

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERBERT L. RAMO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Herbert L. Ramo on July 23, 2003 in Chatham, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. I would like to thank you, Mr. Ramo, for taking time out of your day today to have us here to do the interview. Thank you for the wonderful lunch. Would you begin by telling us where and when you were born?

Herbert Ramo: I was born on September 20, 1928, in Newark, New Jersey.

SH: Tell me about your father and your mother, a little bit about their family histories if you can?

HR: My mother came from Odessa, Russia, my father came from a city also in Russia, Brest-Litovsk, Russia. Ramo is actually a Russian name. It's not Italian, everybody thinks it is, but it's Russian and I've checked it out with the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC and it's correct. We have actual paperwork that shows it to be correct.

SH: Can you tell us when your father came to this country. or did his family come before him?

HR: My father came to this country about 1912-1915. My mother came to this country after the Russian Revolution. They drove them out, the Communists drove them out, she came here, the family came in 1917, that much I do know.

SH: Did your father come alone or were there other family member?

HR: No, he came with two brothers.

SH: What was your father's trade?

HR: He owned a grocery store and he owned a hotel in East Orange, that was that thing.

SH: Your mother's family?

HR: Came from Odessa, Russia. Her family was horse farmers in Russia. They raised horses for the Czar. She often told me that. They were fairly well-to-do in Russia and when the Russian Revolution came they left. My brother has a picture of my grandfather riding on a white horse. I don't have the picture though, but ... he showed it to me.

SH: Did your family talk at all about what it was like to live in Russia?

HR: Not that much. My mother would; my father didn't care about it. He was glad to get out of there. My mother would speak because they had a farm and they had a lot of horses on the farm. It was located outside of Odessa, in Russia.

SH: You said your father came with two other brothers, did the other family members ever come?

HR: No. Those family members disappeared in World War II.

SH: How many of your mother's family came?

HR: ... As far as I know they all came over, that was a total family group. Technically, that would be my grandfather, and they all came over and they first settled in Brighton Beach, New York, and from there they eventually scattered and went everywhere, in New Jersey, New York, and even Pennsylvania.

SH: Did they talk about how they met, your mother and father?

HR: Not that much. I'm not sure. My father says he met her at a social affair. We never discussed that.

SH: Which language did they speak at home?

HR: They never spoke Russian much, very little, very little. They were already, well, by the time I was born it was mostly English, very rarely [Russian].

SH: When were your parents married?

HR: That's going to be an interesting question, let me think, I would say, based on my brother, that's in 1920. I think that would be it. It's a rough guess.

SH: Had your father served in the military at all?

HR: No, not at all.

SH: When your mother met him, he is the owner of the hotel, at that point?

HR: No. That came much later in life. At that time he worked for a wholesale food company, which no longer exists. I do know he worked for that. That's about all I can remember.

SH: You talked about a brother, where do you fit in?

HR: Leon, my brother, was six and a half years older than me. He was in submarine service in World War II. He was in the pre-war Navy. When the draft started in 1940, his number got called, so he had a choice, go in the Army, or go in the Navy. He went in the Navy for one year. His date of discharge was supposed to be September 1941, it never happened. World War II broke out. He never got discharged until after World War II.

SH: Can you tell us about where you went to school, where you lived?

HR: Yeah, I was born in Irvington and I went to school in Irvington, grammar school, high school in Irvington, New Jersey, right through.

SH: How was the separation between Newark and Irvington?

HR: No, they're right next door. There's no separation. You go to Newark and then Irvington is right next door.

SH: Is there a real identity for Irvington as opposed to being from Newark?

HR: Oh, yeah, it's a separate town. Irvington is a separate town of about 70,000 now.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about what school you went to, grammar school?

HR: Yeah, I went to Chancellor Avenue School, went to Irvington High School. I never participated in any sports in Irvington High School, for whatever reason. I guess, it was because we always worked because World War II was on and jobs were plentiful. There was good money to be made. I remember working in a paint factory in Union and made sixty-five cents an hour and that was good money in those days. I worked there during the high school, but also, my last year in high school, I worked down the Shore as a bell boy in Ocean Grove. That comes later, in college, which I will explain later, where I worked after college in the summers. We made very good money in those days.

SH: As a young man in elementary school what were your hobbies, what did you do after school? What was it like to grow up in Irvington?

HR: Nothing special. I don't remember anything specifically that would be worth talking about. I mean, you know, I just went to school and that's all. I can't quite remember anything special in grammar school, doing anything unique or special. I really don't.

SI: Do you remember how the Great Depression affected Irvington?

HR: Oh, yeah. Well, in those days everything, a penny counted. I remember my friend's father worked for the WPA [Works Progress Administration] for sixteen dollars a week. A lot of them worked at Pabst Brewery, which was in Irvington and Newark in those days. They made like about twenty dollars a week. That was the salaries in those days. You had breweries around this area and a lot of people worked in the breweries in Irvington, you'd be surprised, in Newark, that was the biggest employer in Irvington in those days, was the breweries, hard to believe, yeah, really. There were some factories around, too. A lot of them worked a Lionel, where they make trains and I can remember a cousin of mine worked there years before they folded up and that was in Hillside, Irvington.

SH: Because your father came with his brothers, did they remain in the same area?

HR: No. My father's one brother moved to Pennsylvania and the other one was in Newark. They stayed together, they were in Newark.

SH: Did they have a trade when they came to this country?

HR: The one, father's brother, was in Pennsylvania and he had a grocery store there, too, in Pennsylvania, I'm not sure, somewhere in the Bethlehem area and the other one worked in the cleaning trade as an owner. He owned a cleaning store in Newark. But I don't remember much about it, really. He had a cleaning store in Newark somewhere.

SH: Did your mother work outside of the home?

HR: No, except, when we bought the hotel, which was, now this is the 1940s, my father had got into the hotel business. That would be circa 1940, and they owned a hotel in East Orange, not a hotel like you think today, let's call it a boarding house, an immense boarding house. Well, it started out serving meals and they stopped during World War II and just had it as a boarding house.

SH: What were most of the people, what was their occupation that lived in the boarding house?

HR: Everything. I don't remember anything, really. He had some retired people living there. Believe it or not, people retired in that boarding house and they rented rooms weekly. The rates were anywhere from eight to fifteen dollars a week, that was it, and that was the whole thing.

SH: Were they interesting characters?

HR: Yes, some of them were interesting characters, they were, yeah. I mean, ... a lot of them were retired and then they had some that were school teachers and nurses that worked there.

SH: How did the war affect the business?

HR: Stopped the food. They stopped the cafeteria. Couldn't get enough food to run the cafeteria. It was like a restaurant there. They closed it up in 1942, couldn't do it because there was too many problems with getting food in those days.

SI: This boarding house really wasn't affected by the housing issues surrounding soldiers passing through?

HR: Nothing to do with that. Nothing with the military.

SI: Or war workers?

HR: No, nothing to do with that. They might have had some there, but mostly they were older people, some of the younger people worked, and there were a few veterans that came there after World War II, just temporarily living there.

SH: What about the effects of the Depression? You said it was terrible but did you, as a kid, do you remember soup lines or people coming to the house for food?

HR: Father had a grocery store, so he made out with that ... I wouldn't say it was really poverty. I don't recall that. They seemed to have enough money, too, and there were no luxuries. Is that what you meant? Father wouldn't own a car. He said, "I don't have to own a car." He says, "Why? I got busses and trains." So he never owned a car, he never learned how to drive. Neither [of my] parents learned how to drive. That was considered a luxury, a car.

SH: During the Depression, were there any other members of your family that were affected more adversely than your parents?

HR: Yeah, my father loaned money to some of them, I remember that, he never collected back from them, not a lot of money, but I remember him loaning money.

SH: Because you hear stories of people who owned shops and who would give credit to ...

HR: They did credit in the grocery store and he couldn't collect it, yeah. I remember that he couldn't collect it. In those days, boy, it was a very informal way of collecting money. I mean, they kept a notebook and the name of the customer was in there and they write down what they charged and, hopefully, collected at the end of the week. In most cases they did, but there were some cases you just didn't.

SH: Did you help out as a young man?

HR: Yeah, I worked in the grocery store, absolutely, my brother and I, they all did. They didn't hire outside help in those days, no such thing.

SH: Were there any of the traditions from their homeland that they kept, any holidays?

HR: I don't really think so. I mean, you know, the family was Jewish. They had very informal type of thing, they were never religious, let's put it that way, not in the true sense that you see today, no, not really.

SH: Did they keep a kosher house?

HR: No. Wait a minute; let me put it this way, my father would keep a kosher house but outside of the house he didn't care. After World War II started, they kind of forgot about it.

SH: Because of the rationing?

HR: Because of the rationing. The kosher butcher there folded up ... so he just would eat beef. He wouldn't eat pork, that sort of thing, but he never kept it kosher after that.

SH: Did they send you and your brother to Hebrew school?

HR: I went to Hebrew school. I went there and got Bar Mitzvahed, the usual thing, I went through that. They can speak Yiddish but not that much ... I meant to tell you, I learned to speak German, because next door was a butcher called Fredricks. One of my jobs in grammar school

and early part of high school was delivering for a German butcher. In those days, you took a bicycle, there were no cars, and I learned to speak German. I had a pretty good knowledge of German then. I can *Sprechen ze Deutsch*. I still remember how to do this, which I could handle. I still can handle a little German, but not much.

SH: You talked a little bit about rationing, what do you remember about that?

HR: The stamps, my father had to collect the red stamps for meat, the blue stamps for canned goods. They had to collect that. They were very strict on that. I remember cigarettes.

SH: As a shopkeeper, he's collecting stamps and then how was that accounted back in, do you remember that?

HR: He turned it in. I don't remember exactly, but you had to turn it in to the, it was like an administration that Dad had to turn in, the books, otherwise you couldn't get food back. If he didn't turn in the books back, you couldn't get them back; you couldn't get the food back.

SH: He have to go somewhere or did someone come to him?

HR: No, they took them to town hall somewhere. He would have to go over to the town hall. I remember taking them to the town hall and giving them to, there was like a ration office there. Remember people got ration books and the same place you got ration books you turned them in and that gave him credit to buy the next things, otherwise you couldn't get anything. Remember ... he sold meat there, but mostly cold cuts, cheese, cold cuts, butter, and those things were rationed.

SI: Was he constantly dealing with people trying to, maybe bribe is not the right word but trying to get stuff?

HR: No, I don't remember anything like that. There was a rumor that, you know, gas rationing was going on and he wasn't involved in that. I remember the neighbors used to talk about a gas station, if you pay them like fifty cents a gallon, you could get gas. You know, it used to be gallons a week, if you remember that, you don't, but I do. It was three gallons a week because my brother had a car then and when he came home on leave he had that car, he had a 1929 Ford Model A and he took out three gallons a week, that's all, not much.

SH: What do you remember about your brother being drafted?

HR: He got called up in 1940.

SH: What was he doing before that?

HR: ... He worked for a delivery service, delivering teeth for one of the dental services. I remember him doing that and I got other part time, little jobs, I don't recall exactly what they were, but he was doing little part time jobs, working in the grocery store, doing a little bit of

everything. Probably helping in the hotel and everything else then. It's a variety of things. I don't recall exactly.

SH: Had he planned on going to college?

HR: He did ... He was going to Bloomfield College in West Virginia. He went there for six months and he got his draft notice. That was it. In those days, there's no such thing as college deferments. See, not everybody got a call. You know, they had numbers and if you had your number called up, you had to go. There were no exceptions. That's how he did it.

SH: Did he ever tell you about being on the submarine?

HR: He was in the pre-war Navy. He was at Pearl Harbor during the Pearl Harbor attack, but his submarine was out on the water with him and his submarine was on a reconnaissance mission to see if there were any Japanese ships or any others approaching. The only thing was he was in the wrong direction. The Japanese came in on Pearl Harbor from the north, he was in the south and they were on a patrol mission. Then they heard Pearl Harbor got bombed. They came back to Pearl Harbor and got retrofitted for actual submarine warfare, with torpedoes and everything. He went back on missions Early in 1942 and he was doing that right through the war, up to 1945. He was a chief petty officer by the time he left.

SI: How did you feel and your family feel knowing that he was at Pearl Harbor?

HR: Well, we didn't know. We didn't know what happened, you know, and then he, evidently, got off a telegram that he was all right, that his submarine was out at sea. He was five hundred miles out at sea down in the South Pacific. Remember, the Japanese came in from the North Pacific. So that's what happened there.

SH: What grade are you in '41?

HR: '41, I was graduating grammar school. January '41 I graduated Chancellor Avenue School. I remember that. Now, see, dates I can pin down pretty good for you. I'm sorry; January '42 is when I graduated. The war had started then.

SH: What do you remember about that day, where were you, do you remember?

HR: Yeah, I was in a movie theater, and they announced in the movie theater, in those days you could do that. They announced to the world that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, that's all. We knew what to do. We went home, we listened to it on the radio, and that was it. What I was concerned about was my brother was in the Navy, then we didn't know, we knew he was in the South Pacific, somewhere.

SH: Did the family try to get any other additional information or you just waited?

HR: No, we just waited until we heard from him. There's no way of contacting him. His submarine came back to Pearl Harbor about two weeks later ... When they determined there was no further Japanese attack they came in. He was a radioman, that was it, he was a radio operator.

SI: When you were a kid, did you spend most of your time in Irvington, or Newark, or both?

HR: Most of them in Irvington. I didn't do a hell of lot in grammar school. In those days you didn't do a lot. In World War II travel was awful. You couldn't go anywhere. You really didn't, maybe down the Shore, that was all. I don't remember doing anything special. Even during high school I never did anything, really, because World War II was all through my high school days.

SH: Did you see young men from your high school or your community joining the ...

HR: Yeah, when I was ready to graduate, I was due to graduate in January because I started January '42; I was due to graduate in January '46. Late in the spring, around April, they came in, a bunch of recruiters and say, "We'll let you graduate in June of 1945 if you agree to join the services." I did not, because I wanted to go on to college. But a lot of fellows did join up and then they wound up in service and then the war ended and they eventually got out anyhow. None of them in my high school. My best man did that program and he got out that way. He went in the service in the fall of that year, but then he came out a year later, so, you know, it really didn't amount to anything.

SI: Did your parents have any feelings about that, did they say "don't do it," or ...

HR: They didn't like it because my brother was in service then, that was a problem. They felt one was enough, I had only had one brother, so they felt that was enough. They didn't like the idea. I know I would have had trouble at home so I didn't try it, let's put it that way. You know, in the submarine service you don't hear from them. The Army you write notes. You heard from him very rarely. Once in a while you'd get a V-mail letter, you know, telling you where he, but he could never tell you where he was, all he would do is say somewhere in the South Pacific, which meant nothing.

SH: What boat was he on, do you remember?

HR: He was on the *Sea Raven* [Editor's Note SS-196] and the *Aspro* [Editor's note: SS-309]. The *Aspro* was a new one that came out in '43, '44. The *Sea Raven* was a 1940 boat, a 1939 boat.

SI: In the days and weeks immediately after Pearl Harbor do you remember any sense of paranoia or any fear?

HR: No, not really. I don't remember anything like that. I remember ... the air raid wardens coming around, pulling down your shades. They had air raid warden practices. I remember at Seton Hall they had searchlights up there looking for air raids. Yeah, I remember that. That's about all I can remember. Rationing, nobody had cars, no cars in the street hardly.

SH: Prior to Pearl Harbor, with your family having so many relatives in Europe, did they follow what was going on in Europe at all?

HR: ... My mother's family was *en masse* gone. My father's family, they would write to him every week. When World War II started, he lost track of them one hundred percent and never heard from them since. They tried to trace it after the war through the Red Cross, no information. They were just gone, obliterated, that's the only word you can use.

SH: They didn't talk about any of their family being called to service or anything?

HR: Oh, yeah, cousins went in service. Arthur was a cousin who lived with me ... My father's brother died suddenly in Pennsylvania and ... the son came to live with us and he lived with me for a long [time]. He went in the Army after he graduated college. He graduated college in '44, had the same name as me, and stayed in the Army for two years afterwards, he never went overseas.

SH: Where did he go to college?

HR: George Washington. He graduated and everything. He's a CPA.

SH: I wondered about the letters that your father was getting from Odessa?

HR: No, from Brest-Litovsk. My mother came from there. I don't know, they were written in Russian and I couldn't make head or tail of them to be honest with you. I remember seeing them but I could never, he never really would bother to teach me anything. He said it wasn't of any importance.

SH: I wondered if those letters were talking about the war?

HR: I remember the stamps on them and everything, you know.

SH: I wondered if he talked about what the war effort was like for them?

HR: He never knew. After 1939, never heard a word. When the German Army came through, they went right through there, and he never heard a word after that, nothing, no word, nothing. It was just like it's cut off one hundred percent. Never again. He had sisters there; I think one of his parents was there, cousins. The female part of that family stayed there. The male part left, three brothers all left. That's how they worked it.

SI: Given your parents' European background, did they ever discuss what was going on in Europe before Pearl Harbor and before the war?

HR: Not that much. My mother would talk about it. My father said, "I never liked it there," he says. He said it was a dump where he lived. He said his father was a tailor. My grandfather was a tailor of some sort over there in, he said the living conditions there were no good and that's

why they left. That's all he would say, you know. He said he had an opportunity to leave and he left. What the opportunity was, I don't know, but he left. They went through Ellis Island, I know that. They mentioned going through that.

SI: But they didn't follow events, the rise of the Nazis and so forth?

HR: No. No, never followed that at all. I don't remember any conversations of that at all.

SH: In your school, you're starting now in freshman year, what were some of the war effort activities that your school went through?

HR: We used to collect scrap metal. I remember going scrap metal hunting. They hunted for scrap metal all the time. I remember getting toothpaste tubes; in those days they were metal, or tin, they wanted tin. So you went around getting tin and don't laugh, they're looking for rubber heels. If you had any old shoes, they wanted the rubber heels.

SH: Really?

HR: Yeah, I remember doing that. That's all I can remember from scrap drives. I remember doing that.

SI: Did they have like monetary prizes and that sort of thing?

HR: No, you just did it for the patriotic thing, just go try to get what you can, tin, scrap metal, you actually go through your house, tin pans, pots, anything. They want any kind of scrap metal. They had a big pile in the high school at one time. They threw all the scrap metal on it, anything you could think of, everything from hub caps, wheels, car parts, you name it, that's what they did.

SH: Were you part of the Boy Scouts, or any organizations?

HR: Yeah, I was part of the Boy Scouts, Troop 201 in Irvington, I remember the number. It was in a church, it was very nice.

SH: Where did you go for your camping?

HR: Never went to camp with them. Just Boys Scouts, just the meetings at the church, that's all I can remember. I never remember going to Boy Scout camp. They had it; I don't think I ever went, though. I don't remember going there.

SI: When you were in high school you mentioned that one of the reasons you didn't go into the service then was because you had decided that you were going to college, was this always your idea, was this something your parents wished for you?

HR: No, we never knew because, all of a sudden, in April, one day they came in, they called all the senior boys. In those days girls didn't go in service too much, they did but they really, not in

high school, and they just said to us, you know, “Who are you over seventeen?” No, I wasn’t going to be seventeen until September. “When you turn seventeen you can join the Army, Navy or Marines.” They had no Air Force in those days. I don’t remember the Coast Guard being there either. But they said when you join at seventeen, you can join, and you can get an accelerated program, the school will give you the diploma in June 1945 if you wanted it. I could have gotten it, but a lot of, some fellows did and some didn’t. Those that did were sorry they did. I talked to a lot of them, they said they wasted a year and they went to college or something afterwards, because they wound up going in, and then they stayed in for a year, in the Army of occupation, or something like that, then they got out.

SI: Your goal was college at that time?

HR: Yeah, at that time I was going to go to college, yeah.

SI: When did you first decide that you wanted to go to college? When did that idea enter in your head?

HR: Oh, a long time, you know, when you are in high school. My father believed in college. He didn’t like the course I took, but that’s neither here nor there. He ... was old fashioned, you have to go to college to be a doctor, a dentist, or lawyer; they don’t know from any other occupations in those days. That was it. Why would you go to college for something else? But that’s what they believed in. I wound up in the Rutgers School of Agriculture; it was a scholarship, that State’s Scholarship, which doesn’t exist anymore. You know what we paid? We paid seven dollars a credit hour. Don’t ask me what it is today.

SH: Did anyone in your high school encourage you in this way?

HR: Yeah, they wanted you to go to college. I remember the physics teacher, and a couple of other teachers, math teachers, they encourage the fellows to go to college.

SH: Were you involved in any activities in school, as a high school student?

HR: See, that’s what I wasn’t. I lacked a lot of extra-curricular activities because I had part time jobs. In those days you could make good money, so, you know, you couldn’t really do it. I didn’t get involved with any sports at all, none. I just didn’t. I had jobs in the paint factory, also worked at Olympic Park. If you remember, Olympic Park was an amusement park. It was in Irvington. They had some small jobs during the summer, I remember doing that, you know, giving out change for the skee ball. In those days it was like thirty-five cents an hour, little jobs, I remember doing that in high school. But that was, mostly jobs, because you could get a job anywhere during World War II, anywhere. The big strong guys went to work in the breweries and they made good money. They were getting eighty, ninety cents an hour, but I didn’t qualify. You had to be like a football player because you were loading and unloading trucks. So if you weren’t the right size, they don’t want to know you. They actually told you what the size they were looking for. They’re looking for like a hundred and seventy-five pounds and six foot, that’s what they wanted.

SI: Prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, were you aware of any America First organizations?

HR: Oh, sure. We had the *Bund* in Irvington.

SI: Did you?

HR: Oh, yeah, they were there. They marched. I can vaguely remember them marching in Irvington Center. They were the Nazi *Bund* and they had a place in Irvington, too, up on Montgomery Avenue, they had a house, really.

SI: Really?

HR: Oh, I can remember that, Diana [Mr. Ramo's wife] would remember, too, maybe, I don't know. But I remember very well, I mean, we looked with shock on them, you know. To me, they looked crazy, you know. This is now 1939-1940; I was about ten years, eleven years old, and they marched in parades. They marched in a parade one time, and they marched in the park, it was Montgomery Park in Irvington. They had like a little campsite and had a building. World War II they got closed up. That was quick. But I remember them there, yes I do, walking out with little swastikas, you know, and armbands, brown shirts, brown pants.

SI: Was there any violence?

HR: I don't remember the violence, but people told me there was, they got rushed one time. There was some kind of brawl one time, but I don't remember seeing it, though. But I know somebody who was involved in it. Diana knows him; a fellow named Lou (Burnheim?) was involved in it. He told me that they were fighting with chains and clubs. It was a very nasty brawl, but I didn't see it.

SH: As a young man how did you perceive this organization?

HR: They were nuts, they were crazy, that's all. Looked upon what you would look today at a *Bund*, like a group of very stupid people. But Irvington was primarily German. As a matter-of-fact, they used to call Irvington "Germantown."

SH: Oh, really?

HR: Oh, yeah. The butcher I worked for was German. There were German butchers all over the place and a lot of them were pro-Nazi, oh, yeah, definitely.

SH: Were any of them Fifth Column, were they arrested at any time?

HR: I don't know that to be a fact, but I'm sure some were. I know the FBI closed up a few places. They closed up one German butcher on Springfield Avenue, I remember. I can recall that. It was suddenly closed up and there was a big notice from the FBI, "Do Not Enter," do not something or other, there was a few places that were, yeah.

SH: Did your father and mother talk about this at all?

HR: They didn't like it but I don't think they got into it that much. They sort of kept out of it because, you know, the town was, in those days, it was eighty percent German I'd say.

SH: What about politics in town? Were your father and mother involved in politics?

HR: No. Not really. In those days Irvington was all Republican; today it's all Democrat.

SH: What did they think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

HR: Well, my father liked him, yeah. I mean, some people liked him in those days but my father liked him, I know he voted for him. I remember him with an FDR button.

SH: Do you?

HR: Oh, yeah.

SH: Did your parents become naturalized citizens?

HR: Yes. Both became citizens, yeah, they became citizens before I can remember, back, I would say, in the '20s. They were both citizens. I know they both voted, so I know from that standpoint, yes.

SH: They didn't participate in any political rallies?

HR: Nah, I don't think, not at all. I don't think anything at all.

SI: I want to ask a few questions to see how far the war reached into your everyday life.

HR: World War II?

SI: Yes, what were the big stories the people talked about, was it rationing?

HR: No, we just listened on the radio all the time. You always want to know, between the radio and the newspapers, you always want to know what was going on and we were concerned with what was going on the Pacific. Because we never heard from my brother until the war, literally, ended. I mean, you would get letters maybe once a month. I always remember the mailman coming in and say, "Ah, I got a V-mail for you." You know, from Leon, and that's all I can remember. I remember writing to him the same way. It was an APO number, it was APO San Francisco, California, that's where it went, after that, you know, you just hope it got there.

SI: Was that a major preoccupation for most of your friends, too, classmates?

HR: Yeah, they were all the same as me, they were all working jobs. Some of them played football and baseball, yeah, but I don't remember any other extra-curricular activities. You

couldn't go anywhere, to speak of, that far, because you didn't have any bus trips or anything. I mean, you had very limited bus trips in those days. You could take a bus to a football game, maybe, but that's about it. But there was no bus trip like you see today. They go to Washington, they go to Washington, DC, no, it wasn't done. Everything was very limited in Irvington High School in those days.

SH: During World War II were the breweries still open?

HR: Oh, they were there. That was a big employer, a big employer, but a lot of the people didn't want to get drafted, they worked in defense industries, (Kearny?) Shipyards. Yeah, the (Kearny?) Shipyards was a big one because they made a lot of destroyers down there. (Kearny?) Shipyards was big. There were some factories, I don't remember too many. But I know some of them worked up in two of the ammunition places. They were making, Bocar was up in the Maplewood, manufacturing bayonets and a couple of family worked there. I'm trying to remember, Piccattiny Arsenal, I heard that someone worked up there. Then you had them working in the breweries. Like I said, the breweries was a big employer, because I remember my father used to cash checks from them. Ballantines, I can read them off to you, Ballantines, (Tralmers?) Hensellers, (Kreigers?). I can go on and on, Pabst, more than that, too.

SH: Were there a lot of saloons, or bars?

HR: Yeah, it was a big event. That's where the people went for recreation, really. Really, that's what it was, they had neighborhood bars. There's a few of them around, but not many in Irvington anymore. But they were very, very big. Neighborhood bars were big. On my block there was one, two, three within one block radius, one this way, one block that way and one block up.

SH: How far did you live from the grocery store that your father owned?

HR: We lived on top. Those days you lived on top.

SI: Did you notice that there a population influx in the area for people coming in to work in the war industries?

HR: No. No, not at all. Irvington, they worked wherever they can. I would say there's no influx, no, nothing like that.

SI: What about an influx of soldiers for any reason?

HR: There are no military bases nearby. The nearest military base would be Fort Dix where a lot of fellows went when they started in the Army. Fort Dix was big and Bayonne Naval is there, big Navy crew up in Bayonne. But there was nothing else around, no. Nothing at all. Camp Kilmer was there, too, and that was outside of Rutgers. That's right, too, I forgot about that, that Camp Kilmer.

SH: Where and when did you report for the draft?

HR: Me, I never did. I was ROTC. I never got drafted.

SH: So you never had to report?

HR: Now, let me tell you how that started. We graduated in June 1950, as you know. I signed up because I wanted to go in the Air National Guard and they told me, "You really have to go for ninety day orientation tour." Okay, I go for the ninety day orientation tour, started July 1, 1950 for ninety days. I didn't leave the Air Force until 1953. Okay, ninety days, they just extended you. I went on to school and everything else, you know, I went here, I went there.

SH: One of the things that we like to hear about is the reaction that you saw within your community and your family to VE Day, what do you remember?

HR: Oh, yeah, I was working down the Shore. Now that's when I graduated, no, I was in my senior year in high school, this is 1945, July, August 1945. I was working down at a hotel down in Ocean Grove, and when the war ended everybody ran out on the boardwalk and they carried on, the bands came out on the boardwalk. There was a naval hospital in Asbury Park. The Berkeley Carteret was a Naval Hospital, and the whole band and a whole bunch of people came out and they were all celebrating with beer, wine, whatever they could get their hands on, and it was all done on the boardwalk at Asbury Park and Ocean Grove. Then the next day, in Ocean Grove, they had a thankfulness service in the Ocean Grove Auditorium, a real big one and everybody went, the place was packed to the gills. They said prayers, they played all kinds of patriotic music, and I remember going to that. That's what I do remember on VE Day, or VJ Day, excuse me, that was the end of the war. It was a big celebration. The hotel celebrated, I remember that.

SH: You would have still been in school when the war ended in Europe.

HR: Yeah, I was in high school then. No, I don't remember anything, maybe the teachers coming in, and telling us that Germany surrendered. That's all I can remember, the math teacher came in and said, "Germany surrendered," everybody cheered. I don't remember much else beyond that. That's all I can remember on that.

SI: I want to ask you about the shop you worked in, the paint shop ...

HR: Still there in Union.

SI: When you were working in the Asbury Park area, I've heard stories ...

HR: In the summer time, in the hotel.

SI: I heard that there were a lot of British sailors there, too. Did you run into that?

HR: It was a naval hospital. There was British, there was, I remember, Scots, guys walking down with the bagpipes, with skirts, coming down the boardwalk and they played right on, it was

right on Asbury Park. We all ran down to Asbury Park, that's where everything was going on. As soon as I got finished work, I went down to Asbury Park. In those days Asbury Park was the big thing. You got to remember there was Asbury Park and, maybe, Atlantic City. Those were the big events. In those days that was packed and that's why I remember going. ... They had the Scots group there, I imagine there was British, too, now that you reminded me, and American too, USA types, Army. They came out of that hospital there. The Berkeley Carteret was a naval hospital.

SH: The Allied military personnel that you saw when you were in Asbury Park before the war ended, was there any friction between them and the civilian population?

HR: No, I never got that much involved in it. We just knew it was there and it always had a wooden surrounded gate, you couldn't go in. They had a wooden thing around it and you just couldn't go in there. I saw military people wandering around the boardwalk, but I never paid much attention to it. I mean, they were there enjoying the boardwalk, I guess, because it was a naval hospital there.

SH: Some people talk about how graciously they were treated ...

HR: I think they were okay. I don't remember anybody coming in the hotel. The hotels that I worked at, basically, catered to a lot of older people, like me, you know, older types. There was a lot of widows that were there, so you didn't find servicemen there, except, I remember some of the girls. We also had waitresses as well as waiters, had a mixed group, and a lot of the girls they dated some of the sailors, they were like hospital orderlies at the Berkeley Carteret. That I do remember. Actually, I can remember these things now that you're asking. But that's the only thing I remember. I don't remember any other interaction then.

SH: Because sometimes the people were jealous because they say the soldiers were getting the girls ...

HR: No, no. It wasn't that way. There's plenty of dates down there. It was no problem there.

SI: I've read that there is a lot of discussions in the media and among families and stuff, "what to do when all these veterans come home?, how to deal with them?"

HR: Yeah, that's, now you're getting into the college days, you know, but I don't know, I don't remember any problems. Guys got jobs that wanted to. Some bought a house; my brother bought a house in Roselle with the GI Bill. It's a very small house in Roselle Park, I remember that. Jobs were around.

SH: You had talked about the information about the war and how it was progressing, or not, was mostly in radio and newspapers, what about the movies, the newsreels?

HR: I remember going to them. Downtown Newark had a theater that showed nothing but newsreels.

SH: Really?

HR: Yeah, I forgot what it was called, but I remember going there a few times. Then we had the movies, they would show newsreels of the war, since there's no television, so if you didn't see it in the newspapers, you could see it on the newsreel, which was close to like you would see on television. Remember there was no television around then. Television didn't come in until about 1947-1948 to any extent. My brother got a television set the size of that clock, that was the size of it and it could only pick up one or two stations in the evening, and that was it. There was no daytime television, or anything.

SI: The shop you worked in, the paint shop ...

HR: International Paints. I remember that.

SI: Were they producing for the civilian population?

HR: No, no, no. They were producing paints for the military, for aircraft, and they were printing dopes and dyes. That's what they did for the Air Force, for the Army Air Force, in those days. We used to test out the material to make sure it met certain specifications. It was not a pleasant job, the place stunk. Oh, stunk from paint, you wouldn't believe. You know, in those days you didn't have latex, it was oil based paints, you know, it stunk, the dyes was awful. They said, when I came home, they said I smelled from paint. The one fellow there, they had overhead things that they used to test, one of the cans opened up and fell on them, I'll never forget, he was covered in a sort of a very light green paint all over his head. It didn't happen to me, I was all right but, I mean, I always remembered that.

SI: Were there any more serious safety hazards, or accidents, or anything?

HR: No. We got sixty-five cents an hour.

SI: How large was the shop and were there a lot of women workers?

HR: No, no. It wasn't that big. There were a lot of people working full time; we were only part time because we were high school. See, in those days we were only on half day sessions. So we went ... to school like from a quarter to eight till twelve-thirty, so that was the whole day, so one o'clock on we could get a job. So I worked from one o'clock to five o'clock, part time at the place, but there were a lot of people working there, mostly full time, we were just part time. We were with the testing, we had to test the stuff, meet specifications. You did blotches, blotch test for colors and stuff like that. I can't quite remember everything. You had those you put it in the thing to see how fast it would pour. There's a word for that, I can't think of it.

SI: Viscosity?

HR: Viscosity test and stuff like that. It's mostly color, viscosity test, purity test, all stuff like that.

SH: What do you remember about the posters?

HR: Recruiting posters, yeah. They were in the high schools, they were in stores, five and tens had them, yeah.

SH: Did your father have posters about rationing and things like that in his store?

HR: They had posters but I don't remember what they were. There were some kind of posters, you know, about what you were limited to, you know. "You're limited to so many red stamps, so many blue stamps." The red stamps were for meat, cheese and stuff like that and blue stamps were canned goods. That's what that was.

SI: Was your father constantly having to deal with new regulations all the time?

HR: No, I don't remember. He sort of kept abreast of everything. He never had any problems with it.

SI: He never complained.

HR: No. He made the best of it, that's all. He used to say you had to make the best of things, you know. When coffee rationing was hard to get he had to take the pound can of coffee and divided it to quarter pounds, because that's what the, it was called the OPA, in those days, Office of Price Administration. You couldn't sell coffee by the pound any more. He sold it by the quarter pound, which means he had to take it out of a can and put it in bags and sell it that way, that's what they wanted to do it.

SI: Did he sell it in paper bags?

HR: Yeah, little tiny bags. You know, a quarter pound of coffee is not gonna hold much, yeah. But that's what they had to do during the war in the store. Butter was the same thing, quarter pound, only the quarter pound you could sell, same with cold cuts.

SI: Why did you think you were having to go through the rationing? What did you say to yourself, did you think it was for patriotic reasons?

HR: Yeah, for patriotic reasons. I don't think anybody, really, I don't remember people complaining, not the way they would today. I don't think anybody, really, this is World War II. It's the national survival, you had no, this is the way you had to do it, that's it. There was no ifs, ands, or buts. The only thing I remember, like I mentioned, before, was some people bought black market gas from a gas station up somewhere in Newark. You could get it for fifty cents a gallon, provided you brought your own container.

SI: Was that a big topic of discussion or were there news stories about black marketers?

HR: No, I don't remember that much about it. It was there, there were articles in the newspapers where guys were caught selling black market stuff, yeah, but I didn't pay much attention to it. It wasn't an item for me.

SH: If we're finished there, let us talk about how you went on to Rutgers. Did you visit campus? Why did you choose Rutgers?

HR: Went down to see a college in Virginia and I didn't like the looks of it, you know, Virginia, which is now Virginia Tech, as you know it. It didn't appeal to me and Rutgers says, well, they didn't have any mid-year openings. The only thing you could do is go in September of 1946, so I just took a part time job then, and I don't know, I worked for a delivery service then, and worked at my father's hotel, just biding time. Then I worked for a coffee, selling coffee door to door, which I did after college, too, part time. I was doing that occasionally, just to make money. I'll go to part time jobs in college later. But I did that part time, and that's what I did. Then I went to college and I went to Rutgers and they had a something, you took a test for the College of Agriculture, because the tuition was lower, like seven dollars a credit hour, if you passed it and I took it, me and another fellow took it, Rudy Barens, who is still alive, and he graduated same thing I did. It was seven dollars a credit hour. You lived a couple of years in the college dorm and a couple of years on the college farms. I went back and forth there.

SH: When was your first visit to Rutgers? When you came to register?

HR: I think I went down there in the spring of 1946. I remember going there and going to the College of Agriculture on the other side of town. I do remember that, but I don't remember too much about it. I remember getting the applications and filling them out.

SH: Do you remember who you talked to there?

HR: Oh, there was a nice guy there, Dr. Hulyer was there but he was a tough cookie, I never got involved with him. There's another fellow there, I cannot think of his name. He was like his assistant, he was a nice guy. I don't remember his name. If I heard it, I would remember it, but I just can't. He was his assistant; he was assistant dean of the College of Agriculture. Can't think of his name.

SH: Where were you housed then that fall when you went there?

HR: Raritan Arsenal was the first year. Did you ever hear that one? Okay, that was the first year.

SH: What were the accommodations like? Can you describe it?

HR: Like the Army. They had a study room and just barracks. Then there was that year and I spent one year on the college farm after that. I can't remember much about the living there, and then the last, junior and senior year, I was able to get into the dormitory there. I forgot the name of that, too, but it was on the, it's still there; it's in back of what the cafeteria is, by the library.

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

SI: Hegeman and ...

HR: It could be one of those, I'm not sure. I know it was in the Quad, because it was like this, four sides to it. Two roommates.

SH: When you were at Raritan did you have roommates and how did you get back and forth from campus?

HR: It was just Army style. I had a car, I was one of the few people who had a car. I made good money in 1945 down in Ocean Grove. We made pretty good money. I mean, in those days I made a thousand dollars a season. Now, let me tell you, in those days that was very big money, and, you know, it's all tips, you had no tax. So I came home and I bought a car for three hundred dollars. Not three hundred dollars, it cost me with everything altogether I paid less than that, it was a 1927 Studebaker, older than me. Yes, it ran. It ran all right, I got away with it. I kept it for three years.

SH: Did you find a lot of people needed rides?

HR: Yeah, sure, I ran around with that thing pretty good. It was terrible on gas and oil, but I made a go of it. It was a huge car. It had a six cylinder engine like this. Just imagine the size, it was a huge engine.

SH: Tell us what it was like as a freshman. What were some of the activities and what you did at Rutgers as a freshman?

HR: I think I worked with the freshman soccer team as a goalie for a while, but that didn't pan out. I wasn't that good with it, to be honest with you. But then I started on the rifle team, you know, Rutgers had a rifle team and that was the beginning of the rifle team, either in my freshman or sophomore year.

SH: You were in mandatory ROTC at that point?

HR: Yeah, two years. I stayed on, but that's all, I'll get into that later.

SH: The ROTC ...

HR: That was just Army, that's strictly Army, with little brown uniforms, you know.

SH: At the Raritan Arsenal you were with veterans and other eighteen year olds like yourself, what were some of the stories that you remember?

HR: Mostly, a lot of veterans. No, everybody got along pretty good there. I don't remember anything special. A lot of the older guys, there were some private rooms there and the older veterans they just took them, by force and violence, the rest of us just stayed in the main

barracks. But they had a study room there, too. Most of us did our studying in the library where there was like a study room there, too.

SH: What was your day like, did you start early?

HR: Yeah, I drove or you could take a bus. I didn't take the car all the time, because sometimes the car wasn't working, so, cold weather you had to crank it and I wasn't about to start cranking it. In those days you crank the car when it's cold. Warm weather wasn't too bad, but you would crank it and that's how you would get it going. But I would take the bus and sometimes, they had a bus that ran between the campuses and then most of it was at the, the freshman year most of the stuff was on the main campus and then you could take a bus to the Ag campus.

SH: Was there any initiation for freshmen?

HR: Yeah, there was something. We had to go to what is now the football stadium and they had some kind of initiation thing there. We had speakers, I remember, Einstein spoke at our freshman orientation with the long hair and shaggy clothes and he spoke,

SH: Really?

HR: Yeah, I remember him coming there. That I can remember, 1946.

SH: Before World War II there was a mandatory chapel once every week or a couple weeks, did you have that?

HR: I don't recall that. I don't recall that being mandatory, I remember going, I probably went but I don't remember being mandatory. Mandatory doesn't ring a bell with me, no, I don't recall that. In those days they had a theological school there. One of the fellows that I was friendly with was part of the Dutch Reformed Theological group and he went there. He was taking courses to be a minister. I remember him.

SH: Do you remember his name?

HR: Yeah. You're gonna laugh when I tell you. He was, pronounced "Crist," but it was spelled like Christ. But I guess we always joked about it, that's how I remember it, but I can't think of his first name, though, but he went there. He's nice, he was a little blond haired guy. I remember him. I was very friendly with him.

SH: The other question I have then about your freshman year, did you have to wear a dink or did you do ...

HR: No. The veterans protested it and therefore they dropped the idea. They had those, I understand before that they wore little beanie hats. No, they didn't require it anymore, the veterans resented it. Remember that my class was like seventy percent veterans and were just not about to wear that.

SH: Do you remember any interaction with NJC at that time?

HR: Sure. We had dates going over there, yeah.

SH: Were there social events?

HR: Yes, there were, there were dances over there, dances on the Rutgers side. In those days there was a big sign in the hall, "No female personnel allowed in this building, anytime, anywhere" and there was a proctor, you had proctors in those buildings, and they would enforce it,

SH: Oh, really?

HR: Yeah. You would get thrown out of school for that. If you brought a girl up to a room there, that's it. If they found out, you'd be thrown out of school. I don't remember anybody who broke that rule, either.

SH: Were most of your classes on the Ag campus?

HR: No, most of them were in the general campus, most of them, not all. But gradually, they went back and forth, but I would say two-thirds, depending on the type you took. I'd say two-thirds on the main campus, one third on the Ag campus.

SH: What about the summer after your freshman year?

HR: Down the Shore, back to Ocean Grove, North End Hotel, that year. North End Hotel, that was between freshman and sophomore, yes.

SH: Did any of your classmates go with you?

HR: Yeah, there were a couple of fellows there that worked with me, but not that year. That year was more on my own. I don't remember anybody from Rutgers that year coming down. At that time we worked a little up here, a little up there. They already hired somebody, they sent me over to the North End, and I worked at the North End Hotel. They were hotels right next to each other. By the way, they're both gone. One is now a condo set up, they completely rebuilt it, front to back, and the other one is demolished, completely gone.

SH: Coming back then to Rutgers as a sophomore, did anything change now, because there was an even bigger influx of veterans?

HR: No. It was just going on again, you know, doing the same thing. I was part of the Alpha Phi Omega, are you familiar with that service fraternity? Not really a fraternity, like a service group. We had different things in the community. We talked to people in jail, I remember doing that, tried to upgrade them. You had to do certain service things like that. I remember talking to kids who wanted to go to college. This is from that fraternity. They're still there, I'm pretty sure they are. Then I remember going down to Newark Rutgers, and talking to them when it was

Newark College, before it was Rutgers, and telling them that Rutgers was gonna be buying the school. I remember going in and getting involved in that. That's all I can remember, though, I don't remember anything else in the sophomore year.

SH: Why did you choose that organization to be involved with?

HR: I'm not sure, just that other fellows were involved. A couple of fellows talked to me, as a matter-of-fact, one of the fellows who graduated Air Force ROTC. See, I'm starting to remember names now. Martin (Cropninsky?), he was also an Irvington person and he was full time ROTC. He was involved with that fraternity. I think that's where it came about.

SH: The people who were instructing you in the first years of ROTC, had they been involved in World War II?

HR: Oh, all of them. They were all combat veterans. You know, it's funny, I can remember the last two years, it was more intensified than the first two years. I mean, we had one major from the South and there was another captain from the South. I don't remember their names, but the last two years I remember the names, because they were more deeply involved with us.

SH: When did it become Air Force ROTC?

HR: Somewhere between 1949 and 1950.

SH: So actually, it would have been your senior year, did you know it was going to change to Air Force at that point?

HR: We knew at the summer camp, when we went to Stewart Air Force Base for summer camp. That would be 1949. The summer camps, there were two summer camps, one is infantry, at Fort Meade, Maryland, the other one is Air Force at Fort Stewart. We went to Fort Stewart. You had a choice.

SH: How did they determine who would be . . .

HR: They gave you an option.

SH: Did they?

HR: Some wanted to go with the Fort Meade. I mean, somehow it balanced out. They never really said, "You can't go there or you go there."

SH: Why did you decide to go for advanced ROTC?

HR: I liked it, I got along good with the military and I liked the instructor . . . The one instructor was very good with me, and they gave you twenty-seven dollars a month, and it would look like an interesting thing. I can't give you any real basic reasons beyond that. Just that it seemed like an interesting thing to go through.

SH: Now you said you started on the rifle team in your sophomore year.

HR: Sophomore year they had it going.

SH: That was the Queens Riflemen? Is that what it was called?

HR: Exactly right.

SH: Where did you compete and what did you ...

HR: I can remember going to Johns Hopkins University, Princeton, and Rutgers, that's all. I can't remember anything, most of the matches were held locally. They had a rifle team in those years, believe it or not. They had that going.

SH: Was the rifle team marksmanship as well as drill?

HR: No, it was a little bit of both. Eventually, when I left the last year, they were recruiting for the Queens Rifle, you see them now at football games. They were starting to do that. They didn't do it in my time. We fired .22 rifles, fifty yards, twenty-five yards, stuff like that. You know, in the bottom of the gymnasium was the rifle range, the old gymnasium. The old gymnasium had a rifle range down there and that's where you practiced.

SH: Did you wear ear protection?

HR: No, they were .22s, .22 rifles they don't have that kind of bang to 'em. In the first place, they were very short caliber bullets, the .22 shorts. If you fire .22 long, it gets a little noisy but they were shorts in size, almost nothing. They were target.

SH: Have you maintained your interest in marksmanship?

HR: Not in recent years. I still want to get another rifle. I had guns up at the lake. I had, somebody got me a Korean War rifle, it was a carbine. Somebody broke in the lake house and stole them and I had a .22 pump, which I had in the Air Force then, and that was stolen. I had shotgun, a JC Higgins three barrel shotgun that was stolen, all gone. But I still have my revolver from the Air Force downstairs. It's an H&R revolver with sights. It's a sighted gun. It is not fired like you see today, you can't do it. You have to go this way with it.

SH: Really?

HR: Yeah. If you try to do it this way, you can't use the sights, it doesn't, you can't really work it. You learn to do it this way with one eye sighting. I learned how to do that.

SH: Maybe that's what's wrong with my pistol marksmanship.

HR: Well, in those days you didn't fire it this way. You fired it this way. With your left knee you went that way. Its okay you can do it that way, too. But I don't have the rifles anymore. I have the gun, that's all. It's an H&R. It's a good one. But go ahead, with the rifle thing that was it, and then I don't know, in the junior year it kind of, ... for some reason they just did a few local matches. It was kind of fading out, even then.

SH: You had talked about someone that you really liked that was part of your instructors in ROTC.

HR: Yeah, now go to the advanced course. There was a captain, Leonard Frisco. Lenny Frisco was an instructor, he was good. He was a captain, and he, eventually, came into my National Guard Unit later on, maybe five or six years later, and was in the National Guard Unit for three or four years as a full time person.

SH: What about the stories, did any of the returning veterans talk about . . .

HR: Yeah, they probably did. I had a roommate who was named Charles (Kelley?). He fought his way all through the D-Day, Battle of the Bulge, that type of thing. He didn't talk about it too much. He would talk about it, occasionally. He had an interesting time with it. That's all I could tell you about it, but he was my roommate for one year, in the Quad area.

SH: You said after the Quad you were then housed over on the farm?

HR: We spent one year over there and I can't remember too much about that. That's the thing I can't seem to remember.

SH: Do you know what building you were in?

HR: No. I can picture it, but I can't give you a name. It was off the main building there, down aways.

SH: What were your responsibilities there?

HR: Nothing special, that I remember. I remember some of the fellows grading eggs, but we did that as part of our course in poultry husbandry. We graded eggs, stuff like that. I can remember doing that. Those days they graded eggs. They don't do this anymore, you know, that's passé, but they graded eggs. Some of them worked with some of the animals. I don't remember. I just can't put a finger on that one.

SI: Were you part of the co-op group or you were doing work to pay for board, that sort of thing?

HR: I don't remember if I got paid for it or not. I don't recall. One part of it is sort of empty in a way.

SH: What was your major?

HR: Ag, just general agriculture.

SH: General agriculture?

HR: Yeah, general agriculture.

SH: Did you have a minor when you did general Ag?

HR: Yeah, agricultural education. I took some education courses up there.

SH: What did you plan to do?

HR: I had no idea. That was the problem. I figured, you know, in those days there were a lot of jobs with the Department of Agriculture. I did take a test for that and everything. But it had no meaning because I took the test in May, I passed it, and they said they would have vacancies in September. I was already in the Air Force, it was too late.

SH: Where did you go for social activities on campus or off campus?

HR: Oh, you had the student center, like you have today, but it wasn't the same one, it was down farther. The student center had dances. I remember going to the senior proms, junior prom. I remember going to all those things. A lot of my activities revolved around my summer. Summer at the Shore was a very good social life, that's all I could tell you, even though we worked. We had to work seven days a week, you know, there's no such thing as a day off. They told you, "You take the job, you work seven days a week."

SH: Oh, really?

HR: Oh, yeah. They don't know, you take off time during the day, but it was seven days a week. Sure, you're a waiter, you're a bell boy, you got to be on call seven days a week. You're sick, you had to fill in for somebody, or vice versa, but there were no days off.

SH: Where did they house you when you were working at the Shore?

HR: Oh, in a dump. In the La Pierre, we were housed in the cellar. In Ocean Grove, in the cellar. Then I later worked in Belmar and that was way on the top. The hottest place you could ever dream of in the summer, it was in an attic. It was so hot you could weep. That's all I could tell you. The housing wasn't too good, but it was there. You got paid seventy-five dollars a month, plus room and board. However, your tips were the big thing. Your tips could run a hundred dollars a week. In those days that was good money.

SH: Did you bank that money or how did you keep your money?

HR: I don't remember, you know. I just think it was donated for college expenses. It blended into my college expenses a lot, plus, you know, I had a car, which I bought the first year, so I

didn't have too many expenses in those days. Those days auto insurance was like thirty-five dollars a year, plus you kept it going.

SH: Who was your favorite professor?

HR: Keller, he's in economics. I remember him. There are a few others, too, I'm trying to think. ROTC I was friendly with Major Jim Sturgis. He wanted me go in the Air Force. He wanted me to be a pilot, you know. When I took the physical exam for pilot I couldn't pass it. I couldn't touch my right hand to my right shoulder. They bounced me out, when I first went on the ninety day tour, really, because they said, "You can't reach your parachute ring. The parachute ring is here. You're supposed to be able to reach it with both hands." I couldn't reach it with the right hand. So they said, "No, we'll send you to regular school." That's when I wound up going to the Nuclear Weapons School, which was a lot of fun, but that's another story. I want to get to that later. Go ahead. You're just stretching my memory. In college days, you know, what did I do for fun? You know, there was a lot of studying you had to do. Weekends I went home. We had social life at home, too, to some extent, not a lot, but I remember that.

SH: I wondered if you had to help your dad at all during the school year?

HR: Yeah, sure we did. Well, that time they had a hotel and we helped them around with that a lot. But I can't remember specifically. I remember painting the porch and doing painting around, a lot of painting; and stuff like that.

SH: Did you feel that your high school education prepared you to go to Rutgers?

HR: Yeah. I thought it was good. I had no complaints with it. That was okay. I mean, I was no, I was somewhere in the middle of the graduating class, if you know what I mean, not high, not low, somewhere in the middle at best, maybe even lower than the middle, but that's it. I mean, I was no Phi Beta Kappa. My roommate, Bob Norton, was Phi Beta Kappa. He was good, he helped a lot. He was a smart guy. He was a veteran. He was smart. He was okay. Fire away; you're helping me stretch my memory. Nobody has ever asked me these questions in years.

SH: Did you have any interaction with any of the administration on Rutgers campus?

HR: I was friendly with one of the deans. What the heck was his name? He's got, a very famous dean, I can't think of his name, they have a campus named after him, or something named after him.

SI: Metzger?

HR: No.

SI: Silvers?

HR: No.

SI: Marvin?

HR: Tall guy, I can't think of his name.

SI: Crosby?

HR: No. Crosby, I remembered him but he wasn't, if I heard that name. He was like arts.

SH: Mason Gross?

HR: Mason Gross, that's the one, yeah. He was friendly. Mason Gross, he was a lot of help to others. Yeah, you had your problems from time to time, you know. He was good. He was like Dean of Students I think, something in that role, because in those days you never saw the college president. I've gone to a few alumni things and I've met Dr. Francis [former president of Rutgers]. He is very personable. As a matter-of-fact, there is something up here in Morris County a month ago and I'm very friendly with one of the guys on the board of directors. I think his name is (Keller?). He's on your board of directors at Rutgers or Board of Governors; I don't know what they call it.

SH: President McCormick, did you have his father for class at all?

HR: No. I don't remember that. I was in the school of agriculture; I don't think he was in that group. A lot of guys took agriculture because they wanted to get a college degree at a very low rate. Remember that that rate was like half what the regular students pay.

SH: We're finding that out as we do our oral histories.

HR: Yeah, from our standpoint that was good.

SI: Was there any sort of ceremony involved when you got your commission?

HR: Yeah, June 3, 1950, we came to the gymnasium. Here's where I'm getting dates, June 3rd, date of our commission, we were sworn in and they had something like a little, I don't want to say a party, no drinking or anything in those days, just like a coffee party afterwards, parents were there. My father came down to it and there was a commissioning service. We had to go in uniform, but we didn't have our bars, and they gave out the bars as part of the ceremony. They put them on for you. Remember this is Army uniform, this is not Air Force. That's how I remember that very well, done in the gymnasium, June 3, 1950.

SH: Did they designate verbally that you, this group of men are Air Force?

HR: No, we are Army. Army assigned to the Army Air Force, that was a branch. Just like you had branch of the engineers. In Rutgers ROTC had engineers, infantry, Air Force, that's how it broke down. Engineers were the guys who took engineering. You had to be an engineering major to do engineers. Infantry, anything, Air Force almost anything.

SH: Do you remember who was ahead of your group when you were going through the ROTC, the company?

HR: You mean the commander of the ROTC unit?

SH: The student leaders.

HR: No. Yeah, Jim (Schmitt?). He was a veteran. He was like the, one of the head guys. He was very active with it. He was a veteran, the Air Force in World War II. He was involved in it. He died a while back. I remember seeing it in the Alumni bulletin. But I remember the guy who was in charge with the name, James Sturgis. He was a major, he was a B-29 pilot in the war, very nice.

SH: When you think of Rutgers now, what is your most vivid memory of Rutgers?

HR: Oh, it's too many things. Football games, dances, school, the ROTC, ROTC summer camp, things like that, you know, looking for a job afterwards, which never materialized, stuff like that, just social events. The car, everybody loved my car, because it was a monster, you couldn't miss it.

SH: What color was it?

HR: It was, you're gonna laugh, it was gray with chartreuse wheels. It had those huge disc wheels in those days, little tires, huge disc wheels, and I painted them chartreuse, gray.

SH: Did it have a name?

HR: No, no particular name. It was a very primitive car, very primitive car.

SH: Was there one classmate that was, you know, like your best buddy that you would hang around with the most?

HR: No, not particularly. My couple of roommates was Newton (Godnick?) was one of them. I don't see much of them. (Rudy Barons?), he worked with me one summer down the Shore. A guy named Herman Cook, who I was always friendly with, graduated Irvington High School with me. Both Rudy Barons and Herman graduated high school with me. The guy that just died two months ago was Charles (Bobhurst?), he was an Irvington teacher, guidance counselor, my wife knew him. These guys I knew very well, yeah, and they were friendly. I had to drive home with them. I used to drive them home on weekends because in those days I lived in East Orange, because my family had a hotel in East Orange, also a boarding house.

SH: You were part of a service fraternity but was there any competition that you were aware of between the different fraternities?

HR: No. This one was not a living fraternity. It was more like a service fraternity. They had a meeting room, that's about all, somewhere in the student center in those days.

SH: Were you in any other clubs in ...

HR: I was in an Ag club, a couple of Ag clubs. I think I was in a couple of Ag clubs. There were a couple of other things, too, I just don't remember. I can't be sure. I'm sure that I was, I just don't remember, like I say, doing the things with the Alpha Phi Omega group, going to Newark campus a couple of times, and working with them in setting up a chapter there, when it became Newark Rutgers.

SH: Other than Albert Einstein, do you remember any other speakers?

HR: Yeah, there was a guy, when I graduated the speaker was the Secretary of State. I can't think of his name, got a name like Jeffries or Jeffrey, Secretary ...

SI: Was it Acheson?

HR: No, no. It was a name like Jeffries, he was the speaker. He's one who predicted, almost to the day predicted, the war in Korea. He said, "This country is under a lot of tensions with the war with Russia," you know, something like that. But I don't remember the exact details.

SH: You actually remember something about the graduation speech.

HR: Yeah, I remember him giving a speech. It was the day that was hotter than hell. It was held in the Rutgers stadium, it was hotter than hell. I remember going down there and getting a diploma, going down to the middle of the field.

SH: Did you wear your uniform to get your diploma?

HR: Yes, they wanted us to do it. We did, all of us, that time we were already, remember, June 3rd was the commissioning, June 10th was the graduation. That's the dates.

SH: Take us from there, tell us what you did from that point.

HR: I was going on a ninety day tour. I applied for the job but I took a test for the USDA, which I passed, but they didn't give me a definite start and they said, "We'll let you know, September, October," because I was going on the ninety day tour, so I wouldn't get done until July, August, September, anyhow, so I went on that. That was at McGuire Air Force base. That's where I started in the Air Force, 2nd lieutenant, I was working with the ammunition group.

SH: When did you go into nuclear weapons?

HR: Oh, that's interesting. First, let me tell you, you know ... I got reassignment orders to Ellington Air Force base, that's out of Houston, Texas. From there I ... got working with the ammunition group. Then an opening came up to Nuclear Weapons School. Then I went for it.

Oh, God, that was four or five months and it was held in two places, Fort Sheridan, Illinois and Great Lakes Naval Station. It was a joint service course and the course was everything, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, all taking training on how to handle nuclear weapons. The training, and it was difficult for me, because I'm not an engineer, they thought because I had a BS degree that I would be in tune with that. I was not, and it was hard for me to get through it. I got through it because, you know, they were giving us courses in advanced calculus, you know, and how to calculate, everything to do with radioactivity. Every thing you see in civil defense today, which you don't see too much of, determining radiation of the weapons, how to handle the weapons, how to load them on an aircraft, how to unload them on an aircraft, how to work with a dummy weapons, how to arm and disarm, how to know when the weapon was in trouble. Nuclear weapons in those days could get out of control. They are not like they are today, they're computerized today, there's no problem. You had to know how to handle the weapons and then from there I went to Cheyenne, Wyoming, as part of the group and assigned to that particular group. The same thing, we're working again testing weapons, determining their capability, also working with, you know, conventional ammunition, too. We worked with anything from hundred pound bombs up to two thousand pound bombs and then from there the test site was opened up in Nevada. Now we go down to Las Vegas, but not really in Las Vegas, Nellis Air Force Base, twenty miles out of Las Vegas. From there we went to the test site and that's where they worked with the aircraft. The aircraft was stationed in Nellis so we spent sometime there but we spent a lot of time up in what they called Area 51, that's what it's called today, which is completely concealed, and that's where the nuclear test site was, in Nevada, above ground test site.

SH: Your training, as you went to these different facilities, was it military training or was it civilian?

HR: No, all military. We had a lot of civilians with us. AEC was with us. The Atomic Energy Commission guys were the smart guys. They were PhDs, mostly, and they were trained in Nuclear Physics and they were to handle the problems. If there was a problem developing, they could handle it, and mostly to do with radiation. I got to tell you a story, though, when I went to school, the colonel there said two things to us. He said, "I'll tell you now that if you're handling plutonium, and you're handling a device that looks like it's gonna be radioactive, and you're careless and you make mistakes and you've made a mistake, there are two things you do." He says, "First, you go to church and then go see the funeral director, because you're not gonna last more than two days afterwards." That's what you had to be very careful. You had to know when you had a hot spot, a bomb.

SH: What kind of clearances did you have to have?

HR: I had to get "Top Secret." That's another story. They went to college, they asked the teachers, I had a list of those that I could remember who the teachers were. They wanted to know five prominent teachers that you had. Who was the dean, it was the dean, what's the name again you mentioned, Mason Gross? I had to mention him for certain. Then they also went around into high school, got my high school records. They went in the neighborhood, I lived in East Orange and asked my neighbors if I was Communist. In those days, God forbid if you were a Communist. They wanted to know if I was in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, which was active

in Rutgers in those days, it was a Communist group. No, I wasn't. But I eventually got it. I was cleared to handle "Top secret, eyes only." Do you know what that means, "eyes only"?

SH: No.

HR: That means you're only supposed to handle secret stuff that belongs to you. That doesn't mean you have a right to see other top secret stuff, and that's what they mean by "eyes only", your eyes. I mean, you're not supposed to look at anything that is not your business, if you know what I mean. That was the way they worded it. The school was tough; let me tell you, very interesting. But Fort Sheridan was nice, I was there in the summer, it was pretty good. Then we were up at Great Lakes for a while. Great Lakes was the tougher part of the course. Navy instructors were difficult. Most of them were commanders and up and they were well trained in that business, because in those days they were starting to put nuclear bombs on aircraft carriers, so that was the thinking.

SH: Was there any competition with all the different services together in the same class?

HR: No, they got along pretty good. We all went to the Navy Officers' Club, because it was nice. Fort Sheridan was a dump. But I got to tell you about this parade. You want to hear about the parade? Now we get to July 1952. MacArthur now had left the service, as you know, this whole thing. They had a parade for him at Fort Sheridan, that's where he first went in the Army, and they had a parade that lasted eight hours and they brought everything you could imagine to that parade. It started at nine o'clock in the morning, didn't end until five o'clock in the afternoon. We all had to march in that huge parade honoring General MacArthur. He was there. I can't begin to tell you how big it was, huge parade.

SH: That brings up some questions that we have to ask.

HR: Go ahead, go ahead.

SH: First of all, you talked about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, that there was one at Rutgers.

HR: At Rutgers, yeah. I wasn't part of it. I just knew what it, it was known as a Communist organization, that's all I can remember about it.

SH: But you were aware that it was a Communist organization?

HR: Oh, sure, but I wasn't part of it. Don't go by the fact that it's called Abraham Lincoln. It had nothing to do with him. It's just, was a name they picked up, and it was a Communist group. It admitted it was a Communist organization. In those days you had them. Paul Robeson, remember that? He was big then, he wasn't invited back because he was a Communist.

SH: In the early '50s.

HR: I wasn't there in the early '50s. Maybe I was there in the beginning of 1950, just a minute, I don't want to go back to the '51-'52, I was gone already.

SH: In college, did anyone say other than the man who gave your graduation speech that Korea would be next?

HR: No, he just talked about Russia. I remember him thinking World War III was Russia, more than that, not so much Korea, no, that surprised everybody.

SH: When Franklin Roosevelt died do you remember the reactions to that?

HR: Well, yeah, I was in high school.

SH: What was . . .

HR: Nothing. I remember the teachers coming in and telling us they're gonna have a prayer ceremony in the auditorium at Chancellor Avenue School. This was April, 1945. That's all I can remember, beyond that nothing else.

SH: What was your family's reaction?

HR: They felt sad about it because they liked Roosevelt.

SH: What was their perception of Truman as a president?

HR: I couldn't really answer that. They seemed to accept it; I would just use that word. I wouldn't say excited, just accepted it.

SH: The atomic bomb when it was dropped, you were in high school?

HR: No, I was down the Shore.

SH: You were a high school student.

HR: I was a high school student, yeah.

SH: Did the term "atomic bomb" mean anything to you?

HR: No, it didn't mean a thing to me. We just assumed it was a big bomb and let it go at that. I remember the *New York Times* carried a whole article about it, and we were reading it and I didn't understand too much about it except that it was a nuclear type of device, that would mean shooting an atom into a highly charged uranium chamber and that exploded, that set off the chain reaction. I'm giving you very basic stuff that's what I remember.

SH: You are there as a high school student and, you hear about the atomic bomb, later you are at Rutgers, Albert Einstein speaks at your . . .

HR: He never talked about that. He just talked about . . .

SH: And now you are working with nuclear weapons, did it change your perception, did you look back and say, "Gee, I should have known that?"

HR: Well, they taught me a lot about it. I could tell you that. I understand it. As a matter-of-fact, I was a civil defense director for the town of Irvington for a number of years, based upon that fact, which didn't really apply much to what I did with that. It was just about protective devices. Our job also in nuclear weapons is determining what they call an "evacuation plan for the base," what the base had to do if there was a nuclear [weapon] dropped either in or nearby. These are things I had to teach people at the National Guard. What do you do if a nuclear weapon hits? Somebody had to do it, and explain the problems, and everything else. ... Somebody from the medical group also spoke because there's a medical situation involved with that.

SH: Were you as civil defense director part of the training for the schools and how they should react?

HR: No, I didn't get involved with that. The only thing we did with the schools was we just dropped off the dosimeters and the Geiger counters, and we told the principals how to use it, that's all. That was when I was civil defense director. I'm no longer Air Force then. Just explain to them later on how to use it.

SH: Did you have a bomb shelter?

HR: No, just basements. School basements are a bomb shelter, they're really good. But we also had to determine at the Air Force base, what was a bomb shelter. We had to determine the, remember the expression of hardening, that means how resistant is it to a nuclear bomb. It's called the hardening factor. We had to do a hardening factor from about one to ten.

SH: Were you involved with building any of these?

HR: No, but we could figure it out. I figured it out for the town in Irvington, one of the bank buildings was a hardened shelter, because they had below storage vaults. That's a hardened shelter, that's the word they used. Still use it today. You had to determine on the base's what a hardened shelter is, who would go there, where the aircraft would go, how to decontaminate aircraft, how to load bombs on it. Nuclear bomb is different. You don't load it the same way. I see pictures, now they push the missiles on, you don't do that. You have special controls to handle that, much, much different.

SH: Your training is very specific towards nuclear weapons, what, as things were progressing, if that's the right term, in Korea, what did you think was going to happen?

HR: Oh, that was the very purpose. We were told, one of the purposes of the atomic test was to determine whether Truman could use it in Korea. At the conclusion of the test, I saw a lot of reports that told the President, "You can never use a nuclear weapon in Korea for a lot of reasons." One is it would affect the American troops in the South. It would land in Vladivostok,

Russia. It would overfly Japan. We'd have Japan loaded with gamma radiation, so you couldn't do it. There's no way in the world, the atomic tests showed there was too much uncertainty on the fallout, not so much on the explosion and the heat, but the fallout couldn't be controlled. You'd wind up with World War III with Russia, because Russia, in Vladivostok, there was air currents that would pick right up, that was part of your training, you got a lot of work with the air currents and you knew that the air currents were there. You couldn't do it. The bottom line was in 1952, Truman got a memo, a big memo, the whole report, and it just said, "you cannot use a nuclear weapon there under any circumstances." That's why you didn't do it in Vietnam and a lot of places. One thing is when using nuclear weapons you better be damned sure there are no troops out there or Americans, or anything else, because you're not gonna control it in one given area. It's gonna be all over the place. Not so much, like I say, not the explosions, it's not that, it's the fallout is a big factor. Fallout can go in a radius of a hundred miles or more, depending on the size of the bomb.

SI: Were you taught things like meteorology or did you work with meteorologist?

HR: We had a course in Wyoming on astronomy. We had to take astronomy course, which covered meteorology. The University of Wyoming was teaching that at the base, that was in Cheyenne, in Laramie. They came over there, and they explained, but tilted it towards the, you know, when they called it astronomy, it covered that, but it got involved in things to do with the atmosphere, atmospheric conditions.

SH: One thing I wanted to ask is about the conflict between Truman and MacArthur, as a person in the military, what was your reaction?

HR: I didn't have any reaction, except that MacArthur wanted to use the atomic bomb and we knew he couldn't do it. We knew that if he did, it would cause tremendous problems, from that standpoint he was a fool. Other than that he's okay. He kept telling Truman that you have to use a nuclear weapon, and they couldn't do it, I mean, the test sites showed you couldn't and he says, "Well, it could be controlled, it could be." I don't think it could be controlled. I don't think you can. "Well," he said, "You can put them in artillery shells, you can use what they called mini-weapons." There's nickname for it today they use, but it can't be controlled that well. Nuclear weapons are not, even today, I don't know how much control they have.

SH: Do you think MacArthur had the support of most of the military men?

HR: Probably in Korea, because they wanted to get out of there. But it wouldn't have been the answer. It would have caused severe repercussions. That was one of the big conflicts between the two, because Truman has one report that said, "You can't do it," because of the test site in Nevada, it says we can't do it because you're gonna have all these problems. We had problems in Utah; we had problems in Northern Nevada. We had sheep that were affected, plants were defoliated, and you can't control the radiation, you can't control the fallout. You might control the explosion, but you'll never control the fallout. You got China, China would get a dose to of it, but you want to drop in China. Well, in China you could do it. If you do it in China, you go up to Nanking you can drop it, then China would be devastated, then you'd have another problem, you got problems with Russia. Russia and China had a treaty. So what are you gonna

do, you're gonna drop it in China? Yeah, you won't affect American troops but you're gonna have a lot of problems after that. I mean, you know, I don't know that would end the war, maybe and maybe not.

SH: In your training did you interact with the pilots?

HR: Yes. Oh, yeah. The pilots never liked us because part of the training course was you had to tell the pilots the procedure for dropping a weapon and they had to follow that up. It wasn't a long thing because you didn't tell them how to fly the airplane, but you tell them "when you're dealing with a nuclear weapon there is the procedure," and I didn't do a lot of it because we had some senior officers doing it, but we also worked with charts and we explained them. They showed them flight patterns and everything else. Also, that was the beginning of fighter planes carrying weapons. Now the way a fighter plane drops a weapon is this: They fly along, they come over the target, they go up like this, the bomb is kicked off, and then they go back and the bomb is dropped with a parachute ... During the nuclear test sites, there was bombs detonated five thousand feet, five hundred feet, and right on ground zero, right on the deck. Those are the three types they were doing. So you had to explain to them that procedure, and they didn't like it because it put a tremendous strain on the aircraft. Now B-29 droppings were different. No, I didn't get involved with P-36s in those days, because they were there, they were handled differently. The B-29 had to learn to make a turn. When they dropped it they had to make a fast turn and go up, had would gain altitude fast, because you don't know the effect of the bomb, plus that if they were gonna do a five thousand foot drop, they had to come in low. You can't drop it at high altitude. That's no good. There are too many problems if you go up to thirty thousand, forty thousand feet, and you drop it, there's a lot of problems. You really can't do it. So they had to learn to come in low. The drops in Hiroshima and Nagasaki they were low. Those B-29s came in about fifteen thousand feet and dropped them. Because in those days, the Japanese aircraft were pretty well decimated, so they didn't have any resistance. A lot of them said, "My God, if we came in and they had a good fighter they'd never get there." But they went and they went alone, because they were considered a recon aircraft and the Japanese didn't give a damn about recon. They just want to go after the bomber formations. So they went as a recon, that's what they looked like, except they weren't. They were carrying the bomb. Have you seen pictures of it? It's a big fat thing with all kinds of electrodes on it and those electrodes are the things that set the cyclotron in motion, that sends the atom into the uranium chamber. Now it's plutonium, because enriched uranium, which they now call 'yellow cake,' you've heard that expression, becomes plutonium, and plutonium is dangerous stuff. You get near that, or get the effect of that, you will die of radiation. It's dangerous. It's U-239. In the atomic chart, that's way up.

SH: What kind of protective gear did you wear?

HR: Asbestos suits during the test, that's all. I didn't get involved in the actual stocking of the weapon. That was the AEC. Atomic Energy meeting is like a closed club. They handled the weapons. They do their actual putting together of the bomb.

SH: Did you have to wear any kind of meters or anything?

RH: Dosimeters. You wore a dosimeter here. You know what the dosimeter is? It's a little thing you wear that tells you if you are in danger. There's badges, too. If the badge turns red it means you're overdosed, get out of there. Dosimeter actually gives you a count, and then you hold that up and then, of course, you had the Geiger counters and they come in all kinds. I had a few of them here. I had to turn them back to the town when I was civil defense director. The State wanted them back, so I had to give them back. I had a couple of them here though, just for the fun of it, but I know how to work a Geiger counter. It's nothing too much to it.

SH: In the military then did you have any, what you would consider, close calls or any of your people, or, incidents at all?

HR: We had an airplane catch fire and landed in a hurry. I was picking up stuff from Denver and going up to Cheyenne with it and it caught fire, the engine caught fire, and landed. Not a problem, but it was burning. It wasn't a pleasant experience. It was already, almost there then you'd suddenly caught fire, and they hit it with extinguishers and the engine won't stop but the C-119 can fly on one engine, just landed, that's all. Other than that, no, I was careful. Some guys, who may not have been, there's a lot of rumors around, "Oh, you're gonna get cancer, you're gonna get this and that." I never had that problem, but there were a lot of rumors.

SH: At the time was there that rumor?

HR: No, not that much. In those days they didn't discuss that. They were just told, radiation was your fear, don't get a dose. Whatever you do, don't ever get a dose beyond fifty rontgen. Fifty rontgen starts trouble and you can get radiation sickness, which won't kill you, but you would throw up, you will start to feel sick in general, you'll be fatigued. That's a fifty dose. If you get a two hundred dose, that's when you will be finished. Two hundred rontgen will kill you. What happens then, your blood white cells go to pot. You no longer have a resistance, it's almost like AIDS in its advanced stage, it's a similar type of thing. You have no more body resistance. All your white corpuscles are gone; it destroys also the red ones, too. It destroys your blood and it can go through, gamma radiation can go through your skin, if you get that white dust on you. There was a recent movie out, I can't think of it, it was on television about a month ago, it was a pretty good one, about a bomb that exploded in the football stadium and then they had radiation all over the place and it showed little white spots all in the movie theater. That's what it looks like. You can see gamma radiation, you will see it. It's fine, fine, fine, very light, white powder and it floats in the air. It travels with the wind. That's the problem with it. It goes with the wind and if you get it in the upper atmosphere, forget it. It will travel all over the place.

SI: During the testing portions, I've read about these tests where they would have detonate a bomb and then have a company of troops walk through ...

HR: That's right, the Army did that one. I did not, I was eighteen miles away. We did it with an asbestos suit and what you would call a periscope and they had mirrors. You did not look at a detonation flash. That's the last thing you'd ever see. You have no idea of the brightness. You ever see the sunset on extreme? Well, that's what it looks like but it's much more magnified. It's brilliance, it's a terrible brilliance but then you just don't look at it. Because a lot of

Japanese in Hiroshima looked at it, and that's the last thing they ever saw, a lot of blindness. It blinds your eye, it will destroy your retina. So that's the protection, we've had a special periscope, they had glasses, they had everything, and you wear asbestos, which you don't do anymore because asbestos is dangerous.

SH: Did you fly at all with any of this, you talked about delivering ...

HR: No, just the transport flights, that's all, not a B-29. That B-29 was all handled by pilots and crew. They're the ones that handled it. Even in those days they didn't have much of a crew. There were no gunners on it; there were just the bombardier, the guy who actually handled it, and two pilots, that was all, in the B-29. There was nothing else. There were no navigators, nothing.

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

SI: This continuous an interview with Mr. Herbert L. Ramo in Chatham, New Jersey on July 23, 2003 with Shaun Illingworth and . . .

SH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Please continue. I had asked you if you did any flying with any of the training, any of the bombing?

HR: No. The B-29s that were participating in the tests had two pilots, one bombardier, nothing else because that's a training mission. Remember, this was a training mission for them. They had to learn how to work with a nuclear weapon, It's totally different. Their procedures were different. They also dropped smoke bombs. The first B-29s went over and dropped like a smoke bomb, it would come down, it would hit the ground and smoke would rise up and that would determine the different factors of the bomb when it went off ... they're like smoke trails. It went up in the air. They were dropped and then they had a smoke trail, maybe three miles distance, four miles distance, they dropped another smoke trail and they dropped the thing down and the bomb would go off and the smoke go up and that would determine, for some reason, I don't recall, now, that had something do with the atomic testing. But the main thing was, my job was afterwards, what happens afterwards, we had to go in and test it. We had to test the sand. The sand turned to glass. Oh, yeah, the heat was fierce. ... [That sand turned to glass], you had to carry, in those days you walked in with an asbestos suit, you had a dosimeter, you had a Geiger counter, you carried everything.

SH: How soon did you go in?

HR: How soon? About three days later. It depends on the area. If you go in, to ten miles, that maybe two days afterwards, ground zero maybe six days afterwards. You can go into that after six days. Everything was tested before you went in. You didn't, Army troops went in there, too, with us. They were also, we went there to test. I don't know what the Army, the Army was to determine the physical effects, and I think that was a mistake, and it's been reported already that some of these guys got radiation sickness. They were not properly attired. I don't know why they were sent in there. They had no business going in there.

SH: Now at this point you're still stationed at Cheyenne?

HR: Main base is Cheyenne, detached to Nuclear Testing Squadron in Nellis Air Force Base, which was in Las Vegas, but we were out in the desert.

SH: The weather in the West is extreme.

HR: Oh, it's hot. Oh, don't ask. I am in a tent there and it was so hot. There were no fans, there was nothing. It was hot. It was hot at night, it was hot, it was windy, too. That's another thing, the wind there was awful, even in the summer the wind. That was hot, that's all I can tell you. Oh, God, it was hot.

SH: Did you go through a winter there as well?

HR: No, we were there mostly in the summer, that was '52, we went back again for another set of tests, two times in three months, both summer, '52, '53. But they were testing when I wasn't there, when we went back to the regular base. It was sort of a rotating thing, you know. I wasn't there all the time. I drove down there.

SH: If you're in Cheyenne and then did you go by car?

HR: Car. Yeah, with my car. I drove. I took my car there, you know, you could drive down.

SH: Temporary quarters?

HR: Oh, yeah, tent. Now, we went into Nellis, that was good, and then I also stayed in Las Vegas. I remember the hotel and motels there, five dollars a night. I always tell Diana that, five dollars a night, weekends was ten dollars a night, and I also remember the Golden Nugget, the Station House, and the Frontier, that's all I can remember. I remember the penny slot machines and I remember a lot of servicemen, who were in town then, a lot lot lot. That was a military town practically then ... They tell me that the tests shook Las Vegas.

SH: Really?

HR: Oh, yeah. That's how bad it was. They could tell that we were testing, "Oh, my God, when you're gonna test, everything is shaking here." It would shake the ground. You had a ground zero test, like an earthquake, that seismometers, what am I calling, test the earthquake? Seismographs, they all went off. They went off in Las Vegas; they went off in Los Angeles, San Francisco, everywhere, because it's like an earthquake. They were terrible; the Richter scale is a blast. They were five and six in the Richter scale, that's how strong they were. I can remember that. The people used to complain. We had a lot of complaints. They had a whole Air Force group there, that was handling complaints. Oh, yeah, everything from farmers with pigs got killed, pigs got killed, sheep got killed, or damaged, people had suffered injuries from fallout, fallout injuries. If they were dressed like you and I, you'd have trouble if it gets on your arm, get rashes. The dosimeters.

SH: You said you were a part of two series of tests, what did you do in between these tests?

HR: If I told you, you're gonna laugh. I got stuck running the Officers' Club in Cheyenne, because then the tests were finished, the reports were done, and they said to me, "Well, you got a degree in Agriculture, we need your help." The last guy was going to jail for theft. He was a major, and they said, "How would you like to do this? There's nothing for you to do right now," he says, "We're all finished with the tests, got all the data and it has been reviewed, we don't have any assignment for you. But," he says, "I do have an assignment for you, I want you to run the Officers' Club in Wyoming." I got stuck doing that two times, it's four months, and let me tell you, it's not a pleasant experience. There were a lot of headaches with it. These guys complained about the food, about the booze, drinks, about the parties. I had a group of sergeants that worked there. These are the guys who really ran it, they were full time there. They ran the Officers' Club full time. The only story I can tell, and Diana knows the story, now, we have the summer time when I was there, summer of '53. Guess who comes to visit? President Eisenhower, he goes to fish there, in the Snake River. He comes in there, and he came to the Officers' Club, and he sat down ... Of course, the commanding general was there and he said, "We're gonna have a special dinner for you," you know, "what do you like, lobsters, you want fillet mignon, you want a steak, what would you like?" He says, "What are these," this is Eisenhower, "what are these fellows eating here?" He said, "Well, they're having the regular menu, it's meatloaf." He said, "That's what I want. I want meatloaf. Don't give me a special menu." He told the general, whose name was (Backus?), he said, "General (Backus?), don't give me [a] special menu. I'm here with the boys, remember, I'm here to fish; I'm not here to be treated like a president." Just like that, he said to him, he said "I want the regular menu." "You sure?" "That's what I want. I don't want a steak dinner. I don't want anything fancy. What I want is what they're eating over there. If that's what these captains are eating, that's what I want to eat," and that's what he did. But he went fishing in the Snake River. Now, the interesting thing was up in the Snake River, about three miles up, the Wyoming Fishery were dumping trout in like you wouldn't believe, so he would catch. They were dumping, normally, you dump small trout, you know, they grow bigger. Not then, they got the big ones in, they threw them in the river until he caught one, he couldn't miss. He stood in the river there, I wasn't with him there, but I heard ... he caught plenty of trout, and he loved to go there. I understand he went there years after my time there, he went there fishing. But he was nice to talk to. He was pleasant. Sitting in the enlisted men's mess and everything else there.

SI: So his image wasn't just an image?

HR: No, he was really down to earth person. He was fairly down to earth in those days. I don't think it's like the president today. He had security with him, of course, you know, he had a couple of security guards with him and stuff like that, but that's par for the course.

SH: What kind of communications and things did they bring with the President at that time?

HR: I don't remember much. Just the usual walkie talkies, the big walkie talkies, not like you have today, you know. The base had good security to start with it. You're already ahead of the game. In the Officers' Club, nobody is going to bother you there. There was word out, you know, "don't come over and bother the President when he comes in. Keep your mouth shut and

don't go bothering him with questions or anything else." But he did give a speech there one time. I went to it, just, you know, how are you, everybody's fine, hopes the Korean War will end soon, and stuff like that. I remember that going on. That's about all.

SH: The transition between Eisenhower and Truman, what do you remember about that?

HR: Not too much, just seemed to be alright. I don't remember anything, truthfully, nothing, I just remember it took place, that's all, you know. Truman lost the election, not lost, he left the election, Adlai Stevenson was the a candidate, he lost. I think most of the military service people voted for Eisenhower, the absentee ballots, in those days you could just get an absentee ballot and mail it in because he was a popular figure. But that's all I can remember about it. Nothing beyond that. I don't remember ever seeing Truman, that I can tell you.

SI: You mentioned before how people would complain about the tests.

HR: Oh, yeah. There was a lot of complaints. I mean, I didn't get too much involved in them, but I can remember a pig farmer coming in one time, and he was in a restaurant, he's screaming bloody murder. "They ruined my farm." He said every hog he had was dead, because the hogs don't have the, the sheep had wool and that's a degree of protection from the fallout, but hogs don't have that kind of skin, you know, it landed on them. See, gamma radiation penetrates your skin. If you're fully dressed and you're out in gamma radiation, you wouldn't get affected by it, you got to be fully covered, that means your head, your hands, everything. Just like I'm wearing now, except you need long sleeve shirts, gloves, and have some face mask. If you do that, you're protected from gamma radiation to a great deal. But in those days they didn't have that protection. Nobody knew about it. This is in the formative working stages.

SH: Were you worried at any point that you would be reassigned to Korea or to Japan?

HR: No. We were told we'd never go overseas. He says, "No, we need you for these tests. Don't even think of it." He says, "You'll never get any medals, but," he says, "you will get promotions. You'll get them fine, but you will not get anything else." He says, "You'll have a good menu," and we did, they had good food up there. It was field service food. You think, oh, you know, you're gonna get beans and pork and stuff. No, they had steaks and lamb chops and everything else on that facility, out there in Area 51. They trucked it in by freezer. We had a lot of frozen foods up there. I got pictures of me standing out by a mess tent one time, out there smiling, you know.

SH: Did you have to have your mail censored?

HR: No. No, not at all. We were obligated never to discuss anything. Like I told you, no cameras. Boy, they were hot on that, no movie cameras, no nothing. No regular cameras, no photography whatsoever, zero. They were very strict on that. That was a court-martial offense, if you brought a camera, I don't care if it's in your car, or anywhere else. If you had a camera, you left it back at Nellis or somewhere else.

SH: As a serviceman that is working on top secret, high level, high profile . . .

HR: I wouldn't call it top secret, high level, really; it was just a job, you know, look at it that way. It was top secret because they were afraid, because the Russians already had the bomb, they just didn't want them to get the results. That report was top secret. Today you can get it if you ever wanted it. It has to do with the Area 51 test site. You can get it, but in those days that report was very top secret, because it indicated the results of a nuclear test. I don't know, probably the Russians had the same thing, I think so. No, I didn't see any Russian spies around, you know, there was a rumor around that there was Russians in Las Vegas, but I never saw them.

SH: They didn't ask you if you spoke Russian or anything?

HR: No, what they did, they warned us, right now, don't get involved with prostitutes. They says, "If you got involved with the prostitutes, you're out of the picture fast." Because they just didn't know what would happen with it. "No prostitutes," that's what they said. It sounds funny, but there was a rule on that. It was in writing, and also, we were told you can't go to certain other so-called dude ranches, which were not dude ranches. They were dude ranches without horses; they had girls, but no horses. There was an old joke about that, you know. I don't want to get into too many, otherwise it gets dirty.

SI: What if anybody asked you what you do in the Air Force, you'll have to say ...

HR: Oh, no. You could tell them. You just tell them you're working on area test; you're on the test site at Area 51. I could write home, sure, it was no secret. Everybody in Las Vegas knew what was going on, you could hear it, you could feel it, you knew it, and you had a lot of servicemen in town, too. I mean, in those days the Korean War was on, but nobody was being called into Korea, or anything like that.

SH: Was it a regular MP unit that guarded the base?

HR: Oh, Air Police units. They were well-guarded. That Area 51, you had to have all kinds of identification to get in, not as strict as it was today, in a way, you had to have a card and your card had to match up with the list they had. They had card picture with your, they had two lists. I always remember, they had your picture on a card, it's like you see today, like your driver's license, okay, and they had a copy of it, too, and they had to match that with yours. If you lost that, you were in deep trouble. That's all I could tell you. We're told "never lose it."

SI: You were testing atomic weapons, not hydrogen, that was after?

HR: No. Actually, no hydrogen bombs, but they were developing it then. We knew about it but these were regular atomic bombs, but they were of a much higher kiloton than the ones that they dropped in Hiroshima. They were already a hundred kilotons. That was considered big for its day. It's big today. Drop one in New York City, I can tell you, every house around here might be on fire because of the heat. There's a tremendous heat wave that goes with that. You're talking about three thousand degrees centigrade that travels thirty miles, straight to the atmosphere, hot, burns, would burn anything going through. It gets cooler as it goes along, but, like anything else, it starts out at about three thousand degrees centigrade, very, very hot. That's

what turned the sand to glass. When we're out, there, there's sand, you know. You know what Las Vegas is like, it's sand. All of a sudden, it's no longer sand, it's glass, horrible looking glass. But it's the heat, and it's deep, too, and it also formed a crater, big crater, I mean, you know, you got to think deep.

SH: Were they also testing the test equipment and developing new things at the time?

HR: Nothing biological. No, no, no, nothing like the biological. No biological and no anything of that nature. Nobody thinks there was, no, just strictly radiation. Nothing like germ warfare, never got involved in that. The course covered a little bit of it, but I never got involved in it.

SI: Was there anything else going on in Area 51?

HR: No. Now there is. I don't know what they're doing there now. It's very closed but there's something. They test the aircraft up there, and everything else. No, there was no talk of aliens, either. That's crap. You know what Roswell was? You know what they found? They found years ago, in 1949-1950, they had balloons that shot up images of a people, like a doll about so big, about four or five foot deep, made up of all kinds of instruments. They went up in a balloon and they were testing the atmosphere to see the effects on a human body in an atmosphere. I wasn't involved in it, they just tell me the story, and that in that atmosphere they fell down to the ground and people whoever saw them thought they saw, "My God, look at this. What are they?" They thought they were aliens. It's crap, no aliens there. The only thing they had a Roswell was they had some secret aircraft there. They were developing a wing, an aircraft that looked like a wing. That's why it was highly classified. That's all I heard, I never was there, I can't say. That's all I can tell you.

SH: You had talked about how they had to refit the B-29 that dropped the bombs?

HR: Yes, they had to be refitted.

SH: Were they also testing the different aircraft that they were designing to carry these?

HR: No. They were trying to do something with the B-36. I wasn't familiar with it. That's about it. The B-47 came in later and that aircraft was built to handle a nuclear weapon. B-29s were not. They were not built that way. They had to widen the bomb shaft, that's all I can tell you, and they had to handle it, the mechanism for releasing had to be different, and had to be aneroid. You know what I mean by aneroid? It had to be detonated at an altitude. They tried that when they tried it with parachutes, because it is much more effective if you dropped a nuclear weapon about five hundred feet up, it goes like this, it covers an area, you know what I mean? If you covered it, way up, it will cause a lot of fallout, it would go that way. You hit it at ground zero, demolish everything on the ground.

SH: Were there any reports that were used that, had been done about the strategic bombing in World War II that affected any of this? Was there any information to collate?

HR: No, this was strictly a nuclear test. There was no dropping of conventional weapons at all, nothing. Nothing to do with World War II. It's totally a different thinking. The thinking was, "What happens when a nuclear bomb drops? What has to be done to safeguard personnel, aircraft, property, mostly personnel? What do people have to do? How do they dress?" Teach people how to dress in case of a nuclear attack; they had to carry certain things with them, the basic.

SH: The person writing the report then was actually the Atomic Energy Commission?

HR: With the information we gave them. They actually prepared it. Well, I wouldn't say that, I think the Air Force really prepared it, with them working on it, because there was a lot of nuclear physics involved in it and that sort of thing. But they simplified it, in the end, because you got to give it to the President, you had to give it to Congress.

SH: Now, were these same people part of your Officers' Club crew? Where they ...

HR: We had congressmen come and visit us, we had senators come in. I can remember Dirksen coming in. I don't remember the other ones, some others came in, too.

SH: Senator Dirksen from Illinois?

HR: Dirksen, yeah, that's what I think he was. I remember him coming in. There were others, too. I didn't get involved in that. The only way I'd see them is when I had the Officers' Club they'd come in there and eat by themselves there. That was about it. They stayed pretty much by themselves.

SH: So, too, did the Atomic Energy Commission people?

HR: They had their own quarters. They were mostly PhDs who were draft exempt. I always remember that. They were draft exempt. These are guys, you know, these guys were nuclear physicists. I mean, they ...

SH: Now did they eat in the ...

HR: Yeah, they ate in the Officers' Club, too. It was a headache, you know. They were fussy eaters, too. I mean, you know, always hard, you know. The sergeants were good with them. They worked pretty good; it was a big club there. This is not a small operation. I mean, they serve two or three hundred meals, maybe more sometimes. It was a big, big dining room there. They had private rooms in it, too, where you weren't allowed in. In case the commanding officer wanted, the General, Backes, wanted to have a discussion with people; they had private rooms that you couldn't get in. They were lock and key.

SH: So General Backes was there the whole time, in command, when you were there?

HR: Yeah, also in Wyoming, too. He traveled with the group.

SI: How well did your training fit with what you actually did?

HR: Pretty good. That was good; I made the best of it.

SI: There wasn't anything 'on the job' type stuff?

HR: Oh, yeah, well, you had to, go as you go along, some of the job in Wyoming, yeah. There was practice, stuff there you had to practice doing, you know, you had to practice doing charts, fallout charts. They had you to go before troops and explain what to do in case of a nuclear attack, evacuation, protection, aircraft protection, how to protect the ammunition dumps, everything, you had to protect everything. There had to be a plan involved. You know, don't laugh, one day I had to do a plan for, in civil defense, I had to do a plan for the evacuation of Irvington in case of a nuclear attack. They required, the State Police required it. I did that one time, a long, long time ago.

SH: The logistics for something like that is mind-boggling, I think.

HR: Ah, you follow a procedure, like anything else, you follow it. That's the military, they do everything by procedure.

SH: You were so focused on this one specific test site and all of this, what were you hearing of what was going on in Korea?

HR: Just the reports in the newspaper. We didn't pay a lot of attention to it. We were just hoping the war would end, you know.

SH: Was there any concern that it would go on, that it would escalate?

HR: No. No, they're hoping it would end, that's all, you know, and our concern was that they never take into consideration using a nuclear weapon, because we knew the devastation that would result, as we still know today. I don't have to tell you that, you still see parts of it. That's why today you never hear a consideration, in modern times in the '60s, and '70s, and '80s, of using a nuclear weapon. You just didn't consider that, because you don't know the devastation it would wrought.

SH: As we're sitting here the news reports are filled with the stories of North Korea and their nuclear capabilities.

HR: Oh, they can do it. They can do it. I don't think they have got a hydrogen bomb. That gets more involved, but I think they have the capacity to do it. I don't doubt it. They got the tubes already to chart it, you know, they need those aluminum tubes, you need enriched uranium, and then you need the technology to do it, and how to work the electric charges, the cyclotron, and set it up. Once you get it set up, you don't know if it's gonna work. You know, when they did Hiroshima they didn't know if they're gonna work. They weren't sure. The first testing, you know, in New Mexico, they had no idea it was gonna work. They had no idea what's gonna happen. They just knew that this was theoretically possible, you could have it. You could

actually see it happen. You knew it could happen, but you didn't know that it would happen. That's the only way I could explain it. You just didn't know, you just didn't know. When they dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima they kept their fingers crossed it would go. They had no idea what devastation would result, maybe a little, maybe it would ruin all Japan, you didn't know, had no idea. They had no idea of the results. The Alamogordo test in New Mexico did not give you that good a result. It was a small one. That was a five kiloton, that's small, big in size but small in blast, because they were using enriched uranium. They hadn't developed the procedure yet for plutonium. So it was different.

SH: Ironically, you're sitting here in fifty years later ...

HR: Yeah, fifty some years later, isn't that a long time, my God.

SH: What are your thoughts on using atomic power?

HR: Only under special circumstances.

SH: Not the bombing but to use it for generating ...

HR: Well, that's different. Nuclear plants are fine. All a plant is, it's a fission, it's an explosion that's controlled. That's what a nuclear plant is.

SH: So you're not afraid of ...

HR: No. If it's controlled right, it's great. That's the power it's gonna be a hundred years from now. They're not gonna use coal or oil. I think they're gonna go away from that. Like at Chernobyl, what happened was there, it fell down. There was a collapse, and everything came out. That's what you got to be careful of, you know, because then your fallout comes out and it came out like there's no tomorrow. That fallout and I think it contaminated the whole area, killed people. But if you contain it, it's a controlled explosion, it's being controlled. When being controlled, it generates a tremendous amount of heat. What happens to the heat? You put it in a power plant. What does coal do? It generates heat. What does gas do? It generates heat, and that heat can turn turbines and that gives you electricity, there is no waterfall.

SH: What about disposing of the nuclear waste?

HR: That's the problem. Probably dump it in the ocean. That's always the problem. There's no better answer to it. Nuclear waste is not highly radioactive, but it is to some extent. You have to seal it in lead containers and drop it in the middle of the ocean. Unless you got a better idea, I don't know where to put.

SH: Do you know what happened, from your testing, what they did with that?

HR: Sure, there was. Well, there was no really waste, you had to collect samples and they were hot. They were put into lead containers and shipped to Colorado. I don't know exactly where, somewhere outside of Denver, there was a plant that they put them to, I remember that. I don't

know where it went but they sealed them in lead containers. We couldn't go near it if it was hot. That's where you had to be careful. See, we'd come in with those senators with Geiger counters and all those different instruments. There's another name for them, too, and that would be tested to see what the rontgen count is and based on that that's the way we'll handle it. Remember, radiation dissipates. You know that. You have heard of half-life, that half-life keeps going half, half, half, half, half. Eventually the test site there would be neutralized. There'd be nothing harmful. I mean, if you went where they dropped, ground zero, now, there ain't nothing there, just burnt glass. That's why they don't want anybody there. They don't want people wandering around there. That's why when they did those tests they sealed that area off forever. They're never gonna go back in there because they don't want people roaming around there. Not that it's hot, but they just don't want it. They're afraid of the reaction people might have, you know, people, curiosity seekers, whatever, that's why that's a big area that's closed off. My son went up there two or three years ago and they told him to get lost, get out, it was guarded. I told him, "You'll never get in there." As a matter-of-fact, he got a T-shirt there. They were selling them in that area.

SH: As a young man coming out of Rutgers, a 2nd lieutenant, you had not done much traveling before ...

HR: No, not much at all. No, that was my first trip to anywhere, really.

SH: What did you think? What was your perception of the South?

HR: It was segregated. That was my first problem. Oh, yeah, I got down to Texas and, you know, you just didn't do it, you didn't go certain places. I stopped on my way going down to Texas at a place, and I went to a lot a diner, thought I'd go to the bathroom, and he says, "No, you can't come in here, boy," He's black, it's a black diner. "You can't come in here, boy, don't come in here." I just kept going, that's all. Same way with the gas stations, you know, signs: "Colored only." Now in Wyoming, I could tell you a story about that. This is now 1952. There was black and white sergeants' clubs. The Air Force said, "No more, you can't have it." But the black, the white club didn't care, but the black club got upset about it because they called, you know, it was called "The Negro Sergeants' Club" and they wanted to keep it something like that, and the base commander said, "Well," he says, "look, you got to change the name. I can't use the word Negro Sergeants' Club anymore, those words are gone." So they called it, "The Black Aces." They had a big card of the black ace and that was considered it and they had to have an open night, "one night open to everybody, and I expect to see white people in there," and they had a Friday night, I guess you call it soul food, they called it 'fish fries,' and on Friday night they had it open. But there was segregation in the South, when I was in Texas, and in Wyoming, too, segregation down there, and there was segregation with Indians. You'd see signs, "No Colored, no Indians" You probably know that from Wyoming. I don't know if you were that far back, but I remember that. In those days there was a sign in the liquor store, "We do not sell to Indians." No firewater to Indians. I can remember that, it was very strange. I don't know if you remember that or not as in your time or not, do you remember that? They wouldn't sell to Indians. Indians were prohibited from buying liquor. That I remember. But that's what I remember about segregation.

SH: What else do you remember?

HR: Now, I have National Guards stories, too.

SH: Please continue ...

HR: Now I leave the Air Force in 1953, okay, I am no longer, what happened was my time is up and I don't want to be a career type. It was too much pressure, on the go all the time. Now I come back to civilian life and then when I come home, I was home about a month, I got a letter from New Jersey Air National Guard, reminding me that my commission was in the Air National Guard, and that they would need people with my training, nuclear training, go see General Donald Straight and I had an appointment with him in February, right after that.

SH: Where did you report to?

HR: Newark Airport. They were there and then I went to see him there and he really needed somebody with that background. So that's where I was and I spent ten years in the National Guard. I went to summer camp all the time. Summer camp was in Cape Cod, Syracuse, but mostly Cape Cod, and then, eventually, to Georgia, where I had segregation problems there. This is 1961, no, 1960.

SH: Can you tell us about it?

HR: Yeah. Well, we had a lot of black servicemen in there. They're from New Jersey, we don't have segregation. You go down to Savannah, Georgia, everything is segregated. They complain, so they had a big swimming pool on the base, remember this is a state institution. Now the State of Georgia runs the base in Savannah, Georgia, and the State has a sign, "There's no negro personnel permitted in the pool." General Straight gets wind of it, and I don't know why he got hold of me, because he knew I had, in those days the ammunition group had a lot of colored guys, because there's a lot of heavy work, I'd like to say, but they had a lot of colored fellows in it. They were good. They were workers and they were great and he says, "I want two of your big black fellows to come with me and tell them to come in a bathing suit, no uniform." I say, "What are you telling me?" He says, "We're going in that pool." He says, "The State of Georgia is not going to tell me that I can't use that pool," and he took these two guys, arm-in-arm, like this and I watched them and they had, you know, guards there at the pool and he's walking in his uniform, these guys are walking in their bathing suits, and he went up to them and he says, "I'm using this pool." He says, "I'm General Donald Straight from the New Jersey Air National Guard and we are in charge of this base right now. I am the senior officer here. We are using the pool." You know, they let him go. They didn't make an issue of it and, after that, they let them use the pool. Incidents that I remember, I will always remember that.

SH: What was the position of the Guard after Korea?

HR: Well, the Guard went off active duty in 1953-1954 area and they were in Newark Airport for two years. We were flying F-51s, P-51 Mustangs, propellers. Air Force has propellers and they're obsolete, you got to use jets. Newark Airport says, "We can't allow jet fighters to

intermingle with our commercial aircraft, you have to go,” had to get out. Okay, we go. We go to McGuire Air Force Base. About 1955 or 1956 we’re at McGuire Air Force Base and we have jets with the jet squadron, and we stayed there till 1960. Two squadrons went there from Newark. Okay, two squadrons at McGuire were crowding the facilities. One squadron now goes to Atlantic City. The Navy had a base there they closed after World War II. We now go to Atlantic City, this is 1960. We now go to Atlantic City in the Fighter Squadron, the 119, takes over Atlantic City. This is the same squadron you hear now over New York City. They changed the name. 119th now goes there, and I go to Atlantic City, because this one squadron has a nuclear capability. This one McGuire does not, this one is strictly conventional, this one is nuclear.

SH: The one in Atlantic City is nuclear?

HR: The one in Atlantic City was, we never had nuclear bombs, we only had practice stuff there. They never had anything armed. So we go there and 1961 comes: Berlin [Crisis], Cuban Missile Crisis, we now got called back to active duty. This squadron, here and McGuire, now gets orders to go to France. That’s our assignment in case of war. This one goes to France. We’re supposed to follow them, we don’t. Two reasons: French come back and said, “Wait a minute, we don’t want, two things, we don’t have room for you and we don’t want a nuclear squadron in France. We don’t have that in France. We don’t want an American squadron because we’re afraid. We don’t want any problems with Russia, so therefore, you stay in Atlantic City.” So now I stay in Atlantic City for a year. Okay, this is 1962, we stayed in Atlantic City. There are no casinos then or anything else. It was pretty desolate and dumpy, but we had to stay there and they still practice this system of throwing up a nuclear bomb up in the air. They practiced that, but they were dummies. They were just dummies. They were exactly the same, they looked the same, they had the same weight, they have the same physical properties, except they are dead. They called them ‘inert’. So I had to work with conventional stuff there, too, for a while and I also got stuck with the Officers’ Club there, too, but that’s another story, part time. But anyhow, I was working with the food end of it there. So now that goes out. Now we get to 1963, ‘til we come back off active duty, 1963 comes about, what happens is this, the fighter squadron is no longer used. They’re now a transport squadron, they’re now C-5s, no, in those days it was C-130s, C130As, they no longer need me. They say, “We can’t use you.” They kept calling me and they were nice about it, says, “We can’t use you anymore. You’re nuclear, we have no use for you, these transports don’t carry nuclear stuff. That whole situation is phased out. The nearest nuclear squadron is in Reading, Pennsylvania and we don’t know if they have a vacancy.” So I then switched to the inactive reserve, now I’m out, and that’s it, that’s the end. That’s where it ends.

SH: What did you know about the Cuban Missile Crisis?

HR: Oh, you know, we’re still in active service, but we’re in Atlantic City. I can tell you this, a lot of aircraft came in, something we never had at Atlantic City. We have only fighter planes there, now, all of a sudden, we’re starting to get in some big stuff, the B-52s are there. We’d never had a B-52 in Atlantic City and it was quite interesting to see in there, and now we start to have other troop transports came in. We started having C-130s ...

SH: The runways could accommodate it?

HR: Yeah, it could. It was a long runway. It still can accommodate them today. Atlantic City accommodates that today. They can accommodate big aircraft, they can probably, 737, 707s or anything like that, they can accommodate it. They don't because they don't have a need for it, not now, but in those days they could accommodate it, yeah.

SH: Did you realize how close we were ...

HR: Oh, yeah, they armed nuclear weapons down there.

SH: Did they?

HR: Oh, sure, they were armed. I mean, to put a nuclear weapon and arm it is quite a procedure. It's not simple. You had a set of keys, which are punched into the computer, in those days they called it a computer, it really wasn't. It was like an IBM machine, and there are cards and then once that sets it up, it now sets the situation up that the pilot, if he's given the right command, and he doesn't know it when he takes off, he has no idea, there's a series of things that he can punch in, this is before computers, they had to punch it in, and that sets off, that means the nuclear weapon is armed, and it can be dropped. But the thinking wasn't as much to use nuclear in Cuba, because of the problems, but they could have, they were armed to go. The reason was to devastate Cuba with regular bombs. If that didn't work then we would go nuclear.

SH: So was the other squadron ready to go and they were on alert?

HR: Oh, ours was ready, but I don't think our squadron would ever get down to there, because they had enough down there, right now. But we had a lot of stuff, there was a lot of stuff coming in and going out, that's with the big thing. It was like a stopover place. We had all of, no, it was B-52s mostly, that came in. That's what we had on those days, mostly B-52s, some B-47s were still around, and then we had the F-104s, which were armed with nuclear capable, too, they came in, because they wanted them to go up the ocean. Most of them were down at Homestead Air Force Base, that was their stopover, next to us, going to Homestead.

SH: What about the Berlin airdrop and all of that?

HR: Not involved, that's 1947.

SH: I don't mean the airdrop, what do they call it?

SI: Berlin Crisis.

SH: Right.

HR: That was part of it. That's why we're called. It started out with the Berlin Crisis but then transferred to the Cuban Missile Crisis, too. So we're there with both of them, but our squadron didn't get involved in that, except that they had the nuclear capability. But that was when they

started to think that these fighter squadrons don't need this nuclear capability anymore because now the missiles are coming into being. Now you're getting into the '60s and missiles are starting, which was a much better way to deliver the weapon, really. I mean, today you have planes that can drop the nuclear weapon but it's not the thought. Today, it's missiles.

SH: They weren't building any of the silos or anything like that at Warren Air Force Base when you were there or was there talk of it?

HR: There was talk of it, yeah. They were doing a lot of building out there. I had an idea it was for nuclear, but we didn't know what they were doing there. But there was an area out there they were building like mad. It was outside the base, west, going to the Rocky Mountains there. I remember that being dug up. There were these front end trucks going out there constantly digging, digging, and digging. That I do remember.

SH: I know it started early ...

HR: Yeah, it started then. It was in the '50s, yeah.

SH: One other question that I have is, what were you doing as a civilian during the time that you were also involved with the National Guard? You said you went every summer ...

HR: I was with my brother in the dry cleaning business, really. Then when I left that, in 1970s, I then worked for the town of Irvington as an economic development planner, and running the Chamber of Commerce, which I still do today, the Chamber of Commerce. I retired from the town.

SH: So working for your brother, he'd let you have the summer's off?

HR: Oh, sure, not summer, just two weeks. It wasn't a summer. But then we had to go down on weekends, too, we had weekends, too, constant weekends, one or two weekends a month, and the summer's two weeks, that's when I went to Georgia. I went to Cape Cod. That was great up at Cape Cod. That was a great summertime, to go there.

SH: One question that we always ask is how did you meet your wife?

HR: I'm home now, I'm National Guard. The commanding officer was a Major Ross and he introduced me to Diana, going to a dinner, and that's how.

SH: Had you known her before?

HR: No, we both went to Irvington High School. Diana, you don't remember me in Irvington High School, right? Diana?

Diana Ramo: What?

HR: You don't remember me at Irvington High School, right?

DR: Not at all.

HR: Not at all, see? This was afterwards. This is, already I'm out of the Air Force.

SH: When you were doing the civil defense plan for Irvington and things like that, who were you working with? Was there any military arm with this, at all?

HR: State Police gave me a, the State Police sends into the mayor's office that, this is now in the 1970s, maybe even 1980, the State Police now require in case of a nuclear attack, every town should have an evacuation plan. He had no idea how to do it, so I knew how to do it, because it wasn't that hard to do. Basically, we had everybody going up on Route 80 to the Poconos, but you had to set up a procedure plan on how to go. What sections of town would go first, how it would be handled, and everything else. It was easy to do for me, because the town is easy to evacuate. But, you know, you would have to use busses for transportation, and everything else, and the roads would be cleared. I don't think it would really work, but you had to do it anyhow.

SH: Was there any talk of constructing additional roads or anything to help?

HR: No. It was just a, it was a time gated plan. One section would leave at a certain time, next section, next section, next section of town would go, and they had to be deployed to a certain area up in Pennsylvania.

SH: Okay.

HR: We had to get Pennsylvania's approval for it. It's very hypothetical. Don't think it would work I had my severe doubts. I'm gonna wash up a minute in the boys room, take a break.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We're just going to ask you to tell us if there's anything we forgot to ask you?

HR: Well, no. I was on the Board of Education in Irvington for seventeen years as a president, vice president, and part of the state association.

SH: How did you like serving?

HR: Did I like it? Yeah, very much, it was okay, it had its tough moments, too.

SH: What made you run for ...

HR: I heard that it's an experience that everybody should have, is to run on a public board, whether it be council, mayor, or board of education. It was just an experience. I was on it for seventeen years, so that was a long time, been elected five times.

SH: What are you most proud of?

HR: Bringing ROTC into the school, Junior ROTC into the high school, is one of the things. Other things, too, with setting up an alternative school, things like that. Did some other things, too, but I don't remember exactly. But bringing some other programs into the school's system because Irvington is an urban board school system.

SI: What was the seventeen year span, was in the '60s or '70s?

HR: 1973 to 1990.

SI: When you brought in the Junior ROTC was there any opposition to it?

HR: Oh, yes, some board members thought we were war mongers, but the board passed it, majority vote. I tried to get Air Force ROTC and they wouldn't do it because they said you had to be a technical high school to get Air Force ROTC. So we got Army ROTC in, and I remember calling down to Washington one time, when I was down there, to see if we couldn't move it along, time into the Army. We got that in.

SH: Are you're still involved in any veterans' organizations?

HR: Yeah, I'm a member of the American Legion, Post 43; it's a Chatham-Florhan Park-Madison group, still active with that. That's about it. They do a good job. They got three hundred members and they raise a lot of money, they ran a bar and they raise a lot of money, and they donate it all to various civic associations. It's a non-profit group. Nobody is salaried. They do a lot of volunteer work, and the best of it is they raise money, and all the money they raise, in the bar and other things, all goes to different local organizations.

SH: Now as a school board member in Irvington, did you live in Irvington?

HR: I lived in Irvington up to 1996, then I moved here, seven years.

SH: Okay, so why did you move to Chatham?

HR: The neighborhood was getting rough, to be honest with you, and I just felt that, you know, when you retire, you ought to move. The stupid people retire and live in the same house. I don't believe I want to do that. That goes for you guys, too. If you live in a house a long time that's fine, but when you retire go somewhere, go to Florida, go anywhere you want to go.

SH: Did you ever think of going to Florida?

HR: No, not to Florida.

SH: You're still working?

HR: Yeah, still work part time for the Chamber of Commerce and the Irvington downtown district. I work just part time, that's enough.

SH: What is your role in the Chamber of Commerce?

HR: I work as a manager of the Irvington Chamber, and the downtown special improvement as an advisor, and worked with some of the merchant groups. It's a downtown management group, like you have in many towns in New Jersey. They have special improvement districts and Irvington is one of them. I work with that.

SH: So do you work with any kind of grant fundings and things like that?

HR: The special improvement district works with grant funds, absolutely. They get Urban Enterprise money. That's a good sized budget, it's a million dollar budget to run that thing.

SH: When you ran for the school board, did you have to pick a political party?

HR: No, no. School boards are non-political. You cannot in anyway mention it. The State has a ruling on that. It's very firm. It says you must run in a non-partisan capacity. They can get very touchy. Sometimes you can mention that you were part of a Democrat or Republican organization, but you have got to be very careful of it, don't tie in with it too much, otherwise you can come in as a, you know, political candidate and you don't want to do that. It's not a good idea to be.

SH: We know because you've been so gracious and had us for lunch that you have a son, where did he go to school?

HR: No, he went to Montclair State for a year and half and decided it wasn't for him. He works in an import export company as a traffic manager, and he's happy doing that ... See, I, and Diana, both went to college, she has advanced degrees, but he just works like that. My father and mother never went to college, never even came close. They both went to school in Europe, which was very minimal, that's what it amounted to.

SH: So what is your passion? What keeps you interested now?

HR: I used to have a hobby with old cars, but I don't practice it too much. I had one car, an '82 Pontiac, I just sold it. It just got to the point where I couldn't keep it up anymore, but I really like to fool around with old cars, but I just don't. I'll fool around with the moderns cars to some extent but that's it. Today they're all computerized; I don't have the equipment to do it. But if you ask me to fix a 1950 car, or '40, I can do it, but I can't with the current ones. Don't ask me to fix your BMW. It's too complicated.

SH: Shaun, do you have anything?

HR: We've covered everything I think pretty good.

SH: I thank you very much for taking time for us and, again, thank you for the hospitality.

SI: Thank you.

HR: Thank you for coming. It was an experience. I say you dragged up memories, see, nobody's has asked me these questions in forty, fifty years. I had no reason to get into it. Once in a while, the American Legion, they'll discuss things but in a very limited capacity. A lot of these guys are really combat veterans; they got better stories than I. I don't have a combat capacity.

SH: One question, I think, I would like to ask before we close, the Vietnam War, you were still involved at that time?

HR: No. I left service, theoretically, I'm a Vietnam Veteran, because I left service in 1963, I fall into that category, but I wasn't involved with it in anyway.

SH: Any thoughts on it?

HR: It was a waste of money, time.

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

HR: Eisenhower said in 1953, "Don't get involved in wars on foreign soil." He said that after the Korean War, and so far, we've never followed it. Those are his words, exactly. He also warned us about the military industrial complex, because they steer us into that sort of thing. That's my opinion.

SH: That's what were asking, then, again, our thanks.

HR: No, it's okay. Great to meet you guys.

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

Reviewed by Kevin Bing 6/18/04

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/14/04

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 7/27/04

Approved by Herbert Ramo 8/2/04