the best use of fuel. So, we knew we'd land at Iwo Jima on the way back, which we did, and we'd stay overnight, then, gas up and take off the next [day]. [Editor's Note: Between 2,250 and 2,400 B-29s landed on Iwo Jima coming back from Japan before the war's end.]

SH: Where did you drop your supplies? Do you know the name of the prisoner of war camp?

WP: I don't recall the name of the prisoner of war camp. I'm not sure.

SH: That is okay. When you stayed at Iwo Jima, what did you see there?

WP: Not much. We got there, we went into a mess hall, we went into a huge tent with a lot of cots, slept, went out the next day, backed out and left. So, we didn't get to look around at all, yes.

SH: Was the airfield in good shape?

WP: Well, the strip was good, yes, yes. It sufficed. … They tried to fit themselves out to accept B-29s. Some of them came in and never left, of course, and some of them never even made it that close, that far.

SH: Would you hear stories of other people and their experiences while you were still in the military, people who had served?

WP: In different areas? no, no.

SH: The point system went into effect when the war was over. Did you have any expectation as to when you would come home?

WP: I knew it wasn't going to be quick, because we didn't have that many missions. Now, in the 314th, I know there was a crew there and it's their [B-29], the plane that they flew, that's on display at our museum up here, the Pima Air and Space Museum. [Editor's Note: The Pima Air and Space Museum is located in Tucson, Arizona, and displays over three hundred aircraft.] So, I got to meet some of the crew over the years, since I'm a docent up there. … Those fellows flew twenty-five missions. So, at the end of the war, they hopped in their plane, which they picked up in Carney, Nebraska, flew it back to Mather Field and left it, went their way. [laughter] … I hung around and I, you know, pulled different duty at the base once in awhile, for this or that, and we just went swimming and bumming around. … Then, another radar operator and I got together. He said, "I understand there's a weather squadron," not a weather, a rescue squadron, "that's looking for a couple of radar men." So, we went in and asked about it, signed up and we got assigned to them. … Two B-17s, … they were known as the "Flying Dutchmen" and they were equipped with a twenty-seven-foot boat, suspended underneath the fuselage of the plane. It was a Higgins self-righting boat. Now, Higgins was big in those boats. Higgins, he had a big operation in Louisiana and he provided an awful lot of the landing craft that were used in many areas. Well, this boat was totally equipped with everything that you'd need. If you were a survivor in the water, this thing would drop and you would have that to give you shade, to give you food, give you medical supplies, you name what. [Editor's Note: New Orleans native Andrew J. Higgins was contracted to build the landing craft, vehicle, personnel (LCVP) that he had developed for the US Armed Forces. By the end of the war, he had over thirty patents for various amphibious vehicles which he also was contracted to build.] Well, we flew several search missions. Actually, we didn't fly them from Guam, [after we were] reassigned, and then,

we were assigned to go to Kwajalein. So, we went off to Kwajalein and, … about this time, this was about March of '46. … We got there and we were initially stationed, sent to go to this west end of the field, where there's some old Army barracks where we could be and they'd fix us up over there. … We no sooner got in and they said, "No, you're going to go up here. You're going to go to the other end of the field and you're going to house in with the Navy." [Editor's Note: Kwajalein had been a target of the US Army's island-hopping campaign. On January 31, 1944, it was assaulted and it was declared secure on February 8, 1944.] The Navy had a weather squadron there. They were flying Privateers [PB4Ys], which is a converted B-24, into weather, you know. So, we ended up living with the Navy and that's never a very unhappy situation, because they have all the supplies they need, with food and everything else you could think of. [laughter] So, there we were, and [we were] using the Navy "O" [Officer] club and we got there, as I said, in March. … Other than flying a search mission, we were on our own, on the beach, using the equipment for weightlifting or whatever, you know, just occupying your time doing anything, reading and playing cards. … We had been there for a month-and-a-half or so when in came Operation: CROSSROADS. Now, Operation: CROSSROADS was a group formed to run the Bikini atom bomb tests, bomb tests. They had those back in July of '46. So, we got there, we were there, and our stay was scheduled just maybe for another month and that was it, but General [Roger Maxwell] Ramey, who headed up Operation: CROSSROADS, he spoke to the officials. He said, "I want these rescue crews to stay." … What he had envisioned was that, with our equipment, we would be available in case there was any problems with the mission for the bombing. They had two bomb tests, over water, [was known as] ABLE Day; BAKER Day was an underwater explosion. Now, the over water explosion was dropped from a plane, of course. The … BAKER Day explosion, underwater, was a bomb anchored to an old sunken ship somewhere, a couple of fathoms down, or whatever they felt was right, and it was triggered automatically. Well, they had a lot of B-29s there with this, because that's what they were still flying. … What their mission was [was] that on ABLE Day, they would all take off, whether it was the plane with the bomb, the photographers, the generals, you name it, anybody, that they took off a lot of planes and they all went up there. Well, they wanted somebody available in case something happened. So, before anybody took off, we were scheduled to take off and circle overhead, the two aircraft, just be there and stay up until these planes all took off and went on up and stay there until they finished their mission and come back and land, and then, we could come in and land. Well, we did that for ABLE Day, our two crews, and nothing happened at all. We just got a lot of flying time. Come BAKER Day, we're up and we're doing our bit and our pilot said, "You know, we're here, why don't we go up and take a peak?" So, that's a pretty good bite to chew, for him to chew, but we did have to [wait until] everybody was gone and up there. He took our plane, we headed north, to about twenty miles from the lagoon where the explosion would take place, and we took a westward bearing to watch. … We did see the explosion and what followed, and then, we went back and stayed up there until our time was up. At the end, I think, … I know, our pilot was called on the carpet, but he figured, "What could they do? They want to … kick me out? All right." [laughter] He came back smiling, … but it gave us a chance to see something that was quite rare. [Editor's Note: On July 1, 1946, atomic bomb test ABLE was detonated at an altitude of 528 feet. On July 25, 1946, atomic bomb test BAKER was detonated ninety feet underwater. Both tests were conducted to observe the capabilities of nuclear weapons against naval ships and materiel.]

SH: Of course.

WP: Yes.

SH: At any point, did you think about staying in the military?

WP: No. … I didn't even join the [National] Guard. …

SH: I noticed that from your pre-interview survey, but I just wanted to make sure.

WP: Yes. No, I did not have any interest in that. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Okay, you were talking about getting the opportunity to see some of Operation: CROSSROADS and how your captain was able to brush off any discipline.

WP: Yes, well, … that set up of Operation: CROSSROADS is another story in itself. I mean, … how it was done, it was done by the Navy to determine what the impact of atomic explosions would have [been] upon naval craft, both underwater and over water. So, as you can imagine, the lagoon at Bikini was just loaded with old ships they didn't care about anymore, placed around, and for the underwater explosion, they had submarines anchored down below, some facing the target or the point of explosion, others broadside, and so on. … Then, of course, the photography, … I think there were ships equipped with photographic equipment that were [there. They] would probably look ridiculous now. [laughter] …

SH: When you were flying your missions out of Guam, did you have photographic equipment on your planes?

WP: … There was a camera set up to photograph our screen, so [that] they could see what we had done, and that was used for our critique, afterward. So, it took a picture of the radar screen that we were working with.

SH: Really?

WP: Yes, and, supposedly, they wouldn't see the dropping of the bombs, but they could see the point where our equipment would trigger the dropping.

SH: How long did this rescue mission go on in Kwajalein?

WP: What about the rescue mission?

SH: How long were you there?

WP: Oh, well, I said we got there in March. We came back in August to Guam and, at that point, I was released. … We went up to Saipan where we boarded a ship to take us back to the States.

SH: A Navy ship?

WP: Yes, yes.

SH: You could not get one of the B-29s to bring you home. [laughter]

WP: No, no, … and, at that point, we took our journey back to the States. Surprisingly enough, our total time in the Pacific, which was several days, took how long? We stopped at Honolulu, and then, on to San Francisco. The Pacific was just like glass, a mirror. It was amazing, until we were about fifty miles or so outside of San Francisco. Then, we hit some weather, but we didn't have any weather otherwise.

SH: Had you experienced any bad weather while you were in Guam and in the Pacific?

WP: Yes, one time. … I didn't experience it, because we took our aircraft and we flew it to the Philippines to get away from a coming typhoon. … They wanted to make sure that they didn't leave any equipment there that could get damaged. I don't [recall much else]; well, we had weather, yes, but none of it was anything that would [cause damage].

SH: What was the name of the ship that you came back on? Do you remember?

WP: I think it was the *Marine Fox*. … I think it was a converted; what are they, remember, that Kaiser made a lot of ships in those days? This was a converted one to carry troops, yes. [Editor's Note: Henry J. Kaiser developed a process for mass-producing cargo/troop transport vessels. The first design produced ships dubbed Liberty ships and a later design was called Victory ships.]

SH: Did you have good food?

WP: We had food. [laughter] It didn't leave any impression, I'm sure.

SH: Where did you dock on the West Coast?

WP: We docked at, must have been Oakland or someplace around there, and we departed, and I had an aunt that was living in [the area]. Well, it was up to us to get ourselves to the [discharge point]. We'd get paid for it, but get to the … East Coast and report to Fort Dix, [New Jersey], for discharge. I had an aunt that was living in Oakland. So, I visited her and we did a few other things, like, we went up to the Top of the Mark, [an iconic rooftop bar in San Francisco's Mark Hopkins Hotel], or something like that, and then, [I] headed east. …

SH: Was this with other radar members? Who were you with? Who was the "We?"

WP: Well, the one fellow … [was] this other radar guy, but some of the guys [were] from our bomb wing that were in the same category, as far as being released is concerned.

SH: When did you make plans as to what you were going to do?

WP: Well, I felt that I would take advantage of the GI Bill and go to college. … I was not set on being a doctor or an engineer, so, I settled for business administration.

SH: Why did you pick Rutgers? Where did you live on campus?

[TAPE PAUSED]

WP: … We lived initially at Raritan Arsenal, in the old Italian prisoner of war camp, in the barracks that were there. … We were bused in the morning and bused back out at night. … After that, I lived in the Quad for awhile, and then, when I joined Theta Chi, I stayed there, but I seldom spent the weekend down there. I always commuted to home.

SH: Did you have a car?

WP: Yes, I had a car.

SH: What was it like to be a veteran in college with younger students?

WP: I think there was a little bit of, if you will, friction between the kids and the vets. [The vets] were tired of any crap and, you know, hazing and all this kind of stuff. We had a little hazing, but it wasn't some of the silly things that some of them did, and I just don't think that the veterans would have tolerated it.

SH: How did you decide to join Theta Chi?

WP: Well, living in the barracks out at Raritan Arsenal, the preceptor of our barracks was a fellow by the name of Johnny (Ewell?). … I got to be pretty close with John, as did another chap that was with me, a fellow by the name of Joe Trowen, and John was a Theta Chi. Well, he introduced us to Theta Chi and both Joe and I … seemed to be interested and we eventually went through and joined the fraternity. John was my big brother and Bob (Patton?) was Joe's big brother and it was just a nice group of guys. A good many of them were the veterans, and we did have some younger ones that came in, or those who were there had never been in the service and were now in their first years of college.

SH: Did the professors appreciate the seriousness of the veterans?

WP: I can't answer that; … my recollection of Rutgers is [hazy]. …

SH: How were your parents? How had your home and New Jersey changed?

WP: Well, my father and mother had moved from a rental, at about 1946, the one where I lived, into a home they owned, into a very nice neighborhood in West Orange. … I returned to that place and, from there, I commuted to Rutgers.

SH: Had your sister married in the meantime?

WP: My sister, … during the year, I forget what year, she and a girlfriend packed up and went to the West [laughter] and she got married while she was out there in California.

SH: Lots of things had changed in your family.

WP: Yes, I would say so, yes. [laughter] …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Are there any anecdotes about your time in the Pacific or your service that you would like to share before we talk a little more about Rutgers? You said you wanted to move forward from there.

WP: At this moment, no; when I get the draft, I might have some, yes.

SH: Great. That would be great to hear. Do you recall a favorite course or a favorite professor from when you were at Rutgers?

WP: [No].

SH: Did you attend your graduation?

WP: Yes, I did, in the old field. I don't know what's there now. Maybe it's the same one, I guess. Yes, they just enlarged the stadium. [Editor's Note: Mr. Proft is referring to Rutgers Stadium, originally built in the late 1930s and renovated in the 1990s and 2000s.]

SH: Your degree was in business administration.

WP: Yes, yes.

SH: Did you have a minor?

WP: Economics, I think, yes.

SH: Was it easy or difficult to find a job coming out of college?

WP: When I left, I don't know what led me to it, but I ended up at the US Rubber Company in Passaic, New Jersey, and they had an opening at the wage standards department, which I took. This was, maybe, like, July of '50 or so.

SH: Was there any chance that you would be recalled?

WP: There was.

SH: Because of the Korean War.

WP: Definitely, and that in itself is a story. I was recalled.

SH: You were.

WP: … Well, let's put it this way; I got orders to show up [laughter] at Camp Kilmer, … I and about five hundred other guys, and I think most of us … had been flying in '29s. I don't know, [I am] not saying that they were the 315th or what, but … we went through the whole series of processing. I think it was a couple of days, got shots and everything. Then, we gathered in an auditorium, where they started giving out orders, and that meant, you know, you go home, pack and go. There were twenty orders missing and one of those was mine. … We were told, … in no indifferent terms, that we should stay at home, you know, maybe do your work, and so on, "But, don't go wandering around, because you'll get your orders real soon and you'll be called." Well, I'm still waiting for those orders. [laughter]

SH: Not a peep.

WP: … Not a peep, nope.

SH: Have you ever applied for any veteran's benefits, other than the GI Bill for your schooling?

WP: … No.

SH: Was there anything where this would have shown up, that would have explained what happened? That is very interesting.

WP: No, no.

SH: I am glad you are still waiting. [laughter]

WP: Yes, oh, boy.

SH: Where did you meet your wife?

WP: Okay. My employment with US Rubber in Passaic lasted until, let's see, [from] June of '50 until about, yes, I think it was like Summer of '53. … Then, I asked for a transfer, if it was possible, and my boss said, "Sure." So, he arranged for me to get transferred to the Naugatuck Footwear division of US Rubber. … That was in Naugatuck, Connecticut, and I took that. … During those months that I was there, my friend, Joe Trowen, was working at Remington Arms in Bridgeport, I think. … He was married and they lived in Milford, Connecticut. I would come down to visit with them on an evening, say, usually, Thursday evening, so [that] we could watch, oh, what's that show, famous TV show at that time, [about] a detective?

SH: *Perry Mason*?

WP: I don't know, didn't strike a note, [laughter] and so, we'd see each other frequently and reunite. … He had attended Harvard Business School, and then, ended up there in Milford. Well, there was a close friend of his that lived in Milford and they worked together, and the families got to be pretty close. … Then, it came near the end of the year [that] the US Rubber put out their new budget, which was cut by fifteen percent. So, myself and a few others that were the newest ones in the … thirty-man department, or thirty-head department, were let go. … I ended up at Spalding Sporting Goods in Chicopee, Massachusetts, doing basically the same thing. Well, I would, from there, … commute it, occasionally, on weekends, to go home or stay up and maybe, … if it was the winter, go skiing with the buddies, and so on. Well, … back and forth, through Connecticut; … I should say that Joe Trowen and his wife, Nancy, and Charlie and Lucille Turner, who were very close, and Lucille had a very dear friend … that Joe had met. … He said to [the] Turners once, he said, "I've got a friend. They should meet." Well, in the short, that's what happened. Then, after a bit of time, we did get together. That was it. So, yes, … what was the next thing you were on to, … the children? We were married in '56, in February. In January, we had our first child, a boy, and then, we had three more boys over the four-year period. As they grew up, in their younger years, I was very active in Indian Guides, and one of our favorite camp spots was Princeton Camp, which is near Blairstown, [New Jersey]. So, … we were there quite a bit, usually on what we'd call "freeze-outs," where we'd be there in the winter months, do ice fishing and sledding.

SH: You moved back to New Jersey then.

WP: Oh, yes, that's right. In 1958, I came back to New Jersey to join my father in his business, but I was not [satisfied], and, after awhile, I realized it wasn't what I wanted. It was in fundraising and mailing lists. So, I then proceeded to look and, in, like, a year-and-a-half or so later, I ended up with Warner-Lambert Pharmaceutical, back in the field of industrial engineering.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Okay, you said you had just joined Warner-Lambert.

WP: Yes. So, we moved back to [New Jersey] and we settled in Florham Park, New Jersey, and the boys grew up there and went on their way. My activity with them was Indian Guides for a number of years, and then, Boy Scouts. I stayed with Warner-Lambert for twenty-six years and I retired from them in 1986. The boys are all on their own, all with family, and scattered pretty far. One's in Singapore, two are in the New England area, and then, one is up in Mesa.

SH: That is great. I am so happy that you took the time to talk with me today.

WP: I'm sure we didn't get very far, but … I'm sorry I'm not [more talkative].

SH: No, that is quite all right. I look forward to being in contact with you in the future.

WP: Okay.

SH: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Casey Curtin 9/28/10
Reviewed by Daniel Myron 9/28/10
Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 11/29/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/10/10
Reviewed by Mark Proft 11/11/13