RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ROLL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on October 29th, 2010 in Milford, New Jersey with Robert J. Roll and Peter Sims and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you for having us here and for agreeing to participate in the Oral History Archives. Just for the record, can you tell us where and when you were born?

Robert Roll: Yes, I was born in Somerville, New Jersey on July 17th, 1924.

SH: Could you tell us about your father?

RR: … My father's name was Joseph Roll. He was born in Somerville. He's World War I veteran. When he and my mother got married--I'm not sure of the date, but it was shortly after 1918--he worked in the Somerset Trust Bank in Somerville as a teller, and the Depression came along in the late '20s. He lost his job, and he moved the family. I had a sister by that time, moved our family up to High Bridge. He took a job with Prudential Insurance as a rural agent which meant he went through the countryside with his own vehicle collecting premiums on insurance, and the premiums at that time, if I remember correctly, were very small, talking about cents sometimes, fifteen cents, and making a route through most of Hunterdon County, but in the rural areas, dirt roads and stuff. Back in those days, cars weren't as dependable as they are today, so he put in some pretty long days. He also used to come home with chickens, hams--anything but cash. [laughter] He used to catch a scolding from my mother. I can remember the arguments, "What are we going to do with that? What are we going to do with this?" "Oh, they didn't have the money," but that's the way it went. Well, to make a long story short, in 1935, he didn't come home for a couple of days, and they found him passed away in his automobile on one of these rural roads in Hunterdon County. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage. In World War I, he was gassed, and he was put in a hospital, I think it was Germany--I'd have to look it up again--and then transferred to France. He was blind for about a week. Then, he recovered his eyesight, he got back to Somerville and got married and started a family. I was ten years old when he passed away. It was 1935 that he passed away; he was thirty-nine years old. So, I was ten. Of course, my mother was a widow; my sister was in school, not yet in high school, and so was I. Well, I was older than she, neither one of us were in high school at that time, ten years old, but anyway, mother … determined to raise us. Even though my dad was an insurance agent, he did not have big insurance. I wanted to quit school and go to work. Of course, my mother wouldn't do that. My mother was not an academic person. She got an eighth grade education, I believe. My dad graduated from high school in Somerville, and my ambition then was to get through high school, because my mother said, "You're going to stay there till you get a diploma. I don't care how long it takes." In those days, college wasn't as big as a high school diploma, and I was already informed there was no money for college. So, I went to school, and all my friends were taking college prep courses, and I looked at the college prep courses and I thought, "They're kind of hard." So, I checked for, of course, the easiest one was the course they called the general. I thought, "Well, I can pick some of them," but you have to have so many points to move on to the next class, next grade. So, you had to have a certain number of five and a half point subjects which were main subjects. So, I finally took a commercial course, and I kind of liked it because you learned to type, which I happened to learn to type, you knew how to run office machines which are nowhere near what's in the office today, it was mimeograph machines and things like that. I kind of liked taking the typewriter apart when somebody had trouble, the teacher would always ask me if I could fix it. So, anyway, I passed typing even though I wasn't a

speed demon with the typewriter, I passed. I took bookkeeping three times to get two courses in, and the teacher still had sympathy for me, I guess. So, when I finally got through high school, I ended up with the general course, I had to drop some of my bookkeeping subjects. [laughter] The way I got my five and a half points per subject was in, I guess my freshman year or junior year in high school, the principal came to me, and he said, "We're having a new shop teacher and he knows nothing about printing." High Bridge at that time, we had a good print shop, and I knew job printing--what they called job printing--pretty good. I knew the "ins and outs" of that. In fact I had many letters from, I think it was called (Morgenthaler?) Institute which was a linotype school in Newark that wanted me to attend their school, and to make a long story short, I taught the younger grades in printing, and instead of a two and a half point subject, that became a five point subject for me, and that gave me enough to graduate from high school, I don't know third or fourth from the bottom. [laughter] I was rather proud of myself. I got through with such little effort. I used to always say I outsmarted all the teachers, I got through without learning anything.

SH: I would like to go back and just ask about your father's family history. Where were your grandparents from?

RR: Alright, my great-grandfather was from Holland; my grandmother, Sweden. …I've got a history; I don't have it here in front of me. He was a mason, lived in Somerville. I believe he was quite successful. He owned properties around town and collected rents, and Grandmother, I think in later years had what we would call Alzheimer's. She didn't go in an institution or anything, she lived home, but she was senile, and my grandfather outlived my father. I think he passed away several years after my dad did. I don't know much about my grandparents. We lived with them for a short time right after my dad lost his job in the bank. We moved in with my grandfather and grandmother. They had a large house. In fact, it's a double house today, and we lived there until Dad got the job up in High Bridge area. So, I don't know too much about them. I had an uncle and an aunt, and my father, the three of them, they were the three children. My grandfather's name was Joseph H. Roll, and to go back through the history, I don't know if any of you play golf, but over outside of Summit, there's a famous golf course called Baltus Roll. … They hold a lot of important golf tournaments there. Well, that's named after one of my ancestors, his name was Baltus Roll. He was a farmer in that area. Now, on my mother's side, … her family was from Neshanic, New Jersey. They were farm people, name was Herder, married Charles Messenger of Glen Gardner. They had five children. My mother was next to youngest. I've lost track of my relatives growing up because we weren't sociable with them, I don't know why. I think it had to do with something right after my dad passed away. Other members of the family had plans to take my sister and I away from my mother, then my mother could go to work and support herself and Grandmother was to move in with us, and she would raise us, and my mother would go to work. Well, none of that suited my mother too well, and I think there were hard feelings over that, and I grew up really not knowing my family. I think I was deprived a little bit of not knowing them. I met a cousin of mine, which was the daughter of my uncle on my father's side. Some years later when I was recovering from a heart operation. I lived in High Bridge at time. She just knocked on the door and introduced herself. She said, "I know you lived in High Bridge," and she just introduced who she was, and I said, "Oh, come on in." So, we had quite a talk, and we've been friendly ever since. Just recently she lost her husband about a year ago, and I lost my wife about two and half years ago, so once in a while

she'll call up, and we'll go to maybe to a restaurant. She likes to ride up in the country in the fall. We might go to the Clinton House or some place and have a decent dinner. So, we're still friendly.

SH: That is good to hear. What did your mother do to support the family? How did she raise you after your father passed away?

RR: Yes, well, she worked in a silk mill, and of course, when I went to work when I got out of high school which was in 1942, … my ambition was go to work in Taylor-Wharton--which was steel--that supported … the whole town, and everybody that lived in town, most of them worked in that steel mill and everybody knew everybody. So, my future lay in that mill, getting a job, full-time job with a man's pay. I used to, all through high school I delivered groceries. I didn't go out for sports like all the other guys did. Right after school, I went down to the grocery store. I worked till six or seven o'clock at night delivering groceries, which I didn't drive, I wasn't old enough to drive. I had an express wagon, I pulled boxes of groceries around town, and I got paid five dollars for that, and turned it over to my mother, and I did odd jobs around. So, then I got a job in Taylor-Wharton after I became eighteen. I got out of high school, I was seventeen, I couldn't work around machinery. I had to have working papers or some such thing. So, anyway, I got to be eighteen, I got a job, I worked there until March 1943, then I was drafted into the service which any number of people told me I could have taken a deferment because of my mother being a widow, and at that time in the mill, we were doing war work at that time. We were making parts for tanks, and I had kind of a key job there, because there wasn't too many young guys around, so you had to be very nimble on the job I had when you were pouring steel. Each mold, sit there, and the mold is a big sand thing with a metal flask around it. They all had colored cards on them, the cards were colored. They were all different kinds of steel we made, magnesium, what is it, alloys, nickel, stainless steel. We made all different kinds of alloys, and depending on that ticket, the molders had written what that was, what kind of steel was supposed to go in that mold. So, when the molten ladle come down on the crane, and the guy wanted to pour steel, you had to point to the place to direct that crane and get that ticket off of there. You don't want to take it ahead of time, but then you get mixed up where it came from, so you just had to be a few seconds ahead of that ladle. … I learned the foundry work pretty good and I liked it. Of course, I was going to learn a trade. That was my idea of going to the mill, was to learn machinist or electrician or pattern maker or molder or some kind of a trade, but I enjoyed being just in that general foundry doing foundry work. So, I finally went in. I could have taken deferments for a couple of reasons, but I went in and passed my physical.

SH: To back up a little bit, you talked about your mother working in a silk mill. Was that located in High Bridge?

RR: It was, oh, a couple of miles away. It was Glen Gardner where she worked. It was a mill, and I know nothing about silk mills or textiles, but it was called Shoddy Mill--what a "shoddy" is, I don't know--but that's what she did. …

SH: Did her work pick up because of the war as well?

RR: … It got to be full-time; she started part-time. So, it did get to be full-time, and she had some insurance from my dad and very little income, I know. We had tough going. … Other kids would get to go places, I'd have to work. … Mom wanted to take in a boarder for some income.

SH: Where were the boarders from? Did they work in the mill as well?

RR: Some I remember, school teachers. Well, we had an extra bedroom, and she leased that out. … We had a next door neighbor, his wife left him, and to make a long story short, he moved across the driveway, and, of course, there was gossip about that of course, but he did pay, and later years I looked back and I think he was like a father figure to me. He never tried to be a father or husband of my mother or anything like that, he just, he worked, and he contributed to the household.

SH: Where did he work?

RR: He worked Taylor-Wharton in the steel mill. Yes, everybody did. [laughter] He was a pattern maker.

SH: Did your mother drive?

RR: Yes, she drove, yes. She was a young woman right up to the end, really. She stayed active.

SH: How much younger is your sister than you are?

RR: Eighteen months.

SH: Was she also working after school jobs like you did?

RR: Well, I guess she was, I really don't know. I know she didn't have the money to keep up with some of the girls. They always went, going here and there, but … my mother tried her best to see that she could go to those places that the girls went, and she had a lot of friends, my sister did, a lot of girlfriends, and got along well with everybody.

SH: Were you active in any church social activities or anything like that?

RR: I was a Boy Scout. My mother wanted us to go to church, she didn't care what church--just go. [laughter] So, I think I went to a Methodist church for a while, and all my friends were in the Reformed Church, so I switched, went to the Reformed Church, and as I got older, like later years in high school, it dropped away. We didn't get to be that religious.

SH: Did you attend any sporting events in high school?

RR: Well, the man that was the coach in school always begged me to come out because during the school day we had gym class, and we usually played basketball or baseball or something during that gym class, and I was always one of the main players, and he always begged me to come out. He said, "I know you'd get on the varsity with no trouble," and, "No, I deliver

groceries when you guys are practicing." So he did make me a manager. We played basketball after supper. We'd go maybe seven, eight o'clock we'd have a game, so I could attend those. So, being manager meant you took care of the balls and all the equipment that went with your team and I got a school letter out of that. [laughter]

SH: I know Peter has some questions he would like to ask you, so please go ahead and ask them.

Peter Sims: When Pearl Harbor happened, do you remember where you were and what you were doing?

RR: I was living home, and it was 1941, December. All I can remember is coming in the front door. I don't know where I had been, and we didn't have television, of course. My mother was telling me, she said, "There's something happened in Pearl Harbor," so we listened to the radio and listened to the President, Franklin Roosevelt, explaining the problems. I knew then our life was going to be changed.

SH: You understood that at that point?

RR: Yes.

SH: In school, had they talked about what was going on in Europe prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

RR: I don't remember too much. I remember I liked geography, and I liked talking about the different countries and how their borders had changed and the war had changed some of the countries, but I don't remember details. I know we had it, but I couldn't give you details.

SH: I wanted to ask one more question about High Bridge. How mixed or diverse was High Bridge?

RR: Well, we had different ethnic groups, and they all had their own area and the same way in the steel mill. The molders were Polish, supervisors were Irish, they all had their little clique. We all got along fine, everybody liked each other, we had Catholics, we had Protestants. … We never had any difficulties, no friction between groups. The Polish people had the area of town they lived in, the Irish people had an area that they lived in, and let's see, there were very few black people in town at that time.

SH: Did the owners of the foundry live in High Bridge as well?

RR: One did, and one in nearby Clinton. Taylor-Wharton Iron and Steel was the second oldest company in the Western Hemisphere. Hudson Bay Co. was the first, Taylor-Wharton was the second, and the mill foundry, what did they call it, the forge, I guess they called it years ago, started in Philadelphia. A man, one of them was Taylor, another's name was Allen. … It started with two fellows, and it just grew. It made cannon balls for George Washington's Revolutionary War, so they have quite a history, Taylor-Wharton is quite historical. …

SH: Was there any affiliation with the forge that was in Oxford?

RR: There may have been, because they all worked together in the mines getting iron ore out. … I lived in High Bridge, the street I lived on was called Mine Road, and at the end of Mine Road there were mines, but they weren't actively mining it when I was a kid. I don't remember that, but I do remember the cave-ins from the shafts and stuff. We were forbidden to go in certain areas of High Bridge, because there would a cave in, and one day you'd walk down there, and next day there'd be a big hole in the ground, and that still goes on.

SH: Really?

RR: Yes, so, and I can remember, what I'm coming to is one area we were forbidden to play, because of the cave-ins, and it was a shortcut from school to home. … Home was about a mile from school, but to go up through the shortcut it was a little quicker, but we were forbidden to be in that area, but, you know, that didn't stop me too much, but there were cave-ins, and they'd come up with a dump truck and fill it in, and to make a long story short, they built a brand new school house on that property. It was called the middle school or the grammar school. … It's still there, and they've had cave-ins very close in the ball field on that property, and they still have a fence around it. Now it seems like it takes longer to get it filled in, because you have to go through environmental people, find out the history of the place, who's responsible for it. Years ago, either Taylor-Wharton or somebody would come up with a dump truck and fill it in. Now, it's still there with a fence around it.

SH: The owners of the foundry were long gone.

RR: Yes, the mill is closed now. It's been closed for quite some time.

SH: When you were growing up, were the supervisors of the mill living in town?

RR: Yes, pretty much so, yes, and they were town leaders really, you know, they were mayors and councilmen, and so forth, and they were well respected by everybody and we never had too many political arguments in that town that I can recall.

PS: It was 1938 when Charles A. Lindbergh's son was kidnapped. The trial was in Somerville, was that something that was talked about in the community?

RR: Yes, you said that was '38, right. I remember being in grammar school, and I can remember, for a big joke, we used to take a piece of paper and write on it, "Hauptman is innocent for I am the Lindbergh child," and we'd pin it on a kindergartener's back. I do remember doing that. [laughter]

SH: Was there a discussion about whether he was innocent?

RR: There was quite a bit of discussion, and the foreman of the jury was a High Bridge resident, Mr. Walton, I knew him well, and there was quite a discussion about it. Of course, I was a kid, I didn't get in with the grownups that much, but yes, it was quite a famous trial. …

SH: I was wondering if that impacted your area since you lived nearby.

RR: Well, as far as the small town of High Bridge, I think they were mixed just like the rest of the public was, and some thought Hauptman was innocent, and some thought he was guilty. The jury came back, of course, with a guilty verdict.

SH: Were there any incidents before Pearl Harbor that were big news in the community?

RR: Off-hand I can't say. I know there probably were, but off-hand I can't. …

SH: When Pearl Harbor happened, had you thought about enlisting?

RR: Yes. My mother forbid it. She was the boss. [laughter]

SH: You did talk about how you could have gotten a deferment.

RR: Well, I wanted to go in, and when I was a Boy Scout, I had a scout leader, he was also the foundry superintendent, and when I was working in Taylor-Wharton in the foundry he was my boss. Previously, he had been my scoutmaster. Now, I was not an ideal person to have in a class or any group. In fact, one night we stole his car. He kicked us out for misbehaving, and we just took the car for a little ride, and he knew it, never did anything. I almost ran over a guy directing traffic. … [laughter] Oh, God. There was a CCC camp up there, you know, what that was during the Depression, up in Voorhees, which was a couple of miles above High Bridge, Voorhees Park. Well, two guys were hitchhiking. We came down the street, and two of these CCC guys were hitchhiking. We stopped, "Where are you going guys?" "Somerville." "Get in," and I said, "Oh," I wasn't driving, but I was in the group. That's quite a little trip, you know.

SH: How old were you?

RR: Maybe twelve. … We got outside of Clinton, and I guess these guys were looking us over, and they said, "We're going to get out here." I said, "Good." So, they got out, and we went back. Got to the Scout headquarters, we had our own little cabin where we had our meetings, parked the guy's car, but he was there waiting for us. Never did anything to us, and when we came back we were coming pretty fast, we came around the corner, we had special cops, we had one policeman and the others were like help or special cops, and one I knew was standing on the corner, … the fellow driving turned the corner too close, and the guy had to suck his chest in when we went by, and he recognized the car as the scoutmaster's car, so he didn't say anything. We got away with that somehow, … back to what I was going to say, I wanted to enlist, and Mr. Cragen, which is who I'm talking about. "No," he said, "I'll get you a deferment." He said, "You're doing wartime work here," he said, "and you have a mother and a daughter in school, help support those." "No, I'm going to go." So, I got my draft notice and went, but he begged me to stay, and I just didn't stay that's all. Now, I knew after the war they had passed a law that whatever job I had when I got inducted, I would get that job or an equal job when I got back out in civilian life again, and I do remember coming back, and I wanted that job. I liked that heat checkers, the job in the foundry. I did like that. So, I looked forward being back in that job,

came back to Taylor-Wharton, and the personnel guy said, "Well." I said, "I want my old job back." "Well, I don't know. Are you sure you want that?" I said, "Yes, I want my job." Well, my cousin was doing it, and he said, "He just got married," and of course, I'm single, you know. "He just got married, and … he just got out of service too." They talked me out of it anyway, so I took another job, equal pay, but a different job. So, I never got back to doing that.

SH: How many of the students in your graduating class of 1942 went out and enlisted for the service?

RR: Quite a few, there were maybe five that I can think of. Our class wasn't very big. We had, I think my graduating senior class, I think there were thirty-five people in it, and of the thirty-five there was probably a dozen or so boys, and of those dozen boys, I think about half of them enlisted, gave up their diploma to go in the service. … I think a couple of them came back and got their … GED, a couple of them did come back. … Of course, out of the guys that went in, some never came back. That was the problem, you know, we had a class that was hit pretty hard when it came to people dying in the service.

SH: By the time you went into the service, had your sister graduated from high school?

RR: Yes. Well, I went in the service in '43, and she graduated in '43. So she was several months in high school until June probably and then she graduated.

SH: When you got your notice to enlist, was it right after your eighteenth birthday?

RR: No, my birthday was in July, and I got this notice it was the first part of March, so I had been eighteen for, I'll say, six months working in Taylor-Wharton, because I was eighteen.

SH: Did you begin to see how rationing for the war effort affected your local community?

RR: Yes, I began to see quite a bit of rationing, and some of the blackout requirements. Headlights had to have little shields on cars at night, and you had to just have little parking lights, and most of the houses had to have shades and blackouts. …

SH: Even in High Bridge.

RR: Yes, and we had airplane spotters, had little towers here and there like fire towers are today where you'd go up there, you'd have a telephone, and you'd watch airplanes. There wasn't that many back then to see, but every airplane that came over you reported it. … I forget what they called them, there was one guy who was a supervisor.

SH: Air plane spotters.

RR: Yes, and I can remember going up and doing my duty.

SH: You did that?

RR: Yes, … and the groceries, you had different foods. You didn't get butter, you had margarine. What you got was a package of white, it was like fat, I guess, with a little yellow capsule in there, and you kneaded that up and turned it yellow, and this was your butter, and, what else did they have, of course, gasoline rationing. Even though I didn't drive, I knew they had gasoline rationing.

SH: That would have affected your mother to be able to go to work.

RR: Yes. You had rationing tickets, you know, you can get so many tickets, I don't know how that worked really. Oh, what else did they have? … Sugar was rationed, butter was rationed, you saved string, you saved tin foil, you saved everything for the war effort. Whether they ever used it or not, I don't know.

SH: Did your mother have a garden?

RR: We had a garden, and the fellow that lived with us took care of it, but he didn't have a lot of time to work on it. … During the Depression, people would come around looking for food then. We called them hobos, and they were decent guys. They're just down on their luck and they had no work, and they'd come and after a while, certain ones you got to know. One fellow I know came every spring, early in the spring, and dug the garden by hand and got a meal or two out of it, and a couple more would come up, and if we furnished the seed, they'd plant it, and they tended the garden off and on. So, we didn't get a lot from it. We got enough just to change your diet a little bit, tomatoes and beans and stuff like that.

SH: Did your mother can?

RR: She did to a certain degree, but she wasn't like some of them. For some it would really be a big operation, but now and then, she canned tomatoes if we'd get some extra ones, and what else did she can? I don't know, it was some kind of fruit--prunes, maybe--I don't know, a few things, but not too much.

SH: High Bridge is very close to some of the great recreation areas in New Jersey. Did you do a lot of fishing?

RR: Well, I did, yes. There was a dam up there that one time provided power for the steel mill, and it backed up a lake called Lake Solitude, still there, but it's all filled in with silt today, but Lake Solitude when I was growing up was a real summer place, and of course, I delivered the groceries summer full-time through the day, but Saturdays and Sundays I'd have a chance, Saturdays I got a half a day off and I was done. I'd get my groceries delivered in the morning, I'd be done like three o'clock, and then, the manager would let me go, and so I spent a lot of time at that lake. I learned to swim really pretty good. I could swim two or three miles, and we used to have swim meets, you know, where we had races and stuff, I participated. We had watermelon races which was like a volleyball, but you had watermelon, and you fought back and forth in the water.

SH: Really?

RR: Yes, like football you try to go, and somebody would knock it out of your hand. We did that, and I used to like to swim underwater. I enjoyed swimming underwater, and I could swim, I don't know, this is deviating from what you wanted, … but along the edge of that lake were fish, sunfish in little … golden nests that they used to make, and the mud would be spread away, and it'd be just a little golden sand nest, and there'd be like two or a couple of goldfish around. I used to swim underwater up there and look at them, and they'd look me right in the eye, never was afraid of me underwater, and I used to enjoy doing that, and one day I looked up, I was going through with my eyes open, seeing what I could see, and a snake came right up to my nose, and all I know is he turned one way, and I turned the other. Those things just spring to mind while I'm talking.

SH: That is great. Did you ever get a chance to fish?

RR: Yes, I was quite a fisherman. I fished a lot, and of course in later years, when I had the money, I used to go away from High Bridge where I could drive the car. I got to doing fly fishing, and I really enjoyed that. I got, oh, I don't know how many hundreds of dollars' worth of equipment, fishing equipment in the basement here, but I enjoyed going up to New York State and fly fishing, but I did a lot there above that Lake Solitude that I mentioned, that's fed by the south branch of the Raritan River, there's an area above there called the gorge, and it's an area that's a remote part of that river from High Bridge to Califon, that's almost like out west. The river is nice, there's no roads, it's all a rural area, ideal fishing, and I'd spend a lot of time up there.

SH: Did your friends enjoy these activities or was this something you did on your own?

RR: … Fishing I did alone, but, I knew everybody, in a small town you know everybody. … I can remember spending days up there at Lake Solitude. Taylor-Wharton furnished a watchman in a row boat. Usually it was an older man that was ready to retire, but they gave him a badge and a whistle, and if any rough housing or anybody was doing anything wrong, he blew the whistle, and he could throw you out of there where you couldn't go back for two weeks. You'd be punished, you know, so he made you behave, and he used to always, he and I used to sit and talk, because I enjoyed talking, and he always would give me the oars. The oars would be locked up in his little shed, and he'd go unlock the oars and hand them to me. He said, "Bobby, you want to go get me some spring water?" He had a jug. So, I'd row across, that was a big thing, to row that boat across the lake and go over there and get him spring water and come back, and then … we used to teach younger kids how to swim when they came up here and didn't know how to swim, parents would be sitting there watching them, and I can remember Taylor-Wharton got a new, I don't know what it was, a new crane or something, but every once in a while in the afternoon, you'd hear that noise like they dropped steel or something. You would hear "brrrunggg," and the kids used to ask me, "What's that noise?" and I said, " I don't know." Well, finally I got tired of answering them, I said, "You know what that is?" "No," they said, "That's an animal. It's up the river." I said, "When it makes the noise, it echoes all back and forth through the valley here." "Well, what is it?" I said, "Well, it's a mix between a ground hog and a beaver, and what it is, is the beaver likes to be in the water, but the groundhog likes to be up in the field, so they sit there next to the water, and they're frustrated, and every once in a

while they go 'brrrunggg.'" "Did you ever see one?" "No," I said, "A couple of times." I said, "If you go up the river and go around that one bend and be very careful. Sometimes you can catch them," I said. "Now, I never caught one. I've seen the water splash, and I've seen the weeds moving where something ran up there, but I never really saw one." [laughter] They are called Bearogs.

SH: Talk to us about your enlistment. Where did you actually enlist?

RR: … A group of us, I don't know how many now, maybe eight or ten, we got on a train in High Bridge and went to Newark Armory, and we took a physical. … Whether you passed or failed, you were sent back home. You had a week, if you passed, to report back to Newark. So, that's what happened. I came home for a week, got my affairs in order, reported back. I can remember being inducted was an experience. Of course, I've never been any place, you know, I've been in High Bridge all my life up until this time. My biggest thing was the teacher took us to New York to see a play one time. Of course, that's another story about the revolving doors and the escalators and all. … We all got mixed up there, got lost, oh, the poor teacher. [laughter] … I don't know what grade I was in, sixth or fifth, I don't know, but we went to this play, Broadway play, which we'd never seen, and we were going to go in this one store, had a revolving door. Well, we don't know, we never saw a revolving door, we tried to go in both sides, and then, we get pushed, scowling at the guy next to you because he's blocking you. … The teachers had to come, and settle that. Then, we tried to go up the wrong way on the escalators. God, they're going down, and you're trying to run up. [laughter] … I don't know what that thing, probably still don't have them, but there used to be automats where you'd get sandwiches and pie. We went there for lunch, had an awful time getting through that automat, I don't know, we didn't have the right change, and they had people waiting on us. Finally, we couldn't get what we wanted, but that was our experience anyway in New York, and the other big trip was the seniors' trip to Washington, D.C. Again, where we saw all the memorials, and then, famous buildings, and so forth, and it was an educational tour. I can remember still going down there, but that's the only two trips out of High Bridge that I can remember until I went to the service.

SH: I wanted to ask about your experiences in Washington D.C. World War II had already started for the United States at this time.

RR: I don't remember any restrictions at that time. I know they came later, but I don't remember. I know we went to the museums and through the capital. … I just don't remember a lot of restrictions. I know there were armed people around. … We were pretty much, of course, we were under guided tours most of the time.

SH: I just wondered if there was a bigger display of flags or patriotic symbols because of the war.

RR: I don't recall. … So, that was the extent of my excursions out of High Bridge until I went in the service. You can see by this list I gave you, once I got in the service, I moved around a lot.

SH: You certainly made up for it. Did you and your friends all go back together after the week you were home?

RR: Well, the end of the week, we went back and of course when we were inducted, at that time, the ones that passed their physical were asked if they wanted to go in the Navy, the Marines or what branch of service they wanted. Of course, I picked the Navy; some of the guys picked the Army, but when we went back we all went back as a group again, but then we were divided up, and I was sent to Great Lakes, Green Bay, Wisconsin training station.

SH: Why did you choose the Navy?

RR: Well, I don't know, of course, like I say, I try to get through with the least amount of work. I thought it would be easier than the Army. … They don't march. … [laughter]

SH: You went to Wisconsin for your training.

RR: Green Bay, Wisconsin, but it was called Great Lakes Naval Training Station. So, we were, of course, there for what were we, twelve weeks, I guess. We weren't allowed off the base or anything. At that time, … I had I think three, four people I knew from my local area went out there at the same time and was in my training company with me. One ended up being a police chief in Lebanon, New Jersey; one had his own business, electrician; one had his own business as a mason and then, of course, me. [laughter] I didn't have any business. …

SH: What was the biggest shock going from High Bridge, to Newark, and then to Wisconsin?

RR: Well, I'll tell you the biggest experience I can remember. … First thing we did we had to strip down, get rid of our civilian clothes, put them in a box, label them to go back home. Now, we're naked. Then guys shoving needles in this arm and that arm, they're giving you a more thorough physical inspection. I can remember hoping we'd get dressed pretty soon. I'm with a whole bunch of people in the room, and I'm not used to all that. So, we got our Navy clothes, and you got everything, socks, underwear, clothes, and got dressed, and then, we were put on the train. We went out to Chicago and then on up to Great Lakes. The training, I don't recall, we learned how to march and handle a gun, and the protocols as far as greeting an officer, saluting, and I can remember we had an older fellow, he had joined out of just patriotism, and he was going through our training, and he took to heart that you're saluting the uniform, not the man. He'd salute clothes hanging on the clothesline that were officers' clothing. He'd run across and salute them. [laughter] Here he is, an old Polish guy, we used to kid him, he says, "That's what they told you." I said, "Yes, you're right."

SH: Were there people who regretted their decision to join after a while?

RR: Well, all of us kind of wished we could get home. We were kind of homesick, but one fellow with us--I felt sorry--he was really bad. He cried, and the tears would be going down his cheeks, and he'd be looking out of the window. Of course, a bunch of guys had no mercy for you, "Hey, Jimmy you're looking out the wrong window, east, New Jersey is the other way." He'd just quietly walk around, look out the other side of the barracks, so I felt sorry for him. You

just had to let him get over it, and I don't know I guess they were a little stern. I can remember one of the things you had to do was what they called fire watch. Well, Green Bay, Wisconsin was a cold place in March, so at night time, you had to parade around that compound in and out to various barracks looking for fire, and you had to carry a pail of water in case you saw a fire, and you're walking pitch dark up and down these streets carrying a pail of sand and a pail of water, depending on what kind of fire you can find to put the fire out, and you had four hour duty. The bucket of water had a round bottom; you couldn't sit it down, you could rest it, but you couldn't get rid of it, and I can remember being on duty doing that, nobody liked that fire duty. We took all kinds of tests, maybe they don't do that anymore, but at that time they gave me a physical aptitude, mental aptitude, I guess you'd say academic aptitude, mechanical, I don't know, but different tests. After we went through the tests, we had swimming and all different things you had to go through. After that, then you had a written test you had to do, and the written test was timed. They gave us our papers and our questions and said, "You're going to be timed," and the test, well, it would be a picture of a hammer, "What's this used for?" Picture of a saw, "What's that used for or what trade?" So, it was timed, so I went through and did all the easy ones first. Then there were some geometry in there which I didn't have. I tried to dope it out, and I gave some answers that I guessed at, but … I turned in my test before because … in the company I was in there where a lot of guys that had a couple years of college, and then they were in the service. I don't know why they quit college or what their personal reasons were, but they I guess wanted to spend time on the more difficult questions, because they wanted to have correct answers which when it was timed, I didn't want to spend that much time and some of them, it was surprising, could not swim. … How many people in the Navy, signed up with the Navy, and didn't know how to swim? There's quite a few. There was also, just all kinds of common sense questions that some of them failed at, but anyway, the company I was in, the commander of our company was only a chief petty officer, but we called him the commander, but anyway, he said, "Now, you put down your choice of schools, where you want to go, and sometimes your grade that you get on your tests will determine if you're going to go where you want to go." Well, most of the fellows there that were in had washed out of officer's candidate school, had been college guys for a couple of years, had been pilots that had washed out. They all kind of wanted to get a good school and most of their requests were quartermaster school. I wanted to be a cook, because I figured I'd be in the back lines and have plenty to eat. [laughter] … The other thing would be a boatswain's mate, at least I wouldn't be stuck down below decks; I'd be on the topside. So, they were my two choices and I was a Boy Scout, knew how to tie knots and all. So, a couple of days after we had completed our testing, the skipper came, and he said, "Some of you are going to be disappointed, because there was only one person in this company going to go to quartermaster school, and that's the one that did the best on their test, and the test will be out tomorrow afternoon." Well, the guys were all interested in going to different schools, it's on the bulletin board, and they're all clustered around the bulletin board, and I'm walking up there figuring my name would be near the bottom like it was in high school, third or fourth from the bottom. So, a guy, "Who the heck is Roll?" … "Yes, I'm Roll." "You're going to quartermaster school." "Oh my God, I don't know nothing about that." That's where I went. I said, "Boy, the Navy knows how to pick them, I know that."

SH: Where did they send you for quartermaster school?

RR: … I still don't know why I ended up with that test result other than I speeded the thing up, and I didn't spend a lot of time on the difficult questions.

SH: Common sense, maybe?

RR: Maybe, I don't know, but anyway, I got home for, I think I had a ten day furlough, and then went to Newport, Rhode Island to quartermaster school. First day there, the instructor on the blackboard put an algebra problem. "Gentlemen," he said, "You wouldn't be sitting in this class if you didn't know the simple procedure of figuring this out." … Sit there, the class was over, I said, "You know when you put that problem on the board?" "Yes." "I don't know how to do that." "Well, you're here now, you're going to have to learn," and so, a guy befriended me, was a tugboat captain in New York harbor. He had joined the service just out of patriotism, and he said, "Oh, you don't have to learn all that stuff. I'll teach you all that." So, he kind of took me under his wing, but he was an old grizzled sailor really, but I kind of liked the guy, and when it came time to go on liberty like every two weeks you got a pass to go to town, "You're going to go to town with me, or are you going to stay in your hammock and read the book like the rest of these brains?" and I said, "No, I'll going with you." His name was Robinson, "I'll go with you, Robbie." We go to a bar with sawdust on the floor, hands me a chew of tobacco. "You've got to chew that. You can spit in here," he said, "if you want, but you can't swallow it, and you can't spit it out when you drink your beer." … That sounds like fun. [laughter] So, needless to say, I learned a lot from that guy. ... We used to have to figure longitude and latitude and time in Greenwich, England and azimuth readings and all that. He said that when you get out and you get aboard ship, he said they have a coast and geodetic survey publications that come out periodically, and he said you use those tables, he said, it helps you in your navigation. We didn't have GPS systems and that kind of stuff, so he helped me quite a bit, I got my rate anyway to make a long story short. I don't think I was at the top of the class, but I got my rating, and then, I was shipped to … Norfolk. … I was assigned to amphibious which were landing craft, I was on the LCT group. We practiced landings, amphibious landings in Chesapeake Bay. Of course, I did the navigation and signal aboard the LCT which I enjoyed doing. I wasn't a good signalman, but I enjoyed the navigation, and we used to do a lot of sight, visual navigation. You can take two landmarks as a bearing, and I knew all the navigational points around Chesapeake Bay. I could find my way around Chesapeake pretty good. I don't know how long that was really, I forget, but I think it was in January that we were sent overseas, and I was sent to New York to go on the *Queen Mary* which was a large cruise ship owned by England at that time. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We were talking about your experiences on the Chesapeake.

RR: Yes, after I left Newport, quartermaster school, most of the people I was in school with did not go to the same assignment I had. So, I went down to Norfolk, Virginia. Out of the base of Norfolk, we went to various places in the Chesapeake Bay area practicing amphibious landings. I was on an LCT. An LCT has got a flat bow with a ramp type door that just flops open. It's the smallest ship in the Navy that still has a crew on board. Small boats and stuff, they don't have a permanent crew, but our vessel, we had fifteen enlisted men and one officer, that was our crew make up. I enjoyed doing it. We'd come up to a beach. You'd practice how you land although

we didn't have a lot of Army or troops on board at that time, we were practicing with an empty ship, but as you approached the beach, you came in … full steam ahead. We had, on the LCT, you had three engines, big engines they were, and you had three propellers on the stern and through those engines, even though you had a rudder, the three engines, you could steer the ship pretty good. You put one ahead and one back and you could turn it around on a dime. So, we got where we can handle our vessels pretty good and went toward the beach. You're going to land up on the beach as high as you could go so that the people on board didn't have to go in over their head in the water and drop that bow door down, and as the people left the ship, you had to keep ramming against the bank because as your ship got lighter, you started to free float, and you wanted the bow against the beach. So, you're always pushing into the beach as your load is becoming lighter. When you're empty, what you had done--I forgot to mention this--as you're approaching the beach, I'd say you're out maybe a hundred and fifty yards or so, you dropped the stern anchor which is attached to a big cable on a drum, and you play that out as fast as you're going in, so that helps pull you off the beach when you want to back up. You have to know the tides, you have to know when you're landing somebody whether the tide is going out. You'd end up high and dry, if you get up on the beach too dry, the anchor's not going to do it for you. So, a lot of the details like that you learn when you were handling the ship, same way with navigation. If you were with a group of ships you all had to have your position in that group and to hold that position. We didn't have a lot of radio contact at that time, everything was visual, we had semaphores, flag hoists, and the flags of the Navy, each flag was a little different, but it had alphabet symbols and depending on what flag you had up on the halyards, when you pull those flags down in a sudden motion, everybody did it at the same time, well it might mean to the left flank, that meant all the ships turned to the left, … port and starboard, of course, but you'd all turn, and you had a line going in front of you and all of a sudden you're going one direction or the other or if you're going to make a big wheel turn, one guy would be the pivot ship and the others would be strung out and go around in a big circle just like a wheel, you had all different and from that different maneuvers to go … into the beach and the idea was to fool anybody on the beach that was shooting at you not knowing where you're going to go. … The fact is we had a maneuver where, I don't know if you've been around the water a lot, but sometimes in warm weather on the quiet water, there might be these little black beetles on the surface of the water, and if you throw a little pebble in there, you'd disturb them, and they'd go around like dodging cars on the merry go round, you know, or in the amusement park. Well, we had a maneuver like that where you'd go around the ship to your left, and so forth, and we practiced all these maneuvers and sometimes we'd have people on board that simulated the Army. We had vehicles, tanks and stuff that we could practice unloading. So, through practicing in the Chesapeake, you had a good idea what an invasion was like. Of course, we were the only ships doing this because during the regular invasion you'd have other vessels in the area. So, we got our training in Chesapeake Bay. Like I say, I did the navigation and signaling part of it. I enjoyed that because I was topside most of the time, could see what was going on and seemed to be part of things. So, I don't know when it was, it was January. … December, I left Virginia, went to New York, and eventually got on board the Queen Mary which was a troop ship at that time. … From Norfolk area, I think I was home for a while, I don't know.

SH: Okay.

RR: Maybe not. … Yes, we got on Pier 90, the *Queen Mary*, which had been converted to a troop ship. At that time, it was one of the fastest ships on the ocean. We knew we were going overseas, we didn't know where. It could have been Africa, it could have been England. We didn't know, but it was run by British sailors. We left New York, and we figured, well, there were a lot of submarines, German submarines in the ocean at that time. They were caught off the coast of New Jersey and off of Massachusetts, and we knew that they were waiting for ships. So, we figured we'd have escorts to protect us. … The first day we found out, no escorts, that we were so fast that we were going to go on a trip that was supposed to keep us away from the submarines, I don't know. I know on the second day on board that Queen Mary, it was hot. Where we were, I don't know, somebody said we were down in Bermuda, but we couldn't have been, but it was cold when we left New York City. I think five days maneuvering around, I remember going through a place they called the Azores, and we went into a harbor, the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, and I knew why we were going Scotland. The ship was the roughest trip I had ever been on. The ocean and the storms were bad, and that was one thing I think that saved us from a lot of hiding out from the submarines. I don't think they were following us too good. We also had an item called a radar that could spot other vessels that were not visible with the naked eye.

SH: Were the men being transported on the ship Army or Navy?

RR: It was all mixed. I'm not sure. Mostly Navy, I believe.

SH: Really?

RR: Yes. We had our own area that we had to be in, our group, our Navy group. There were many, many different groups on board that ship, and I don't know how many decks are on that ship, but there's a lot of different decks. … One part of one deck was our part, and we were given a colored badge, I'll say we were in the yellow section where everything on the bulkheads and on the stairways and everything was marked in yellow, all your signs and information was yellow, and you were in a yellow area. Well, if you went to the red area with a yellow badge somebody would chase you back. You're weren't allowed there, you had to stay in your area. … The only way you could around that, it got where you traded badges, see. … If you wanted to go up topside and see what it's like up topside, well you'd have to trade four or five badges to get yourself up there. [laughter] Finally, some hotshot, probably some guy from a gambling casino, he'd have a pocketful, "Which kind of color do you want, mate?" So you didn't have to worry about finding somebody, so everybody had four or five badges, and you'd just change them, have them in your pocket. So, we wandered all over the ship, and I remember talking to some of the crew that were running the ship, British sailors. They said that was the roughest trip, and the captain even said that was the roughest trip that their ship had ever been on, and I can remember being below deck where you can't see the horizon or the surface of the water, big ballroom type space. Of course, there's no chandeliers or anything. You can't get any sense of the ship rocking. You just see the walls and the ceiling, but everything is fixed, nothing is moving. The first thing you're walking across and the next thing you're running across, so you know you're going downhill or you're going up, that's the only way you knew, seasick, that ship was a mess. I tell you, you had to have a strong stomach to stay there. I was lucky, I didn't get seasick, but I felt sorry for some of them that did, and they got over to the harbor there to Firth of Clyde in

Scotland, they'd never get aboard ship again. They're going to stay over there in Europe or somewhere, they weren't going to do that again. So, we got to Scotland, and we got aboard a train, and they took us to a place called Falmouth, England, and way down in the southern part of England. … It was a shipbuilding harbor, and in that harbor, when I first looked at it, they had ships at berth all around there, and they had these cranes, these big, high gooseneck cranes, so they said we're going to work in the shipyard until we got our assignments. … So, that's what we did. I remember working on a ship, I think I was doing something with the electronic compass aboard the ships, and I can remember meeting some of the British people that worked there, nice people. I liked them all, the younger guys were all in the service, of course, people that worked there I'd call them "old guys." They had their set habits. Now this was a wartime effort, everybody's going full blast to build and get on the offensive. When tea time came, everything stopped. … We weren't used to that, see, and the guys would walk off and sometimes tea time was two hours.

SH: Really?

RR: Yes, and here we are in this frantic building effort, and all of a sudden in the middle of the afternoon from twelve o'clock till two, everything is done for, and it took a little while to get used to it, but they were, like I say, they had been through a lot already by the time we got over there.

SH: I wanted to ask on the train ride down from Firth of Clyde, what did you see in the area?

RR: All I know is looking out the window. … Rural areas.

SH: Did you see any of the devastation?

RR: There was some near the towns. The only thing I recall is, figured how old that country is, Scotland and England, how old it is, now there's nothing there just grass and fields and sheep and clean, and I thought, "Man, how come we don't have it like that? How can they be here that long and not have it cluttered up like we got our place messed up?" … I had to say it was a nice countryside, and I didn't see anything other than the rural countryside on the train. Down in Falmouth, it was a pretty good sized town. We were stationed up on an area above town, they called it Beacon Hill, and that's where our quonset hut barracks and stuff were and the Navy base. So, I was stationed on Beacon Hill. I had to go down in town every day to work in the shipyard. So, you begin to meet civilians, girls especially, and they had a movie there, movie star, and everything was blacked out. You'd stand in the pitch dark waiting to go in this movie theater and to get in, you had so many going at once because you could open the outside door, but the inside door where the light was had to be closed. Then, you get in that little space between the two doors, they close the outside door to open the inside door, and you go into the movie theater. I could remember standing in long, long lines, but it was dark, and you had a girl, and you don't care. [laughter] … Didn't know how long it took, didn't even know what the movie was after a while. [laughter]

SH: Were the movie theaters equipped just like the ones in the United States?

RR: Not quite as modern looking, and put me in mind how our country was years ago. It just seemed like behind some of the stuff we had, and they used to argue with us, so we used to say every house has a refrigerator. Well, they were still in ice boxes and coolers in the cellar and outside toilets sometimes, you know, they just didn't have some of the stuff that we were used to, cars, a lot of them didn't have a car, and at that time, most every family had at least one car, but they liked our cigarettes. We used to trade cigarettes for whatever they had. I liked their pipe tobacco they had, … I'd trade cigarettes for pipe tobacco.

SH: Did the Navy give you any instructions on how to deal with the British people?

RR: They did. I don't recall any specific class on it or anything, but we did have some guidance, and they tell you how to behave.

SH: Were you using British money?

RR: Yes. I can remember when I first got in town, and we were getting our assignments. We had to buy some toilet articles, toothbrush and razor blades, and they had a five and ten there, Woolworth's, which I recognized the name, but it wasn't a five and dime, it was tuppence and sixpence or something like that, you know. So, I bought some stuff, shaving lotion, after shaving lotion, razors and toothpaste, toothbrush, I don't know. So, I paid with American money, and they wouldn't take the American money, so that, and I couldn't understand the people, … they talked too fast, at least I thought it sounded fast, and I'd go to pay for it and the girl would say something like, "Thrupence, tuppence, and hapen" "How much money you want?" " Thrupence, tuppence, and hapen." "Okay, is that enough?" I don't know, it took a little bit while to get onto that. When I got up to Beacon Hill, we finally started to get other assignments. This is another story that I'm going to tell you that happened in the Navy, through the Navy's incompetence, but I got the blame of it. … I used to have that here, I don't know if I have it, but anyway, when I'm going through the chow line up to Beacon Hill, the master at arms, that's the guy with a little band on his arm saying MA on it, he's the guy in charge of that area. He came up to me, and he said, "You're Roll, quartermaster third class?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock," he said, "I want you to go down to the hotel." I forget the name of the hotel, "and help correct charts in the hotel for this area," and I said, "Okay." At supper time, we're going through the chow hall again, and this MA comes up to me, he said, "You're Roll, right? I talked to you." He said, "They want you to go to Airplane Recognition School tomorrow morning at eight o'clock," and I said, "Okay." So, I went to Airplane Recognition School, we broke for lunch, and I'm going to lunch and the MA comes up to me again, and he said, "They want you down in the harbor to help compensate compasses, report to chief petty officer (Bussy?)." I said, "Okay." Well, I had I think I got it written down there, I think five different assignments. Now, the last one I went to is the one I stayed with so I went to chief (Bussy?) down in the harbor to go out and compensate compasses. See, with the magnetic compass, every geographic location has a different effect on the magnetic needle so you had to know the deviations and the variation and how to set it on some of these ships, and you had fixed bearings that you could take a heading and, you know, this is what the compass should read when I'm on this heading, so you could correct the compasses on the ships. It was not a hard job, but it was interesting, I enjoyed it. So, I don't know, after about a week … at Chief (Bussy's?) assignment, I'm up going through chow hall again, and the master at arms comes over. He says, "You're Roll?" I said, "Yes." "Come

with me." "Where are we going?" "You're going to the brig." Took me to the brig, I said, "Why am I going to the brig for?" He says, "Shirking duty," he said, "We don't allow that here." I said, "I'm shirking duty?" I said, "I've been reporting every day for work." … I said, "Well, you're the one that told me where to go," and I said, "The last place I went was down to chief (Bussy?)." "Don't tell me nothing about it, tell the captain." I said, "Where is the captain." He says, "You'll have a captain's mast in a week or two." I went to the brig, that was in a big hotel they took over for a brig, and I was in a room, had a big heavy door on it with a padlock, and you're locked in there. If you wanted to go to the bathroom, you had to rattle the door and a shore patrol guy would come and escort you. You never saw anybody, in the room you can't see out, but they'd take you out for breakfast and supper and dinner. Through the day they took us out after chow in the morning, we get on board a dump truck, took us up in this hill, and we shoveled gravel on that truck by hand with shovels, and then, rode the truck back to Beacon Hill because they were expanding Beacon Hill making more road, and we shoveled the gravel off and spread it on the road. … We did that for the day back and forth in the gravel pit. Next to us were four guys in a room, and they were black guys. At that time the Navy was not integrated too well. There were some black people, but they were mess cooks and maybe in the hospital and stuff. So, these four fellows we in this, they never got out. When we went to breakfast in the morning, they had these stainless steel pails, and I guess the British carried beer in it, but they gave us that, and he said, "Put some food in there for those guys." So, we'd have to put scrambled eggs and bacon, or whatever, bread, toast, all in one heap and handed it in to the shore patrol guy, and he'd hand it to the four prisoners in there. That's the way they were treated. Anyway, to make a long story short, after about a week of that, the shore patrol guy in the hotel said, "You're going to go up to your barracks and get a shower and get your dress blues on. You're going to captain's mast at two o'clock." That's like a trial. So, I get ready, went in front of this captain's board, there was a captain, he was a four striper, and two or three on each side of him were gold stripe officers, I don't know what they were. So, he reads off the docket there, "This is Roll quartermaster third, shirking duty. What do you have to say for yourself?" I said, "Well, I was going to my last assignment. I was assigned many places to go, and the last one I was assigned to, that's the one I went to." "You were absent on airplane recognition. You were absent on correcting charts. You were absent here all the way down." So, I said to one of the guys there, one of the officers, he said, "Get on the phone and call so and so." He called two or three, "Yes, he never showed up. He was supposed to be here two weeks ago and never showed up." So, I said, "Call Chief (Bussy?)," and he called Chief Bussy. He turned you in too, you haven't been up there for a week. [laughter] … Finally it dawns on the captain, "Well, he's been in the brig for a week." So, the chief said I was doing a good job there, and he missed me, and he wanted me back. "Okay, dismissed, nothing will go in your record, next time speak up," and that was my dismissal, and he shook my hand. One of those things, I guess.

SH: After that, you reported back to (Bussy?).

RR: Yes, yes. "Where have you been?" [laughter] One of those things that happen to you, you know, I don't know how I could prevent it. So, we maneuvered out, … after I got on board ship eventually, got our own assignment, I was on an LCT called 618, that was the number of it, had an officer and about fifteen crew members, and then, oh, I'd say after two weeks we got more crew members and each classification aboard that ship had another fellow like an assistant, like I had myself and another younger fellow that was a signalman striker like anybody that was in the

training stage, they called him striker. So, I had a signalman striker for an assistant. Well, then when we got more troops aboard I had two signalman strikers for assistants and all the other fellows, machinists, boatswains mate, gunners mate, they all had an extra helper and the officer had another officer, another ensign, and so, we had a double complement of crew. Once we got our assignments, and we got our bunks and everything figured out, I think it was maybe, maneuvered for a couple of months practicing in the English Channel, and the English Channel was a dangerous place. There were submarines in there. The fact is, one of the group of amphibious flotillas, wasn't my group, were practicing landings in a place called Slapton Sands. I'm not sure where it was; I think it was the northern part of the Channel, and they got clobbered by the Germans up there. They got hit pretty bad, and I just recall that it could happen to any of us.

SH: When did you hear about that? Was it while you were training?

RR: Yes.

SH: The other people in the Navy knew about it then?

RR: Well, it was part of the amphibious group. It wasn't my flotilla, and I didn't know the guys, but it was part of the amphibious part.

SH: It was something that you were aware of at the time?

RR: Yes, yes. We were told about it. They just said, "Well, see what happens, you have to be careful." So, then we left the Falmouth area and went on up, and we stayed in two or three different little towns on the Channel. I can't think of the names of them now, but we went to a place called Portland Bill. Now, why it was called Portland Bill, except if you look on the map, there was an island that come out looked like it might have been a bill on a duck or something, so, and that bill from that island, oh, I don't know how many yards out from that was a floating boom like, now on the bottom of that boom was chains hanging down, and at night they closed … the harbor up, they pulled that floating boom closed, so you couldn't get through the mouth of the inlet to get into the harbor, and there was a submarine netting, chains hanging down. So, you had to be back there before dark. If you got caught out there, you just anchored out in the English Channel, you were a sitting duck. So, anyway, in Portland, the dock where we were, there was nothing there, it was just a landing, and it was quite long, I'd say I don't know, a thousand yards, two thousand yards long with docks. Then, there were steps going up the side of this like a cliff and the town of Portland was on top of this cliff. So, one day we had a chance, we walked up those steps and we went up into the town of Portland, and it was right after we got there, the people in the town didn't know what we were, "Are you French, are you Canadian?" We said, "No, we're Yanks." "You're Yanks?" We said, "Yes." Well, they were glad to see us, but we were the first ship that came in there, and I can remember talking to the people, and then, I forgot to tell you when I was stationed in Falmouth and some of the other towns that I was in, that I got a chance to go inland. Inland from the coast, miles and miles and miles of roads going inland, some of them both sides of the road long enough for maybe, wide enough for one vehicle to get through, were Army vehicles covered with camouflaged netting, there were tanks, there were, I don't know, all kinds of stuff, all just waiting on all these roads that went in from the

harbor, in from the Channel, and there's just miles, you can't believe how much equipment was parked. That was one thing that impressed me. We knew we were getting ready for an invasion, of course.

SH: You knew an invasion was happening, but you just did not know when or where.

RR: Didn't know when or where, knew it would probably be the coast of France because it was the closest place. So, we left Portland, well, I don't know when this was, had to be probably in May. We got troops aboard, we got tanks, and I remember two tanks and a couple of vehicles. …

SH: Were they American troops?

RR: … Yes, they were from the First Army.

SH: Did you pick them up in Portland or somewhere else and bring them to Portland?

RR: I don't know. … The fact, I think we picked them up two or three different places to tell you the truth. I remember we got the tanks, and we got the halftracks on one place, just the driver, and then, we went somewhere and got infantry guys, foot soldiers, but I can remember going out of Portland during May and going out at night figuring, "Well, this is it, we're going." If I didn't get orders to make a U-turn and come back. We did that two or three times and having the Army on board, we were overloaded with personnel. The bathroom got stopped up, of course. That was the first thing, had to do your business over the side. We had to hang a hand line all the way around the side of the ship, if anybody had any business to do you'd hold on the hand line and hope it isn't too rough out there. So, we were looking forward to the invasion to tell you the truth.

SH: How was the weather during the time period?

RR: Well, for May, it was cold and rainy, and well, of course, I know later now what one of the delays was, it was trying to get the tide and the weather ideal for the invasion. I know we went out on Sunday night and made a U-turn and came back. Of course, we were back in. On Monday, we went out, I think it was around midnight, and we kept going. So, Tuesday morning we're hitting the beach, and we did, that was June the 6th.

SH: Can you talk about what you saw? When you would have to make a U-turn, did you have to be aware of where other ships were?

RR: Yes, in fact we were always related to another ship. In other words, if I was supposed to follow a ship, I followed that ship wherever it went and what we had was like spotlights with a long tube on the front of them. Inside that tube was like honeycombs. When you shined the light down that tube, it didn't flare out like another spotlight, it just went in a straight line. Now, the guy on the stern of the ship ahead of me would keep that aimed right at my ship, and I was able to follow that light. If he turned the light a little bit, I couldn't see it; it would be black. So, that's the way we followed each other around. Of course, like I say, I had three engines on there,

and if you're turning or maneuvering, the engine's reeved up, so you're out in this quiet water, and all you hear is these ships moaning, "rurrr." I said, "There's one over there." …

SH: Did you have a good relationship with your officers?

RR: Well, we had one officer in charge of the ship, his name was Ramsey. He was only a young man, a little bit older than we were, that's about all, and he's a nice enough guy, gentleman, but he seemed unsure of himself too. We didn't have a lot of confidence in him to be honest with you. I guess he was a smart enough guy, knew what he was doing, but he couldn't seem to project himself as a leader for some reason. I can remember sitting there in that galley having coffee. We were always kidding, you know, a guy said, "Yes, we could take this ship over that guy wouldn't do nothing," just talking, you know, like getting to ready to run a mutiny or something, but I liked him, he was a good gentleman, and I'll say he knew what he was doing, but quietly.

SH: Do you know where he was from?

RR: I have no idea, no.

SH: Where were some of your other crewmates from?

RR: Well, we had a boatswains mate from Macon, Georgia who hated blacks, and I never knew it, but once in a while we would get what they called torpedo juice which was alcohol and mix it with powdered orange juice or powdered lemonade or something and make a high ball out of it, and he would get in bad shape. He couldn't drink, and he was what you would call an out and out rebel, had the Southern accent, hated everything black. We had a black mess cook. Well, we were having coffee in the galley, and the cook provided some snacks and something. Well, this guy was a helper to cook, this black fellow, and he did something that the boatswains mate didn't like. The boatswains mate pulled his knife and chased the guy out of the galley, all over the ship, and the guy is hollering, and we finally subdued the boatswains mate and ever since then he was the guy that I steered clear of, good enough fellow sober, but he could not handle that torpedo juice. … One of the things I remember. Another fellow from Scranton, Pennsylvania, I forget what his classification was, name was Mike Harruska. He was an older guy, real nice fellow, I liked him, and we were pretty good friends, had another guy was the electricians mate, and he was always fiddling with the two way phones, name was Harry Hartman and Harry Hartman would get on the phone, and he'd want to talk to this point or that point up in the bow, or in the stern, or in the wheelhouse. "Hey, anybody down there? This is Harry (Hartman?)." I said, "Who the hell was that?" So, finally the guys decided they had enough of him testing the intercom, so he'd call, and he'd say, "Is this the galley? Is this the galley?" and the guy up in the bow would say, "Yes, this is the galley what do you want?" and it would be the wrong, but we all could hear him, you know. We drove the poor guy nuts, he'd walk up there, "You must be on the wrong frequency," he said, "that's the galley frequency." He'd fiddle with it a little bit. We got the poor guy, he was just trying to get those intercoms going, and then we'd say to him, without the microphone, "Harry (Hartman?)," "speaking, speaking." … We of course had … poker games and wrote letters and stuff. Yes, we kept ourselves amused. …

SH: Did you hear from home quite often?

RR: Not very often when I was aboard ship. I had a couple of letters, but not too much, no.

SH: Did they have enlisted men's clubs in England?

RR: They may have had something for the officers, but I don't recall other than going to the pubs with a bunch of fellows and shooting billiards, what they call billiards, snooker, and playing darts, I know that.

SH: What did you think of the warm beer?

RR: I'll tell you the truth, if it wasn't too warm I liked it, and I found out later that anything ice cold does not have the flavor. If it's cool like wine, I never want ice cold, because you don't get the flavor. If it's cooler than room, but it's a cool temperature, it's not ice cold. In the hot weather, you like something ice cold naturally, but I found here I like ale. If I take it out of the refrigerator, I don't get the taste, but if it's in the basement or over in the cellar where there's no heat, it tastes better to me.

SH: What about the English food?

RR: I didn't like it. I was on an English base for a week, and I don't know how come I was assigned to something up on that base. … You'd go in to chow hall, I guess it was cabbage, but it smelled like somebody cooking diapers. [laughter] They were great on cabbage and potatoes, and I called it lamb, I guess it was lamb, but it wasn't my idea of a good meal. I could eat the potatoes, but that was it. They like their, … I called it mutton, but I didn't care for their meat. … We used to go to the tea rooms in the afternoon. … We're used to going out for a hamburger here. You go there, you know, they don't have that. You go to a tearoom, and you had to wait till they opened, they weren't open like all day long like you are here. If you want to go into the tearoom, you might have to go at one o'clock or so, and they have crumpets, little bitty things, you know. Christ, you'd take four or five of them, put them in your mouth, gulp the tea down, and then the lady would come pour you a little tea, and that was our snack, and then, we went to the pub. … They had an allotment, that they didn't have all the hard liquor that we wanted. They had beer and draft in kegs, but if you wanted, they had Guinness and stout. I didn't care for either of them, but if you wanted whiskey, they only got one bottle a day, that was their allotment … and they used to save it for their regular customers. Now, a bunch of Yankees come in there, of course, they'd clean the guy up in no time. So, you had to drink the beer most of the time, and then, they'd close, "Time gentlemen, time." What the hell does he mean by time? He's going to close. He may be closed for a couple of hours and open up again at night, … just the way they were, … you got used to it. Like I say, they were good people. We got in a fight one time, though, I do remember that, but that's later in my story after we get there. [laughter]

SH: Let us talk about the morning that you take off for the coast of France. I guess it was really in the middle of the night.

RR: When I realized this was going to be D-Day, it was pitch dark. As it gradually got light, you could see ahead of us the reflection in the sky like heat lighting would be, but it was guns going off, large guns from battleships that our Navy had off the coast. I know the one battleship we were near was the USS *Texas*, but there were other battleships in that area, but you could hear those guns going off. Of course, there were guns on the beach shooting back, cannons, and they were loud also. So, as it got light, of course, I'm steering the ship, I'm on the wheel, I'm in the wheelhouse, and I'm looking out through the port. As far as I could see were ships of all shapes and sizes all going in the same direction. Ahead of me and starboard and portside, as far as I could see, the stern, turned around, looked at the ships behind me, it seemed like thousands and thousands of vessels all going in the same direction, I'm steering the ship and like I say, it felt like it was as big as a house. Of course, I had two tanks on there and a half track and a whole bunch of people, and we're going through rough water and I have a flat bow door, not a point, so every time it hits, it mushrooms off to the left or to the right, and it's hard to keep a steady direction. So, I'm struggling with the wheel, and I'm looking around, and I looked up the sky, the sky is black with airplanes, as far as I can see, airplanes going the same direction. I shook my head, "Man, I wouldn't be on that beach for anything to see all this coming at me. You're never going to stop them there's so many coming that they're going to overrun you," you know, that's my feeling, and I didn't know what we were going to get into. I was 19 years old and apprehensive about what was going to happen, and what it would be like at the end of the day, you're always wondering, but you're busy too. So, we hit the beach. I got to know some of the Army guys that were on board before our landing.

SH: I wanted to ask about that because you were there so long.

RR: Yes, we got to know each other. I knew, one fellow was a short guy; he was a master sergeant which meant he was a couple of ranks above some of the other guys. So, I said, "I never see you talking to the buddies there, 'Sarge.' What's the matter?" He said, "I don't want to be too friendly with those guys." I said, "Why? They all seem pretty decent fellows." "Well," he said, "I'm tired of packing up personal gear and writing to the family." He said, "I've been through Africa and Italy, and I just don't want to have to write home to anybody that they're not coming." He said, "I picked up their personal stuff and packaged it up and mailed it," and he said, "I don't want to get that close with anybody." … I didn't blame him. If you do that a few times … you don't want to get involved maybe. So, anyway, we hit the beach, and these guys went off in their tanks and their halftracks, and the water was deep. I couldn't get in close. I hit bottom, and I couldn't get up on the beach like I wanted to, and they got in water up to their hips to get off, and they got pinned down. Of course, I'm there, like I say, I put a lot of the unpleasant stuff out of my mind, but I will say for the record that the water was full of bodies. There were people laying on the beach that took two steps and fell down, never moved again. There was shrapnel flying all over the ship. … I was crouching down. By the time you hear the shrapnel, it's too late. Two of our crew members got hurt, hit with shrapnel, not serious, I don't think they were life threatening wounds. One got hit, lost a couple of fingers and the other guy got hit near the eye, I think he may have lost his sight in one eye, but eventually they got off later on. As far as I know they made it through alright. So, we're pinned down on the beach, and I'm seeing all this around me, and I can't wait to get out of there, waiting to get the last guy off, tell the guy to bring up the stern anchor and put my ship in reverse and back off. … We hit that Omaha Beach I guess it was 7:30, 6:30 or 7:30, I don't know. … We were one of the first ones in there. So, I'm

watching all this activity. You see the bullet shells coming out of that cliff, and every so often you see a tracer come out, one you could see, but you couldn't see where it came from. You didn't see it till it's halfway out to the beach, came out of the cliff somewhere, but you couldn't see where and that had everybody pinned down, that one gun there, because every so often you'd see the tracer come out, but you couldn't find out where it was located. So, I see this sergeant that I had spoken with earlier stand up, and I recognized him standing up because he was a short bowlegged guy, and he started running up toward that cliff, and the guy alongside of me said, "Look at that bowlegged little guy running," and I said, "Yes, that's the sergeant," and he ran up that bank as far as he could go, and he lobbed a grenade like that, and it went off over his head and all the sod came off of this cement bunker that was there, and the gun was silenced. It never shot again. He got the gun, he knew where the gun was, he found it, and he dropped it into their bunker, and then he waved at all the guys. Maybe that guy didn't want any friends, but I think he made a few there. … They all started advancing in a little bit. So, one of the things I remember. I hope he made it through, I don't know, I never saw him after that.

SH: Did you know his name?

RR: No, I really didn't know, "Sarge" is all I knew. I waved at him, but of course he didn't see me.

SH: You were able to get off the beach.

RR: We got off the beach, and we made I think two other landings that day, and it was still turmoil in there, when you go in, it wasn't secured.

SH: When you back off, did you then turn around?

RR: Yes, when I got back to where the anchor came up off the bottom, then I could turn and go out frontwards, but you had to back all the way up until that anchor came up because you didn't want to back over your cable. In fact, when we were practicing amphibious landings, in the Navy you washed your own clothes, so you'd wash them in, we had salt water, soap. I don't know what kind of soap it was, it was hard soap, I don't know, you didn't get many suds out of it, and you had a pail and a little plunger like a plumber's helper, and that's the way you washed your clothes, and you never had time to do anything, so to rinse them, a lot of times you were out on the water, the guys would get a line and thread the line through their sleeves and their pant legs and trail them behind the ship as we're moving along and the salt water would rinse them. The only thing is when they forgot about it, we had to back off the beach, and a lot of them lost their [clothes], you could see pieces of T-shirts and stuff, pieces of rope. … It's another one of those things that happen.

SH: When you went back, did you go all the way back to England?

RR: No, we went back to … Liberty ships anchored several miles off shore. They were freighters and stuff; they were full of men and equipment, and you'd go back to a freighter, tie up alongside of it, and they would load you up. They had these booms, they might pick up a tank or a vehicle or something and put it on your deck, and they'd put over a ladder and maybe a bunch

of men would climb down, and we'd take them in and off load them, and we did that for, I don't know, several days on that Omaha Beach. Then, we were reassigned to take the British, some British troops in and that was a different beach. That was up north of us; I think that was called … Gold Beach. … I was on different beaches there; that's why I get mixed up, but we worked back and forth.

SH: Did you ever have any time to rest?

RR: No, that's why they put the extra people on, but my signalman helper got hurt, and the other one, he just wasn't any good, and the other person on board that could signal was the skipper, and his … other ensign got hurt; he got hit in the eye. So, it was just the skipper and I as far as taking signals, and, of course, we're going back and forth, … hitting the beach, and I can remember one day, we're headed toward the beach, and I had been in there before, I even saw my marks on the sand, we went out only a little ways and got a load and came back, and there was what they called a "tank trap" over on the beach, and I could remember that being there as a landmark, so I'm going back in exactly the same place where I was before when I get all this frantic blinker light from the beach at me, and I couldn't read it, you know, this was like Friday, and I hadn't had any sleep since Tuesday. I could sleep standing against the wall, and it all looked like a blur, just, I couldn't read it. So, I said to the cook, I said, "Holler down, get the skipper up here and see if he can read that light." The skipper spent a lot of time after we first landed, in his quarters, and I spent a lot of time running the ship. So, he's standing there, he couldn't read it either. "I'm going up on the conning tower. " Well, it was above the wheelhouse, he couldn't read it, and we're going in all this time, and we dropped the anchor, and we're playing out cable, we're going in, and I could read part of it, "here," and "come," finally, and the first part of every message on a blinker light is your code, identification code. I couldn't read the first part, I said, "Yes, it's got to be American." So, anyway we hit the beach, got there, and the guy gets up with a semaphore and he's spelling out the letters with the semaphore flag so I could read that. The first word was, "Don't come in here." I said, "Well, we're in," so the harbor master came down, he's raising hell. "Who's in charge, the signalman on that?" Well, we didn't really have a signalman, it was me and that skipper. So, he said, "Guy," he said, "Look there." Well, about a hundred and fifty feet off my port side was a pole sticking up, it had a bomb strapped to the top of it. If we would have hit that, we'd have blown up. I never saw it before, but it must have always been there it's just where I went in, and that's why I always wanted to go where I had been before. I didn't want to run into anything new. So, it was a close call. I felt guilty, but I couldn't read the damn thing, you know. I needed some sleep.

SH: The bomb was hanging on a pole. Was it sabotaged by the Germans?

RR: Well, it was like a post, … it was sticking up out of the water and on the top it had, it looked like a bullet, had a point on it and it had a strap over it, and if we hit that I think I would [have exploded].

SH: It was set up to blow something up?

RR: Yes, eventually I guess somebody shot it and blew it up.

SH: What kind of armament does your ship have?

RR: We had two twenty millimeter guns, antiaircraft guns, plus we're all armed with rifles, submachine guns if we wanted them. We didn't carry them with us all the time, they were available, and side arms we had forty-fives. We didn't take them with us onboard ship, but if we went off the ship, we carried the forty-five with us. I remember shooting the submachine guns, target practice, but during action, I never shot it.

SH: When you are making these landings, and you are going back and forth, were there any German aircraft?

RR: Aircraft all the time, and see, that was one of the ways I injured my ankle there, and the way that happened is we were close with another bunch of ships taking supplies on, this was, I don't know, how long ago it was now.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RR: … I'm going to tell you when I got injured that time. …

SH: We were talking about how many hours you were awake non-stop from Tuesday to Friday.

RR: I'm looking for that date. … The 16th of June I was taken off of my LCT with an injury, and I went on an LST-505 which was in the English Channel picking up injured people, but the way I got injured, which had to be on the 15th probably, we were clustered, tied up to other ships taking supplies on, and that meant we made a large target from the sky and through the day, there were planes that came through that every once in a while, of course, they always strafed you, you'd see them coming, you'd duck because they're strafing, but besides the strafing, they had some kind of bomb they can drop. I don't know whether they dropped it themselves or if it was fastened underneath. It was not a torpedo but it was more like a bomb like a hand grenade would be, so when there was a large of cluster of ships, they would aim for that and drop their bombs, and so, one thing we were always conscious of that if we were aware that there was an air raid warning, to disperse, and to break up as quickly as possible. So, that's what the situation was. We were taking on food supplies, and I was up in the wheelhouse when I heard the guns going off on the beach which meant, "plane coming over." We wanted to disperse. So, I rang general quarters which meant that everybody goes to their post and no one came to the stern of my ship for the stern line, and I was closest to the stern, and I put the ship ahead just slowly and left the wheelhouse and left it going ahead slow and ran out to the stern line and the bits on our ship. We had figure eights that the rope was fastened around it. I undid a lot of that slack, and it was playing out as the ship was moving, and the guy on the ship that we were fastened to, standing there, I said, "Throw my line off," and he stood there looking at me, "Throw the line off." Our hawswer was on his cleats, "Throw the line off." Well, he stood there and stood there, so I thought, "Well, I've got to run back to the wheelhouse and put this thing in reverse." I went to jump over the cluster of rope, the slack that I had paid out there, when a bomb or something went off, I don't know what happened, but I remember there was a flash, and I hit the deck and when I woke up I had a hitch around my ankle, and the ship is moving, I can't get to the ship controls, and the line is tightening up, and I thought, "Well, I don't know, something is going to happen, I

guess, lose my leg maybe." So, it just had one hitch around it. Well, as it tightened up, that hitch flipped out, flipped me up in the air, and the line broke when the hitch went out, the line broke. So, I hobbled back to the wheel house on one leg, and I had a little three leg, like a stool, like that, … and got right to the ship's controls and the wheel. I called for the cook to come up. We didn't have any medical people. … "Bring me a bucket of water; I have a sprained ankle." So, he brought me a bucket of hot water. Of course, it hurt like the devil, I tell you. I couldn't walk on it, I couldn't step on it, and it wasn't straight. [laughter] So, I sat there like that. I ran the ship for the next day, I guess, and my leg had swollen up and turned black all the way up to my hip. "I guess … I need a doctor." … The officer was in his cabin most of the time, he had his own private crew cabin or officer's quarters. No one saw what happened. I said, "Tell the skipper I'm in trouble." … I signaled over to an LST saying we required medical assistance. So, they sent a small boat over, and I guess they were doctors, they were all officers, of course they were doctors, "Oh, you can't stay here. You've got to go with us." So, I hobbled off of my ship and got on that small boat, and I said, "They need an officer. They need help on there. They don't have any officer to run that, just one guy," and I said, "He's getting wore out." So, they said, "We'll take care of it." So I went back to the LST, these guys, they got me aboard the LST, and I got a bunk, and they made me as comfortable, and still my leg hurt, they didn't do anything. I guess they sent another officer over to my ship to help Ensign Ramsey, and they started back on their regular duties. So, while I was on that LST, I could hear the buzz bombs going over, they were something new, they just started them then, and the buzz bomb was an unmanned, like a little airplane, but it was a bomb, and they were timed with so much gas to go to a certain point, they'd run out of gas and then drop down and bomb what was … under them. So, we used to always listen to see if the thing keeps going, okay. If the motor quits, we were in trouble. So, they explained that to me when I was a patient on this LST, and so, it took me I think three days or two days in that English harbor before I got to a hospital in Southampton, England.

SH: The LST took you back to Southampton.

RR: Yes, it took me back to England. They had a bunch of injured people at that time, and it was two days, yes. I was in the Channel two days, the 18th I went back to Southampton, England, and August, I guess, they put me on a hospital ship, and I came back to Charleston, South Carolina.

SH: When you would go to offload men and supplies, did you ever bring anything back with you?

RR: … No, but I had some souvenirs if that's what you meant.

SH: Well, I thought maybe you had brought back injured men or vehicles from the beach.

RR: No, broken vehicles; anything that got bombed stayed there, any wrecks, anything there was a bunch of derelicts. … Injured people, we didn't pick them up, but others ships did. There were people assigned to that. One time we hit the beach and we were taking British people in, and they were trying to build roads on that sand. What they had, they had these big mesh screens rolled up, and they would unroll them and roll them down with a roller so that their vehicles didn't bog down in the sand, and they were making roads out of that stuff. Well, we had one of

the rollers, I called it a steam roller, but it was diesel, but it was a roller, they couldn't get it going, they had it on the ship, they couldn't get it going. So, when we beached the ship on the beach, and they said, "You keep the thing, Yank, we can't get it going." So, they left the steamroller on. Later we got back off the beach, and I said to the motor "mac," he's a mechanic, I said, "Grimes, you think you can get that thing going?" He said, "Let me try." So, he fiddled with it, and he got it going. Well, our ship was all metal, and you'd be in the wheelhouse or something, and Grimes would be playing with his toy, running that back and forth. You'd hear "bong," when he's going into the front, into to the back, and the skipper would say, "Tell Grimes to get off that thing. He's going to sink the ship," because the ship would list. … The thing was heavy. So, he said, "The next time we hit the beach put that thing right up front. Next thing, we hit the beach that's the first thing off." I said, "Okay," so we got the thing up front. Now, nobody knew how to run it except Grimes, so we drop the bow door. Grimes is proud. … We got it off, and the British people were so glad to see the steam roller, "Over here, Yank, over here." He's building the road since, and the skipper said, "Where'd Grimes go." I said, "They drafted him to go build roads for those guys," so, we finally got him back on the ship. … We were laughing, that was funny, but we got … the thing going for them anyway.

SH: It is amazing that this stuff is happening during the invasion.

RR: That's why I remember all this stuff. The unpleasant stuff was going on too, but, yes, I don't know. … One time I went up on the beach. Oh, we thought we got hit underneath, so it's a flat bottom ship that I'm on, it's a flat bottom. … It doesn't draw a lot of water, so we went up on the beach as high as we could. We knew the tide was going out. … This was like four or five days, the beach was sort of secure, so he said, "We're going to dry up, go up on the beach. … I want to look under the ship." So, that's what we did. So, we had like four hours or something to kill, and there were a bunch of German prisoners being guarded by the British Army guys. … The British guys were called "Tommies." So, I went over there, and they were guarding these guys. They were in a circle, and they've got submachine guns guarding these Nazis or these German guys, and the one had a Nazi pin on his shirt, and they were trading cigarettes, you know, and all that stuff, and so I know they spoke German, they didn't understand me, I said to the Tommy there with the gun, "Ask the guy how many cigarettes he wants for that pin, the Navy pin." It was a Nazi sign, and it had wings on it. So, he said something to the guy. I don't know whether the guy was an officer, he spit at the British guy. The guy pulled the gun, and you could see the sand spurt up all around the guy's feet. Oh my God. I thought he shot him, but he didn't. … He walked over to the guy and grabbed the pin, ripped it off his shirt and handed it to me. "Here Yank, you've got it." I said, "Oh, thanks," and I left. The Brits hated them, I tell you, they didn't need much excuse to shoot them. I got to get out of there. Another time we went in, and we had our side arms with us, we were going to do a little exploring, and I said, "How far inland are they?" … "About three miles," so we wanted to see what it was like off the beach and it was all supposed to be farmland and vineyards. So, we went up this little roadway and went up on top of the cliff, and we started walking. There was a nice orchard there, and we walked back to see where everybody was, just exploring, looking around, and the guy said they were in there three miles. I said, "Oh, well, we're not going that far." So, pretty soon, I hear shooting, and I see the sand spurting up in front of us, and I said to the boatswains mate, "Somebody's shooting at us." "Goddamn … Limeys," he said, "We're Yanks, goddamn it, we're Yanks, don't shoot." They're shooting again, finally some guy come out of the hedgerow, "Get down you

dumb," … he said, "They're snipers." [laughter] They're still in the hedgerow, we didn't get them all cleaned out yet. I said, "Oh, we're leaving." [laughter]

SH: When you started going to Gold Beach with the British troops, how was it different?

RR: They had the big Liberty ships there too, of course, they're British and we had to take food off of those ships one day, and I tell you, they had bread. I don't know how many times it had been dipped in salt water, but it comes over in a big net, you know, and the ships are rocking, and you'd see this bread go down in the salt water and come out again. I said to our cook, I said, "Make sure you dry that bread off before you give it to us." I can remember that, but we used to have to take their supplies, and like I say, I knew what their food was. … They were out in this anchorage, I don't know we were anchored in between getting loads, and there's a bunch of ships anchored out there. So, we signaled back and forth, and I'm signaling to this British ship. Well, they always have rum on board. They have a rum ration, British … sailors always have their rum. … I knew they had rum, and we had scads of American cigarettes which is what they wanted. So, I signaled over, I said, "We'll trade cigarettes for rum." "Okay," so I think it was four cartons for a bottle of rum. So, I said to the guys there, I don't know if it was the motor mac or the electrician. I said, "Get a couple of cartoons of Chesterfields, leave two of them intact and take the rest of them, and fill it with that excelsior that come with the shells, you know, and then, just put maybe a couple of cigarette packs on top and close them up." So, we had I don't know how many cartons, we were going to trade for bottles of rum. So, they take the cigarettes all smiles and stuff, and we take the rum all smiles and stuff. We get the rum, boatswains mate opens one up--salt water. [laughter] So, I said, "Well, they didn't get too many cigarettes either," and then, the guy's waving at us, we're waving at him, "eh," even swap, I guess. [laughter]

SH: Do you have any other stories about your experiences before you were injured?

RR: I remember someone got the toilets working again. We began to feel like humans again. Yes, I went to the hospital in Southampton. An LST picked me up. They were busy picking up wounded and bodies in the area and took us to Southampton.

SH: What about your days immediately before you get to the hospital?

RR: I was in a top bunk o this LST and could see the sky through an open hatch. I did see a buzz bombs go over. Didn't know what they were. I guess I can't remember a lot. There probably is, I just blocked a lot of what was happening from my mind. Very upsetting to recall. I am in the hospital and I've got a cast on my [leg]. How strange it was to be standing next to a shipmate talking and he doesn't answer. You look, he is not there. He is rolling around on the deck in pain from shrapnel hits.

SH: Where were you operated on?

RR: In the hospital.

SH: In a general hospital.

RR: It was a naval hospital, the US Navy had taken it over, but it was a full hospital and the captain, well, he was a four striper, I guess, he was in charge of the hospital, but he was a head surgeon, and he was good, I'll tell you, he saved my leg really. My leg was black all the way up to my hip, and I've got the medical records there. Eventually, I got some of my records and heavy contusion in the fibula and tibia damaged and splintered, and I know I'd come back from the first operation, my ankle hurt just like it was in a vise, the two bones on each side of my ankle, just like somebody was pressing them. I had a plaster cast on there; it hurt. God, it just made you cry. So, when I came out of, all the way out of the anesthesia, somebody asked me, "How do you feel?" I said, "It hurts, it hurts." I said, "Get that thing off of there. I've got to have relief." So, they took me back for a X-ray. The guy said, "Yes, you're going back in the operating room." So, I guess they gave me another general anesthesia at that time. I went back, I had another operation, and they took the X-ray before I got back to my bed, and when I came to, the guy said he's not satisfied yet, but it didn't hurt that much. So, the four striper came in and talked to me. He said, "There's this one little thing we got to do yet." He said, "I'm going to have to take you back in the operating room to do it, but," he said, "you don't have to go today." So, I went the next day, and that was the third operation, and I guess they got it straightened out; my ankle is alright, anyway. So, when I had the plaster cast on, it was up above my knee, but after a while, he took it down to below my knee, and then, put like on the bottom of it like a horseshoe iron thing so I could walk. So, I got where I was ambulatory, where I could walk on that leg, and it got to feel pretty good. I got where I could spin around on one leg. [laughter] In fact, that iron thing wore out, it wore out into two pieces, and he sent me to the machine shop, "See, if you can fix that thing up." They guy welded a big piece on the bottom of it, … stomp along. … In that ward where I was, there were three guys from Pennsylvania, and they had been on a destroyer, and they got hurt. One was a great big guy. He had … knee trouble, and he had a cast all the way up above his knee up to his hip, and another guy, which was his buddy, wasn't a very big man--a short guy really--and he had his back in a cast, and he was arched like that with a body cast on, and the cast was down so low both on his hips that he couldn't even take a full step, he had to take little bitty steps. He looked like a little banty rooster going through trying to walk. So, another guy had his arm in a metal thing out like that and myself with a cast on my leg. I was the most ambulatory of all of them. Well, the girls in there, the nurse's aides used to come in talk to us and stuff and the orderlies, and the one guy said, "It's too bad you guys are in such bad shape. There's a pub down the railroad tracks." We were called ambulatory patients. When the air raid sirens went off, we were supposed to evacuate to the bomb shelter across the road out the back. We did this a few times or tried. In the back of the hospital was a railroad track. "How far down?" He said, "Oh, it would be like a city block maybe," but he said, "there's a fence." I said, "Maybe we go down there, holler, some guy'd bring us out a drink." "You can try it." So, I don't know, right after evening chow, I don't know what time it was, maybe seven o'clock, "How about we try getting to that pub?" I said, "Okay." So, we go out, and we get on the railroad and we see where the back door of the pub is, and we holler and holler nobody comes, so the big guy that had his … knee in a cast, when he walked he had to walk like this. … The other guy he's walking like this, and the other guy is lumbering along with his arm up, and we looked like Halloween going down the track. We get to the fence and nobody would answer, hollering and yelling, and nobody came. … This big guy said, "Hell, we can get over that fence. I can handle all of you over." Well, we get over the fence. I can remember the guy in the body cast, teeter-tottering on the fence, he's stiff as a board. We finally dumped him over on his head. … We got over to the pub, go in the back door, "Where are you guys from?"

"From the hospital, can we get a drink?" Well, of course, the British liked the Yanks, you know. "Yes, hell, you can have a drink." Well, we're having a few beers, and we get to playing darts. The guys thought they were good dart players, we beat the hell out of them, … and we got in an argument, and the one guy shoved one of my fellow patients, and the big guy came over, and he back handed him, and the first thing you know we were in a brawl, and they hit that little guy, I don't know where they hit him, but they hit the plaster. "Christ, they're wearing armor." First thing you know some jeeps are here, shore patrol guys, "What the hell is going on here?" We said, "I don't know, this guy got pushy," and, "Get in!" So, we get in the jeep, of course, they take us back to the hospital. I never heard any more about it, but just one of those things. … But I can remember walking down that track, and I thought, "Christ look at this group, guy with his arm out."

SH: I am sure you hit the rail with your foot.

RR: Yes, oh, yes.

SH: Did you ever go back to the pub?

RR: Not to the pub, no. … Sometime in August, we got on a hospital ship called the USS *Dogwood* and talk about a luxury cruise, nice weather, we went through the southern route back towards Charleston, South Carolina. … You sit all day in a lawn chair up on the deck with people waiting on you. "Want something to drink, want this, want that?" …

SH: Was this manned by Navy personnel?

RR: Yes, orderlies, and so forth, but they had a lot of them, nurses. The fact is, when we left the hospital we had such a party in that hospital that day we left, the girls were crying. They were trying to dance, none of us could dance. … Like I say, we danced and everything. We had this real party; the girls were crying and escorted us aboard this train, we got back on that ship.

SH: Where did you leave from?

RR: From Liverpool. So, you know, we really had a nice cruise. I don't know how long it took us, but I could have stayed there longer, I know that. It was comfortable and everybody waiting on you. When we got back to Charleston, I guess we were the first bunch of injured people from Normandy that hit the hospital in Charleston, and they treated us royally, I'll tell you. They had a big parade. They pushed me in a wheelchair in the parade, and they had everybody turn out. I was in that hospital in Charleston for I don't know how long. … All summer.

SH: Were you in a naval hospital or a civilian hospital in Charleston?

RR: … Naval hospital. It's still there, I guess there's a big naval hospital there. So, then we went back up, eventually I went back to Lido Beach, Long Island, hospital there. They released me back to full-time duty again.

SH: Did you have to have any further surgeries?

RR: No. I had to have a lot of therapy. The fact is, before I left Charleston they took the cast off, and then I had trouble walking, my leg was thin, and … I didn't have many clothes. See, when I was taken off of my ship, all I had was the clothes on my back.

SH: Your personal items remained on the ship.

RR: Everything stayed aboard the ship, and when I told the people in the hospital to contact my skipper, he had the boatswains mate and one of the other guys clean my locker out and pack everything up in a sea bag. … I never got it, and I had souvenirs, I had coins, and, you know, stuff like that you collect. I lost all of that. I had another locker with ship's inventory that as quartermaster I was responsible for, with a list of the items. I don't know where anything is. I never heard from anyone since I got hurt. I did get a letter from my skipper after I was discharged and home. So, then when I got ready to go back to sea duty I had to get a reissue of clothing. … I also learned later some of my personnel records are missing.

SH: Did you think that your medical care was good?

RR: Yes.

SH: Were they able to treat you well?

RR: I know they were short-handed. I could have taken that cast off before it came off, but I wasn't in pain, and when they got around to it, I figured they'd take the cast off. …

SH: Did you have to go through some kind of rehabilitation program to strengthen your injured leg?

RR: No, I don't recall much. I remember, of course, I lived all that summer from the time I got hurt till late in August just in bedroom slippers and bathrobe, and then, I remember getting my issue. I said, "Throw out all the left socks. I only need one sock." … I was telling the guy giving me the socks, "I can't wear that one, I still got the cast on there," just trying to be funny, but it didn't take long they decided I was okay, went back to Norfolk. I got to Norfolk, I went up to Newport, Rhode Island to quartermaster school, the same instructor was there. He looked at me, and he said, "You look familiar." I said, "Yes," and I told him I got hurt in Normandy, and just getting back to duty. "Oh," he said, "You don't have to do anything in this class, except if I ask you, 'Is that how they did during the invasion?' all you've got to do is say 'Yes.'" He said, "You'd pass one hundred percent." … I didn't have to do any work. He didn't know why I was there. Neither did I.

SH: Why did they send you back?

RR: I don't know. I never heard from my skipper or anyone else. I believe my personnel records were lost. It may have had something to do with it. They didn't know what to do; that shows you they didn't know what to do with me. The best duty I had was in Chicago selling war bonds.

SH: When you were transported from Charleston to Long Island, was it by train?

RR: Yes, everything was by train.

SH: Did you get a chance to see your family or did your family have the chance to visit?

RR: I think somewhere in there I did. I don't know whether I had a ten day leave, but I do remember, yes, August 25th, I got home.

SH: How did the people in High Bridge treat you when you returned? Were they curious about your experiences in Europe?

RR: Yes, I had a lot of people want to know, the fact is, I spoke to the Rotary Clubs, I think the Legion or VFW, I think at one of the schools.

SH: Did it seem strange to come back knowing that the war was still going on?

RR: Yes, like I said I was only home ten days. … No other fellows my age around.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RR: Now, I'm back to Long Island. While I was there I guess they didn't know what to do, and I went to the Navy shipyard in Brooklyn. I worked in the shipyard there for a while. I stayed at a hotel called the Seamen's Institute, and the Seamen's Institute had old washed up sailors for tenants. Who was paying the bill, I don't know, but they were guys, I don't think were in the service any longer, but they were on pension or something, and I stayed there for a couple of weeks while I was working in that shipyard. I remember being associated with those older guys.

SH: Did they want to know what you had gone through?

RR: No, they kind of lived their own life. … Some of them had girlfriends that come get them in the morning and take them out for the day, but to me, they were old. They were probably younger than I am right now.

SH: What were your duties at the Navy yard?

RR: Security Guard. I worked on the compasses again, yes. Then, I was at Pier 92, that's the famous Navy pier, in New York City, had a lot of personnel aboard. I can remember being on Pier 92 and what my duties were, I don't remember, I think I was in between assignments, but I can remember the captain of the Navy pier, name was McGrudder, and he would come in there, I'd say in the middle of the night, and a warrant officer, and their wives, and we would be sound asleep, and somebody said, "Attention! You had to jump out of bed and stand at attention in your skivvies, and these people marched down the length of this pier.

SH: Really?

RR: Yes, why, I don't know. I can remember that, the guys are coming, McGrudder and his fellow officer there and these two wives must have been coming in from a night out on the town, and I don't even think they lived on the pier or anything. I can remember him saying, "Attention!" and we all had to stand at attention alongside of our bunks while they paraded on through the pier. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

RR: I was on a landing craft, that's a ship that's under two hundred feet long. Anything over two hundred feet long is called a ship. I was on a craft.

SH: When you were at Pier 92, what were your duties?

RR: Security Guard. I also hitchhiked home to High Bridge when time permitted. I think I was in between assignments. I was only there for a week or two, and then, I think I ended up going back to Norfolk to be honest with. … After Pier 92 I was in the Navy yard, and then I went back to Pier 92, and then I went to Camp Bradford, Virginia.

SH: Did you get to go out on the town?

RR: Yes, off and on. Most of these places I had adventures, knowing me, always had something.

SH: Did you have any experiences with the Red Cross and the USO?

RR: … There were dances held by the USO and other groups at times. I didn't go every time. I don't know, I think when I was on the West Coast we had some entertainment come to the base. Norfolk to me was bad duty. I didn't like Norfolk. The town, and this is no kidding, it had signs in the park, "Sailors and dogs keep off the grass," and you've probably heard that.

SH: I have heard that before.

RR: … I got back down to the Norfolk area, back into the amphibious part of it again, and I'm, I don't know where it was, and a master at arms at that base came to me, and he said, "They want you over to the captain's office," and I go in there and the captain or one of the captains there said, "Do you have dress blues?" Well, you know, the dress blues you bought in town. They were civilian, but they fit you better, and they looked better. I said, "Yes, I have a set of dress blues." "Put those on, get whatever insignias that you're entitled to, put them on, and come back here at two o'clock." I went back, so, he said, "You're going to Chicago to help sell war bonds."

SH: When did you do this?

RR: I went to Chicago, Illinois, Navy Pier, I think November 8th. …

SH: In 1945.

RR: Yes. … When I had sent for my records, my records had come, pages nine and ten are missing, and some of this stuff I had listed here is repeated on the official record that I received. … I don't know what I did with that, it's in here somewhere. … We went out there to the Navy pier, and I was assigned to an amphibious ship called an LSM, which I had never been on before. They started building them in Charleston, but they had not been in Normandy. They were getting ready for the Pacific. So, anyway I was assigned to an LSM.

SH: What does LSM stand for?

RR: Landing ship Mechanize. LSMR is LSM Rocket, LSM, I don't know. I'd have to look that up, but we were docked at the Navy Pier which was open to the public, and they had booths set up to sell bonds, the Sixth War Bond Drive was the name of it. So, the Sixth War Bond Drive, I was supposed to be selling bonds and what my duties were was to take civilians aboard the ship and explain the ship's operation during an invasion. There were certain parts of the ship you couldn't take them, but for the general purposes, you could show them around and a lot of the people had sons and husbands, I guess, in the service that were interested especially if some of them were assigned to an LSM, how they lived, where they slept, and the galley, and what they ate. So, I was able to take civilians around and show them the ship and answer questions, and there was other sailors there doing the same thing, and the radio man and myself got to be pretty friendly, guy by the name of Smitty, and we took a lot of people around. Well, after about the third day, nothing but young girls, "Sailor, would you show me around the boat?" "Well, you don't call them a boat, honey. Come here and I'll show you." So, the poor civilian with a pocket full of money, "Where the hell are all the sailors?" [laughter] So, we're standing on the deck, and this old Italian couple came out--I didn't know they were Italian at the time--but they came up, and they looked kind of lost, looking around. So, I said,"Smitty, we've got to show those guys around, those two." So, he said, "Yes, okay." So, I introduced myself, and he said, "Well, we're interested in the ship. Our son had run away and joined the Navy, and we just heard from him, he's on an LSM in Charleston, and he's a Fireman First class, and I was wondering what he does, and what kind of insignia he wears." I said, "I'll introduce you to a Fireman First class," which I did, and he explained what his duties were down in the engine room, and so forth, and then I took him all around, and he said, "Can I see where they sleep?" I said, "You can, but your wife can't." I said, "I'll take you through the crew's [quarters]." So, I took her to the galley and set her down and asked the cook to get her a cup of coffee and entertain her, and we'd be back. So then we went through the ship's crew's quarters and the showers and the bathrooms and everything else and come back to the galley. The cook in the meantime explained about the food. So, they were quite pleased, and they got ready to leave, he handed me a little card, and he said, "The next time you go in town if you want to," he said, "You can stop [by], give the guy there a card," and he said, "You'll get a meal on me." He said, "I own a cafe there, (Maroney's Cafe?)." "Okay." So, one day we did that. I had the card, and this place was a ritzy restaurant, Jesus. You didn't see sailors in there; it was all civilians, all dressed up. We walked in there and sat at the bar. … Smitty, he said, he's more forward that I am, "Ask him where the hell old man (Maroney?) is." I said, "No, I'm not going to ask him." He said, "Tell them we're going to eat." So, I ordered a beer, the bartender came over, laughed. He said, "Sorry fellows, I can't serve you." Smitty, he's ready to fight. I said, "Why not?" "You've got to take your hats off." So, we took our hats off, got our beer, and then, I showed him the card, and I said, "Is Mr. (Maroney?) around?" … "He

usually comes in around six." "Well, he invited us to have supper." "Yes," he said, "You can go in the dining room there and order." "No, if he's going to come I'd rather talk to him." I didn't want to just walk in there, tell the waitress we're going to have a free meal. So, pretty soon he came in, and, "Oh boy, I'm glad you stopped." He said, "I'm glad to see you." He said, "You've come to eat?" We said, "Yes." We go back in the dining room, he got a special table for himself for us. "Let me order for you." "Okay." So, he ordered for us, and I don't know, we had a first class dinner, a steak I guess it was, I don't know. He had milk and crackers. He said he got ulcers. He said, "I can't eat." Well, he gave us more cards, and he said, "Any time," he said, "I own three places here." We never went back, but, you know, it was good that the guy appreciated [us]. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You said that you were sent to Chicago to sell war bonds.

RR: Yes, it was called the sixth war bond drive.

SH: When you were leading tours around the LSM, was that in Chicago?

RR: Yes, Lake Michigan. … We left Norfolk and went out to Navy Pier in Chicago.

SH: How did they treat sailors there?

RR: Chicago they treated sailors "A" number one. You didn't pay for any public transportation, any bus or subway or anything. Most of the people wanted to buy you lunch, buy you a drink, they treated you first class there, that's what I remember about Chicago.

SH: Would you have liberty often on this bond tour?

RR: Pretty near every evening. There were enough sailors out there to keep the thing rolling. …

SH: How much money did you accrue doing this?

RR: For the drive, I don't know, but I heard it was quite successful personally, if that's what you meant. I didn't make much money, because all the while I was in the service, I sent what they called an allotment home. I think I got five dollars a month. … I think wages were twenty-one dollars, so my mother got sixteen and I got five.

SH: No, I wondered if they ever told you how much money was made from your efforts for the war bond drive.

RR: All reports, everyone was very pleased. How successful it may have been? I have no idea. … They may have told me, I think they were happy with, when that drive was over, it was successful, because people were anxious, you know, we had, I guess the Germans were just

about done for, and we were ready to tackle the Pacific area, and people just wanted to get the war over with.

SH: At this stage, are you paying attention as to how the war is progressing in Europe?

RR: Yes, you mean, current events? At that time, I thought the was going well. Well, I listen to the news every day and today's events and grumble a bit about the way things were going now because I don't agree with them. I've always felt that if you find yourself in a fight, pull out all the stops and overwhelm them with might. … I've done that my whole life. … I was bullied one time when I was a kid in school, and the guy did something to me I didn't like, I picked up a section of two by four and hit him. He was bigger than I was, but he went down, and I shook the stick at him and said, "Don't ever do that again," and I never was bothered anymore, and I feel the same way with the nation. If they find themselves in a war, … like if you have a relative in a war zone, and someone is shooting at them, you'd want to drop the atom bomb on them, that's the way I feel about it, you know, get rid of them, and I think some people understand that. That's what I feel about Afghanistan. I feel that they've got a tiger by the tail, they got more than they anticipated, they're not going to kill all the Muslims there are in the world, they might as well know that, but at least the violent terrorists, they ought to be able to put them down. After all, at one time, I don't know if we still are, we were like the mightiest nation in the world and to have, of course, my vision of things, a bunch of guys running around intimidating you, I think we ought to be able to overcome it.

SH: Is this based on what you went through during World War II?

RR: … I believe the nation and other nations were 100 percent together and gave the troops full support. I feel whatever the generals that we send over there in harm's way, and the troops that we send over there, if they ask for more help or more equipment, we should pull out all the stops and give it to them. I could remember a year or so ago, the general over there asked, "We're not going to win anything over here unless I get more troops. I need something in the neighborhood of forty-five thousand to sixty-five thousand troops." It took three months to give the guy an answer. They gave him an answer, "We're going to send thirty thousand, but they're coming home next summer, and we're not going to send them all at once. We'll send ten. Then, we'll send maybe another ten or another five." I don't know if they got their thirty thousand there yet, but it aggravates me to think, … "Christ, if we had to evacuate German or evacuate South Korea or wherever they got troops, send him what he needs and get this thing over with," and I still feel that way. If we're not going to do that, let's go home.

SH: When you were in Chicago with this war bond effort, are you aware of the war in Europe?

RR: At the time I did, yes, I couldn't relate the date now where the war stood, but yes, I knew we were winning in Germany, and I knew if I waited long enough I was going to end up in the Pacific.

SH: After your experience selling war bonds, where do they send you to?

RR: Yes, I went back to the Norfolk area, Camp Bradford; … so, Bradford, Solomons, Little Creek. … That's all on the Chesapeake Bay, and I was in both of those. … I wasn't on the same ship all the time, you moved around. Then, they sent me to Galveston, and I don't really know what I was doing in Galveston except I was on an amphibious ship, and I, at one time, I was assigned to shore patrol in Galveston, and we had an escaped prisoner, and I was in the headquarters there, and the head shore patrol chief said, "I think the guy went out on the end of the pier." He said, "Roll, get the jeep and go out there." I never drove, I didn't have a driver's license. I think I was twenty, but my mother wouldn't let me drive till I owned my own car, that way you will take care of it, she said. So, I could never drive her car. So, I never drove. He said, "Take the jeep, go down there take it away." [laughter] I said, "Okay." So, I got in the jeep, and well, I had no idea, you know, I got it into forward gear, and it went down, and, "Christ, I hope it stops when I get to the end of the pier." I can remember that.

SH: Did you get him?

RR: Yes, he was trying to get on board a ship there somewhere, and they got him, and, you know what he was being chased for; being a homosexual. They wanted to discharge him. He got caught with another guy or something. I don't know if they do that today or not, they probably would maybe I don't know, but that was his crime.

SH: You had talked about how badly some of the African-American sailors were treated. Did that continue throughout the war?

RR: Gradually, it got more integrated and more acceptable, but it was tough when some of our Southern people just didn't want any part of that. … I don't know now. I guess all of us to some degree at my age--people my age--probably grew up with a little prejudiced feeling. I grew up in a town that didn't have any black people in it, but I accepted them, and I had some that were good friends, and guys I liked, but I wouldn't say I knew enough about them to say whether I liked them or didn't, but I could see they were okay. They didn't have the advantages we had, and you could overlook some of the things that happened to them, but for the most part, I had no problem with them. If you're going to have them for cooks, and you're going to have them for waiters, there's no reason you can't be friendly with them. So, they finally got to, and still I guess they didn't give them an active combat role yet when I was in the service. I think it still was a little separated there. I felt sorry for those guys in that brig when I was in the brig, and we used to try to bring them extra, and try to keep the food separated, so it wasn't all thrown in together. We finally ended up with a couple more pails to bring food back with, and we used to knock on the wall and ask them if they wanted anything, because we could knock on the door, and the guy would escort us to the bathroom or somewhere.

SH: Are you assigned to another amphibious craft at this point?

RR: Yes, I was on different ones, I don't know, I'd have to look. … They give you a flotilla number; it doesn't give you ship number. Like I say, I was on different ships.

SH: You get a leave to come home in June of 1945. Do you remember hearing about the end of the war in Europe?

RR: Yes. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: According to the record you provided, you were in Galveston. When the war ended in Europe was there a big celebration there?

RR: Yes, yes. They all had parties. I know that. Of course, Galveston is another sailor's town which, like Norfolk, you know. … They didn't bend over backwards to be extra friendly with you, but, yes, I can remember going out on liberty. I guess it was Galveston, then.

SH: Did you think that the war was going to end in the Pacific as well?

RR: I knew it would eventually, but I thought we were going to invade Japan before it happened. … I thought there was going to be a lot more fighting, but I thought it would end because we were going to be able to concentrate more troops from the European theater over there and like I say, when I was stationed in Coronado, California, we were getting ready to go to Japan, but we weren't the only ones. There was group after group after group doing the same thing. They were making up, well, maybe not exactly the same where I was, I was in a group, and we were going to be part of the Admiral's fleet which was only one of those, and I was going to be on the flagship which was quite an honor, and the camp commander told me. He said, "When you get assigned to the ship," he said, "I'm going to upgrade you to first class," which was a good rating, and eventually I'd be a chief petty officer, but it never came to pass.

SH: What ship were you going to be on?

RR: I didn't know yet. … An aircraft carrier or a battleship, but it was going to be the Admiral's flagship, whatever they chose to be the flagship. What they were doing, they were getting other ships ready for the flotilla, and they were transferring me out of the amphibious part of it, but they were filing in, in fact I got a whole list of inventory. I was responsible for a lot of the inventory as far as the navigation end of it goes, publications, and sextants, and binoculars and all that kind of stuff to get in order and logged in. That's what I was doing when I was in Coronado. Lieutenant Commander Craig and his warrant officer, they lived on Coronado. I was on the Navy base, but they used to come and get myself and this radioman called, his name was Rizzo, and we'd babysit for them, and they'd go to Tijuana for an evening out. Couldn't do that today, of course, but Tijuana, when I had liberty, that's where I went. You could get a good steak dinner there, drinks were cheap. Yes, I can remember going to Tijuana.

SH: Were you aware of the Japanese-Americans being put into internment camps around the country?

RR: Internment for; oh, yes. I don't know where they were, I don't have firsthand [knowledge], but I know Roosevelt did it. … I knew about it, I knew they did it, and at the time, I didn't find too much fault with it during the war. I know when Pearl Harbor came there were Japanese envoys in Washington, D.C. talking to our government people, and while they were there smiling

and bowing and shaking hands, the Japs hit Pearl Harbor. So, I thought, "They're a very devious type people. You can't trust any of them," and they put them in internment camps. I agreed with it. I look back at it now, and I think there were a lot of innocent people that got rounded up and were not treated right, and it was their misfortune to be born Japanese, but sometimes you're just protecting yourself or other people, and that's what happened.

SH: President Roosevelt dies in March of 1945. Was there a reaction among the sailors?

RR: Yes, I remember, getting a blinker signal. … I think I was back in Chesapeake Bay. … I was at anchor and a blinker light came over, and I don't know who sent it to me, one of the other signalman said, "Your President just died." … I knew he had been sick, he hid it pretty well from the public, but I knew he had an illness. In fact, he had infantile paralysis, and he came down to High Bridge one time--this is years ago--and we had a kid in High Bridge that had that, infantile paralysis, and his name was Jimmy Anderson, and Jimmy and the President met, and they had it in the paper and all, and then, Jimmy had braces, he was able to walk pretty much on his own with braces on his body somehow. In fact, I worked with him in Johns Manville when I worked in Johns Manville Asbestos Factory. Jimmy worked down there, and I used to … ride in the car with him, car pool. Yes, I remember him.

SH: Were the sailors upset that the President had died?

RR: Yes, they, I could say that blinker light was going all night long, wanted to know a little more about it. Of course, we didn't know everything, but just that he had passed away that Truman was going to be the [the President].

SH: What did the sailors think of Truman in the beginning?

RR: They were a little bit apprehensive, they didn't think he had the background. He didn't come across like Roosevelt when he spoke, but when he did speak he said what you wanted to hear. I mean, he spoke like he meant business. We were just a little nervous about what he was going to do, how he was going to handle it, but we could have had worse, and I guess most of them thought we could have had somebody worse maybe.

SH: When you were in Coronado, was your training intense?

RR: No, there was very little training. … I was like an office worker really. I was doing the inventories. … I didn't have my own office, but I was in an office where we were putting together this flotilla to go out into the Pacific. So, there was a lot of organizing, doing, and I don't remember being on any ship out there. I know it was nice duty, I remember Coronado was a nice place, but a lot of paperwork.

SH: What about when you first heard about the atomic bomb? Did you understand what the atomic bomb was?

RR: Not a hundred percent. I knew we were working on it and testing the thing, I knew it was a big deal. I didn't know when they dropped it. At first I didn't, I thought, "Why did they drop it

there? Why didn't they drop it on Tokyo?" You know, that was the only question in my mind. I didn't know the geographic layout of everything either. I didn't know what islands or what part of Japan we were going to have to approach and when they dropped the second one and then they talked about the war being over, I agreed with everything.

SH: Did you ever entertain the idea of staying in the military?

RR: Yes, I was asked quite a bit to stay in. In fact, my lieutenant commander out in Coronado, he promised me advancement if I stayed in and stayed with him. I thought seriously about it, and I had letters from the Coast Guard. … Somebody also wanted me to join the Coast Guard, they wanted me, … armed guard or some other organization that was quasi-military, anyway, and I thought no. In fact, … Coast Guard offered me an officer's post if I go. Well, you'd have to pass some test, but I thought I wanted to go back to High Bridge. [laughter]

SH: Can you talk about what you did when the ended? You mentioned that they put you on another LST.

RR: That was a temporary thing, yes. See, we were getting ready to go to the Pacific, and we had practice moving with a group like a flotilla movement, and I went on board this LST to more or less familiarize myself with … an Admiral's flotilla, which ship's here, which ship's there, who protects the flagship, what your positions are in the flotilla, and then, the maneuvers, the turns and staying together with the group without getting all mixed up. So, that's what we practiced.

SH: Did you get to go to Hawaii?

RR: … We started for Pearl Harbor, but we were going to pick up the flagship, the Admiral and the flotilla at Pearl Harbor. We started for Pearl Harbor, and when they dropped the second bomb, we made a big U-turn and came back. So, I never got to Pearl Harbor.

SH: Have you made it yet?

RR: No.

SH: You just had to wait your turn to get out of the service.

RR: Yes, I had asked. See, when I got taken off hurt, when I got taken off in Normandy, I didn't have any records or anything. I asked somebody about records, and I asked this commander that I had out there in Coronado, and he had written several letters, I don't know, I got copies of them, and he asked my skipper who was Ensign Ramsey, what happened to him, I don't know. … I got a letter from him after I got to High Bridge one time, just saying, … well, I've got a copy of it, saying I did a good job.

SH: You said your records got lost. Did that mean you had to wait for them to catch up in order for you to be discharged?

RR: Yes, well, no. They were for my own personal. … This just gives you an idea of some of the inventory that I started collecting. … I was just starting here. …

SH: These documents are from the LSM Group 46. Yes, my group in Coronado.

RR: … Yes, this is a letter from, I had written, just for the record, the commander said, "You have to write me a letter to request your records," so I wrote a letter to my skipper during Normandy, Ensign Ramsey, which was a fleet post office address saying I wanted page nine and ten from my records, which shows I was in the Normandy Invasion. It shows participating in the Normandy Invasion, authorized to wear American Area and European, African, Middle Eastern Area campaign ribbon, one star on the European African ribbon, received a leg injury on June 16th, transferred from your command to LST 505--that's when I was taken off--and that wasn't in my record. I still don't have page nine and ten. I got the medical records to show I was hurt, and the date I was hurt, and the date I went to … LST 505, and so forth, but it does not, it's not page nine and ten, it's not part of my record, it's the medical corps.

SH: They have never been able to find it for you.

RR: I guess not. I never got it. I tell you, I never got anything, and then one other time I did get a Purple Heart in the mail and other medals. …

SH: This document says the Purple Heart came forty years later.

RR: Yes. It said, here's a note from my lieutenant commander out in Coronado, it said, "Roll's injury was a result of hostile action. He was recommended for an award for wartime meritorious service," which is not a Purple Heart. "A memo from Lieutenant Commander Craig to the Secretary of the Navy," but I never heard any more about that.

PS: They mailed you the Purple Heart.

RR: Yes, well I had written to, "personnel records center." I have a copy of their reply. I had asked them to send me any awards, citations or medals I may have been entitled to …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You mentioned that you were trying to get your military records.

RR: Yes. There's a couple of letters here that Lieutenant Commander Craig had written to Chief of the Bureau of Navy Personnel. "Subject: Robert Roll. Subject: Purple Heart Award," and there's a couple enclosures, which I don't have that he sent, "Reference A," I don't have, "Commanding officer ATB Coronado," I don't have that. I don't have the backup for this letter; it says, "In accordance with paragraph two of the second endorsement of reference A, enclosure E, is submitted." It all had to do with being awarded the Purple Heart. This says, "Roll is due to be transferred to a separation center on December 5th and discharged on or about December 15th." It suggested that any further correspondence on this subject be made to him at his home address. I never heard anymore, and the only thing is I had written to naval personnel records

center that any military records I had … which I was figuring page nine and ten, if they had anything to send it to me. So, the only thing they sent was what they called, today they call it a DD form, I think.

SH: A DD-214.

RR: Yes, DD-214. When I got discharged, they didn't have them, they had a form like this and this lists quite a bit of the information I had already done. So, they also sent a listing of what my awards would be. This is one copy of it. … Yes, I guess I'm entitled to the following awards.

SH: Do you want to read them or should we?

RR: No, I can read them. … I had a different piece of paper telling me that.

SH: It says you are eligible for the American ribbon.

RR: Yes, I knew I had that, that's not the regular form. I think that was someone that told me they're out of some of them. …

SH: Was it difficult to go through this operation? Did it take a long time?

RR: What's that?

SH: When you leave Coronado and come back to Long Island.

RR: Long Island, yes, … here the thing from the awards they sent me. Naval Personnel Command, retired. … That's the final thing.

SH: You got the Ruptured Duck. That is good.

RR: Yes, I got that.

SH: The Discharge Button.

RR: I had that, yes.

SH: I am glad to see you got the Good Conduct Medal.

RR: I don't know, I never had one of them.

SH: It says you are eligible for it. It also says that you received buttons for the American Campaign, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign, and the European, African, Middle Eastern Campaign.

RR: Yes, the only reason I got the Pacific was I made a U-turn in the Pacific. [laughter] … Like I say, I had written that, I didn't hear anything for a while, and then, the next thing you

know, of course, the newspaper article here, which I did not want in the paper, I can't believe people put that in the paper. …

SH: I saw it briefly in your papers.

RR: … I was working for the power company. They wanted to interview me and, here it is, "Forty Years Late." … That gives you a rundown. …

SH: This article was written in 1984. How were things in High Bridge when you returned home in December?

RR: … Well, the guys were all coming home, and it was just a grand reunion. … People had been away, we're all starting to see each other, we all went to school together, we all knew each other. So, it really was a drinking party. [laughter]

SH: Approximately how many guys from your area did not return?

RR: Well, in my small class which I said was thirty-four or thirty-five, three did not come back, and out of the, when I say the class was thirty-four or thirty-five, most of them were girls. There were only about a dozen boys in the class, and as far as I know, all of us went in the service. Like I say, three didn't come back out of a dozen. One real close friend of mine didn't come back, and then the grades below me and the grade ahead of me got it just as bad. I don't have the figures, but I know that High Bridge High School has a plaque in the front of the school with all the veterans' names on it, and if I looked at those names, I could tell you all the ones that didn't come back, quite a few for a little town.

SH: Did anyone come back injured? You had recovered by then.

RR: To tell you the truth, I don't recall. I know there were shell shock guys. … I know one guy, he never got a hundred percent. He'd walk up and down the street throwing a baseball up in the air. Finally, in later years he went to Lyons Hospital. …

SH: Do you think part of it was that they did not know how to treat it?

RR: Yes, and part of it was not getting any treatment, I think till they got to Lyons, and then I had a good friend of mine, in fact he was a postmaster in High Bridge at one time, he had seen the worst part of the war, really had it rough. He was a prisoner of war for a while, and he finally retired and went to Idaho to raise potatoes, and while he was out there, he committed suicide. He just had some problems that nobody knew about.

SH: You mentioned before that you went back to the foundry and tried to get your job back, but you had to take a different one.

RR: Yes. I still wanted to learn something, that after being in the service and getting a high score on that test, I thought, "God, maybe I'm capable of learning something." [laughter]

SH: Did your confidence level go up?

RR: A little bit, yes. I thought I should have applied myself better, but anyway, I got back in the foundry, in the mill, and I didn't want to take the job away from my cousin. So, they gave me another job, and it was in the laboratory. When they were making steel in the furnace, they would bring up a little test of the molten steel and bring it up to the lab and dump it out on the anvil there, shake it out, and then from that little test, … you put a drill on it and make filings from it, and then, you test it for chemical content and all the different chemicals that steel had to have in it before it was ready to pour. Now, the melting department, their responsibility was to have the right temperature and get the right additives and slag on it and all that. In the lab, the responsibilities were ours, either pour it or add more carbon, or add more of this, cook it a little longer and get some of the over treated stuff out. So, I did that, and I kind of liked that, so I put in for metallurgy. I figured that would be a good trade to learn. … They had representatives come in, and they signed everybody up for certain things they wanted to learn under the--it wasn't the GI Bill--but it was a training program they had.

SH: This program was paid for by the GI Bill.

RR: Yes. A lot of them had signed up for machinists and electricians. They got their schooling. What you got, you got three years of apprenticeship, but you got the full first class pay for that three years, and if you passed your tests and qualified, then you're a tradesman, you had that skill. So, I put in for metallurgy, and one day all the guys were going to a meeting, all the young guys. I said, "What's going on?" They said, "Well, today they start with the GI Training Bill." I said, "I'm part of that. I put in for that." So, I called the personnel guy up, "Oh," he said, "I forgot to tell you, Taylor-Wharton is not qualified to teach that." "Oh," I said, "Is it too late to get in the other program?" "Yes." So, I was working there, and then they put me on the night shift, and I quit. I went to Johns Manville which was probably worse, and I worked down there, and that was a laboratory job, and what we were trying to do is design brake linings and clutch facings, what they call friction materials, and I designed, or my formula came out that a company by the name of American Chain and Cable Company, American Chain and Cable liked my formula, so they bought that product that I had come up with. I thought, "Boy, that's going to give me a boost, a raise or something." Well, I didn't have the college degree. I worked with a technician who did. He was the lab tech, and I was the lab tech's assistant, but it was my formula that was approved. He got a bonus, I got nothing. So, I quit again. … I went on the railroad, and I liked it outside on the rails, until the winter time came and you're standing out there, I'm on the bridge and trestle gang now. You paint the bridges or you go down on the waterfront, and you creosote the pilings where the ferries, barges, and stuff that belong to the railroad come and go. I did that for a while, and then one boss came to me, he said, "You're going to stay with the railroad?" He said, "You don't seem like a railroad guy." I said, "Why?" "Well, I'll tell you, I'd make you foreman if you're going to stay, but if you're not going to stay I'm not going to make you foreman." I said, "I'm not going to stay." [laughter] So, then, I went back to Manville and instead of working in the lab, where I didn't like the way the supervisor figured things, I went to the factory, and I went on the floor that was making these brake linings that American Chain and Cable were buying, and they were buying so many of them that they went on three shifts down on the factory floor to make these brake segments. So, I went down, and I talked to the supervisor, Mr. Soriano. I said, "I'm the lab guy that came up with the formula, how long you

bake them, and how long you do everything, and the guys down there are on piece work making big money. So, that's for me." So, I got on piece work, the more you made the more money you made, and I was making pretty good money, and that was from four o'clock till midnight. I didn't like the shift because I like to hunt and fish, but I'd go home at midnight and go to sleep, I'd sleep almost till noon, so I didn't have time for any outdoor activities much. So, one day the lights went out at about five o'clock in the afternoon, everything stopped, all the machinery stopped, we're sitting there in the dark in the factory, and I go up to the window, I'm looking out on the street, so is everybody else, there's nothing else to do, you've got to wait for the lights. Pretty soon a guy came down in the Power and Light pick-up truck, climbed the pole, reached up there with a stick, put a fuse in, the lights came on. "Wow, that's what I want to do," and I quit, went with the power company. [laughter]

SH: It was probably good that you got out of John Manville.

RR: Yes, oh, yes. Friends of mine didn't make it. A good friend of mine died with emphysema or whatever it is.

SH: Did you have to go to specialty schools when you worked for Jersey Central Power and Light?

RR: I started as a ground hand, temporary ground hand doing construction work over at the generation station over here in Holland Township, and I was working overtime, I was working ten hours a day, six days a week, almost made as much money as I was in Manville, not as much, but with the overtime and all, brought me up pretty good. I was still single. So, then they got that project done, we got back to straight time, but I liked the work. I was out on transmissions that was cross country lines, had nothing to do within the town, and I enjoyed working on transmission lines. One thing led to another, I advanced a little bit. I think I worked there twelve years and then advanced to supervisor, and then, to supervisor of the construction department. I retired after thirty-three years with the power company.

SH: How did you meet your wife?

RR: … I used to go to dances, but I couldn't dance worth a damn, you know. … Years ago, there used to be what they called granges, you know, they were mostly farmers, like a farmers' club, but they had dances. So, I went to the grange dance in Stanton, and I hung out with the guys … and across the dance floor three or four girls were there. So, I thought, "Well, I should ask somebody," wait for a slow one, but when a slow one came I'd go over, and the girl I was going to ask to dance, the one I had my eye on, I go up to her chair and some hot shot behind me comes over, "You want to go? Let's go." He grabbed her, she's up out of the chair before I even can clear my throat. So, the other girl sitting there is my wife. So, I look at her, "You want to dance?" She said, "Okay." That's how I started going with her. …

SH: Did she teach you to dance?

RR: She tried. I danced with her, but I never was a good dancer; only slow ones, but she did like to dance.

SH: Where was she from?

RR: High Bridge, in fact, she's seven years younger than I was. I don't know if that tape you got tells about me starting a fire in school, but she was one of the lower classmates up in the floor above the shop and the smoke came up through the floor. She remembers that, and the fire alarm going off, and all the kids having to go outside.

SH: Do you want to tell us how you started the fire?

RR: Well, I don't take the full blame, there was help. [laughter] … In the shop, one part of the shop was partitioned off and it was a paint shop, and the paint shop was back where the print shop was, that was partitioned off section. Well, I was really assigned to the print shop, but in the paint shop, we got looking at the kids were making bird coops and book shelves and stuff like that, and they had them paint it up, dry them, and shelves and behind the paint bench had to be the steps that came down from the upper floor, and if you broke that partition out, you can go under the steps that are coming down, and there's like a little "hidey-hole" in there. So, let's get behind that bench and see what's under those steps. So, we did, of course, it was all dirt floor and everything else in there, but there was a lantern there, kerosene lantern in perfectly good shape. So, we took that out. "That's a nice lantern, I'll clean that up." So, in the paint shop, there's all kinds of kerosene, we cleaned that little lantern up, and we filled it with kerosene, and lit it to see how it would burn. Needless to say, we burned the outside, too, because it was coated with kerosene. So, when that caught fire, the paint bench caught fire because it had painting stuff on it, the guy says, "Get something to put that out." The guy grabbed a rag, it was full of paint, goes to snuff the fire out, and he's beating the fire, and the rag is on fire. I said, "Holy cow," I said, "Get that on the floor and stomp on it." Well, we had smoke, and the kids' bird coops were on fire by this time, all the fresh paint on it. … I ran out to the teacher, and he's sitting there over his desk, and I came up behind him, and said, "Mr. Brown, Mr. Brown." "Just a minute, Robert." I said, "Mr. Brown." Finally, I said, "Goddammit," and I tapped him. He looked around. I said, "Look." The flames are coming out of the door. He looked stunned. Then, ran down the hall, there was a fire hose down the hallway. We rang the fire alarm, and we got the hose up, put the fire out finally, and five of us, and we were on the carpet, of course, explained what happened, and we had to stay there that night after school. The paint shop and the print shop were down one step from the woodworking shop. That was filled with water and black floating water and burned sticks, and, "Boys you've got to bail that out." So, we had to take a bucket, bail that charred stuff into a bucket, take it outside, and dump it. They didn't want it in the cesspool or anything, put it over the bank in the back of the school. I don't know how long we worked. … We worked there I think three nights after school, had to clean that up, had to paint the place over again, and we didn't get expelled. We were on the carpet, of course. One thing that saved us, one kid, his father was on the school board, that kind of helped. … That's what I say, when I set the school on fire, my wife remembered it, she said, "Yes, I was one of the little kids upstairs." [laughter]

SH: You just had not been properly introduced at that time.

RR: No, not yet. I feel we were lucky. We had a good principal. He could have raised hell with us, I guess he didn't.

SH: When you got out of the Navy, did you stay in the Navy Reserves at all?

RR: I think just for a short period of time, it was just something on paper, I wasn't active in it. I guess if they had another emergency, they could have called me. I think I was a reserve a couple of years.

SH: You did not have to worry about being called back for the Korean War.

RR: No, I'm not sure if I worried. I really don't.

SH: Just for the record, you were married in 1953.

RR: Yes.

SH: You have two daughters.

RR: Yes. You met Susan, and then, the younger daughter was Pat, Patty--Patricia.

SH: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you or that you would like to add for the record?

RR: Well, I told you too many personal stories, I could have stuck to the service, but I'll be honest with you, you know, the service in my mind today, if I didn't have notes and stuff, would be a blur. … I'm not a detailed person anyway. I don't remember details and like I say, I had to write dates down so I could recall. I remember a lot about the service, a lot of what happened during action. I know what happened then, but I don't like to remember, and I don't like to talk about that. I don't know why other people don't mind, but I saw stuff that I don't like to recall. I was glad to be home and in one piece and I've lost interest in trying to get my personnel records completed.

SH: How do you think World War II impacted the man you became?

RR: … Well, I think I had, first of all I had a feeling of being thankful that somebody is looking out after me, that I could have lost my leg, I could have got shot, anything could have happened, so I look at it that way. I look at some of my early years, where I was just in life for a good time. I got through high school without working. I did things that you'll see on that tape, I'm not proud of, a lot of mischief, and nothing, well, I'd say, I could have got arrested. [laughter] … So, my early life, I look back at how lucky I was, and then, the other thing that affected me was I grew up during the Depression. My parents were trying to raise a family. We had tough going, and my mother had tough going. Then I look back at what … the generation ahead of me went through, again I feel fortunate. When I got in the service and got out all in one piece, I felt fortunate again. When I went to work to earn a living I didn't get a lot of breaks, and I think some people took advantage of me, but when I got with the power company, I got advancements. I'm not sorry that I went with the power company, and to make a long story short, yes, the

service had an effect on me, but it was only over two years, and a lot of stuff happened in two years and a lot of it is a blur. I do remember the training. I do remember how important taking orders was and being organized and doing what you're told, all that had an effect on me. If I told somebody I was going to do something, I'd do it. If I was assigned to do something, I would do it, even though it was distasteful, and so I made a lot of sacrifices in the service that I thought I had to do. I didn't think I had any choice, I probably didn't have any choice. … From that I developed a work habit that I think was beneficial. I know when I went to power company, I had been knocked around to three or four different places working, none of them were easy jobs. … When I went with the power company, that was a hard job, … working outdoors all day, and I liked the transmission end of it, and you see some of these steel towers, I climbed all of those towers, not all of them. … I climbed a lot of towers, climbed a lot of poles. I can remember a guy taking my picture. The highest pole in the northern part of New Jersey was a hundred ten feet long up here over by Rockport Game Farm. I remember climbing that, a guy taking a picture on me, and a lot of guys wouldn't do it, and I can remember as a lineman, they'd call you out on storm trouble, you went, and you had to go. They'd say, "They got wires down or they got people out of lights." You'd go. One of the toughest things I could remember doing was up on Route 10 near Dover, a tower line, the wires had come down, it was an ice storm, the wires had come down across the two lanes of Route 10, east and west lane, and they had traffic rerouted. We got there, of course, we had to get the wire out of the way, had to run new wire, but I had to climb the one steel tower. The steel tower was full of ice, had to climb it, had a wrench in my belt, crescent wrench, and I was cracking the ice off the steps on the side of the tower, pitch dark, wind blowing like the devil raining, leather gloves, ice cold. They got wet climbing that tower. I get up on the top where I wanted to go, I couldn't do anything with my hands. … I just sit there, and they're hollering at me from the ground, but the noise is bad with the wind. Finally, I shouted down, "Send me up dry gloves." So, the hand line just by luck you had a place I could hook it. So, they sent me up dry leather gloves would help, my hands started to work better, and then, I was up there I'd say an hour and a half maybe before I was able to get down, and I did it because that's what you're supposed to do, you know, but somebody else maybe wouldn't have gone that far, but I think, all in all, the service helped me a lot. If you commit yourself to do something, do it. Otherwise, get out of there. In my time with the power company, I became more dependable and assumed many responsibilities. I started as a temporary laborer and retired after thirty-three years as a supervisor of the construction department.

SH: Well, I thank you so much for being willing to talk to us.

RR: Well, I could say I talked more about myself than I did about the Navy.

SH: Before we end the interview, did you ever stay in contact with anyone in the service?

RR: Not really, no. Well, the local people I had met. … When I was in California I met a friend of mine he was in the Marines. Oh, that was an interesting story. When I was on the base in San Diego, the Marines were the guards at the gate so you were not allowed liquor on the base, but the sailors with their bell bottom trousers and their good socks were able to put a pint bottle in your sock and go in. Well, the Marines were always after that, and they'd crack you on the ankles with their club. Once in a while, they hit a bottle and break it. So, regardless of that we

used to manage to sneak some booze in there and once in a while the SPs would have a search for contraband, and they'd go in your barracks when you were not there and look in your mattress and look in your locker and confiscate any whiskey that you may have stashed in there. So, I'm lying on the top bunk. I didn't have duty that afternoon, and if you go into a barracks and there's double-decker bunks, and if a guy is laying in the top bunk and he's sunk in, you don't see him. So, I heard their leather heels clicking on the barracks floor, and I said, "Oh, it's an officer." I looked up and I said, "Oh it's a Marine," because they had the same shoes, and he went in between every bunk back to the lockers, jiggle the locker, if it was an unlocked he looked in there, looked under the pillows. Then, he went into the next aisle between the bunks. I said, "Well, that son of a gun." I had a bottle under my pillow, and I grabbed it by the neck, and I said, "When that guy comes in here, he's getting boxed," because all I'm going to say is I thought somebody was molesting me. So, I had the bottle ready, and the guy came down, and I had it like that, and he must have seen me move or something, he turned. It was my buddy from High Bridge. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm looking for you." He said, "They said you were here, and I'm looking for your stencil on your pillow case, you know, your name." He almost got bopped, and I told him that. He said, "I'm not attached to the base." He was over in another town, El Cajon or somewhere. So, we went out and had a few drinks.

SH: Did you join any organizations?

RR: I belong to the VFW and the Legion, life-member of both, but I'm not active. When I first came home, I joined everything anybody wanted. I was in Lions, Elks, VFW. I'm charter member of Pattenburg VFW, by the way, I got a picture of that. I joined gun clubs, hunting clubs, I don't know what all, I couldn't keep up with it. They want to put you on a committee to do it, well, the committee does all the work. … I gradually dropped. Masons, I started with that, and finally, I wish I stayed with the Masons in a way, but I dropped out of everything. I had three gun clubs I was in. I liked to hunt, and I was president of two at the same time, Califon, High Bridge, and then I finally got out of that. Then, I got in a club that I stayed with. I was president for a long time, and then, the secretary who really makes the club, died, and we had nobody to be the secretary, so I abdicated being president which was just a figurehead job and took over the secretary job, and I did that for twenty years, took the minutes, typed the minutes up, kept everything organized, club almost broke up two or three times. I'd go around to my buddies and we'd dig into their pocket, and we'd pay whatever the bill was, and try to keep it going. So, I was getting fed up with doing all the work. I used to organize everything. In other words, all the land owners we had, I always wanted to have a party for them in the summer like a picnic, and we would invite the land owners and their families free of charge. Well, you had to do a little work, and we'd charge our members a little bit, just a token fee, and it was a good get together. Well, later on some of the guys didn't want to do that. "Ah, take the money, we'll go deep sea fishing." "Oh, the family is not going to go deep sea fishing with you." So I kind of had a disagreement with them there, and then, … to tell you the truth, I was getting bored with it. I didn't hunt that much. I was working to make hunting for everybody else. Every Christmas, I would deliver the bottle of wine to the landowner, if they wanted it. If they didn't drink, they'd get candy or something and make sure they all got something, because I know a lot of clubs started paying their taxes, landowner's taxes, started leasing the property for exorbitant fees. Our gun club was charging you forty dollars a year dues, other gun clubs were charging you five hundred dollars a year. So, it began to change, and some of the guys, "Well, we … won't pay

them all. We'll pay this guy so much. We'll give this landowner five hundred and give the other guy a bottle of whiskey." I said, "That's not going to work." They talk, you know, they talk. … So, finally it got where we, I said, "Somebody else run this." I did it long enough, I said, some of the younger guys, they had all the young ideas anyway. So, one guy did, he said, "Oh, I'll do it," and I said, "Okay, good." So, I met with him and showed him, you know, we had incorporation papers and insurance, show him the ins and outs of keeping the paper work. I'm still an honorary member.

SH: Well, again, thank you, and we look forward to seeing you again.

RR: You're welcome. It is funny, but I never thought about my time in the Navy or talked about it, my World War II experiences, or anything for years, until I was over seventy years old. Now, I am willing to try and get something recorded.

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

Reviewed by Alexandra McKinnon 7/8/2013
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 7/9/2013
Reviewed by Robert Roll 6/2/2014