RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE REISCH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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MONROE TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY
MARCH 12, 2007

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Lawrence Reisch on Monday, March 12, 2007 in Monroe Township, New Jersey with …

Elaine Blatt: Elaine Blatt …

SI: and Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Reisch, thank you very much for having us here today.

Lawrence Reisch: Quite welcome.

EB: To begin with, growing up, what was your father's name and what did he do, what was his occupation?

LR: My father's name was Morris C. Reisch. His occupation was, after the war, he served in World War I, he was forced to become a letter carrier, in as much as he suffered from mustard gas in World War I and he had to work outside, not indoors. That's what he did all of his life and he retired from the post office, and after that he went to work for an anthracite corporation, and he retired from there. He died at the age of eighty-nine in the Lyons Veteran's Administration Hospital in Lyons, New Jersey.

SI: Could you tell us a little bit about his time in the service, what you know?

LR: Well, I know he was in the service from his records and I have his discharge here, which I've shown to you, Shaun. He served for seven years, he enlisted in the Army. He served in every major battle in France, in World War I. He also was in the national, the Reserve rather, and he served the army of occupation in Germany, after the war was over, and he came home in 1920. His total amount of time in the service was approximately seven years in the Army, and he came back home in 1920.

EB: It [The pre-interview survey] says that your grandfather served with him as well.

LR: Yes, my grandfather more or less, and I don't have records to substantiate it, but I know he was, he evidently served about, maybe, twenty-five years in the Army. He also served with my father, overseas in France in World War I, with the Big Red One Division, General Blackjack Pershing. I think that was his name. … I was a very, young boy when he passed away, so I don't remember too much about him, my grandfather, but I know he served quite a long time. Served on the Mexican border. He served, as I said, in World War I, overseas in every major battle alongside my father, although they didn't speak to each other, and that's as much as I can remember about that. … I do remember, growing up, I used to go to polo games at Governor's Island. I remember one general's lap that I used to sit on, his was General Summerall and that's all I could tell you at the present about my grandfather. But he did distinguish himself as serving for the United States Army, as well as my father.

SI: Did he join the service before or after, or during the Spanish American War? Do you know anything about that?

LR: I have no idea. I have no records, I have no idea.

EB: How long had your father's side of the family been in America, do you know? Did your grandfather first come over; had they been in America for a long time?

LR: Truthfully, I don't believe my father was, my grandfather rather, was born here. I think he came from what I gather from the family, he came through San Salvador. I don't know what age he came through, or anything like that, but he wasn't born here. My father and mother were both born here, so that I do know, I have records to substantiate that. I really don't remember that much about my grandfather outside I know he was army veteran and served.

EB: You said his nationality was …

LR: He was from El Salvador, my grandfather and what I've been told he came here.

EB: And what about your mother, what was her name and what did she do?

LR: My mother was strictly a housewife. I know her maiden name, her name was Molly Lieber. Going back to my grandfather's name, I think his name originally was Eduardo Ricardo, which was Spanish and, evidently, maybe in coming here, enlisting or whatever, his name was changed to Reich, Edward Reich or Reich, however you want to pronounce it. But my father changed his name, I believe, when he enlisted in the United States Army at the age of eighteen, which is on his record, and he changed his name, and added an S made it Reisch, to take away the German connotation that existed going to war with Germany. He had a brother, Max Reich, never added the S to his name and I remember my uncle very well and he maintained that name of R-e-i-c-h, but my dad changed his name legally and [it] is on all his papers and all his records. I do want to interject one thing. My uncle, my father's brother, whose name was Max Reich, had a son, and his son was a fighter pilot. He must have enlisted in the Air Corps around 1938 or so, was a fighter pilot. His name was George Reich, and he was shot down over Italy, while I was overseas, and was killed. So I thought I'd let you know that I did have a cousin that was also in the service and was shot down over Italy.

SI: Did you find out about that while you were overseas?

LR: Well, I knew he was a fighter pilot, because in 1938, I was seventeen years old, and I knew him casually in visiting with the family, my father visiting his brother, but I didn't know that he was killed until I came back from the service in 1945. I had no idea.

EB: Was your mother Spanish?

LR: No, my mother was Jewish. My grandfather, going back to, when you say he was El Salvadorian, when he, evidently, married my grandmother, my grandmother who was Jewish, he converted to Judaism and he raised his two children, which was Max and my father, Morris, in the Jewish religion. … They both were *bar mitzvah*, as we say, and our family, my father raised me and my brother as Jewish, we're all Jewish, my present wife and my first wife were Jewish, so that's the lineally of the family.

EB: When were your parents married?

LR: I believe my father married my mother pretty soon after he came back from Germany, after [19]'19. I was born in 1921, December 5th. He came back from the service, it's on his record, sometime in 1920, and, he must have married her, after he met her … would say, let's go back mine months, the time it takes me to be conceived, they must have married somewhere in the later part of 1920, or the early part of 1921.

SH: Do you know how they met? Do you have any idea?

LR: No, no idea.

SI: You mentioned that your father was in every major battle in France, did he ever talk about any of these experiences?

LR: No, never, and, like I say, he suffered from mustard gas.

EB: Is that the only injury he had or had he been wounded otherwise?

LR: The only one that I know of. I guess when you read about and watch the boys coming home from Iraq, and they talk about TBS, traumatic brain syndrome, you know, you never know how they were affected mentally. My father was a fairly volatile man, and that could have been from the war, or I really don't know.

SI: This is jumping ahead a bit, but do you think your looking at your father's experiences in the trenches, did that encourage you to go into the Air Corps?

LR: Absolutely not. No, the only thing that, possibly, I know, I came from a family background of military service because, I'll get to that story in a few minutes, how I enlisted and what happened.

EB: Where were you born?

LR: Brooklyn, New York.

EB: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LR: I had one brother. I had another brother, Victor. He died at two years old from a busted appendix.

EB: What was his name?

LR: Norman, he's still alive, he's eight years younger than me, lives in Florida at the present time.

EB: What was it like growing up in Brooklyn during the '20s and '30s?

LR: Well, I think I would preface my remarks, we didn't know any better, let's put it that way. We were very poor. As I said, I was born in 1921and I lived through the Depression years, all the Depression years, and I know how bad it was. … I could remember one thing that I always say to my grandchildren, "That I remember the times that I had for dinner, a piece of bread and ketchup on it," and that happens to be in my memories that for dinner, I had bread and ketchup …. I remember my dad, who was a substitute in the post office at that time, in the late '20s, '29, '30, '31, was a sub in the post office. … He would like shape up, like they do on the docks, at the post office and he would leave at four o'clock in the morning to go down to Canal Street in New York, and he would get two hours work, or three hours work. He would come home at midnight and then go to sleep again. Those were the days that were quite memorable to me. It was bad times.

SI: Do you remember the soup kitchens or lines to get food?

LR: Well, I remember once, sounds strange, but I remember once walking from my home of Park Place in Brooklyn, about two miles, I may have been a kid of eleven or twelve years old, walking to Rockaway Avenue in Brooklyn, to a communist organization that had a soup kitchen, to get lunch. I was not a Communist, but in order to get some lunch they were giving out, free soup I remember, we all, the kids, went down there to get a bowl of soup. So things were pretty tough in those days.

SI: Did you have to scrounge for like fuel?. I've heard people talk about going, looking around for coal by the railroad lines.

LR: No, I don't remember because my parents were janitors in an apartment house, so my dad had to stoke the coals for the apartment houses in the basement. I remember that.

SI: When did he, you said he later changed from the post office to the anthracite company.

LR: No, he became a regular back around 1936. My dad, also I remember him going to Washington. He was fired on by MacArthur in Washington; he went there in '32, when they had the Bonus March on Washington. I was a boy, about eleven years old at the time, when he went down to Washington. He went with a lot of other veterans, and, as most of you know the story, that they fired on the veterans,

SI: The Bonus March.

LR: Bonus March in '32.

SI: So, he only went down by himself?

LR: He went down with some other veterans.

SI: But not with the family.

LR: No.

SI: Okay, how long was he gone?

LR: A few days. That's all I remember, I was a young boy.

SI: Do you remember anything that he said about either that experience, or just in general about the whole idea of the Bonus March, and did he share his opinion of MacArthur at all?

LR: Don't remember a thing about it. I don't remember anything that he said. If he did say anything, I have no recollection.

EB: Where did you go to school growing up?

LR: Local school, like we all did. We walked to school two to three blocks. We walked to our elementary school. I went to public school. I went to junior high school and then, from there I went to Erasmus Hall High School and when I graduated at Erasmus Hall High School, I went to Brooklyn College at night. I only went for one year, I was a young boy of fifteen and a-half, when I entered Brooklyn College, and things were still pretty rough, and it was a little too difficult for me, because I worked during the day at fifteen and a-half.

SI: What kind of jobs did you hold then, at that time?

LR: Well, I used to pay a nickel to get on the subway, from Brooklyn to go to New York. … I went to 36th Street and 8th Avenue, to a luncheonette, and I worked as a short order cook from six in the morning till four in the afternoon, in order to get a meal; and my salary at that time, six days a week, was $3.00 a week. Sound good? [laughter]

EB: Did you do anything fun growing up, like social activities, dances, or going to movies or anything like that? Did you ever have a chance?

LR: Well, I didn't have too much of a social life in high school, because, evidently I was a little too young. You got to remember I graduated at fifteen and a-half. I went into high school at Erasmus Hall three years before, because I came out of junior high school, so I went into high school at twelve and a-half years old. So, it sort of cuts down on your social activities, I didn't belong.

EB: Why were you so young?

LR: Because I was too bright, and, in those years, you were able to skip. You were able to go 1A to 1B, from 1B to 2B. At that time you were able to skip a half a semester, if you were very bright they pushed you ahead. Evidently, I was very bright, because I got pushed ahead. That's the reason, as I showed you from my yearbook.

SI: You showed us the yearbook from the year of '37.

EB: Did you participate in sports in high school?

LR: I was a very good athlete.

EB: What sports did you [participate in?]

LR: Baseball. My father, by the way, who went to Boys High School, he graduated Boys High. He was a baseball player, and he also holds, at one time I know, he held the cross country, three and a-half mile cross-country record. His name was posted in the records in Boys High School, as an athlete.

SI: What position did you play?

LR: Pitcher.

EB: So, your school had a team and you played other teams of other high schools?

LR: When I went out for the baseball team, at Erasmus Hall High School, the coach said to me, "What are you doing here? Come back when you get to your sophomore year." I say, "I'm a senior." So, I never did play for Erasmus Hall, but I played semi-pro ball at the age of sixteen. I played ball around Utica Avenue, there's a ball field there, Oakland Field they called it.

EB: Did you have an idol in the professional baseball league? Is there anyone that you would watch?

LR: Not really. I used to go to many baseball games. My dad was an avid sports fan. He took me to Yankee Stadium, we went to Ebbetts Field, we had season tickets Ebbetts Field. I used to sit in the bleachers in Ebbetts Field for a quarter. Twenty-five cents, to get in at that time, that's all it cost and I also loved football. When I was twelve years old, we had a newspaper in Brooklyn called the *Brooklyn Daily Mirror*, and they had a cheering squad for kids. Brooklyn had a professional football team, like the New York Giants, it was called the Brooklyn Dodgers, and the Brooklyn Dodgers played in those years, in the early '30s. … I was on a cheering squad of the Brooklyn Dodgers and sat on the fifty-yard line, right on the field, and I went there on Sunday's, when they played, and I remember names of certain football players to this day that I watched.

SI: It's interesting. A lot of the people I interviewed remember listening to the Brooklyn Dodgers football team and I think they were playing the Giants, when Pearl Harbor happened and that everyone was listening to that game.

LR: Well, that was in the later years, you're talking of 1941 when that happened.

SI: You were in the cheering section in the '30s.

LR: Early '30s, I was born [in] '21, so I was about twelve years old, so it had to be 1933.

SI: What was the name of the team you played on, the semi-pro baseball club?

LR: The Oaklands.

SI: How did that work, how much were you paid?

LR: Ten dollars, five dollars for the game.

SI: Was it just a league in Brooklyn or did you go to other places?

LR: Local. Didn't last that long. Things were too tough in those days.

SI: Were you playing with people that were much older than you?

LR: I was out of my league.

SI: I heard that the guys who played in those were factory workers, who would do this on the side.

LR: I was out of my league, didn't last long.

EB: So, you were in the Chemistry Club then, at Erasmus Hall High School.

LR: I don't remember a thing, that word chemistry that you see in my yearbook; I don't remember anything about it. It's something that's, I don't remember a thing about it.

EB: Did you have a favorite subject in school, was it chemistry or did you have another subject you liked, reading or …

LR: I was very good at math. I liked math, math was one of my better subjects basically. I guess that's why I'm treasurer of my fire district to this day.

SI: What did you study, when you went to Brooklyn College?

LR: Just general subjects, just to get credits for points. I really don't recall, to be honest with you.

EB: When you were in high school, were you thinking you were going to go to college to get a degree, or did you have any idea what you wanted to do?

LR: No, idea at that age, none whatsoever.

EB: That was just because you were too young to really think about it?

LR: I think I was just too young to think about anything. The way things worked out, I worked. I had to work. When I left college at fifteen and a-half, I had worked for a textile company. I

left the luncheonette after about a year, and I went to work in the neighborhood. I remember where, I remember the name of the firm I went to work for a firm, Imperial Textile Company. I remember the address, 240 West 37th Street, and I had a very nice boss and I pushed a hand truck and I delivered piece goods. …We sold to the furniture trade; we sold denim, velourette, cambritte, that went into furniture. I worked there for many years, until I decided to take a civil service test. We were getting close to building up for wartime and I took a civil service test and I passed the test. I applied as a sheet metal apprentice. I guess that was around 1940, still in the Depression years, still things were tough, and I got called for the job. I went to work in Portsmouth, Virginia, in [the] Portsmouth Navy Yard. … The first job they put me in was the yellow powder room, making torpedoes, and being in the yellow powder room was the worst experience in my life. Your skin turned completely yellow. The most they could keep you in there was three months. … I remember to this day, as a kid, I wrote to my President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, I told him to get me out of here. I really did. I wrote a letter to the White House, and I did get a letter back from a secretary. Evidently my time ran its course, and I was transferred out, eventually, to the sheet metal department in the navy yard. … I started to work as a welder, and making air scoops for battleships and destroyers, and that's where I remained. … I worked on the midnight shift, twelve to eight in the morning, that was my shift, twelve to eight, seven days a week, not five days a week, seven days a week. … I earned enough money, I was able to send my parents home money, and I remember sending my brother, kid brother, who was eight years younger than me, I sent him home $25.00 a month. … I kept sending him that money when I was in the service, and working those hours constantly, well over a year, year and a half, I don't recall the time element anymore But that's when Pearl Harbor happened, while [I] was working in the yard.

EB: Did you know what was going on in Europe, before the war broke out? Particularly because you were working at this navy yard, did you know that they were building and there was going to be a war probably?

LR: Absolutely no. I had no idea. I mean, you worked, you boarded out, I boarded, out in a very nice home, in a Gentile home in Craddock, Virginia, which was suburb of Portsmouth, paid $3.00 a week to sleep, that was all we had to pay, beautiful home. I had two meals a day with a Jewish family, paid $8.00 a week. That was the cost, three and eight is eleven and I earned about, seven days a week, about $50.00 a week with the government at that time, because I was on a midnight shift. So, we got extra pay for that. That I do remember, and then Pearl Harbor happened. … Then what happened was, they came around in the yard and they asked us for volunteers to go to Pearl Harbor, to build up the base. They needed workers, and I was sort of experienced now. I had some time in and I applied for it, however I was under age, I was still under twenty-one. I needed my parents consent and my father refused to sign.

EB: He did that because of his experience in World War I, he didn't want you to go through same thing?

LR: I have no idea what went on in my father's mind, really. So I can't give you [any more information on that.].

SI: He never talked about things like that?

LR: No. About three months later, must have been March or April, they came around asking volunteers to build the Bermuda Naval Air Station in Bermuda, nice place to go work make good money as a defense worker I applied. Father said, "No." Turned it down. About May of '42, not May, had to be before that, because I enlisted in May, maybe it's sometime in April, I contacted my father and I said, "I decided to attempt to be a pilot and join the Air Force," which was called the Air Corps at that time, and he says, "Son, come home, I'll sign for you," because you had to be twenty-one to enlist at that time. … I came home and I attempted to enlist in the Air Corps, I had to take a physical down at Whitehall Street in New York. My father signed for me, I passed the physical, and I had to take a written test, passed the written, and I was in the Air Corps. That's when my army career started.

SI: Before we go too deep into your military career, can we ask some questions about your time in the shipyard? Could you describe for the tape, what a typical shift would be like? What you would be doing and how difficult it was?

LR: I don't think I found it difficult in the shipyards, because, I guess, if I found it difficult, I would have quit and come home. I found it difficult to date, let's put it that way and I'm being truthful about that, working on the midnight shift. I did date, and we dated, we got off the shift at eight o'clock in the morning, and the average date with a girl that I would make would be around noontime, whatever date there was, you know.

EB: Sleep for four hours, get up.

LR: Get up, maybe noon or sometimes, then go back to labor, and then go back to sleep or whatever, but we dated. You always found a way to date. But life, I had friends. I did have a roommate, where I slept in Craddock, just the two of us, we shared the bedroom and we got along. We lived a life. I don't remember finding anything too terrible about the life in my time being in the navy yard, working for the government. Just we worked seven days a week, eight hours a day, and that, I guess was difficult. But, I guess, as a kid, we didn't find it that way. I guess it was so much better than what I had at home. … I know I was earning money and I was able to help my family back home. I didn't find anything bad about those years.

SI: Would you describe the pace of the work as being intense?

LR: No. Does any government job sound intense and the pace of any government job sound intense? No.

EB: So, you would get there at midnight and they would tell you what you're going to do that night?

LR: Yes. They assigned us, we always had a supervisor to assign us our work, and he gave us our work. If I was welding air scoops, I have on my welding mask. I had my welding kit and I would do the weld and make the air scoops and produce. But there was nobody over our heads to really snap a whip, and, you know, crack down on us. I mean, it was like anything else.

SI: Do you remember if there were any accidents or anything at the shipyard while you were there?

LR: I don't remember.

EB: It seems like it might be dangerous with all the steel and sharp metal.

LR: Don't remember, but not without danger.

SI: Was it strenuous having to wear the heavy gloves and the mask and having the heat of the torch right there?

LR: I guess now that you bring it up, I guess it was uncomfortable. Let's use that word, not, you know, strenuous. It was uncomfortable, using a welder's mask and whatever in those days.

EB: Now, is a there a reason why you did it from midnight till eight in the morning?

LR: More money.

EB: Okay, so, you took that shift.

LR: I picked that shift.

SI: Were there many women in the shipyard at that time or was it still mostly men?

LR: I don't remember. I don't remember if there was or wasn't. I really don't. Can't answer that truthfully.

EB: So, where would you meet girls, local restaurants, soda shops, in that day?

LR: Bus, restaurants, burlesque houses.

EB: So, where would you go on a date? Would you take her out to lunch, [that] type of thing?

LR: You're getting very personal, where I would take her. At that age, the hormones in a young man of twenty was flowing, and basically, truthfully, he was looking for sex if he could get it.

SI: What was it like being twenty and younger, and being so far away from home, and being on your own totally?

LR: Didn't mind it.

EB: You already started young in high school.

SI: You were pretty independent.

LR: I didn't mind it.

SI: Was there a union? Were you in a union?

LR: No, there was no union at that time, working for the government, no. Civil service job in those years, I don't think they had a union; I doubt it, not in 1940.

EB: You said that you wanted to enlist, but, your job would have been considered like a wartime job, you might have been exempt from the draft.

LR: If I went to Pearl Harbor and, left to work there, while I was working on a defense job, I would naturally, when the draft would come up, I would be exempt, or whatever.

EB: So, what made you enlist or want to enlist?

LR: What made me want to enlist, as to be in the Air Corps? As to being in the Air Corps, I guess one reason is to maintain the military role that my families always had, and possibly the glamour of being a pilot, that always was glamorous thing to a young kid. We didn't realize the danger involved, but the glamour was there, "into the wild blue yonder," all that garbage that they fed us at that time.

EB: You had a certain image of a pilot and the crew.

LR: Yeah, that's right. That's what made me enlist. … As you know from what I told you, I went to Maxwell Field as an aviation cadet, and we also didn't get too bad a pay as a cadet. You didn't have to go through basic training as an infantry man, that is, all nice accommodations in Maxwell Field. I think my pay grade at the time I was in Maxwell Field was like $75.00 a month, as a cadet. … Somehow $75.00 months rings in my head. I'm not sure if that's what it was, but that's what stays in my mind. … I graduated Maxwell Field as a cadet, I think I was there approximately three months, and next stop was primary flying school.

SI: What was the training at Maxwell Field like?

LR: School classes, strictly classes, engineering and math and flight, not flight training, it had nothing to do with flight training, strictly bookwork.

EB: You didn't find it hard, you liked the school, studying.

LR: Very nice, very nice place, it was beautiful a country club that we were housed in. I remember where it was, it was Avon Park, Florida. No, not at Maxwell Field, I'm thinking of primary. But Maxwell Field was very nice, the town was Montgomery, Alabama; and we used to go on weekends, we go into town. We had camaraderie with other cadets. It was a nice life, it was very nice. We were dressed spotlessly, cadets with all, the cadet uniform, the eagle on top, it was nice.

SI: So, you got along well with your fellow cadets?

LR: Got along fine.

SI: They were from all over the country?

LR: All over the country.

EB: Was this is the first time you met a lot of people from different backgrounds?

LR: No, I met people from different backgrounds in the navy yard. Here, of course, you mixed in with a lot of different type of people.

SI: Did a lot of them have, like you had, a college background? Did a lot of them have that level of education?

LR: Most of them had a higher level of education than me; I would say had a higher level.

SI: Would you say that they were weaning people out at that point, or were they holding you until the training spot would open up?

LR: Weaning people out? You mean were they particular, at that time, in what they accepted?

SI: I mean, in terms of the intensity of the classes, were they trying to get people out who couldn't hack it?

LR: I don't recall. When I went through the courses, I took my exams, and thoughts like that never entered my mind. I don't think I was that analytical, to think about what, "Are you trying to weed us out or not." That thought never came to me.

SI: Do you remember people being there one day and not being there the next?

LR: No.

EB: So, you had one group of cadets that were there the first day and they graduated together.

LR: Well, we shared a room with, I shared a room with three other cadets, there's four cadets to a room, and I went through with this group till I graduated, if I remember.

SI: Then your next training was in Florida?

LR: Avon Park, Florida, primary flying school. That's where I washed out.

SI: Can you tell us about that training and what happened?

LR: Training was flight training, PT-17, primary trainer. I soloed, came to my twenty hour check, I came down from the check, and my instructor said to me, very nicely, he says, "Cadet

Reisch," he said, " I have to wash you out." I say, "Why?" He says, "You might make a good pilot, it might take several years to be a good pilot, and the Army doesn't have the time for you." … In other words, evidently, my instructor felt I was a little too slow at what I was doing. I wasn't qualified enough and, evidently, maybe it's the best thing that ever happened to me, and maybe that's the reason why I'm talking to you here today, that I didn't become a pilot.

EB: How long before that happened, how long were you there?

LR: In primary, about a month.

EB: So, they got you pretty quickly out of there.

LR: Yeah, the training was pretty quick. I mean, went on some primary, then the basic, and then into advance. It was three stages, before you became a pilot. Three different schools you went to.

SI: How did that affect you, getting washed out? Were you disappointed?

LR: At the time, I was disappointed. But it didn't really affect me in anyway mentally, psychologically.

EB: So, you didn't have this whole built up that you're going to be a pilot, and now they're talking …

LR: No, I figured I would still try to fly, which is I wanted to do, want to be flying, and they shipped us from there to Biloxi, Mississippi, Keesler Field. … I remember being in a hangar, about three thousand washed-out cadets like myself, with about two or three bathrooms. That I remember, [laughter] and I was there quite a while and they came around, [asked] "What did we want to do," I filled out papers to become a bombardier or a navigator, and it came back after a while that they were overloaded; they didn't have any room for us. The next thing I did, I filled out papers to become a radio operator-gunner. I still want to fly. Then I was accepted, and that's when my next phase of training started. I remember I played while I was there, I remember playing for the post team, I played on the team, in Keesler Field. I remember playing softball, which I also did when I was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Kingman, Arizona. I was always a good athlete. Where do we want to go from here? Now that I was accepted as radio operator-gunner, my next phase is where?

EB: What did you know about being a radio operator or a gunner? Was that what was left it you still wanted to be in an airplane or did you …

LR: Well, I could have been just a gunner. I applied to be an aerial gunner, but I always felt I had certain qualifications, a step above, so you could either have been an engineer.

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

SI: Please continue, you were talking about your options at that point.

LR: Well, at that time, if you still want to fly, you could either volunteer to be an aerial gunner, that would give you the rank of a four stripper, not a tech sergeant, just four stripes; or you could try to become an engineer-gunner or radio operator-gunner and I'm the least mechanically inclined person you ever met. I can't screw in a light bulb; the fixture will come down, if I take out a light bulb.

EB: So, being an airplane mechanic, was out of your ….

LR: I wanted no part of that, so I decided to try to be a radio operator. Had no other experience at that, absolutely none.

SI: You hadn't been like a ham-radio operator?

LR: Nothing, absolutely nothing, playboy of the western world.

SI: So, before you went to the radio training, you had been in Keesler Field for a while?

LR: Yes.

SI: Several weeks?

LR: Much longer than that.

SI: Were they just testing you that whole time, or just keeping …

LR: Nothing, just hanging around, they didn't know what to do with us. They had so many washed-out cadets, at that time.

SI: Did you talk to anybody at that time, did anybody express bitterness, or where they mostly like you, just wanted to get in to the flying somehow?

LR: I don't think that bitterness ever came out between washed out. I don't think any of us really spoke about it. I remember going to New Orleans from there on a trip, a couple of guys, it wasn't as if we're going too far from, New Orleans, was a couple of hours. I remember going there.

EB: Were people really excited about, wanting to get in a plane, or I want to go over there and fight and I want to beat them?

SI: What's the attitude?

LR: I really don't know the real attitude of the people we are talking about. Vindictiveness against the Japs, against Germans? We don't recall. I don't remember. I do remember one thing about morality, about what we do if we shot down a Japanese pilot out of the Zero. "It would be strafe him and kill him while he's dangling from his parachute?" and he always said, "No." That changed after my first mission.

EB: So, you didn't feel any sort of hatred going into the war?

LR: We're fighting for our country, that's about all.

SI: Do you remember if there was any kind of indoctrination in training? Did they show you films, tell you anything about the enemy to kind of get you psyched up?

LR: I don't remember. Maybe they didn't, maybe they did, but I don't remember.

EB: What about what has been going on? Were you're getting newspaper[s] saying this battle happened or anything like that, or updates about the war, and how we are winning or losing?

SI: *The Stars and Stripes* or anything like that?

LR: I don't remember reading too much outside of the sports pages. I really don't remember those years, what I read and what I didn't read.

SI: So, your next training station was Sioux Falls.

LR: I don't recall, it's in my records; I don't recall whether I went to gunnery school first or radio school first. It's in my records. But, I do remember being in Sioux Falls. I was there possibly close to six months, and gunnery school. I'm not sure of the time, maybe three months at the most, which was in Kingman, Arizona. I know I played ball in both places. The only time I got hurt in the Army was playing ball in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I was pitching, talking about hardball now. It wasn't in Sioux Falls; it was in Kingman, Arizona in gunnery school. I was pitching for the team and I went to cover third base on a hit, I got spiked in the groin, I wasn't wearing a cup, so I got hurt pretty badly. I was in the hospital for several weeks, severe groin injury, my testicles area. But, I came out of it fine. Back on duty after a couple of weeks. That's the only time I got hurt in the Army, playing baseball.

SI: On any of these teams, did you play with anybody who played professional ball?

LR: Yes. I played ball, in fact, he became a buddy of mine, I saw him after the war, he played shortstop for the team, name was Stan Rojek. R-o-j-e-k. He was All International League Shortstop. He went to the Pittsburg Pirates and eventually wound up with the Brooklyn Dodgers but he was beamed and that cut his career short, being beamed in baseball. His parents owned Rojek Dairy Farms, in North Tonawanda, New York and we kept in touch for a while and we buddied out for quite a while. He never went overseas; I don't recall him ever going overseas even [though he] pursued going the way I did, as far as gunnery school, radio school, and flying. I don't think he did. I've been around playing ball with him, Lou Stringer played ball for Chicago Cubs. Those were some of the names I remember. My career after the war, I went to work for Buddy Lee Clothes. I used to call every guy on the Brooklyn Dodgers, because we were very big and sponsoring advertising. We had got Buddy Lee Clothes, we had warm-up time, we had Burt Lee and Marty Glickman, for the radio announcers and Buddy Lee sponsored it, which is the friend that I worked for, and I knew most of the ball players and I got all the ball

players to come down and buy clothing down at the Buddy Lee. I mean, I'm starting again right now, but we could go back now. Whatever we're up to, we're up to about radio.

EB: What was radio school like? What did you do?

LR: Difficult. I had to learn the Morse Code, how to operate, take care of the ultra high frequency set, VHF set, Morse Code, how to take it apart, put it together. It was a hard course. It wasn't easy. I found it difficult.

EB: How long were you there?

LR: I think close to six months somewhere along that period. I found it hard, that I remember. Sioux Falls being the coldest place in the world.

SI: Were you there in the winter?

LR: In the winter months, it was terrible.

SI: How many hours a day would you train?

LR: I think we went to school pretty close to eight hours a day, pretty close to it, and played bridge for about three hours a day. That was our past time, now I like to play bridge, at that time, or pinochle.

EB: So, you would actually go to class for eight hours, or would you just go to class in the morning and then you could study?

LR: No, and then in the afternoon.

EB: Did you have exams?

LR: They tested us.

EB: Throughout the six weeks that you were there?

LR: Throughout the time we were there. I don't know how many times they tested us but I graduated, had it done with.

SI: How proficient in Morse code did you have to get?

LR: I was good. I think the average, I don't really recall but I think we had to know at least twenty words a minute, or maybe sixty words a minute. I don't recall. But I was pretty good, because in my missions I recall, and we were lead ship and we were tracking a Japanese Naval Task Force, I was the only one handling the radio, back from our base, so I was good at it. I don't know how proficient item we called, how many words a minute, but I did very well; I was able to do a good job.

SI: Did they take the radio school cadets on any flights during that time?

LR: We weren't called cadets,

SI: Okay, students, yes.

LR: Students or whatever. Did they take us on any flights? No. No flying. There's no flying involved in radio school.

SI: Did they teach how to ground, how to follow a radio beacon and all that?

LR: Well, that's what they had to teach us, I don't remember, but we were taught extensively. The biggest job, of course, was to handle the radio set and they taught us what we had to know.

SI: You also did gunnery training at Kingman, Arizona.

LR: Kingman, Arizona was my gunnery training.

EB: What was that like?

LR: I got airsick the first time we went up, because of the smell of the bullets and the cordite, or whatever it is that we call it. The odor was terrible. But after the first time I was okay, and they taught us how to shoot at planes. They taught us what they called a pursuit curve, enemy aircraft coming at us, how to lead it and distance to lead it.

SI: Did you shoot at the tow targets?

LR: Tow targets, we shot at tow targets.

EB: In what kind of plane were you practicing?

LR: I don't recall. I don't remember what kind of plane we were in.

SI: Was there also ground gunnery like training with shotguns?

LR: I remember that we did some skeet shooting. They taught us, I recall that at gunnery school.

EB: Did they teach you what the different planes looked like, like the Japanese Zero?

LR: They teach us how to recognize, yes, they taught us that. I believe in gunnery school they taught us that, how to recognize different planes.

EB: How close they had to be?

LR: Before they were effective, they were in range or out of range, they taught us that. If you ask me, "Do I remember?" No, I don't remember and we're talking now about sixty years ago.

SI: Was most of the training on the .50 caliber machine gun?

LR: Yeah. I handled a .50 caliber machine gun.

SI: Did you have to learn how to … some people talk about having to do it blind folded.

LR: How to take, I don't remember doing anything blind folded. I remember how we had to learn how to take care of jams in the gun. That's happened to me once in combat. One time, they taught us, like I say, whatever we should know, how much attention any of us and all of us paid to it, I don't remember. Was I a student that was focused completely on it? I would say, "No." I don't think I was, but I learned enough to handle what I had to do.

SI: Either at Sioux Falls or at Kingman did you get much opportunity to go off base?

LR: Yes. We got leave. Had a girl friend in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She was a farmer, on the farm, had a nice experience with her, spent time with her, used to see her whenever I had an opportunity to get off. Kingman, Arizona, I don't think my social life was that good, but Sioux Falls it was pretty good.

SI: Did you find that most people were pretty receptive to servicemen? The local civilians, were they welcoming or not?

LR: I think they were receptive. I did find, I'll have to say this, I did find some anti-Semitism prevalent in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

EB: Can I ask you about that, if you found in your training whether there was anti-Semitic tendencies, officers or [anyone else?]

LR: Absolutely. One hundred percent. Then, I'll give you a story about that, if you have the time. I had anti-Semitism prevalent and in forming a crew, after we finished our training out of March Field, and we picked up the other nine members of our crew, and we're on a train going to California to March Field. This is the first time the crewmembers met, and I was playing pinochle with three other enlisted men like myself, not officers, and I was winning at the game. … The engineer of our new crew, we had never flown together yet, said a very disparaging remark about us Jews being money and this, and I threw up the table and I almost got into a fistfight with him, they pulled us apart. Not only was there anti-Semitism, there was anti-New Yorkers, against us, they hated New Yorkers. I was with a bunch of Southerners. We didn't have horns on our heads, they thought we had, and it was very prevalent. New Yorkers were despised Jews were despised and when we formed our crew, I didn't speak to the engineer and two other crew members, I'm not talking about the officers, for the first nine missions. I talked to them when I had to on the plane, on a mission. That's the way it prevailed in the service. The Southerners hated us. They hated not only the fact that you were Jewish and a New Yorker, forget it, you are bad. I never socialized with any of my crewmembers, up to non-coms. My

best buddy was my bombardier, who was an officer, a first lieutenant. I was very friendly with all the other officers. My lieutenant, was my first pilot, was from Boston. He got killed. My navigator, who got killed, he was also from a northern state. My co-pilot was from California; the bombardier was from St. Louis, so all these were, they know what Jewish people were. They lived in major cities, they lived in major states, and they could take New Yorkers.

SI: They never came around, you know, they never got along or anything.

LR: Well, I'll give you a story, if you want to get to the war record, I'll give you a story about one mission I was on, which is true and factual. You know, we New Yorkers, what did we know? Jew boy from New York. … I handled the left waist gun and this kid, Southerner, Johnny Hicks, young, gung-ho Southerner, real gung-ho, supposedly a top gunner, handling the right waist gun. … It must have been, maybe, in our seventh or eighth or ninth mission, I don't recall what mission it was on. … I have on my left waist gun. I had another ship in the formation I was covering, my left waist gun, so I was like okay. I didn't have too much to worry about. He was on the right waist, it was on the outside, he didn't have another B-24 on the side of him. So when the Zeros came at us, they would be coming after him, that side, or they would be coming at the other plane that was on my wing. They would be on the outside of me. Well, it was a Zero that was coming in, the Zeros attacked us. We didn't have fighter cover and they attacked us, and the Zero was coming in on his waist side, and he froze at the gun. Actually froze. This is a young, hotshot kid from the South, froze, and I was watching him, because I have nothing to do on the other side of my waist at that time. I pushed him away from his gun and I took over the gun position and I started to fire. Now, this is how they knocked us Jew boys from New York, and this gung-ho Southern kid, who was a kid, supposedly [a] hot shot, and I handled his gun position. So that sort of changed a little of the feeling, a little bit after that, because people knew what happened. I didn't go to the officers, or anything like that, but they knew what happened.

EB: Did he change after that or was he mad at you that you took over his gun?

LR: I never picked up a relationship with any of them, all during my career. I wasn't a snob, let's understand that, I only spoke to and hung out with the officers.

SI: I also heard, with the anti-Semitism at the time, there was also this stereotype that Jews weren't fighters.

LR: That's so, more or less. Like I said, I, the Jew that wasn't a fighter, had to push him and knock him away from his gun position. That I remember very well, it will never leave my mind and I remember his name, to this day.

SI: Did anybody actually say that or did you just get that feeling that, that's what they were thinking?.

LR: They were at the beginning; they showed that they resented us. Soon, I was in the jungles of New Guinea, when we were based and flying missions out of there. I mean, what we had; they had about four Jewish boys in the whole outfit, of the whole Air Force there, and our

squadron, in our group. We had a Protestant chaplain that gave us services, to the Jewish kids. We didn't have many Jews over there at that time. We didn't have a Jewish rabbi giving us services; we had a Protestant chaplain that gave us services, for us, properly, but I didn't resent that. Never carried it forward all through my career. It didn't affect me, I mean, it just bothered me with these boys that I flew with, I don't let them annoy me.

EB: Were there African Americans?

LR: No, they're all white. There wasn't a black boy among us.

SI: You mentioned you also encountered some anti-Semitism in Sioux Falls.

LR: Yes.

EB: Was that from the local people?

LR: The girls I was going with, and I hate to say it, I didn't want to give her up. I was sitting in a restaurant with her, and a very nice looking, I would say, a man in his thirties walked in the restaurant and said, "Hello Dorothy." Dorothy said, "Hello" to him. He was a local boy, good-looking nice and she's sitting in a restaurant with me and she says to me, "He's Jewish. I hate the Jews," and here she was going out and sleeping with a Jewish boy.

EB: So, she didn't know.

SI: So, you never brought it up.

LR: I didn't.

SI: Did you ever bring it up there?

LR: I didn't. The last date, the day I was leaving, I told her, who she was sleeping with, as I was walking out the door.

EB: What did she say?

LR: She didn't have an opportunity to say anything.

SI: Well, after you were finished with your training in Kingman and Sioux Falls, where did you go next?

LR: We got a brand new ship. We flew out of California, brand new B-24, flew to Hickam Field, stopped over there, flew to Guadalcanal from there, and then flew from Guadalcanal to our base, which was, I think, Manus, in the Admiralty Islands. That's where I flew my first mission. It's in these records, that I showed you before. The time frame is in it, so I was able, by the time frame of these records, to realize where I was.

EB: When you were leaving the US, did you know that you were going to the Pacific and that you weren't going to Europe?

LR: Oh, we knew we were going to, when I was going to Hickam Field, I knew we were going to the Pacific; sure, we were flying to the Pacific.

EB: They told you that or you just assumed it.

LR: They told us that, sure, absolutely, in fact, I had to handle, that I remember, my first real test as a radio operator. I had to send back to California, whether it was March Field or somewhere in Frisco I don't recall, had to send position reports, Morse Code, back to the base, back at home, every half hour, every hour. The flight, I think, to Hickam, took about eight hours, or something, maybe, at least, eight hours, maybe longer, eight to twelve hours, I don't recall. Then we went to, like I say, we wound up at the Admiralties [Admiralty Islands], and that's where we started to fly our combat missions.

SI: Were you assigned to you unit when you got out to the Admiralties or had you already been assigned? Did you go over as a unit or were you a replacement?

LR: I think the groups were formed in the States; we were assigned like 372nd Bomb Squadron, which I was in, part of the 307th Bomb Group, which was the 13th Air Force. You also had the 5th Air Force in the Pacific. You had two air forces there, the 5th and the 13th.

EB: So, you've been assigned to your crew there?

LR: I was assigned to my crew.

EB: So, you knew what you're going in then. From there you went, what was your first mission is getting there?

LR: Well, at night, you go to where they post the crews that are flying a mission, and, you know you're flying that morning.

SI: How much time elapsed between when you got there and when you flew your first mission?

LR: I don't recall.

SI: Did it seem pretty quick or did you have training?

LR: Pretty quick, they didn't baby us when we got there. There was a war going on; they figured we were trained already, and like I say, my first missions were on Truk, which was, I think I wrote that in there. It was on Truk, which was supposedly the Japanese naval base, like Pearl Harbor was to the United States, and there were all tough missions. I think I flew nine missions on Truk. We had no fighter cover, average [number of] B24s that went up against them was twelve B-24s, that was the power we had, very little. We had Japanese Zeros attacking us and ack-ack coming up from the ground; and they were tough missions, everyone of them.

EB: [Did] you fly at night?

LR: No. All daylight missions, we didn't have any night bombing, never flew any night missions.

EB: Did you have just one plane, did you say, that your crew was constantly on?

LR: Yes, we had our own plane. We had the name of our plane, I remember, the first plane that we had was called, *I'll Get By*.

EB: Was it painted on, did it have art work on it?

LR: Yeah, artwork painted *I'll Get By*, that was what pilot wanted. Then, when we got a brand new plane, I think, about the twentieth mission, they sent in a brand new B-24 from the States for us and we called it the *Wicked Wench*, gave her another name. We didn't like to fly the brand new silver planes, because the Japs thought we had dignitaries on board, because most of the planes were, you know, they're green color, or whatever, and when you got a silver plane flying among the greens, they thought big shots were on that plane, so they went after that. We didn't like it, but we managed; and then from there we did our missions. There was one major mission, that I mentioned, I'll tell you about. But this lieutenant, Earl Rice, we're on take off, we were carrying 8,000 pounds of bombs, I think, 500 pounders or 1,000, I don't recall, but we lost two engines on one side. … When you lose two engines on one side and you're 200 feet off the water, carrying 8000 pounds of bombs, with a heavy gas load and you don't know whether you're gonna make it. They wiped us off the board, down at the operation center; they figured we'd go right into the drink, because we're only flying over water. But this pilot, Earl Rice, he was a great pilot. He did everything by the book, and I was standing behind the pilot and co-pilot and my bombardier was standing there with me, Al St. John, and I remember Rice was flying, and the sweat was coming off his brow. I remember him to handle the plane, because to be technical, you took off from your runway, now you're off your base and you had to get back to it. To make a swing, you got to dip a wing; if you dip a wing and you got all your power on two engines, on one side, you got a great potential to go right into the water, because of the power of those two engines on one side, and what's left to do is, you got to like drop a wing, like two-three degrees and fly way out. Make the turn very long, miles and miles out, before you would even consider coming back in and he did everything according to the book. The only thing that we had to worry about was the bombs. We had to drop the bombs. We couldn't get any altitude. We couldn't go low, and he was standing; he was flying this plane, and was worried about when he had to put the flaps down. Now, the flaps were up when we took off, and they put the flaps up, because when you lower your flaps, you drop immediately to some degree, and then, we had to drop the bombs and we were just worried that our bombardier didn't arm the bombs before we took off. Because sometimes they're drunk enough to do it, before take off, and some of them go into the plane drop [dead], whether you know it or not, you heard stories, and my bombardier had a tendency to be drunk, and so we worried about whether the planes were armed or not. I said to John and he says, "I don't remember." Now we had to ditch the bombs. We had to let some fuel out and the flaps down. So, we dropped the bombs. Thank God, it didn't blow us up, they weren't armed. Then when we let the flaps down, and it had to be done in a split second, the

flaps down, the landing gear come down, and touchdown. We just missed the runway. We hit some logs, we bounced up once, and we landed fine. It took us three hours, from the time our engines went on fire. Of course, we feathered the props, we put the fire out on the engines. We didn't have two engines on one side, and it came down. He got a big medal for that, I don't remember what it was, but all I remember is one thing and this is the truth. Neither St. John nor I were frightened. I remember saying something to him, standing behind the pilot and co-pilot, and I said to him, "What a "f" way to die." That's exactly what I said, that's all I said, and you know the word I used, and that's all we said. I don't think either one of us were frightened. I guess, at that age, we were young, all of us. All the officers were young, we all were young. We were all young kids, twenties to twenty-five year old, at the most. Evidently, we didn't know better, we didn't have too much fear, and that's the way it was.

EB: There was actually something I read that there was this talk that the young men were invincible, that they didn't really have such a fear of death, at least to begin with.

LR: I don't remember being afraid, but I do remember when I finished my last mission, and I came down on the ground, and I thought would be my last mission, I says, "I'll never fly again." That's what I said, and I want you to know, I didn't fly after I came home from the war. … I should have flown, not flown as a businessman, the third time, and I forced myself when I went into business with my brother. We needed a name of a corporation and I had to fly to Albany from New York because every name we submitted to the corporation they turned down the name, so, my brother says, "You better go up there and submit the name and wait for it." … I went on one of these twelve passenger prop planes, and I was frightened. This was twenty years later, I think it was on 1965, it was the next time I flew. I didn't want to fly again, and every time that I fly with my wife, if we go anywhere, on take off my hands are a pool of water, the sweat that comes off my palms of my hands, a pool of water, and on landing. During the flight, I'm okay, only take off and landing.

EB: Did that have to do with the war, and that you were lucky so many times?

LR: Well, because I seen too many B-24s, in the war, taking off on a mission and cracking up on take off. So, I've seen so many of those things, and I've seen some of them on landing, and, I guess, that stays in your mind, it affects your psyche.

SI: Would you say that these accidents had more of an effect on you than combat?

LR: I don't know if any of it had any effects, outside of what I'm telling you.

SI: You know, it stands out more in your memory.

LR: Combat, the only thing I remember is when we tracked a naval task force. We knew it was like a suicide mission. Because when you track a naval task force, we were sent out and we didn't know where it was. It was the Sulu Sea or somewhere, I forget the name of where we were tracking this task force. They just sent us out, and they would supposedly send us position reports, where we should look for the, they didn't have the exact position. …When they contacted me, as the radio operator, then I would, you know, want to know where we are and

where we're going. If we got close to the task force, what would we do? Who would have a job, the bombardier, the pilot and the co-pilot? The gunners, the ball turret or the tail or the waist, none of us would have anything to do. We had parachutes on board. We would hook up our parachute, because we could be blown out of the sky by a battleship or cruiser or an aircraft carrier, fifteen-twenty miles away from the target, or wherever. I mean, that's what could happen to us. … It was like a suicide. Fortunately, we never got to find the naval task force, which relieved all of us, so, I mean, it was like you're going out on a suicide, when you go after a naval task force. We're not talking about the torpedo bombers, we're talking about lumbering B-24s, that is almost stationary in the sky compared to, you know, a fighter. So, that's when you're scared.

SI: Yes, when you have nothing to do.

LR: You have nothing to do and you're putting on a parachute and you say, "Hey, look, you're going after a naval task force." That's when you worry.

SI: Was your mission to bomb it or just to make contact?

LR: Bomb it. We had other B-24s up there, but I was receiving, as a radio operator, receiving messages from back at the base, and they were telling us what to do. Evidently, their scout planes never found them.

EB: Did your view of the Japanese change after, as the missions went on? Did you feel more, as people that you knew were being killed

LR: The only thing that bothered me, that changed my morality, as far as being fair handed, is before I went overseas, I said, " What would I do if a Japanese pilot bailed out of his plane, would I strafe him, would I kill him?" We all said, "No." But when I flew my first or second mission, and I saw our wing plane go down, and we had some of our boys jump out with a parachute, out of the plane, and were parachuting down and the Japanese Zeros came down and strafed and killed them, while they were coming down, so that changed your whole attitude. So, from that time on, if a Japanese Zero pilot bailed out, we would just cut him to ribbons, and we had no qualms about it.

EB: So, it became more personal.

LR: Well, they did it to us, why shouldn't we do it to them? I mean, I see them cut our boys down in there, while they're hanging from a parachute. We saw it happen. I mean, we can't be fair. "Don't kill anybody just because he's coming down on a parachute." We killed them. We would strafe them.

SI: How often would you encounter Zeros or other fighters?

LR: Seventy-five, eighty percent of the time on our missions. All I know is, at the beginning of the war, with Truk, they had as many as seventy fighters up with us, over Truk. Some of the smaller bases, they had less Zeros, but they were there. We didn't have fighter cover until later

on in the war, because our average mission, we were called, it's here in these records. Our outfit was called the *Long Rangers, L-O-N-G Rangers*. Our average flight, to the target and back, was between eight and twelve hours. To the target and back, that's a long time to go to hit a target and back. Because in the Pacific, it was all over water, you're island jumping and attacking, getting closer to Japan.

EB: Were you constantly informed of what was going on, the battles with Japan?
LR: Absolutely not.

EB: You weren't informed.

LR: Didn't know anything. I knew very little.

EB: Just wanted to survive yourself …

LR: Want to survive each day, want to know where my next can of beer was coming from, or next drink was coming from. We used to get scotch every time we returned from a mission; we got two ounces of scotch, I think that is what they gave us.

EB: How long between missions, did you say?

LR: Eight to twelve hours.

EB: No, between, like if you went on a mission, how long would it be before you went on another mission?

LR: Three, four days, five days, sometimes a week, it depends upon how many planes we had available at the time.

EB: That's pretty constant throughout, year-to-year.

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

SI: This continues an interview with Lawrence Reisch on Monday, March 12th, in Monroe Township with Shaun Illingworth and …

EB: Elaine Blatt.

LR: Actually, I remember, talking about Zeros, I remember towards the end of the war, the end of our combat missions, we were once, a *Kamikaze* attempted to ram us, just missed us, and we knew he was coming at us.

EB: So, at that point, there were more Kamikaze, toward the end?

LR: I only experienced one coming at us towards the end of my service.

SI: Was that shocking that they went from, you know, the standard fighter tactics, to trying to ram the planes?

LR: I guess they knew they were losing the war, and, I guess they were instilled, the same was, as you got suicide bombers here in Iraq, they're blowing themselves up. I guess, they were instilled in that. That I do remember. I remember one of missions was interesting, it was what they call a "searching for shipping." Go along the coastline, the Japanese, and we are looking for fishing vessels or any kind of vessel, gunboats, or whatever and you fly about two-three hundred feet off the water and you go and strafe them. Interesting mission.

SI: So, you were just looking for targets of opportunity?

LR: That was one mission.

EB: In between missions, did you hear stories of other people's missions, planes going down, or was hit there a lot of talk about that?

LR: The only time we knew was when a plane didn't come back, and then we heard some rumors that they crash-landed somewhere, and then when you're watching a movie at night. … The bombardier, who I remember the name very well, in another plane, he went down in Mindanao, but they were picked up by the guerillas, in Mindanao, and he came strolling into the movie theater, a month later. "Where's my sox? Where's my coat?" Somebody took it, he didn't have a thing left. … He came out and survived. Guerrillas had gotten him and saved him, and stories like that; that's what we hear. We didn't hear about, you know, a plane goes down, it goes down. You know, the plane is lost. It's crossed off the list, when names aren't there anymore. I remember, talk about the story, talking about gays, let's get into something interesting. I remember them pulling out a pilot, first pilot, out a tent in one of the islands I was in, just pulled out, sent back home because he was gay. They didn't know about it. All that money that was put into this guy, and he's a pilot, he has flown plenty of missions, they sent him home.

EB: Was there any African Americans at this point, any working that you know?

SI: Around the base.

LR: Oh, well, you have the perimeter, wherever I was on, whether it was Wadki, Numfor, Moratai, these islands that we're on, they were protected to a degree, the perimeter, by the Army, and I think you had blacks in there, serving in there, I don't know. I didn't get to see them.

SI: Was there much interaction in any case between the Army units and the Air Force units?

LR: No. No interaction at all, not that I remember.

EB: What was the food like? What did you do in between missions? Or you just slept and drank and just didn't do much?

LR: Didn't do much, couldn't drink much either, but, not as a non-com, the officers drank. The officers were able get the liquor. Some of them made money out of it; a lot of black market money going on then, selling it to the perimeter, the Army. Use the fat cat planes down to Sydney, pick up the booze, come back sell it to the guys in the Army, make a tremendous amount of money. We knew what was going on in the base. We didn't ever get it unless my officer, my buddy, St. John, my bombardier would once in a while hand me a couple of drinks. … They had an officers' club wherever they went on the island. We didn't have it.

EB: You kept, felt, the separation between officers and enlisted men?

LR: Absolutely even as far as going to the men's room, which I resented terribly, and I told them to "blow it out their barracks bag," the old expression. One night, you know, this is not a war hero, you get up at four in the morning and maybe a take off is at five-thirty or five or whatever, and you have breakfast in the enlisted men's quarters and the officers eat by themselves, and they have their own latrine, by themselves. … After I had breakfast, I had to go to the bathroom and the men's room for non-coms were big distance away, and I had to go, and the officers' men's room was right there, where I was. So, I went in there and I did what I had to do and I got a tremendous argument from one of the officers there, and I told him to get lost. I say, "I'm good enough to go and fly a mission with you now, that we're leaving on, and I can't go to the bathroom with you here?" I really said some nasty words to him, nothing ever happened about it. But there was a class distinction, of those officers that want to maintain it, not all officers wanted to maintain that class distinction, but you had those that did, and I resented it.

SI: Did you find that those were flying officers or were they ground officers?

LR: They were all flight officers. They were flight officers, absolutely. Did I resent it? I certainly did.

EB: I've heard that our guys on submarines had really good food, whenever they wanted anything that it would be made by a chef in the submarine. What was the food like on the bases that you had been on?

LR: Nothing, right, because we were all, we didn't have what you call permanent bases. We were always moving to an island. They had to build the tents; they had to build the quarters there for us, the engineers, when we got there, and Spam was great. We didn't have fresh eggs; I mean, there is no such thing as fresh eggs.

SI: Did you always get American rations, or, I've heard some American units got Australian rations, with a lot of mutton,

LR: No, I don't remember mutton, no. Do know the Australians, when, we regularly get fighter cover, were very good fighter pilots, the Aussies, they were good.

EB: Mostly you stayed in tents?

LR: Tents, yeah.

SI: Was there a difference between the officers' living quarters and your living quarters?

LR: Maybe a slight difference, not so much. I mean, they slept four in a tent; we slept six, that was the difference. There was four officers on a plane and six non-coms. We all slept together in one tent, the six non-coms.

EB: Did you feel uncomfortable because of the anti-Semitism, being such close quarters?

LR: Like I say, I went my own way. You had to do what you felt comfortable with. I was uncomfortable hanging around with the non-coms on my crew. I may have had other friends, on other crews, that I mingled with, the non-coms, and on my own crew I just mingled mostly with my bombardier, who came from St. Louis, and that's about all I remember. Where do we go from there, you want to go into what's next?

SI: Well, can we talk a little bit more about your missions, the things that stand out in your memory, in terms of can you describe a typical mission? …

EB: During your eight hours, what was the flight formation like? Did you always have three groups at a time?

LR: No, it was, as the war progressed, we built up the Air Force. I mean, when I first went over like on Truk, I think the first mission was twelve B-24s, that was from the 13th [Air Force], possibly the 5th [Air Force], may have had twelve. As we got later on in the war, you had more planes and more crews coming over, so maybe from the twelve bomber crews went out and they had went to twenty-four and then later on possibly you went to forty-eight, so then it became bigger, more extensive flights. But I don't remember being more than forty-eight planes. That's about all I remember.

SI: And you mentioned that your plane was usually a lead plane?

LR: Well, after about our first ten missions, we became a lead plane in our squadron, not at the beginning, and as soon as the bombardier dropped his bombs, the rest of the bomber crew's bombardiers dropped down on his release, if he's lead bombardier. He was a good bombardier, drunk, but a good bombardier.

EB: So did you primarily do the radio, … and then you would switch to your gun?

LR: Well, the radio was behind the co-pilot's seat. When you got near a target, you left your radio position and went back to your waist gun position; maybe an hour before you were getting closer to target. But the Japs had a habit, they rarely attacked you before you came to the target. What reason I don't know. They attacked you after you got off the target. The ack-ack went up at us, and then after we've dropped our bombs and we came off our bomb run, and we'd be heading home, then they attack us, most of the time. So we had time, and where did we go to the bathroom? Good question, the lunch box that we had on the plane. We had to eat lunch on the plane and we usually had our lunch after we came, after about eight not eight-thirty? Four or

five hours in the air. I'd say our run was about six hours to the target, or let's say five, usually we'd have lunch about four hours after we took off, and if you had to defecate, there's no place on the plane to defecate. You had a place where you can urinate but not defecate, so we used to use the lunch box, the big lunch box, and that's where we defecated. And what did we do with it? When they open the bomb bay, both doors, as you went on the bomb run, that's when we drop the box. That's the truth. That's what we did with it. Missions that were memorable? I think the most memorable mission is what I told you before, with my pilot; the average mission, having the Zeros hit us, getting struck ten, twelve, fourteen times. Our plane, nothing severe, outside of the navigator got killed on one mission. But memorable as the losing of those two engines on one side, that was memorable. Me, pushing the other waist gunner out of the way, was memorable to me. The other memorable thing was on a run, the heavy attack, and I was a lousy mechanic, as I always said, and my gun jammed and the Zeros were coming at us on my side pretty good, and how I fixed the jam to this day, I don't know. I fixed it in midair. I don't know how I fixed it, but something, sixth sense, made me fix it, and, as I say, I was a lousy mechanic. I never studied hard on it, but I fixed it. I remember how dangerous it was when you had to get more ammunition; you had to go through the bomb bay, with the bomb bay doors open, and pick up .50 caliber bullets that were on trays and racks, and walking through it was dangerous, I remember doing that.

SI: Was it that the floor was weak?

LR: It's open. I mean it was open. You had a catwalk, you know, like catwalks are. The bomb loads we used to carry; carried as much as eight 1000 pounders, when we had a big raid. Fighting, like I said, we were kids, that was just the games, like it was shooting ducks. We didn't know we'd be killed the next minute. We don't think about it. I didn't.

EB: You didn't think about the person you were shooting at either, I'm sure.

LR: Absolutely not, never thought about the person I was shooting at. He was shooting at me, why should I worry?

SI: How close would the Zeros come to your plane, would it be pretty close?

LR: I would say so, 400-500 feet, 300 feet, I don't recall exactly, but they were close. We knew if they didn't make the attack, they would stand out and follow us for a while, off our wing, until they were ready to make a pass. So they would follow us for a while, then they would make the pass, coming at us. We knew they were coming. Because as the war progressed and, as I said in my notes to you that when we lost seventeen out of twenty-four planes on a raid over Balikpapan oil fields, that Lindberg came over. He came overseas and was teaching the pilots on my base, where we were. I never saw him, but he was teaching the fighter pilots how to what they call "throttle consumption"; how to save on throttle consumption in order to have fighter cover on the next attack on the Balikpapan oil fields, which was like the Ploesti oil fields were in Europe, and we finally knocked them out. We got fighter cover after that. So he did a service till [?] on the gray. I know nothing about it, only what I read about it, being a Nazi sympathizer and evidently, he was, but he was over there.

SI: You also had Americans flying fighter cover after a while.

LR: Yeah. I got American fighter cover, we had Australian fighter cover. It was much better as the war progressed; it was much greater, much greater cover.

SI: Did you notice the Japanese fighter forces diminishing, or were they pretty much able to throw up the same amount of resistance?

LR: I don't think they diminished until about, maybe, the later part of or the beginning of '45, later part of '44, beginning of '45, that they start to diminish, plus less Zeros coming at us. We used to do a pretty good job on their bases. You know, in order for the fighters to not attack us we used to attack runways and bomb the runways and everything else try to keep them out. We did a good job, I think we did anyway. You always like to think you did a good job.

SI: Were these the bases, that they had in the island hopping strategy? Were you bombing the bases that they had left behind?

LR: Yeah, and then we moved there, and I remember bombing Moratai. We took over then. We threatened closer to the Philippines and Borneo. We kept island hopping. I went from the Admiralty, I think I went to Wadke, then to Numfor, then to Moratai, always kept moving north in that one year. I didn't stay at a base too long.

EB: Did you think you would eventually have to bomb Japan?

LR: Never even gave it a though. When I was there, I had no idea. Like I say, I don't think the average soldier, or flyer like I was, saw the big picture. I don't think we realized the big picture, we really don't. It's like when I was coming home, I was on a Liberty ship, coming home, back to California, and there was, I think V-E Day was around May 15th, and I was coming home for thirty day furlough and then I was supposed to be transferred to Europe, but I was getting a thirty-day furlough. …V-E Day happened while I was on board the ship, coming home. … When I got home, I was shipped from California, by train, back to Fort Dix here in New Jersey, and, you must have been told, there was a point system to be discharged and I was the second batch, I think, to be discharged out of Fort Dix, because I had enough points. You got points on missions, for time, for whatever, and I have enough points and I got discharged on May 31st, and I was on the high seas coming home only on a thirty-day furlough and the war ended. Now, did I know was the war was ending in Europe? I had no idea. All I know is, I was coming home for thirty-day furlough back to New York, then, supposedly, being shipped to Europe. But fortunately, I was discharged, Fort Dix, May 31st.

SI: Was there any kind of set number for just how many missions you have to fly, like a tour, or were you just there for the duration?

LR: The tour in the Pacific was for the length of time. If I remember, you got certain points for every three months. You got certain points for every, this is in order for you to finish flying you mean?

SI: Yes.

LR: You got points for time over there, you got points for missions and that's all I remember. I think, it was thirty-five missions, something like that, we had to fly. Somewhere along that line, thirty-five or forty, I don't remember, but my other mission was as an instructor.

EB: Can you tell us what that was like? What changed when you became an instructor? What did you do?

LR: What did I do? I had to indoctrinate new crews that were coming in from the States, and my job was to handle the radio operator, the new radio operator on his coming over; to indoctrinate them on what's happening on the missions, talk to them. … Everybody had an instructor, whether it was a pilot, whether it was a bombardier. They all had pilots; they will fly two instructors on a plane.

SI: So you finished your thirty-five or forty missions and then you, did you have to volunteer to be an instructor or they asked you, or no choice?

LR: No, it was punishment. They punished me. It's a long story, if you want it I'll tell it to you.

SI: Yes, if you would. You don't have to, but if you would.

LR: After you hear it, if you want to delete, it it's all right too.

SI: We don't mind, it's up to you.

LR: The story, when I was coming home, and when I was AWOL, I was with my bombardier. It was farewell from Sydney, a ten-day rest leave in Sydney, Australia. We were both AWOL. That's AWOL, I mean we weren't there. … The guy I came over with, who is now a colonel, he was head of the outfit, he was a pilot, same as my pilot-boss. He was made a colonel, while I was there, or whatever, his name was Harris. … I was summoned one day to his quarters. I must have had about twenty-five missions, or thirty missions, in at that time, and he says, "Sergeant Reisch, you're not only AWOL with Capt. St. John," and I says, "Yes," after all I was under his jurisdiction and I had no control over it, I mean, he was my officer. … You got to remember, I came from a long line of army men, and I was around army men most of my youth. I mean, my father went to polo games, was among Army, met generals as a kid. … He says to me, "I might have to give you a summary court martial because you're AWOL, I got to punish you." I says, "What did you do with St. John? You did nothing to him." He fucked me off; I says, "He was with me. I was sleeping with him in the same home. I was with him all through this and you want to give me a summary court martial? Do what you want to do." He says," Well, I have to drop you down one rank, from tech sergeant to staff, and I'll have to take away a couple of months' pay from your two-thirds of a month, each month, or something like that. I says to him, and I really wasn't what you would call an army lawyer, you know, and I really wasn't there to cause any trouble, I says, … "I'll tell you what, Colonel Harris," I says, "I happen to come from an army family and you know it from my records, you want to give me a summary court martial? I want a general court martial." That's exactly what I said to him. Now a general

court martial, they have to get some generals from all over the South Pacific and form a tribunal and give me a trial, and I say, "When I get to this general court martial, I'll bust this outfit wide open on what's going on here as far as black market in whiskey and everything else that you're sanctioning actually here." He looked at me, and I says, "I can prove it, too." I says, You want to do this to me, fine. I won't accept the summary." I had a right to it as a non-com, as a tech sergeant, not to accept the summary court martial. I knew this as an army boy. I says, "You could give me a general court martial, that's the only thing I'll accept." " Fine." I walked out, went about my business and never heard a word from him. But he was gonna get back at me, and the way he got back at me was when I finished my missions, he sent me on detached service as an instructor. That means I had to stay. I could have gone back to the States, but he punished me, sent me on detached service and I flew those seventeen missions, as an instructor, and that's how he got even with me. That's my tale of woe, but I fought for what I thought was right, and when I say "What was going on there the black market," and besides that many things that were going on. It was sanctioned with the nurses, what they were doing, they were prostituting themselves something awful there. You've read stories like that I'm sure. It was awful, so wide open, in a jeep. An officer riding a jeep, put a mattress in the back of the jeep, going off with a nurse, and these nurses were sending bundles of money, at home, back to the States. But my gripe wasn't with the nurses; my gripe was with the booze that was being sold to these poor bastards on a perimeter of an island protecting us flyers. … It's forty dollars a bottle. They were getting it for nothing back in the Sydney, or three dollars a bottle. Because we got all the cigarettes we wanted, when we went to Sydney, Australia we filled up our flight bags with a hundred cartoons of cigarettes or 300, not a hundred, 300. When you got to Sydney, you were able to sell a cartoon of cigarettes for three dollars at that time, so when I stepped off the ground, we had $900.00 in our pockets, cash. Didn't cost us anything and that's how everything was rented in Australia. I rented a five room in Bandai Beach, a beautiful suburb on the water like West Hampton, or any of those beaches, beach areas for $100.00 for ten days. I rented a car for $100.00 for ten days. All this money was what we got from the cigarettes, when we got there. They were trafficking in cigarettes; they were doing everything, what was going on there. So you ask me, sometimes is there a resentment what went on between officers and non-coms? Of course there was. We were flying in the same plane. My crew wasn't doing it, none of the guys in my crew did it, the officers weren't part of this.

SI: Did anybody else share your resentment of what was going on?

LR: Of course, they shared it; they knew what was going on. I used to have to walk on an island, a base, the Aussies were part of the island also, different section, I used to walk to be able to buy a case of beer from them, about six miles maybe, we couldn't get it on our base, so I resented it.

EB: Were you a religious guy all through this?

LR: No. I'm not religious, not religious at all.

EB: I know a lot of people that maybe weren't religious before the war after returned to praying when they got, you know, in that situation they would …

LR: I went to Hebrew school. After public school, you go in the afternoon, to Hebrew School. I went for several years, I was *bar mitzvah*, but I think I have less religion after I came out of the Army than before, and to this day, I'm not religious at all.

SI: Did you see ways the people would cope with the stress of flying in combat?

LR: I saw some guys getting a little hyper, a little tense, a little nervous. I didn't see it on my crew. I saw it on some other crews that I recall, but it didn't seem to affect my crewmembers, because after about our twenty-seventh mission, our crew split up, because my pilot was killed and my navigator was killed. So once they split up our crews, we were assigned to different crews. They split up our entire crew. So in case some other crew needed a radio operator, they would push me in, so my late missions were flown with different crews, which wasn't too great, I mean, they weren't too happy about it, but we did it, you did them, so that's what happened.

EB: You never noticed anyone refusing to go back in the air, like there was never a point where someone was just like, "I can't do it anymore; I'm not getting back on a plane"? There was never anyone court martialed for that?

LR: Not that I know of, not that I saw it. It could happen, but I won't know about it. So now, you got a lot of crews to turn around. But it could have happened. I remember after my sixth or seventh mission and we're on Manus, in the Admiralties, and they knew how tough those missions were, what we were facing. … I came down after one mission and there was a cook in the outfit, and he was Jewish, and he was in his forties, wasn't a young man. He came over to me one day, knew I was Jewish, he says, spoke a little Jewish, a little English to me. He spoke English. He says, "What, are you crazy?" He says," What are you doing flying? You can get killed up there," he says to me. "You're crazy, why don't you come down? Why don't you quit flying? You could quit flying at any time, if you want to quit, you could be shoved into anything else, infantry where they want to shove you," he says. His name was Rocky. I says, "Rocky, if I got to stay in this jungle for another couple of years," and at that time we thought the war would be going on forever, I says, I'd rather fly and if I get killed, I'll get killed" I says, because the conditions you lived under, I mean. So he says, "What are you doing, flying?" I remember those words, and then I came home. What else can I tell you now? Want to hear more about the Army? Are you ready to leave? You had enough of my army career?

EB: Do you have any other stories about the time that you were there?

SI: Anything we should add?

LR: I'll tell you what I remember. I remember coming home on a Liberty boat. We had a Japanese sub following us around. I remember on one of the islands we had a, every night a Japanese plane came over our island, didn't drop any bombs, just, we called him "Washing Machine Charlie," just made noise to keep us up at night and know we were there. Then later on, the night fighters came in. We eventually, got night fighters from the States, I think P-51s or whatever they were. They kept those guys away from us. But as far as the average mission, it was a mission. You faced the Zeros, faced ack-ack, and you were lucky you came home alive. … You didn't think about it and I think to me it was really, it was a mission and, I think, we were

too young and too stupid to know how easily you could get killed. Although you saw planes go down and American bodies coming out of those planes, getting killed, but we were too young. I think I was.

EB: Were there any mechanical problems? Did you have a ball turret on the bottom of the plane that would come up?

LR: Yes, I had a ball turret and a tail turret.

EB: There are no mechanical problems that, it always came back up?

LR: No, sometimes, ours always came back up. We never had that failure and the biggest guy on our plane was in the ball turret, John Connolly.

EB: How big was he?

LR: Six foot.

EB: He was in the ball turret, on the bottom? I've seen pictures of them; they're really cramped in there.

LR: Yeah, he was a big guy.

EB: Did you know if he would come out of the plane with back problems? He would be sort out for a week lying down?

LR: No, never complained.

SI: When you were flying as an instructor, would you just be watching the radio?

LR: I just talk to him, that's all.

SI: Other than that, you had no other duties on the plane?

LR: Like I say to you, the only time as an instructor that I was lucky, I didn't fly in the lead plane that day. … It cracked into a mountain and everybody was killed and I wasn't on it, because of my friend, who had a toothache, and I didn't get on the lead plane. I flew on a wing plane, so that's fate as far as I'm concerned, not due to religion, due to fate.

SI: Did you find that frustrating being instructor, and, you know, you mentioned that not having something to do, did that keep you busy enough?

LR: No, the only thing that bothered me was that it kept me from going home.

EB: Did you know how much time you would be there?

LR: I knew the most they could keep me there on detached service was three months, so that was the most, and then my orders came through to go home.

SI: The crews that you were flying with, that was their first mission, that you could fly with them on? Did you see, like mistakes that they were making?

LR: I gave them instruction as far as the radio operator. I told them what to be careful of, not to worry about, told them how to set up his frequencies, to recheck it, make sure the sets are working right. As far as the gun position, there wasn't too much to instruct. Instruct them in gunnery, that wasn't my job. My job was a radio instructor, really. That's all. There was nothing to it, just a waste of time, as far as me being overseas. I want to be at home. Then I came home.

SI: So, you were processed out of the Army before V-J Day?

LR: I was processed out of the Army, May 31, 1945.

SI: What were your first weeks and months out of the service like?

LR: First week, I came home and my sleeping quarters at home were not suitable for me, and I had a friend that was in the service, who had relatives in Miami Beach, and we got on the Silver Meteor, out of Grand Central, and we took the train down to Miami, to his aunt or sister or whatever. We stayed there about two weeks in Florida. I was only home a week, and, then, I went back to Florida.

EB: When you were in the war, did you write letters home saying that you're okay, or telegrams, or "I'll be home soon" or anything like that?

LR: Occasionally, not too often, occasionally. When I wrote home, my mother always worried. I was always afraid of insects, little, the smaller the bug the more I feared it. … My mother always wrote to me. She says, "How are the insects there?" You know, we have plenty of insects and mosquitoes, mosquito nets over our tents all the time, taking malaria pills, and in my letters, my mother always wrote back to me, "How are the insects? " Always asked me, "How are the insects?" Didn't ask me, "How is the war going? "How are the insects?" … I could tell you, there were snakes. In one of the islands, they had a boa constrictor come into our camp one day about thirty-six feet long, killed it.

EB: Were they keeping up with the war? Were they reading the paper, and nervous about you being there?

LR: I don't know their reaction. Really, can't tell you. I do know one reaction is that my father didn't speak to his brother for several years after the war, because while I was overseas and I was still alive, on a visit they once said to my parents, "Well, my son is dead and your son is alive." … the connotation that his brother said it then. They stopped talking to each other. My father stopped talking to him. Because my uncle's son was killed, he's a fighter pilot, so those things happen in the family, but, eventually, they got together again.

SI: We talked a little bit about your life on the base and all that, but could you talk a little more about how it was like in a jungle environment, has that affected you at all, like in terms of the weather and the heat, did that bother you?

EB: Affect your health at all?

SI: Did it affect your health?

LR: My health was fine, never put in for any disability or anything.

SI: Ever get malaria or anything like that?

LR: Never got malaria, only got hurt playing baseball.

SI: Do you know if malaria in general, affected your unit a lot?

LR: I really can't give you any figures or anything. I know I took the Atabrine, I think it was Atabrine that we had to take for malaria. We took our pills all the while we were there, had to take to ward off malaria.

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

EB: When you got back, did you know what you wanted to do after the war? Did you have any plans, or were you just happy to be back? Do you have plans for your future?

LR: I'd say all I thought about was leading a life, when I was overseas, of coming home and meeting a girl, getting married, and having children, and getting work and making a decent salary. I had no idea what I wanted to do, none.

EB: Did you think that maybe your experience in the war, as a radio operator, maybe you would use that experience when you got back?

LR: No.

SI: Was that something that kept you going through the war, the idea that you would have a life after?

LR: Well, I always looked forward to that. Did it keep me going? I can't say anything kept me going. I was just a kid that wanted some life and to come home. I don't think that was any goal or anything. I know you want me to say something.

SI: No, no.

EB: I know. I kind of had different ideas.

LR: No, I had nothing to, nothing that kept me going that way.

SI: Do you remember any moments of despair or low morale?

LR: Moments of despair do I remember? No, I don't recall moments of despair.

EB: When you did get back, I know that whole baby boom era started people that came back from the war, did want to settle down right away and have children, that's what you had, that idea too, that you wanted to find a wife and have children right away.

LR: That's what I wanted, that's what I wanted and I got a job. I didn't take advantage of the 52/20 club. They got, collected free checks. I didn't take advantage of the GI Bill.

EB: Why not?

LR: I have no idea why not. If I had to do it all over again, I certainly would have taken care of it, taken advantage of the GI Bill, because I was bright; I wasn't stupid, my grades were there and, but, I guess I didn't.

SI: Did you just want to get started making …

LR: I always use the excuse, I didn't have the motivation, and my excuse that I used, used as a crutch really, is that I didn't live in an environment that I mingled with people that had a drive, or parents motivated their children to that degree, and that had the education, or anything else. We were struggling. I came through the Depression, that doesn't mean I shouldn't have. I should have. But I didn't have it evidently; and there were other boys that took advantage of the GI Bill, became professional people. I admire them, I really do, and if I had to do it all over again, I would have taken that road, but I didn't. So that's one thing I regret, that I never took that road.

EB: Did they use the GI Bill to buy houses and things, too?

SI: Yes, did you use the GI mortgage?

LR: No. I was lucky to get an apartment when I got married. You had to pay some landlord office to get an apartment, under the table, in those days … When I got married, it was 1947, that was, as you say, the boom was on.

SI: There was a housing shortage all over.

EB: When you got back, you went to your house for a week and then you went to Miami, you said.

LR: Went to Miami for a couple of weeks, yeah, lived it up.

EB: So, you just took a couple of weeks to do that, and then what did you do after that?

LR: Came home.

EB: Came back to Brooklyn.

LR: Came home, lived in a small three and a half-room apartment, quarters were tight. Had an aunt living with us all my life. My sleeping quarters was certainly not suitable for me, and I wanted to get out of the house as fast as I could.

EB: What did you do to get out of the house?

LR: Got a job with Buddy Lee Clothes in Brooklyn. Started from bottom up, became a salesman, short space of time, became a union salesman, made a decent salary, enough to get married on.

EB: Where did you meet your wife?

LR: She was a local girl, a neighborhood girl. Eventually, at Buddy Lee, I worked for them for close to nineteen years, I became manager after about six or seven years. We were the biggest clothier in Brooklyn. We had three-storey building at Flatbush and Fulton. We were a big name, like I say, in the sportswear. Warm up time, Burt Lee and Marty Glickman. …. I knew all the ball players. I brought ball players in, which is a good publicity for our store. Eventually, we wound up opening five stores. I remember working with Don Newcombe, who was a black pitcher for the Dodgers. He worked for us, got him to work for us … after nineteen years, it was a family affair, I saw I can't go any further. My brother was in business, he was in the adjusting business, defending insurance companies on claims. …. He had a financial problem and I always a conservative type of boy, always the brother with money but not real money but, you know, and he says, "Why don't you come in with me? " Which I did, and put some money into the business. I took a big chance. I had three kids at that time and I went in with him in business, must have been in 1965 at that time. … We had a very successful business. I was the guy out on the road, making contacts with insurance companies, going up to the claims managers' offices, represented all the major insurance carriers in the tri-state area, home insurance, Royal Globe, Geico, Liberty Mutual. … We got claims from them and that built up the business. … Eventually, we employed eight adjusters and I had four girls working in the office for us. It was a good business and I had a good living at it, while this was coming to fruition. Of course, I met Millie, second wife. Had gotten a divorce, got three kids. … I was single for four years, between 1965 and 1969, and met Millie. Had the life of a single guy for four years, great years, and I was formally introduced to Millie by a business associate and we fell in love. … She was a widow. She lost her husband on the night of the boy's *bar mitzvah*, next morning her son was supposed to be. She lost her husband in a heart attack, he was forty-one. We met, we got married, thirty -seven years later we're still married, so, Adam Cooper matches her bloodline. She had two children, daughter lives in Manhattan. When my brother married his fourth wife and left New York, he left the business. I decided I had enough. I always invested in the stock market, and it's a hobby to a degree. I didn't make that much money out of it, but I liked it. … I was looking to be connected with a major brokerage firm. I wanted

to become a stockbroker and at that time, this was 1976 or '7, I already was fifty-five years old and, you know, to become a broker at that age is pretty difficult. No experience, but I went around, nobody would hire me. Millie's son's mother-in-law was an investor in the market. She called me up one day and she said, "Larry, I'm looking to change brokers, there's a broker in Great Neck." We lived in West Hempstead, not too flashy, lives in Great Neck. "I'd like you to come with me to the office and see what you think of the brokerage firm." I was looking now for a job as a stockbroker for close to a year, and I managed financially, it was no problem. And I went up to the office with her, and I walked into the private office of the boss, they had about twenty-five brokers sitting there, and back offices, and bond people. …They started to talk and I started to talk and he gets a phone call with a stock, and I know all about the stock, and I'm telling him what to do, what I think about it, and I says to him, "By the way," I says," Would you mind if I, if you put a trade in for me?" He was soliciting my son's mother-in-law to buy the stock at that time, after he got the phone call, and she turns around to me, she says, "What do you think of it?" I say, "I would buy it." It's supposed to be a take-over at that time. It was, I remember the stock, it was Schlitz, I think it was Schlitz and I says, "Buy it," and I say, I turned around to the boss and I said, "Would you buy a thousand shares of it?" He says, "Sure," we got talking. I was there an hour, and he says, "What are you doing?" I say, "I'm trying to get a job, to get connected to a brokerage firm." He says," You see that desk over there?" I'm looking at a glass window, he says, "Tomorrow morning, you come in and you sit at that desk, it's yours." He sent me to school and I had to take a test down at Wall Street, after about six weeks. Spent a lot of time at school, three nights a week, down at Wall Street and I took the Series 7 test, that's the big test. I don't know if you know anything about this, Series 7, it's the big test you take, that's the one that you really are licensed as a broker, and I was taking the test with guys from Yale, Princeton, Harvard and Cornell and all the Ivy League schools and I'm up against guys that are twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five years old and twenty-eight years old, college guys. …I passed the test the first shot out of the box. It was a six-hour exam, and some of these guys failed the test, and I went back to the office everyday, and about three weeks later, it was an announcement over the PA system, that I'm a licensed stock broker. I passed the test and it was a big feather on my hat at my age to change vocations. I was a stockbroker for about seven years, till I retired, and I moved here, when Adam was born. When he was born, I moved here, because I got tired of my wife going from West Hempstead. He lived in Twin Rivers here, right off [Rte.] 33, and I didn't like her visiting once and twice a week, when that new baby was born, the grandchild. … I was alone. So I retired and I was a successful. When I say successful, I managed to eke out a small pittance, out of being a stockbroker till 1984, and that you have my full career.

SI: It seems, like, one constant is you're in the jobs where you have to be very outgoing, whether it's salesmanship or a broker.

LR: Yeah, I was outgoing and I was always, when I moved here, I became a public advocate. I fought the mayor, I fought the town council, I fought the school board.

EB: Would you said the war had an effect on the way that you fight for something, like how you were going to be court martialed and you fought for that?

LR: I think it had nothing to do with it. I think when I had the time, when I moved here and I had time to devote, when you move to a planned retirement, I had time to devote to politics or being active in the community. I found the time and I enjoyed it. …In 1999, I ran for Fire Commissioner's office. It's a publicly-elected office, by people of the township. It's a five-man board in our district, and I ran for them against two incumbents and another person running for two positions open, and I got elected and I'm serving now my eighth year. I'll run for reelection, if I'm still alive next year, and I enjoyed that and I found time for that, I found time for my community. I got a lot of articles about myself, with the newspapers, and all that stuff.

SI: For the record, you showed us one of the articles in the *Concordia*,

LR: No, I'm talking about articles that really pertain to my advocate fighting, that's not important at the moment.

SI: You find that rewarding?

LR: Very rewarding, very rewarding. Right now, we're building a firehouse, a new firehouse and I'm fighting the mayor because he's not giving us enough money, so I'm still fighting.

SI: When you moved here, was it built up as it is now?

LR: Monroe Township was not, it's prairie land. They only had two major communities here. You had, no, three, Rossmoor and Clear Brook. Concordia was built, across the street wasn't built, Green Briar, Whitingham wasn't built, Ponds wasn't built, tremendous expansion. That's why we're looking to build a new firehouse right now.

SI: It seems like a lot of the issues you're dealing with involve a growing community.

LR: Like I say, you got pretty much of my story, unless you got any questions, you're the ones to come up with questions.

EB: About the war, and how it affected the way you thought about things, how hard you worked.

LR: I'm a very loyal Democrat. I gave you Adam's card.

SI: For the record, could you just explain who Adam Cooper was in Rutgers. You talked about that before. …

LR: Adam Cooper is the grandson of my wife, Millicent Cooper, and I'm his grandfather, because I'm the only grandfather he ever met, or he ever knew, the two boys, the two grandchildren, are the apple of my eye naturally, now I'm very, very close. Adam, we're very proud of him and proud of the other grandchild, Brett Cooper. Brett now goes to Delaware University; he's in the second year, I believe it's his second year and he's looking to be a veterinarian, right at the moment. That's his dog. Adam is in the Duke Law School, finishing his second year.

EB: He went to Rutgers as well?

LR: Adam went to Rutgers, he was president of Rutgers College for two years, his last two years, it's in the records that you have.

SI: President of his class?

LR: President of the school.

SI: The governing association?

LR: Yeah, president of the governing association. Adam Cooper fought the [George R.] Zoffinger. You know Zoffinger, head of the Sports Authority? That Adam fought him for, he was a member of the Rutgers Board of Trustees, he [Adam] said it was a conflict of interest. After Adam graduated, Zoffinger is no longer on the Board of Trustees. … Adam was also a fighter and Adam was well known in the school, a very popular boy. Right now, at this minute, as I said, he's applied for a fellowship in the Kennedy School of Government. I don't know if you ever heard of it.

SI: Oh, yes, certainly.

LR: He applied for a fellowship. It takes like one year for that as part of your law school at Duke and it coincides with it, something like that, I'm not sure at all, but he's being, he's one of the final candidates for the fellowship. He was accepted to the school, but not for the fellowship yet. I think they give out maybe about twenty fellowships, and he's got another interview up in Boston, so he'd be flying there tomorrow night. His interview was either Wednesday or Thursday in Boston. A fellowship is what he needs to attend Harvard. So, he's accomplished quite a bit. In Rutgers, he was graduated *summa cum laude* there or whatever. He was one of the speakers at the graduation. Like I say, we're both very proud of him, my wife and I. We're proud of both boys, both great.

EB: What about your children? You have five children?

LR: Three children. I'm estranged with them several years ago, more than several years ago.

SI: You don't have to say anything more. Yes, this is about average, three hours or so.

LR: I was just telling them about Adam. [LR is talking to Mrs. Reisch]. They wanted to know what the relationship is. I said, "He's my grandson" I don't belong to either. I was just telling them about, what is it, the Kennedy School of …

Millicent Reisch: John F. Kennedy School of Governance at Harvard University. Yeah, he's talking of getting a fellowship, yeah, we hope. Well, he was accepted into the school, now if they give him enough of a grant, because he's, you know, in hock up to his ears in student loans. Duke is very expensive. Rutgers didn't cost, he got a full scholarship, complete. I don't think

they're giving them out anymore at Rutgers College, but he had a full scholarship. But Duke is very, very expensive, about fifty-grand a year. So, he's going there, he's finishing his second year. Did he tell me he's working for John Edwards?

LR: He's working for the John Edwards campaign right now, because he went to school in North Carolina.

MR: Not only does he like him, but he's fifteen minutes from his apartment, which makes it very convenient. By the way, good luck to you, you're a senior too?

SI: No, I graduated several years ago.

MR: You might have graduated when Adam did two years ago.

SI: No, I graduated in 2001. I graduated a couple of years before he did. I recognize his name from articles in the *Targum*.

MR: Which college did you go?

SI: I went to Rutgers College.

MR: You went to Rutgers College, too, and you're there?

EB: Yes, right now.

MR: They haven't done anything with the eliminating of the school yet, have they? They want to put it under one umbrella or …

SI: I think that went through. That will take full effect in a couple of years. They still have students who will get a degree that says Rutgers College or Douglass College, but in a couple of years that will disappear.

MR: Well, good luck to you both.

SI: Thank you, glad to meet you too.

LR: Adam, talking about Adam, he also interned for President Clinton, two years ago, up in Harlem, in his office. … He also interned for Assemblymen, or is it Senator, Pallone, from New Jersey. I don't know what he is.

SI: I think he's a congressman.

LR: Congressman Pallone, he interned there when he was very young, interned for him, interned for President Clinton, now he's working for John Edwards.

EB: Adam, he encouraged you to do this interview.

LR: Otherwise, I want to be, not encourage me, he says, "You got to do it."

SI: Well, we appreciate that.

EB: Did he grow up with you? When he was growing up, did you tell him stories from the war, or was he just interested …

LR: Tell him, I always kept an elephant in my trunk, no stories like that. I told him stories, we have a very close relationship, Adam and I, and Brett also, very, very close. That's one of the things that happened to my life and my wife. The first marriage was … That's what counts.

SI: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

LR: No. Nothing else.

EB: Okay.

SI: Well, if there's anything else later on you want to add you could always add it to the transcript. Thank you very much for sitting down with us..

LR: You don't want to hear about my sex life, or my gambling, or my drinking, that you don't want to hear.

SI: Thank you very much. Thanks just for the record, you brought out a lot of material and thank you for bringing that out. This concludes our interview with Lawrence Reisch on March 12, 2007 in Monroe Township, New Jersey. Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Edwin Robinson 9/11/2007
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/30/2007
Reviewed by Lawrence Reisch 5/29/2013