RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SALVATORE RESTIVO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Salvatore Restivo in Cranbury, New Jersey, on February 18, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Brian Furgione: … Brian Furgione.

SI: Mr. Restivo, thank you very much for having us here today.

Salvatore Restivo: No problem. As I say, glad to have you.

SI: Thank you. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

SR: New York City, Manhattan. I was born on 38th Street. My parents were born in Sicily, … but my brothers and sisters, they're all born in New York, all on 38th Street, really. … It was the Great Depression, as you people know, and we didn't have much. … We were not as fortunate as you people were, where you can go to college, and it was unheard of then. … Well, we grew up and I think we grew up fine, because our mother and father were great people. They saw to it that we were okay, and so, I was brought up, actually, in the streets of New York and, there, I had an interest in what was going on with the events. I read the *Daily News* quite often. That was my library, really, where I started off with the comics, then, the sports and I graduated into even the editorial, and the *News* is a tabloid, if you don't know it. It still is, but it was my education there and it was New York. … Whenever any event [was upcoming] that was worthwhile, I would see it in the *News* and, all by myself, I would go and see what it was all about. If the fleet was in on the Westside, I lived on the Eastside, I'll take the walk over, whatever it was, if there was a parade on Fifth Avenue, because I was very close. I lived in Midtown Manhattan. So, I had all this by my side and I took advantage of it as a kid.

SI: How did your family come to settle in Midtown Manhattan?

SR: Well, what it was, there must have been people here, friends or relatives, that came before them and they probably settled where they were, and that happened to be Midtown Manhattan.

SI: Was it a largely Italian neighborhood or was it a mix?

SR: Well, the block was half Italian and half Irish. Now, we didn't mingle. … [laughter] So, it was all right. The Italians were down the block and the Irish were up the block, and that was it.

SI: Did the two groups not get along or did they just not mingle?

SR: We got along. We didn't bother with one another. [laughter]

SI: There were no fights or anything. What did your father do for a living?

SR: My father was … uneducated, never went to school, and he couldn't read or write, and the same thing goes for my mother, but my mother picked up the English language pretty good. … She wasn't fluent in English, but she understood and could speak it, where my father [understood] just a little bit. … My father was a laborer. He worked for Con Edison,

[Consolidated Edison, the New York City area power utility company], and my mother took care of the kids.

SI: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

SR: Well, I had two brothers and I had two sisters.

SI: Are you the oldest, or where do you fit into picture?

SR: I'm the youngest guy.

SI: I do not think that you said your birth date on the record. Would you?

SR: Well, my birthday's October 14, 1920, goes back quite a bit. [laughter] …

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about what your household was like? Did they maintain any Italian traditions in the home?

SR: Well, partly, but not really, you know, partly. … My father just went to work. We'd have food on the table every night. … We had a coal stove in the kitchen and we never bought coal, because, on 37th Street, there was a coal depot, like Burns Brothers, and they were your big distributor throughout the city. You had trucks all over the place and they unload the coal from barges right off the river and, as the trucks were moving out, they spilled the coal, and that's how we got coal. My brothers went down with a bag or two and they filled it up and we never paid for coal. … We always had coal and we always had heat.

BF: Did you speak Italian, since both your parents spoke Italian?

SR: Both from Sicily, the same county, more or less.

BF: Were you able to speak Italian?

SR: Yes. … Well, they spoke Italian in the house; my brothers and sisters, English, so, I picked up … on both; not really, you know, but I did pick up on both and understood.

SI: What about food? Did they have a lot of traditional Italian foods?

SR: Well, if you [can] call [it] that, we had soup. That was the mainstay, soup, and then, maybe on a Sunday, we'll have veal cutlet or meatballs, … but we had soup and, after that, … not that much food. … My mother didn't go in [to it]. Sometimes, she would make some pizza, you know, and some other Italian food, … I don't even know the name of it, but it was delicious.

SI: Did you have to do a lot of chores around the home? You said your brothers went out and collected the coal.

SR: Yes. Well, what I did was, when I was old enough, like, in the morning, I would go to this grocery store and pick up the milk. We didn't have any home delivery and we had a can and the grocer would fill up the can with milk and that was it, or whatever we needed, whatever staples we needed, like bread or such, nothing really fancy, or maybe I'll take a walk to the bakery store. … They had a German grocery store on Second Avenue and there were delicious buns, where you got crumb buns, you know. Now, I don't know how much they're worth, but we got four for a nickel and they were delicious, you know. So, that's what I had to do, more or less, but any other chores, maybe on the side, I would help clean up, use linseed oil on the furniture. That was it, but I didn't have any other chores, other than that.

SI: Did your family live in an apartment?

SR: It was a tenement, and … it was about, I think, a four-room flat. A "railroad flat," that's what they called it. [Editor's Note: A railroad flat is an apartment in which the rooms are laid out in a straight line, like compartments in a railroad car.]

SI: Can you tell us a bit more about your neighborhood and what it was like to grow up there?

SR: Well, the neighborhood, we were, like, on 38th Street, in the middle of 42nd Street and 34th Street, the main avenues in New York, or I think they still are. … I think we were more sophisticated, because of that, than other neighborhoods, where they were a little bit remote, but we were there. … I don't know, that's how I feel.

SI: You mentioned that you were very aware of the news and what was going on in the city.

SR: Yes, well, [I followed] what was going on.

SI: Did you follow politics, for example?

SR: Well, as a kid, … I would read the editorials, and … the *News* was strictly for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and I would read that.

SI: Do you remember any parades where Franklin Roosevelt came?

SR: Oh, the parades, I remember parades. I remember the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the NRA Parade that they had. NRA stands for National Recovery Act, and they had a big parade. It lasted for hours and I remember Mrs. Roosevelt being there. It was a long, long parade. I think it lasted all day and into the night.

SI: The National Recovery Act was part of Roosevelt's answer to the Depression.

SR: Yes.

SI: How bad was the Depression in your neighborhood?

SR: Well, in the neighborhood, it was like this: if you couldn't pay the rent, and a lot of people couldn't pay the rent then, what they would do [was], the landlord would get whatever furniture you had, it wasn't much, and they'd put it right on the sidewalk. That was it, and you saw quite a bit of that. … People were hungry, period. I don't know how they managed. We were just lucky enough that my father was working, and my brothers and sisters, so, the income was there for us.

SI: Did your older brothers have to leave school and go out to work?

SR: Well, let's see, one brother went to high school and another brother never went to high school. He went to work, if he could find it. I don't know whether he worked or not, but … my oldest brother did. … One of my sisters went to work, she was older, and another sister was still in school as I was growing up. She was not that much older than I was.

SI: Your father never lost his job. He was never laid off.

SR: Well, my father, later on, he got hurt on the job, while he was working with Con Edison. … They gave him something, I don't know how much money, and that was it, but he found other work.

SI: Okay. Was that after the Depression?

SR: Yes, after, yes, he was hurt.

SI: Being in the heart of New York, do you remember seeing some of the scenes that we commonly associate with the Great Depression, like the bread lines and people selling pencils?

SR: Well, yes, there were people there. … Now, where I was living was not too far away from the Bowery and the Bowery is where people lived in; what did they call it? Well, they would pay about a quarter a night to get a room and a bed.

SI: A flophouse.

SR: Flophouse, you got it, and I saw a lot of that. [As] a matter-of-fact, when I graduated from high school, I worked downtown, right on the Bowery, at Canal Street. I was [in] the jewelry trade, as an apprentice, and I would see a lot of those guys. They never bothered anybody. They were just homeless. They just didn't have a job and they would just go around, back and forth, on the street. Where could they go, you know?

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your schooling, your education, where you went?

SR: Well, the schooling, I went to grammar school, junior high school then, and then, high school. … Forget about college; we never thought about college. … I felt I was not qualified.

SI: How did your family feel about education? Did they want you to stay in and at least finish high school?

SR: Well, my mother passed away when I was a child of ten, and my father, there, they weren't too keen as far as education. … What they were interested [in] was the money, getting money into the house, so [that] they could live properly.

SI: Did you have any part-time jobs when you were in high school?

SR: No, none of that. I just went to school, period.

SI: Okay. Did you work in the summers?

SR: No.

SI: Were you able to take part in any recreational activities, like sports or hobbies, anything?

SR: Not really, no. … Then, again, I think I have a complex, where I thought I was not qualified to stand up with other guys. I don't know. So, that was it.

BF: Was religion a big part of your life when you were younger?

SR: No.

SI: Were you Catholic?

SR: Well, I was a mix there; that's what I say. I was a Protestant, I was a Catholic, and not really into it the way I should have been.

SI: It was interesting that you mentioned following the news through the *Daily News* and other sources.

SR: Yes.

SI: Were you aware of what was happening overseas with Mussolini and Hitler?

SR: Oh, yes, yes. I was old enough then to know what was going on, yes. … Then, again, if it wasn't the *News*, it was the newsreels. We had newsreels there. In-between a double feature, they'll give you a newsreel and, there, they would cover events. You could see what was going on.

SI: What did you think of what was happening in the world, particularly in the late 1930s, as Hitler was taking over all these countries in Europe and Mussolini invaded Ethiopia?

SR: Well, I wasn't really focused on that, you know. I thought about it, I knew it was there and it wasn't right, but … that was it. I still continued my life the way I was going on.

SI: It was not discussed in your neighborhood or among your friends.

SR: Very little.

SI: Did you ever think, before Pearl Harbor, that the war in Europe would drag America in?

SR: Well, yes. Then, the papers and the newsreels, they were on it. They covered the news and they gave you the facts and, of course, you had to think about that, especially before Pearl Harbor, where young guys were being drafted. My friends, my relatives, they were being drafted and, of course, you had to think about that.

SI: When did you graduate from high school?

SR: What was it? In 1938.

SI: You were out working for a few years before America entered the war.

SR: Well, I was working. It was tough. No, this was still the Depression. The Depression lasted for years. It didn't last for six months or a year, it lasted for years, and, even when I graduated, in 1938, jobs were scarce. Doors were not open to you. So, it took quite awhile before I got any kind of a steady job.

SI: That was in the jewelry trade.

SR: Yes, I worked [in] it. I started out as an apprentice, running errands, going uptown, downtown, and, there, again, it was a real education, right there in New York.

SI: What stands out in your memory about New York in that era?

SR: Well, I don't know what stands out. I don't know. …

SI: For example, I am familiar with some things that happened in New York relating to the Great Depression, like the dance marathons, things like that, that were kind of unique to that era.

SR: Well, let's see, … dance marathons? You know about that, huh?

SI: Yes. It was really just an excuse for people to get some food and so on.

SR: Yes, … and they'll dance all night and get tired and get poofed out and they couldn't dance anymore. … Anyhow, what I remember about that is, what stands [out] in my mind is, that I had a little money and I could go to ballgames. … Especially when I went to junior high school and high school, I was given carfare, but I would walk, even lunch money, I would sacrifice my lunches, so [that] I could go to the ballgame on a Saturday and see my hero, Lou Gehrig. You guys heard of Lou Gehrig?

BF: Yes.

SR: Yes. So, he was it. I would go there. … For a dollar-ten, I could get one of the best seats in the house, because most of the seats at the Yankee Stadium were not reserved. There was [the] grandstand. They had bleachers, but the grandstand covered … most of the area there. They have some reserved seats, but, if you can go there early, like I would, because … my mother was gone and I had time on my hands, [you could get good seats]. … I would go and I had … about a dollar-ten, and I had that, and ten cents for carfare, a nickel going and a nickel coming back. I would walk to Grand Central from my house, which was a short distance, and I'd be in the ballgame before you know it, get there early, so [that] I can see the guys going into the clubhouse, the ballplayers, and then, as soon as the gates opened up, I would get one of the best seats in the house. For a dollar-ten, … I would sit right by first base and home plate, right there. So, you couldn't beat the seats. That was my passion, more or less.

SI: Do any of the games stand out in your mind, like when the Yanks would go to the World Series? Were you able to go to those games?

SR: Yes, quite a few games. One thing that stands out in my mind [is], one day, I saw Lou Gehrig, my, well, I always say, yes, idol, not a role model, because I could never be what he was, and I saw him at the plate, one day. He was standing there, poised, you know. … With a bat in his hand, he was just ready to strike the ball out, and I said, "Gee, this guy's going to hit a homer." On the next pitch, sure enough, he did, and I remember that. [laughter]

SI: Were you able to go to his farewell ceremony?

SR: No. I was working at the time, but I'll tell you a story about Lou Gehrig. As I said, I was also an errand boy. … It was rings and jewelry, you know, I would deliver down at downtown, and it happened that Lou Gehrig, after he got sick, … Mayor [Fiorello] LaGuardia gave him a job as a parole officer, or in the commissioner's office. I don't know what his capacity was. [Editor's Note: Lou Gehrig served as a parole commissioner in New York City in the final years of his life.] … He would go down there and I would go next-door, or across the street, from the parole office, and there were two jewelers there. They happened to be German, as Lou Gehrig was, and they kept very interested in Lou Gehrig. … They'd tell me, "I see Lou Gehrig," and, when I'd go down, … they would tell me, … "He's looking pretty good," and then, before you know it, he says, "Well, Lou Gehrig is not [looking] that great," when I would go there in that time. … Then, one time, [I] went down there, they don't see him anymore, they said, and, before you know it, a couple of weeks later, he passed away. That, I remember.

SI: Going back to your high school years, you went to [Central] Commercial High School.

SR: Yes.

SI: Was there anything in particular that you studied?

SR: Well, … bookkeeping.

SI: Was it a commercial course or did you learn other things besides the bookkeeping trade?

SR: Well, there's also salesmanship, too.

SI: When you got out of high school, was that initially what you were trying to get into?

SR: Yes, but I couldn't get a job; … lucky thing that I had a brother in-law in the jewelry trade and, actually, he got me this job.

BF: You said other members of your family were being drafted into the war before you.

SR: … Not in my particular family, but I had cousins that were drafted into the war.

SI: What about your brothers?

SR: One was drafted later; I was in the service at the time he was drafted. The other one never [served, because he] was married and he didn't go.

SI: Going back to how you followed the news, did you go out and see the *Normandie* when it burned at the piers? [Editor's Note: The SS *Normandie* was a French luxury liner that sought refuge in New York Harbor after the fall of France. On February 9, 1942, while being converted into a troopship, the USS *Lafayette* (AP-53), the *Normandie* caught fire and capsized.]

SR: Let's see, I saw it, yes. I saw it, because I was that interested.

SI: Did events like that pique your interest in what was happening overseas?

SR: Well, you know, I had an interest. … Even as I said, [if] the Navy was in on the Westside, I would take that walk from the Eastside right to the Westside, what is it? on 43rd Street or 44th Street, wherever they are. … I would see the Navy. When I say "the Navy," I've seen, like, carriers, like the old [USS] *Lexington* [(CV-2)], the [USS] *Saratoga* [(CV-3)], and they had the old planes up there. It was just an interest. If a parade was on Fifth Avenue, they would assemble in the park, a couple of blocks away, on 38th Street and the park there, and I would see them get assembled. I had that interest.

SI: Before you actually entered the service, had you considered enlisting or going into any other service, like the Navy?

SR: No, no.

SI: Were you aware of things like the German-American *Bund* or pro-Mussolini people in the United States?

SR: Yes, well, I read the papers, yes, but it didn't occupy my entire time.

SI: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

SR: Well, I was home. I was home, I'll tell you, the day itself, what happened. I was living, at that time, in Astoria, Long Island. … I was at a park, watching a football game, a local football game. It was a cold day and, therefore, I and my cousins and some friends, we went to the movies. We walked into the movies, on 58th Street in Manhattan, and Third Avenue, and one of the ticket collectors says, "Hey, looks like we're getting into it," and we didn't know what he [was talking about]. We knew he was talking about the war. I said, "Yes, we will," you know. But, actually, what happened, … later on, I knew that he knew about that the Japanese [had] bombed Pearl Harbor. … We didn't know it then, because we didn't go into any details. We went to the movies, and then, from there, we went up in the Bronx. There's a wedding that my cousin was invited to, so, we went along. It was a "football wedding," and [do] you know what a football wedding is?

BF: No.

SR: A football wedding, … it's not a dinner. What they do is, and that was the norm, [in] those days, the guy would come out with a cardboard box filled with sandwiches and, instead of delivering from table to table, he would throw them at you, [like] it was a football. [laughter] So, we went to this wedding, and then, on the way, on the subway, they had the *Enquirer*, the city *Enquirer*, *National Enquirer*. Now, they weren't known for their integrity, you know, and this had a [head]line, "Japs Bomb Pearl Harbor." We paid no attention to that at all, because we thought it was just sensationalism, you know. So, we went into the wedding and I danced with a girl there and she told me, … "You know, we're at war, the Japs." That's how I found out. … After that, we just left. I couldn't be at that wedding anymore.

SI: You were pretty upset by the news.

SR: Yes.

SI: Did you realize, at that point, that you would probably be going into the service?

SR: Well, yes, and, actually, what happened [was], I was working in the jewelry store, and manufacturing, too, and so, as I said, I was working in this [store].

[TAPE PAUSED]

SR: It's not recording anymore? … [Editor's Note: Due to a technical mishap, the recorder shut down during the interview, a fact that went unnoticed for a short while.]

SI: I just turned it back on. I think it cut off just after we were talking about Pearl Harbor. Could you tell us a little bit about when you joined the service, where you went first?

SR: Well, when I joined the service, … I went to the draft board and I told them to put me ahead, which they were very happy to do, and, before you know it, I was drafted into the service.

SI: You said, first, that you went up to Camp Upton for a little bit.

SR: Yes, Camp Upton, for a few days. … I think they sent everyone up there to Camp Upton, Long Island, yes, and then, from there, you'd be assigned, if they needed you, say, in Keesler Field, like I was sent to, or wherever they needed personnel. … From there, they assigned you [to] where you would go. I went to Keesler Field, down in Mississippi, down by the Gulf of Biloxi, [Biloxi Bay, off the Gulf of Mexico]. You ever hear of Biloxi? They made a picture, *Biloxi Blues* [(1988)], about that. [laughter] Yes, I was there and, there, … [the] humidity was terrible, and I told you about the uniforms. They would be soaking wet; when they dried, it'll be all white with salt. … Packs, I had to carry a pack on a long march, and I'm a small guy. … That bothered me more than anything else down there, or pulling KP [kitchen police duty], where you had to get up around three-thirty in the morning to get ready for KP, and that was the worst part about KP. Otherwise, it wasn't that bad.

SI: What about the drill sergeants? Does anything stand out about them?

SR: Not particularly. … One guy, our drill sergeant, tried … to be tough, but he was a good guy. He didn't bother us that much.

SI: There was not a need for much discipline.

SR: No, no. As far as us scrubbing the floors with a toothbrush, they did none of that, not that I know of, anyhow, you know.

SI: Then, you went up to Chicago for radio school.

SR: Well, I went, … yes, to radio school.

SI: One thing that stood out was the cold.

SR: Well, the cold, … but, also, I was in Chicago; that stood out, too. That was right in the middle of Chicago, right by Grant Park, right by the lake, [Lake Michigan], living in a hotel.

SI: Which hotel was it?

SR: Right now, it's the Hilton International. [As] a matter-of-fact, my son just was there recently, … but, then, it was the Hotel Stevens. I don't know; at that time, it was the largest hotel in the United States. I don't know about the standings now, but, anyhow, it was and the one thing [was], you didn't pull any extra duties. … You went to class and you studied, … if you wanted to, and that was it.

SI: You said it was a pretty intense course.

SR: In the beginning it was, but, later on, it wasn't.

SI: You were learning both code and the mechanical workings of the radios.

SR: Right, yes.

SI: About how long was that session?

SR: Well, I always say it was day and night, six months, but I'll tell you something about that. They had this radio school in Chicago, but it didn't last long. As I said, … one of my sons stayed there recently, … he got me some memorabilia about that, … and I can show you that, too, and they closed the hotel, the session with the radio school in Chicago. They closed it early, even before the war [ended], and I'll tell you why, because they weren't using radio operators anymore. Morse Code? … I don't think they used it anymore on the B-17s or anything like that, where, prior to that, they did. So, they closed the school, … I found out later, before the war ended, but, when I went there, it was the highest priority. …

SI: You explained to us how you were sent for aerial gunnery training, but you were not able to complete it.

SR: Yes. Well, after we graduated, we took a physical, it was mandatory, more or less, where a colonel was conducting the test and you had to go through. … It was a stricter examination than normally and you had to pass everything okay, and what kept me from passing was this left eye. It was 20/30 and, being the right height for an aerial gunner, particularly a tail gunner, a tail gunner doesn't have much room in the tail of a plane and I'm a small guy, I was almost perfect for the job, that is, physically, … but this eye kept me back. I took the test again and it didn't work, same thing. … I couldn't get into it, not that I was unhappy about it.

SI: Then, after Chicago, you came east to Atlantic City, for a brief time.

SR: Yes, overseas basic training.

SI: That was where they taught you more about bayonet work.

SR: Yes, how to use a bayonet. It was more body contact, like, that kind of training, you know.

BF: Did you get to see Atlantic City at all while you were there?

SR: Well, whatever there was to see of it. It was all GIs down there and there were no casinos then, as you see now, and just, to me, after Chicago, Atlantic City was very dull. What could I tell you?

SI: Before you went overseas to Hawaii, were you ever able to get back home or visit your family?

SR: Yes, once, for about a few days, from Atlantic City.

SI: Did you have a lot of contact with your family when you were in the service?

SR: Well, you've got to remember, my father didn't read or write. So, I wrote to my sister, and it wasn't that much, but it wasn't that little, either.

SI: Was that important to you, to get mail from home? Was it good for your morale?

SR: I liked to get mail, but I didn't go crazy over the mail itself.

SI: Can you tell us again about going over to Hawaii, what that process was like?

SR: You mean on the boat itself?

SI: Yes.

SR: Well, I'm not a sea-goer, but I took this trip on this boat and it was an old Army boat. They said it was a ship; they can't call it a boat. It was an old Army ship and they said it was from World War I, and it looked it, and they didn't have any modern conveniences. It was an old ship and they assigned me, … with other guys, down in the hold of the ship, right by the propeller, and that's all you'd hear, "Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom," you know, all day long. So, that got me, and then, the ship itself, … also, not that the waters were that bad, it's just that I couldn't take the water, the rock and roll. So, I got sick and I was sick as a dog. I'd lay in that hammock there, in that hold there, listening to the propeller, and I didn't feel good anyway. [laughter] It wasn't the greatest thing in the world. If I go up on deck, I'll throw up over the railing. …

SI: Did you know, when you got on the ship, that you would be going to Hawaii and what you would be doing?

SR: Yes, that, I knew. That, I knew.

SI: When you got to Hawaii, you went to Haleiwa Field and joined the 47th Fighter Squadron.

SR: Yes, that's where they put me.

SI: I am not sure if this was on the tape, but you were telling us a little bit about how they told you about the history of the squadron.

SR: Well, they were there, the squadron there, itself. Now, Haleiwa is on the other end of Honolulu, on the other side, and it's a small field, very small. … With the runway there, you can't have a long runway, but you can have a runway where you have fighter planes there, no bigger, and so, when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor itself, they bombed all … the airbases, like Hickam Field, Bellows Field, Wheeler Field, and they didn't go near Haleiwa. So, there were two pilots that were stationed in Haleiwa, in the 47th Fighter Squadron, that were able [to take off]. I don't know where they were during the night, but, on that morning, they came with their street clothes and got into their planes and took off and they were able to shoot down seven Jap planes, the only outfit that was able to do that, because we were in Haleiwa, where the Japs didn't bomb. … Actually, I'll tell you another story about Haleiwa. There was B-17s, bombers, Superfortresses, [Flying Fortresses], coming in from the States, or on their way to the Philippines, and they're going to stop in Hawaii, at Hickam Field, where they couldn't land.

Guess where they landed? in Haleiwa, even though that airfield was small and barely can make it, but that's where they had to land the squadron.

SI: What were the conditions like in Haleiwa? What was the base like?

SR: Well, the base, I loved the base. The base … itself was by the sea, beautiful scenery by the sea, especially at sunset. You couldn't beat the sun coming down, and there were no fences. … It was by the water and they had a nearby Japanese, American-Japanese, fishing village, which was so unique and quaint. It was beautiful. So, they had that, and then, I was with the planes, where I'd never been with planes. Don't forget, I was down on 38th Street; where did I ever see a plane at? [laughter] … Then, I was assigned to the Major, the commanding officer, his plane. … There's a little incident there, which I wrote about, … if you want to take a look later.

SI: Do you want to tell us the story on the tape?

SR: … Well, the story was that I was assigned to Major Heath's plane and, gee, I was so happy to be assigned. … There I was, just a buck sergeant, you know, and assigned to his plane. So, what you had to do [was], as I said before, … when they come down after a flight, you ask him, "Radio okay, sir?" … Of course, sometimes, you get, "Okay, fine," you know, but, this time, I asked the Major, "Radio okay, sir?" and he answers back, "No, it wasn't," and he told me … what he couldn't do. Now, he was the commander. … While in flight, they do maneuvers and he had to give out orders. He said, "I couldn't do this and I couldn't do that and I couldn't do this," and, when he finishes off, he says, "Is this sufficiently explanatory?" So, naturally, after that, I was never assigned to the Major again. [laughter] So, that was the story. There's more to it, … if you want to read the article later.

SI: Was it just a mechanical problem?

SR: Well, engine noise.

SI: The engine noise you were talking about.

SR: You couldn't fix that. …

SI: You said that was a problem on the P-40s and the P-47s.

SR: Right.

SI: However, not in the P-51s.

SR: No.

SI: When you joined the outfit, they were still flying P-40s.

SR: Right, yes.

SI: Could you tell us again how you and the other radio mechanics fit into the unit?

SR: … What do you mean by [that]?

SI: What were your duties like?

SR: Well, we got along, we got along. You know, don't forget, everybody was away from home and somewhere where you thought you'd never be. It was a different feeling. There was no animosity among people, personal, that I know. I don't think of anybody fighting with anybody there, or talking bad about somebody. That is the truth.

SI: What were your regular duties? What would you do in an average day?

SR: Well, there, on the average day, … as I said before, … check out the planes early in the morning, before they took off, and check with the tower, see how they heard us. They'd give you a, "Loud and clear," if it was okay, and then, you'd say, "Roger and out," and that was it. When they came back, you asked the pilot how the plane was, the radio was, and he'll give you an answer. Usually, it was okay, but there was times when they picked up the radio noise and that's it.

SI: You said the pilots called it "radio noise," but you thought it was "engine noise."

SR: Right. It was. [laughter]

SI: Do you think that was because the pilots did not want to believe anything was wrong with the plane, that it was something else?

SR: No. I don't think they thought about it. … I don't know. We all got along swell. I don't know how they thought, but it just was the Major, once; I told you about that story, he couldn't give his commands, you know. Usually, they accept it, what was there. Hey, look, they have bigger problems to worry about, you know.

SI: You said, even before you went to Iwo Jima, that the squadron lost pilots

SR: Oh, yes. They lost pilots, pilots I never saw, or it crashes itself, or, among themselves, … the plane will malfunction, they have an oil leak or whatever, and they'd have to go down into the drink or whatever.

SI: The planes that went down in the drink, would they usually rescue the pilot or were they usually lost?

SR: Well, they were usually rescued, especially when … we were in Iwo Jima and many planes went down into the drink and they had submarines … in the Western Pacific there just for that purpose, to pick up these pilots that went down, and we had a lot of people [that] went down there, and submarines did it. …

SI: When there was a crash at the field, like at Haleiwa, would you have to respond? Would you run out to the crash with the other ground crew members?

SR: No, no. … It was just a crash; there were always personnel assigned to that, to do what they had to do.

SI: How long were you at Hawaii before you were sent over to Iwo Jima?

SR: Well, about twenty months.

SI: Did you and your fellow ground crew want to do something else or were you satisfied to sit out the rest of the war in Hawaii?

SR: No, no. You just wanted to get the war over and done with. That's how I felt, and many guys felt that, "Hey, let's get going here. What are we doing in Hawaii?"

SI: You felt frustrated being there.

SR: Yes. Well, after awhile, as I said, I never went into Honolulu anymore.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about preparing to go to Iwo Jima? When did you find out that you were going to make that move?

SR: Well, that was towards the end of 1945, [1944]. We got ready, and the rumor was; they never told you, specifically, that you were going to go here or there. We got the rumor that we're going to go to … Truk. I think they called it Truk, an island out in the Pacific, and we were on our way to the dock and, what happened [was], it was called off. We didn't go there. So, we … had to come back, and then, it was only about a few weeks later, if it was that much, we were put on the trucks again … to go over to one of the islands, to invade, and we were put aboard ship. … Only when we were on the ship itself did we find out, from Marine personnel, there was a lot of Marine personnel there, … that we were going to Iwo Jima, and I heard about Iwo Jima before that, because I kept up on what was happening during the war. … I knew that the B-24s were bombing that island incessantly for months, dropping bombs and bombs and bombs and bombs, every day. So, I knew about Iwo Jima and I knew where it was and it was a small island, and so, all the Marines were there and they were the attack force. I was on the invasion force. Not all of our squadron members were there, because the planes … had to go elsewhere to get there. They couldn't go on the boat, naturally. … I would say about seventy-five to a hundred guys, that were radiomen or maintenance men, went on that boat with the Marines, not that we were going to attack. We were there. … They were going to take the island in three days, so, the second day, the airfield should have been ready, and we were on our way there. So, that was the concept. We were going to be there and be ready for the planes to come in … and be part of the fighting. So, we get to Iwo Jima and, before that, a fleet of battleships joins the convoy. It was a big convoy. It was about five or six battleships, big ones, and we met them at Saipan. They escorted us into Iwo Jima and they shelled that island like nobody's business. Remember, B-24s were bombing that thing daily and you thought, "Who the heck could live on that? With all that shelling, how could anybody be alive? How could anybody [live] there?" You see those shells,

they're just going in there. What are those, sixteen-inch guns, from the battleships? They were going in there and you said, "Hey, nobody can be alive on that island." Okay, so, comes February, today's the 18th, it was February 19th, the day we invaded, and the Marines go in. … We were onboard, right there with them, because Marines from our boat went in there, got into these, what are they? …

SI: The Higgins boats, [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel (LCVPs)]?

SR: Yes, and you could see their faces. Nobody was happy. Nobody was smoking, like you see them in the movies, all solemn, and they were going into battle. … So, they went in there and there was a public announcement there, onboard ship, how, when they went in, "All the Marines are going in. We've covered, already, two hundred yards now; five hundred yards. We're making progress." "Hey, this is a snap," you thought. For the first two hours, they gave us this announcement, that the Marines were meeting very little opposition, that they were going in. It was almost like a cakewalk, but that was not so. After two hours, we didn't hear nothing. "Something is wrong," you thought, and it was. You didn't hear nothing and you never heard anything else, that day or any other day. It seems that the Japanese now were attacking the guys on the [beach]. They had them on the beach, they had their sights on them, from those caves. You couldn't see the caves. You couldn't see their guns, and then, they got those Marines right off the bat, and I don't know how many went down the first time around, but you heard no more announcements. … Where the island should been taken in three days, it wasn't taken for over a month, and here we were, we're supposed to be [ashore]. On D-1 Day, we were supposed to be put ashore; we stood on that ship for six more days. … The only [reason] they let us out of the ship was the fact that the ship had to be ready for another invasion, [which] was Okinawa. So, they put us on the shore, with only some K rations; that was the Navy. We were the only Air Force [men], out of I don't know how many thousands. They estimate it's sixty to eighty thousand Marines on that invasion force and we were the only guys from the Air Force, this seventy-five to a hundred guys, and we had … nothing with us at all, just that one K ration. [Editor's Note: Over eighty thousand Marines were committed to the battle for Iwo Jima.] … Once we were there, we couldn't get any food, because we didn't have any papers to get any food. We're unassigned. We were unassigned, but, anyhow, that's another story.

SI: They just left you on the beach.

SR: Left us on the beach. The ship had to go out and … get ready for another invasion, Okinawa.

SI: Before then, had the ship been positioned where you could see the island?

SR: Oh, yes. I saw the whole works. You got to see the island, because we had [inbound Marines], and then, the ship served as a hospital ship.

SI: Do you remember the name of the ship?

SR: No, I don't know. PA something, I don't know, and it had to go, yes. So, anyhow, I could tell you a little incident there. It was a hospital ship and, at night, when I was aboard that ship,

still aboard that ship, … the first couple of nights, we stayed right by the island, but it was too dangerous to stay by the island there, because of any Japanese, whatever, attack. So, we had to go … a little bit out of the way, into the ocean there, and we had to leave. So, as we were leaving the waters around Iwo Jima, there was one of these smaller craft, I don't know what it was, but it had the wounded from Iwo Jima. … The wounded wanted to be [put aboard] and the naval corpsmen, they wanted the ship, our ship, to stop. It was on its way, leaving, and the ship wouldn't stop and you could see the faces on these guys, the naval corpsmen, who expected the ship to stop, take on the injured, you know, but they didn't do that. They just left them flat. What happened to those injured, I don't know. That's what war's all about. That's a sight. I can't forget that. So, that's what happened, and I was aboard ship. Of course, there were many guys that … died while they were onboard the ship, that went into the water, [were buried at sea?], and their blankets, their brown blankets, blood oozing out from their wounds, … that's not a pretty sight.

SI: Did they have you and the other Air Force men help out at all?

SR: Well, later on, well, there was another incident on Iwo Jima. That was another incident there, … where we were on there, and it seems that the Japanese were on their last leg. … They were still there. … The war was almost ended right there. … It was about, I don't know how many days, but, anyhow, they were down to their last leg and they pulled off one of those *banzai* attacks. That's what you call them, right?

SI: *Banzai*.

SR: *Banzai* attacks, and they attacked it and they went into the other [airfield]. We were the first on Iwo Jima, our squadron, and they went into the ones that got into the second [airfield]. … We had two airfields there and they were on that airfield. … The Japanese, when they attacked, they went into their tents and they killed quite a few officers in their sleep, but the Marines were still on the island and they got all of those Japanese. They were slewed all over the place, and I, among quite a few other guys from the squadron, … we were called in there to help get rid of the dead and load them on trucks. … So, they got us there, but we couldn't do that, because there were some Marines still there; they didn't want you to touch those bodies, because they thought they may have some explosives underneath their arms and such. … They were skilled in demolition, you know, so, they knew what it was all about, the Marines. So, they wouldn't let us go anywhere near the bodies, but that's the way I was asked to do extra duties. We did pull guard duty there, because there were no guards. At night, we pulled guard duty there.

SI: Was that at the airfield or when you were on the beach?

SR: No, on the beach, no. The beach was cluttered with junk. There was nobody there to give you an order.

SI: You had no equipment.

SR: No. The only equipment we had is a gas mask and a rifle. That's all. We had nothing, and we only had one meal there, one K ration, and it was a few days before we got any food, because the Marines wouldn't give you any food. You didn't have any papers. So, we were alone on Iwo Jima, on the beach.

SI: How far had the front advanced? Were you close to the line?

SR: Well, it was very close. No, it was a small island, now. [The landing beach on] Iwo Jima is by Suribachi, where the mountain is. Suribachi, you must have heard of Suribachi. … They have the [top of the] island, then, it thins out a little bit, then, it spreads out like a pork chop, you see, and we were right at the beach where Suribachi is, where they landed. … So, that's what happened there.

SI: What did you do for those few days?

SR: Well, what did we do? I'd just sit around, trying to escape any snipers. I didn't see any, but I heard there were snipers there, and what could you do? We tried to go by the Navy quartermasters or Marine quartermaster, or whatever they were, see if we could get some food. They wouldn't give you any. They would be … unloading it from their small ships onto the dock, but they wouldn't give you any. So, we scrounged around for food. I tried to help one guy out. It seems that he had an episode aboard ship. See, going over to Iwo Jima, I always slept on top, on the deck itself. I never went into the hold. So, the guys who would assign you any duties, the Navy, they didn't know I was there. [laughter] So, this guy, one guy there, who was asleep in the hold, he got picked out and assigned … to go on a section of the ship somewhere. So, what happened [was], he was assigned and got on his post, but, while he was on his post, he fell asleep. Now, this was a Navy ship and we were Air Force. So, what happens? Well, he fell asleep, someone stole his rifle and he's left without a rifle, and the Marines caught him asleep without a rifle. So, they put him into the brig and he was there while we were on Iwo Jima, about to go ashore. So, what is the Navy going to do with this one Air Force guy who didn't have a rifle? Are they going to keep him? Well, where could they send him, in the brig? So, they let him loose, without a rifle, with us on Iwo Jima. So, he had no rifle on Iwo Jima. [laughter] … So, he happened to be a tent mate of mine … on Hawaii and he asked me, … they used to call me Rusty, he says, "Rusty, could you help me?" He says, "I want to see if I can find a rifle, you know, among those [areas] where they fought before." I said, "Okay." So, I went with him. It wasn't … that much of a walk. It was very little. [As] a matter-of-fact, we had cannons, … American cannons, that shot over us. That's how close we were to the enemy. … I took a little walk with him and we looked around there, but everything is clean. If there's anything of any value there, somebody's going to take it. There's a lot of souvenir hunters among servicemen, you know. … So, we looked and there was nothing there and, before you know it, we heard machine gun fire. I said, "I'm getting out of here. Good-bye, buddy; forget about your gun." [laughter] He came along, too. …

SI: Among this group of unassigned Air Force men, did anybody take charge among you?

SR: No, there was no one there to take … charge, no.

SI: It was kind of every man for himself.

SR: More or less, every man for himself. That's all.

SI: How long did that last?

SR: … Then, my outfit came in. It lasted, … I would say, about four days or so, … but this was without water or anything, really, because there was no water on Iwo Jima. You had to barrel it in, you know. … Then, while I was sleeping in these foxholes, my outfit came in, but we still slept in foxholes, I mean, the rest of the squadron. For awhile, I got sick. I had a temperature [of] about 105, they told me, and I went into the field hospital, with the Marines, and that was a little experience there, you know, with all those Marines being sick, and a lot of them were fatigued, or they called it "shell shock" in World War I, and they were out of it, those guys. … I never knew what I had. I never knew, but they treated me, I think, with sulfa. I don't remember how long I was there or any part of it.

BF: Were the relationships stressed between the Marines and your small unit there?

SR: No. Marines were actually, no, … more combat wise than we were, but, … more or less, they took charge. They never bothered with us, we didn't bother with them, but they took charge. They knew what they were doing, these guys. [As] a matter-of-fact, the first night we slept in the foxholes, they came around in the middle of the night and said, "Hey, wake up, you guys. There's gas." You know, we put on our gas masks. I doubt there was any gas around, but they were very helpful and they [went] out of their way, as they proved, you know. … Nobody had to do that and tell us to wake up.

SI: Was there shelling where you were? Was there any danger of being hit by artillery shells?

SR: Well, let's see now; where I was, now, on that beach, it was all cluttered up with all sorts of debris, … war debris. There were shells, there were empty tanks, beat up tanks, there was everything that you could imagine, as far as warfare, but … they didn't shell us. We had air raids, but actual artillery shells, no. I think the Marines wiped them out, … by the beach, not saying up north a little bit, where there's still fighting going on, but [the] Marines wiped them out, as far as any big guns. … Yes, they wiped them out.

SI: However, there were air raids.

SR: Oh, yes. That's why we pulled out at night. The boats would go in a different part, get away from the shore, … so [that] we won't be sitting ducks and [to] get away from it, so [that] they couldn't spot us that easy.

SI: Were there air raids when you were on the beach?

SR: Yes, and there were air raids after. Now, those air raids, they didn't have that many planes, because we knocked out quite a bit of them and they didn't have a navy that you can talk about. … So, they had air raids, but there were not that many planes, and, actually, with all our guns on

that island, they would be shot down. You could see them being shot. As they're coming down, aflame, we were still shooting at them.

SI: Once your unit came ashore, were you able to resume your normal duties?

SR: No. … [When] I was on the beach, you couldn't do anything. We didn't have anything. We didn't even have an outfit.

SI: I meant after the rest of your unit came in.

SR: Oh, after that, after I came out of the hospital, they were set up in tents and, there, … I could assume my regular duties, and everybody else.

SI: Okay. You went into the hospital before the rest of your unit came ashore.

SR: As they came, yes.

SI: You are not really sure how long you were in the hospital for.

SR: No, I was out. I don't know how I was treated or anything, who came to visit me, or, if anybody did, I don't know.

SI: However, you remained on the island. They never took you off the island for treatment.

SR: No. I was just on the island. I was in the field hospital, … where all the wounded were, where all the Marines were. I think I was the only Air Force guy there. [laughter]

SI: What was it like to now take over this Japanese field and try to do your duties under these combat conditions?

SR: What was it like? Well, I don't know; we resumed our jobs as we did. I don't know. All you know is, the pilots, some pilots, didn't come back, and a lot of pilots didn't, for many reasons, weather, the plane itself and getting shot out of the air. I don't know. I'll tell you what, if you read … one of my articles, it'll explain it much better than I can tell you, you know. … Actually, you do get close to some of these pilots and, then, you expect them not to be there anymore. I had that type of a feeling and there's a lot of pilots that went down. The "Old Guard," they were shot down. Most of the Old Guard was shot down. New pilots, they didn't know what they were up against and they fought on and they were shot down, too. The losses were very great, very great. You know, I've got to tell [you], see, between Iwo Jima and Japan, we used to bomb Japan, make sorties into Japan itself, Tokyo, … other places in [Japan]. I forgot the towns in Japan where they would make a run, between Iwo Jima and Japan itself. Tokyo was seven hundred miles and they had to fight over there, and then, come back seven hundred miles. That was quite a trip for these guys and it lasted a few hours. It wasn't one hour, two hours or three hours. Sometimes as long as four or five hours, they'll be gone, and these guys did it and they knew what the odds were going to be. … I never heard anybody kick about

it or anything. They just did it, period. If they felt anything, maybe they'd tell their roommate, but they didn't tell us, the enlisted men.

SI: Were they going out on bombing missions or were they escorting bombers?

SR: Well, we did both. We escorted B-29s, and … plenty of [B]-29s were doing a good job. They found out that they didn't need the escort as bad as they did at the very beginning. So, we would go out on our own raids and just shoot up whatever. If we saw any boats on the way, ships, attack them. If there were any factories, railroad cars, or any planes on the ground, zoom. Yes, I'll show you something there, … our record. Because of Pearl Harbor, we were there first, we were the first on Iwo Jima, as I explained, the only guys, … we led other squadrons into Iwo Jima. … The brass gave us that assignment, you know, because we're the 47th Fighter Squadron. What's your question?

SI: I was going to ask if there were any supply problems, like if you were not able to get the radios that you needed.

SR: No, none of that. The equipment was there. There was none of that there. We had everything we wanted.

SI: Were there any threats to your airfield once you were in there? Were there any Japanese attacks or shelling?

SR: Well, we had air raids. … That was at the beginning, but, after awhile, they settled down. There were no Japanese. You may find some stragglers, Japanese, nearby, right by the airfield, or in the airfield, above the airfield. They were there, hidden in caves, you know, and then, they were there [on the airfield], probably wanted to come out to get some food or water or something. They had to live on something, and that's the only time you'd get these guys, but they were shot off right off the bat.

SI: You said you had to stand guard duty at the airfield.

SR: Oh, yes, well, we did. When we got to Iwo Jima, our planes came in and we didn't have any guards assigned at night, so, they got us guys [to stand guard]. I was a sergeant, but even a sergeant had to stand guard, … because who else would there be? There were no other people around. Later on, of course, we got some regular Army guys to do it. That was their job in the Army, their assignment.

SI: What was it like, in general, being in these places, standing guard at the airfield or being on the beach? Was it frightening? Did you just deal with it?

SR: [laughter] Well, you knew you had to be on Iwo Jima and you knew the answer to that question, because they had caves all over the place. If you saw something standing there and you thought that may be a Jap there, there was a Jap there. That's how it was. So, naturally, we would be afraid. One night, we were there and it was raining like hell. We were guarding these P-51s and it was raining. It was a storm and we're underneath the wing and we've got special

equipment, to keep warm and dry, that didn't work. We were soaking, soaking, soaking, and, before you know it, somebody said, "Well, heck," and they were shooting mortars at us. So, these people; like, there was a freighter [that] had washed ashore nearby, and you knew there was going to be Japs on there, and there were. Later on, they discovered [them]. Suribachi, they said it was secure; they put the flag up there. It was secure. There was [still] Japs living in these caves. I visited one of these caves after the war and it's made of solid rock. So, these guys were, what should I say? embedded in there, in their rock caves. [laughter] So, they were all over the joint, you know.

SI: What happened the night they were shooting mortars at you, when it was raining?

SR: Well, what happened, it was raining and they were all duds. [laughter]

SI: Okay, all the mortars were duds.

SR: Yes. [laughter] …

SI: That still must have been very frightening.

SR: Well, yes, of course it was, just the fact that you were there, at night. It was dark and lonely, no lights, and you knew they were there, somehow, and they were.

SI: When you were standing guard duty, would a lot of guys just start firing into the darkness?

SR: Well, these guys, none among ourselves, but there was when the regular Army guys came and they guarded the ships, and I heard of where they would hear something, and then, they would shoot, and, actually, they would shoot at one another. That, I heard, but I don't think it happened that often, though, but it did happen.

SI: What were the living conditions like at the field, once you got up and running at the airfield? Were you able to get a decent night's sleep? Were you able to get food and clean yourself, that sort of thing?

SR: Well, yes, okay, as far as keeping, you know, a cleansing program, it was normal. It wasn't that bad.

SI: I would imagine that the pace of the work must have been a lot different from Hawaii, where things were pretty set. Was it more like a twenty-four-hour job?

SR: … Well, you mentioned twenty-four hours; you lose some sleep during the night, because, some nights, you didn't get any sleep at all, because, if it wasn't a bombing raid, it would be some kind of a rumor, I'd say, that something was going on, but, then, again, there would be fierce storms out there. This is out in the Pacific and there'd be typhoons. [As] a matter-of-fact, a lot of people were afraid of [the] typhoon itself. I wouldn't go into that, but, yes, they thought even the whole island would sink. …

SI: Many people we have interviewed have talked about the typhoons and other storms in the Pacific. They had a tremendous impact and could even destroy entire bases.

SR: Well, I don't know. It didn't bother me that much, but other guys, it did bother. I'll tell you the truth, where even the barges out [there] just offshore [would] get wrecked.

SI: Did they ever have to send the planes to another base to protect them from the weather?

SR: No. The only thing that we [did was], we'd tie them down. What other base could they go [to], Chichi Jima? [laughter] Chichi Jima was a milk run. The island was not that far away from Iwo Jima. It was between Iwo Jima and Japan, and Chichi Jima was a tough island, … not that we attacked it or wanted to attack it, but, there, the Japanese were barbaric. They used to eat human livers. … That's what I heard. [laughter] …

BF: Did any other Air Force units set up on Iwo Jima after you guys had all settled in?

SR: Well, there was where you had those other squadrons. We were not the only squadron. Later on, we had other squadrons come in, where they decided to live in tents right away and there's where the Japanese got them, in their beds. We were in foxholes, still in foxholes.

SI: At your airfield, were there only P-51s or were there other aircraft?

SR: Well, we had so many B-29s come in. B-29s were stationed in the Marianas. There were three islands there, Tinian, Saipan and Guam, Guam being the furthest one down. So, a lot of B-29s [flew from there] and one of the reasons why they invaded Iwo Jima was that it was a shorter distance for bombing planes to get back, if they were wounded, to land at Iwo Jima, rather than Saipan or Tinian or Guam. So, a lot of planes were shot up. A B-29 is a Superfortress, the big ones, and we had so many planes come in wounded there. [As] a matter-of-fact, they estimated, after all I found out, that about thirty-six thousand guys were saved because of Iwo Jima being there, that the planes were able to land there … and wounded to be taken [out]. [Editor's Note: Iwo Jima's airfields facilitated emergency landings by roughly 2,400 B-29 bombers, manned by approximately 27,000 crewmen, before the war's end.] Some planes, even though they … had to land there, there was no room on that island. We had to chase them away. The guy would say, I would hear it on the radio, … "We have to land. We have no more gas left. We can't make it to Tinian." He [the tower] said, "Try it." … War is tough, let me tell you that, you know.

SI: Did you ever have to help the B-29s, do anything with their radios?

SR: No. They were their own crew and everything else. You know, there was no intermingling anywhere. You had your assignment and that was it.

SI: This is going back a little bit, but did you see the flag raising at Suribachi?

SR: Well, I was aboard ship. Now, the flag was raised on a Friday. We were still on[board], because I landed about six days later, [after D-Day]. So, the flag was raised five days after they landed. They landed on a Monday, because this was a Monday, February 19th was a Monday,

and, on the 23rd, the flag was raised. I don't know why I remember these things. … I was aboard ship, still aboard ship, … and then, the announcement [came] on the ship's PA system, right, they announced it, "The flag now … rises on Hot Rocks." See, they didn't call it Suribachi, they called it "Hot Rocks," [the Allied codename for the mountain]. … You looked and, of course, you could see Suribachi, we were right offshore, and there was the flag, but they had a smaller flag first, and then, they took it down, and then, when the picture was taken, they had the bigger flag, yes.

SI: Did your unit's mission change at all after the battle ended?

SR: Well, it never ended. We were still bombing Japan. … We were still going and going and going. We were there for that purpose, escorting the B-29s and going into Japan. The Marines were a separate battle they settled there. Whatever they had to do, they did it. But, we were still there. The Marines went back wherever they went to, and we were still there. We stayed there until the end of the war. … [As] a matter-of-fact, we were still up in the air, when they came back from a mission, … and the war was over, while they were up in the air. So, actually, the 47th was there first and last; some distinction, isn't it?

SI: Yes. I guess what I meant was, after the Marines wiped out the Japanese on the island, did that allow you to do more?

SR: No, it didn't affect anything at all that I did. … We didn't take [on] any of their responsibilities, and that was it. They were a separate unit and that was it.

SI: Did you still have to worry about snipers?

SR: Well, you had to worry about whether there were still Japs on the island. [As] a matter-of-fact, after the war itself, when I was on Saipan, on our way getting back home, and do you know there were still Japs still living somewhere in Saipan? … The battle ended up there a few years before.

SI: Yes, there were holdouts for decades afterwards.

SR: Not decades, it wasn't decades there, months later, a year later, you know.

SI: You continued your duties up until V-J Day.

SR: Yes. … Well, here, I'll tell you [about] V-J Day. Now, I was there how many years? While I was at Atlantic City, I visited home, so, I wasn't home for over two-and-a-half years. … The war was ended; do you know, not only me, but a few other guys, as the war ended, I never serviced another radio or plane, I didn't go on, near, the field? I wouldn't. I just couldn't do it. I didn't want to and I didn't. Nobody bothered me. Whether they knew I was there or not, I don't know, [laughter] but we would rather do some other duty than go back on the field. … I would do KP, help a guy slice up chickens, to do something, but not on the field.

SI: Why was that? You just did not want to.

SR: That's it. I felt as if I did it. What for? The war is over.

SI: Were people still doing it, though, other people?

SR: I don't know, … but I know there were some guys, quite a few guys, with me, that just didn't go back on the field.

SI: Were you eager to go back home at that point?

SR: Of course, yes. You get it over and done with. That's why we were willing to leave Hawaii, get it over and done with.

SI: Do you remember the day that you found out the war had ended?

SR: I was there.

SI: Was there any celebration?

SR: Well, the only celebration I was at, we had our little mess hall there, … I drank more coffee and had some cake. [laughter] There was no one to celebrate with.

SI: How quickly did they get you off of Iwo Jima and send you back to the States?

SR: Well, it ended up in August; at the end of October, I was on my way home. [As] a matter-of-fact, I could have gone home before that, if I was willing to go back to Iwo Jima, but I never took that option. I was going to stay there. … How could I enjoy myself and go back to Iwo Jima? How could anybody do it?

SI: You were at Saipan during that time.

SR: No. Saipan, I was, yes, on our way back home. That was a staging area. From Iwo Jima, we got on a Navy cruiser and, from there, they dropped us off at Saipan. We were there for about, maybe, three or four weeks, to get a ride home. So, we just waited on Saipan, nothing to do, just [wait] on Saipan, maybe go swimming. That's all.

SI: I do not quite understand. You said you could have gotten home earlier if you had gone back to Iwo Jima.

SR: Yes. I was due for a furlough, you know, if I was willing to come back to Iwo Jima, while the war was going on, but … I didn't want to go back to Iwo Jima. I just wanted to get it over and done with. I couldn't enjoy myself if I went home and I had to go back to Iwo Jima.

SI: Okay. During the war, you could have left Iwo Jima, gone home, and then, come back to Iwo Jima.

SR: Yes; no, that was not an option I was willing to take.

SI: Then, you left Saipan. You were at Saipan for a few weeks. Did you then come directly home or did you go back to Hawaii?

SR: No, we skipped Hawaii. We went into … Long Beach, Santa Ana. We stayed there about a few days, and then, we got transportation, by rail, into Camp Dix. At Camp Dix, I was discharged from there, stayed a few days and that was it.

SI: Did you ever give any consideration to staying in the Air Force or did you just want to get out?

SR: No thoughts. That was it. I'll show you those papers, whenever you're ready.

SI: Sure. Was it difficult to readjust to civilian life?

SR: No. I had no qualms about anything. I just was there. … I think it was part of the structure; I go back and it was all right. … I didn't go back to my old boss right away and enjoyed free life for about a couple of months. Then, I went back to work.

SI: Did you use the 52/20 Club, [unemployment insurance (twenty dollars a week for up to a year) provided to former servicemen under the GI Bill]?

SR: No. I didn't take advantage of that. I should have, but I didn't take advantage of it. I had money. My father saved me some money while I was gone and that was it.

BF: Did you go back and live in New York?

SR: Well, no, I went back to Astoria, … back to where my sister was.

BF: How did you end up in New Jersey?

SR: Well, it's a long story. … Now, I was working for this cosmetic place, after I had some problem with the jewelry boss and I left him and I got a job, after awhile, not that easy. I had two kids and a wife. My other wife passed away. … What happened was that I got this job, through the *New York Times*, answered an ad, I got this job. I started out, I was making, for that time, a hundred bucks a week, it was pretty good money, … but I wasn't going to get that unless I followed the same trade I was in, and that was up in New England somewhere. I didn't want to go there. So, I had to take a lesser job, a job I knew I could do. … So, I took a job with this cosmetic place, in a production department. … So, I worked there and I was making progress, slowly and surely. I wasn't a college graduate, so, I didn't have the easiest time in the world. So, the offices were in Brooklyn then, the plant and offices, I worked in the office, and the offices moved into New York, on 42nd Street, not far from where I was born. … That was great, but, then, again, the plant got bigger, the offices got bigger and they moved to a plant out in New Jersey, Jersey City. So, it was a hassle, going back and forth from Astoria, I lived in Astoria, to Jersey City. In the mornings, if I left early, it was nothing, … but, in the evenings, again, I don't

care what time you left, if you left at five, six, or seven, traffic will just eat you up, and that's what was happening to me. I would try this route, that route, this bridge, that bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, Williamsburg Bridge, you name it, this tunnel; it's always the same. I would get home and I'd have headaches like nobody's business. If I would leave at five o'clock, I wouldn't get home before seven. I don't care what it was. It was a two-hour trip anyway you went. So, I moved out to Jersey that way, to Jersey City. … I moved out to Jersey, I moved out to … East Brunswick. Why did I move there? Because of you guys, Rutgers; I had two boys that were ready to go to college. Where did they go?

SI: Rutgers.

SR: And they're doing good today. It's a good school; I want to tell you that.

SI: Was that in the 1950s when you moved to New Jersey?

SR: No. It was 1962.

SI: How long did you work for the jeweler before you made the switch to the cosmetic company?

SR: Well, I would say I was there … about six or seven years, or something like that.

SI: Had you met your first wife before the war or after the war?

SR: Before.

SI: However, you got married after the war.

SR: Yes.

SI: Do you have any other children, besides the two boys?

SR: That's it.

BF: After the war, did you keep in touch with any of the people that you served with?

SR: I did for awhile. That peters out, though, you know. I did send a Christmas card here and there, but you do it for a few years, but, before you know it, all gone.

SI: Do you think the war affected you in terms of making you who you are today?

SR: I don't think it made much of a change on me itself, no, … not at all.

SI: You said you did not take advantage of the GI Bill. Did you use any part of it?

SR: The only part is the houses, when I buy a house, but I didn't take any advantage [of the other parts], … which I should have, but I didn't.

BF: You said earlier that the movies were a lot different than what was actually happening when the men were going onto Iwo Jima. They were not smoking and laughing and all that.

SR: Yes.

BF: Nowadays, if you have seen any movies recently, do they depict it better than what they did in the past, or is it still mistaken?

SR: That's a good question. You know, the movies itself, they want to make a movie to make a movie, like, for instance, talking about Pearl Harbor, you ever see that *Pearl Harbor* [(2001)] picture, where these pilots take off, they're supposed to be our [47th Fighter Squadron] pilots. But, they take off from a field where there's hangars. We didn't have any hangars at Haleiwa. They didn't take off from the big field, where they had the hangars; they took off from Haleiwa. … So, their plot is to suit them, to make a picture and make money. … The two guys, you saw them before, that night before, hanging around with enlisted men. They were officers, right? When did you ever see officers and enlisted men hanging around together? Where?

SI: Was there a lot of discipline and protocol in the Air Force? For example, did you always have to salute your officers and call them sir?

SR: Yes. Well, of course, you always called them sir. You never called them John, Jack or whatever. "How was your radio, sir?" "Was your radio okay, sir?" [laughter]

SI: In general, was the Air Force maybe more relaxed than the Marine Corps or the Navy?

SR: Oh, I think it was, yes. I think it was. I was in Chicago there and we didn't pull any duties whatsoever and it was more relaxed. … On the weekends, you had a weekend pass, more or less, and so, you know, that was more relaxed.

SI: What did you think of all the different places that you saw in the service, whether it was the South or Hawaii or Iwo Jima?

SR: Well, I learned a lot. … No, I've been to places where I never would have been. I saw a lot. Now, Hawaii, as I said, was beautiful. Iwo Jima, … I couldn't stand it. Saipan was nice. I was on Saipan. I was out in 'Frisco. Santa Ana was beautiful. The weather there, you couldn't beat that weather, and Atlantic City. [laughter] Chicago was, "Hey, you're in the service, you're in Chicago, in a hotel, that had elevators going up and down?"

SI: Did they have a lot of stuff for servicemen to do, like USO clubs and shows?

SR: Oh, in Chicago, they did, yes. Chicago, they had a USO right next-door, in another hotel.

SI: Did you ever have the opportunity to see any of the big USO shows, like Bob Hope or any of those?

SR: I saw Bob Hope and his crew in Hawaii. I saw Gene Autry, … Benny Goodman. … Who else did I see in shows? Quite a few guys, lesser people, a lot of people that were not as big of stars as those guys were, you know, but I've seen them, yes.

SI: Do you remember the day that Franklin Roosevelt died and what the reaction was like?

SR: Yes. … My reaction? … "Who knew Truman? Who was this Truman?" You know, that's the reaction I got. "Who knows Truman?" but he turned out to be pretty good, didn't he? …

SI: You came out to New Jersey with the cosmetics company. Did you stay with them for the rest of your career?

SR: I was with them maybe thirty years. I'm going to say thirty years.

SI: Did you work anywhere else?

SR: Oh, after that, … I retired, and then, … I got myself a job at the courthouse, … in the courthouse itself. Yes, I worked at Rutgers for awhile, too. I left there, though. I worked in the mess hall, at Brower [Commons]. You guys would know Brower.

SI: Yes, we know Brower. [laughter]

SR: I worked at Brower for awhile, then, I worked checking out their stubs, their tabs, you know, see if they had a pass, and then, I worked … as a payroll guy, but I left there. I didn't like the environment there. It was not for me, so, I left. I said, "Here I am, retired, why should I take this nonsense?" You know, so, that was it.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add about either your time in the service or any other part of your life?

SR: No, that's okay. I think you've got a good part of my life.

SI: Thank you for being so open. We would love to see those articles.

SR: Okay. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We are looking at your medals. You have the Bronze Star, which you were just saying is for being on Iwo Jima. There is also the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, with one Battle Star, and the World War II Victory Medal. Is this the Defense Medal?

Dolores Restivo: I'm going to show you these. We're waiting for his Army picture [to come] back, … but there are these pictures [from] when he was in the service. You have that, and here's his conduct record, honorable discharge, thought you'd like to see all that.

SI: Thank you.

SR: That's a discharge paper. That's all that is. These are long articles. … If you want to read this, this is my latest one. … This is our emblem.

SI: We identified that other medal. It is the Good Conduct Medal. I guess you were not in any fights. The Bronze Star is for general meritorious service.

SR: Yes, it is, … yes, because of the … night duty, I suppose, you know, guarding the planes and something that you …

SI: Above and beyond your normal duties.

SR: Yes.

BF: What are your sons' names that went to Rutgers?

SR: One is Charles, the other one is Steven. … You know where the football … statue [is], outside the stadium?

SI: The first football player.

SR: Yes. Their names are on one of those blocks. Yes, I have two granddaughters going there, too. Dolores's child, kid, is going there now.

SI: Great.

SR: It's a good school. I'm glad. … Well, I couldn't afford anything else but Rutgers, [laughter] at that time, but it turned out to be a blessing.

SI: You encouraged your children to go on for higher education.

SR: They're both MBAs.

SI: Thank you very much for spending all this time with us.

SR: Thank you for listening to me.

BF: Our pleasure.

SI: Thank you for loaning us the articles. I will get them right back to you, as soon as I can.

SR: No problem.

SI: Thank you very much for your time and your hospitality.

SR: On, come on.

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

Reviewed by Daniel Ruggiero 9/15/08
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/7/08
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/15/08
Reviewed by Salvatore Restivo 4/18/09