

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN G. ROSTA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with John G. Rosta on October 18, 1997 at Rutgers University with Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak. I am going to begin by asking you about your parents, beginning with your father, who came from Hungary to the United States.

John Rosta: Correct. My father, Lorincz Rosta, was born in Hungary, near Budapest, and my mother, Elizabeth Simon Rosta, was born in Hungary also, in what is now the Ukraine, and they both emigrated into the United States in their early twenties, and, after my father was here about five years at different jobs, he married my mother here in New Brunswick, at St. Ladislaus' Church, ... up on Somerset Street, and I was born in New Brunswick in 1914 on June 25. ... Most of our activities, all our religious activities, were centered around St. Ladislaus' Church, so, all birth record and baptismal records are all on record there.

KP: Do you know why your parents left Hungary?

JR: They left Hungary for a better life, ... for economic reasons, mainly, that they were peasants at the time, and they had a difficult time, and saw ... no future there. To make it easier on their parents even, they emigrated, so that the parents wouldn't have to support them, and the only labor they could find there would be farm labor, or ... a woman would be a housekeeper. They came to New Brunswick, because they had relatives here already, and they had sponsors to sponsor them when they arrived. Until 1920, the feudal system still existed in Hungary. Barons and counts owned all farmland. Most persons worked as serfs (or peasants) on farms at low wages.

KP: When you say that they had relatives here, who were they?

JR: They were my uncles. My father had a brother here who came first. I don't know who sponsored him, but, my mother also had a brother here who preceded her and he sponsored her.

KP: Did your family, even your extended family, ever work for Johnson and Johnson?

JR: My parents did not work for Johnson and Johnson. My father did work for Michelin Tire Company in Milltown for fifteen or more years, and, my mother worked in the cigar factory between children. However, I had several uncles and aunts who did work at Johnson and Johnson, and, of course, J&J was glad to get all the Hungarian workers they could.

KP: That is the story many Hungarian people have told us. I wanted to get the story from someone who is from the Hungarian community.

JR: ... They claimed, Johnson and Johnson, Mr. Manly, who was the personnel director, claimed that the best workers, and hardest workers, and the most trustworthy were the Hungarians, because they ... came here for a better life. They were willing to work for any gain that they could make, 'cause money was the first object.

KP: Your father played the ...

JR: Cimbalom.

KP: The cimbalom, thank you, a traditional Hungarian musical instrument. What is a cimbalom?

JR: ... It's like a dulcimer, but, it is larger, like a dining room table. The sound is similar to that of a piano. It is played by hitting the strings with pads. They're all steel strings and he has padded sticks, ... one in each hand, for getting the melody out of the instrument. Well, he learned to play that from his father, and even his brothers learned it, so that they had an additional talent, besides farming, which came in very handy for them. They all ... almost made a living out of playing the cimbalom for many occasions, social occasions, dances, baptisms, and ... my father had another advantage. He came from a part of Hungary where there were Schwabs, where Germans settlers had moved in, perhaps, one hundred years before, and they maintained their German language, and the Hungarians assimilated them, also picked up that German language. My father could speak German and Hungarian when he arrived here, which was an advantage. My mother, however, only spoke Hungarian.

KP: Your father, from 1905 to 1913, made his living as a traveling musician. How far did he travel?

JR: He settled in New Brunswick for a year, then, he went to Pennsylvania, Allentown, I believe, and, from there, he went to Cleveland, always looking for a better job or looking for adventure, also, to see part of the country. He got out as far as Cleveland, to my knowledge, perhaps, Toledo, Ohio, and I know he spent some time near Buffalo, New York, but, eventually, he came back to New Brunswick, because most of his friends were here, and then, he did get a permanent job with Michelin Tire Company.

KP: How long was he with Michelin?

JR: From about 1913 to 1925.

KP: Why did he leave Michelin?

JR: ... He and my mother decided to go into a grocery/butcher business. So, they bought out a local butcher and grocer, and learned the trade, and worked at it for a good fifteen years, plus five more.

KP: Of course, starting a shop in 1925 was not the best timing, with the Great Depression around the corner.

JR: Well, ... the main essential was food, at that time. So, here, we had the "bank," we owned the food bank, the store. We were fortunate in that way, that we could eat at wholesale prices, and, yet, make a living out of it, and the people had to depend on a local store, because they had only an ice box that could keep food for overnight, and they had to go to the store everyday,

practically, for goods. It was a profitable business, even though almost every second corner had a grocery/butcher store on it.

KP: I imagine your parents gave credit to a lot of people.

JR: That's right. ... Almost every grocer and butcher ran his own credit and welfare system for ... his block, about a four block area, perhaps, and people would buy, and they would put it on the books, and they'd pay half of it, perhaps, and they'd pay a little more, but, kept giving them more and more credit. By the time the war broke out, ... those people moved away and never paid their debts. So, there was at least a twenty-five percent lost.

KP: Due to the credit.

JR: Due to that credit, but, it created goodwill, and, of course, my mother and father were willing to help out their friends and neighbors, so that they didn't cry about it.

KP: Your parents met in New Brunswick.

JR: Correct. ...

KP: Did they know each other in Hungary?

JR: No, they didn't. They hadn't, but, they had some mutual friends, perhaps, and it didn't take them long to get aquatinted, because every girl that was over sixteen was already looking for a husband, and any good prospect, as long as he was not a drunkard, would be a good prospect, and if he had a job, especially, he was a prime husband prospect.

KP: Do you know how your parents met? Did they meet at a dance or at church, for example?

JR: I believe that they met at a social function at St. Ladislaus' Church and, perhaps, attending church services, too, but, at some social function at the church.

KP: You mentioned that your mother worked at a cigar factory. Was it in New Brunswick?

JR: It was the General Cigar Factory on Somerset Street, next to the church, from 1918 to 1924. ... The church ran a nursery, a preschool nursery, and my mother would drop us off at that nursery, right next door, and she'd go to work, and then, we'd be at the nursery until she quit work later, ... about four in the afternoon, pick us up, and take us home, walk home, because we only lived about a good quarter mile away from there, but, we had the liberty of ... entering the factory at that time. We had fund-raisers at that time, also, so, we were selling the candy for the school, and we'd go up to the factory. They had no vending machines, this was pre-vending machine era, and, my God, these women would be buying everything we had. We'd sell out in five minutes. [laughter] So, we could go up there and visit our mother, even before quitting time. The safety rules were very disregarded or they weren't worried. We had much fewer lawyers at that time, see, so, there were ... hardly any suits, kinds of liability.

KP: Do you remember how old you were when your mother dropped you off at the church for day care?

JR: Five years old to ten years of age.

KP: Before that, did your mother work or did she go back to work when you were five?

JR: Well, she did go back to work after I was about a year old, and she would work a year, and then, the second child, my brother, came a long, and then, she'd have to drop out for another six months to a year.

KP: Who took care of you at the day care center while your mother worked?

JR: There were nuns, Sisters of Charity, that ran the nursery, and they provided a hot lunch, and, also, [they were] monitoring our activities and checking [on] us in the playground, before and after school hours.

KP: You were about five when you went to the nursery, so, you were very young.

JR: ... I was at least four, just pre-kindergarten.

KP: You have memories of going to the nursery before starting school.

JR: Yes, and, ... even when we were attending school at St. Ladislaus' ... grade school, we were at that nursery. We had lunch there. ... We also had a place to stay until ... [our mother] came out from the factory to pick us up.

KP: You were used to having your mother work.

JR: Well, she worked until the fourth child, my sister, was about four. ... I don't think she went back to work that. ... It was economical for her to stay home and take care of us, rather than putting us in the nursery, and paying the charges there, and working. A year later, they went into the grocery/butcher business.

KP: Growing up, did your parents speak Hungarian at home?

JR: Only Hungarian, and we only spoke Hungarian. When I started school, I could only speak Hungarian. I could understand a little English, but, I couldn't carry on a conversation in English.

KP: You must have had a tough time in school, at first.

JR: Well, first year, ... I couldn't understand all the instructions from the teacher, and, I remember, I broke down and cried. I didn't know whether I was wrong, or she was wrong, or

whether I was stupid. I complained to my mother when I got home, and she tried to explain it to me. In about three months, I picked up a running conversational English, anyway.

KP: Hungarian is a very difficult language.

JR: I think you have to be born into it, or live in the country, to learn it.

KP: Yes, I have a good friend who is a Hungarian historian, and she was not a native of Hungary, and she had to learn Hungarian, and the only way to learn Hungarian is to live in Hungary for years at a time.

JR: Yes, I believe it is. It's a scientific language, it's a phonetic language, and it's very precise, but, it's an elaborate language, and the usages and the vocabulary can be only picked up by very serious study.

KP: Can you still speak Hungarian?

JR: Yes, I can, mainly because I maintain my contact at St. Ladislaus'. We had a big influx of refugees in 1956. ... Most of them could only speak Hungarian. ... My contact with them renewed my usage of the language. ... I've been able to keep it up and I try to practice it as much as I can when I'm with these Hungarians. I speak in Hungarian ... not to lose the language.

KP: Did either of your parents ever go back to Hungary for a visit?

JR: Never, neither one. ... They didn't hanker to go back, because they had a much better life here, and, in order to go back, ... it would have cost them quite a bit of money, and the unfortunate thing was that their parents died in their younger ages. My mother's mother died when my mother was only about fourteen, and my mother, being the oldest daughter in the family, became the "mother" of her other siblings, about five other siblings. ... Then, her other siblings all came out here, except one, he remained. So, she had no hankering to go back. I was fortunate that I made a visit to Hungary on a tour, with a tour group, in 1984, an eighteen day tour in Hungary, all in Hungary by bus, and I enjoyed that very much, because I did meet my uncle, who was still alive. A half brother of my father, same last name, Rosta, Uncle Paul, and he was about eighty-eight at the time. He was happy to see me. ... He was the last surviving older generation on my father's side.

KP: Did you meet any of your mother's relatives?

JR: Not there, no, because they were in occupied Russian territory and our visa did not permit us to enter that part of Ukraine. The farthest east I got was the city of Debrecen.

KP: Oh, yeah, I have been to Debrecen.

JR: ... That was the farthest east we went, the closest to the Russian border, which was only about twenty, twenty-five kilometers from there.

KP: Yes, it is very close.

JR: Our visas did not permit us to enter Russian territory.

KP: It sounds like the church, St. Ladislaus', was very important to your parents, the nursery, the elementary school ...

JR: ... And, it was their spiritual center as well as their social center. Even though they had many friends ... [who] belonged to the Hungarian Reform Church, the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Church, the Greek Catholic Church, they had friends in all of them, and, of course, with our business, they became familiar with all of them, but, ... St. Ladislaus' was the focal point, and it was for me, in my earlier years, in my teenage years.

KP: Did they join any other organizations besides the church?

JR: The only other groups that I know were, like, fraternal organizations that were insurance agencies, really, insurance groups, like the present day William Penn Society, but, the forerunners of that. ... They would have meetings ... at least once a month, and they attended some of those meetings, but, the other meetings were ... at the school, like the forerunners of the PTA, that they would have to come talk to the teachers. That was like an informal meeting, but, ... they were not joiners.

KP: Where did you live in New Brunswick when you were growing up?

JR: Mainly. [laughter]

KP: Yeah, it sounds like you moved a few times.

JR: I was born on number 2 Somerset Street, right on the river almost, and then, when ... Public Service put up that big gas tank, natural gas storage tank, and manufactured gas, we had to move from there, and we moved to 50 City Alley, which was off Washington Street. Now, the present J&J headquarters is built there. From there, we moved in 1929 to Ball Street in the Fifth Ward, out between French Street and Somerset, going towards Mile Run Brook, a one way street, into a new house. It was one of the early houses with electricity that was affordable, and we lived there for six years. Then, my father went into this business in October, 1925, bought the store on 77 Central Avenue. After five years there, ... he didn't buy it, he leased the store, but, the owner wouldn't renew the lease. So, my father had a house and store built across the street, corner of Central Avenue and Robinson Street, 52 Robinson, and then, we lived there ... [from] 1930 until I got married, and I lived there for a year after I was married. ... I was married in 1940. In 1941, I had to go to Philadelphia to work. ... I lived in Philadelphia for a year-and-a-half, went into the service in June of '42, and, in the meantime, after four months, my wife moved back to New Brunswick with my one-year-old son, and I was shipped overseas. When I came back, ... I moved in with my wife, actually, at 228 Somerset Street, and we lived there for about three years, until we got the second child. We were cramped for space, and then, I bought a house on North

Brunswick, just off Livingston Avenue, 2 Cleremont Avenue. I lived there for about sixteen years, and that's where I really raised my family. From there, I moved over to Piscataway. My wife wanted a new house. So, we moved to a new house in Piscataway, off River Road, 45 Lincoln Avenue, and lived there 'til all the children were grown, and married, and moved away. ... We decided to sell that and move into a smaller place, or one with less maintenance, so, we moved to Rossmore Adult Community Center in Monroe Township.

KP: Oh, yes.

JR: Senior adult community, I should say, an active senior [community]. ... We lived there eight years when my wife, Margaret, passed away in 1994. I lived there for two more years, then, I remarried in 1996. So, I'm married again now ten months to Eleanor "Sally" Polgar Rosta.

KP: So, you are a newlywed.

JR: Almost eleven months now, November 30th, 1996. I married a second time and that's where I live now. My wife, second wife, did not want to move out of her house, because she'd been there for twenty-eight years, and it would be more traumatic for her to move than it would be for me to move out of my condo, so, I gave in and moved into 3 Wellington Place, New Brunswick.

KP: So, you came back to New Brunswick.

JR: Back to my roots. [laughter]

KP: What percentage of your neighborhood was Hungarian?

JR: Well, on Somerset Street and City Alley, it was at least eighty percent Hungarian. On Ball Street, it might have been about fifty percent Hungarian, and then, on Central Avenue again, it was about seventy-five percent Hungarian. ... Most of our customers were Hungarian customers. Then, after that, it was cosmopolitan.

MR: Were they mostly Eastern Europeans?

JR: Right, ... like when we were at the store. At the time we owned the store, most of our customers were Hungarian immigrants, also, maybe more recent immigrants than my parents, but, still, most of them were not native born. They were born in Hungary. Their children were born here, locally or in the States, anyway, in, probably, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, or New Jersey. ... Most of them were of Hungarian extraction. ... Their children were born here, but, the parents were born in Hungary, similar to my case.

KP: Did your entire family work in the store? I get the impression your parents were very hard working.

JR: That's true, my mother and father both worked equally hard, and, at that time, the stores were open from six o'clock in the morning 'til nine at night, and somebody had to [be] on duty all the time. Well, my two brothers and sister, like I would help out a little bit after school, delivering orders, serving customers, stocking the shelves, but, I didn't spend all my time in the store either, because we were out playing. We had to get our exercise, besides work, recreation. However, Saturdays, we spent considerably more time in the store, because it was busier, and then, that was our day off school, but, that was our work day in the store.

KP: When I interviewed your classmate, Colonel Van Allen, I asked him what he did for fun. What did you do for fun?

JR: ... In the early teen ages, it was athletic, mainly. Even in grammar school, ... we played out in the street. Fortunately, Central Avenue and Duke Street, there was a big, wide triangle. There's an island in there now, but, before, it was a triangular space, all of Macadam, and that was our playground for playing ... softball, hardball, nip, where you hit a short, pointed stick with another stick, and all kinds of games, touch football. Wore out a lot of pairs of shoes on the Macadam. That was my mother's complaint. [laughter] ... We did have other activities. ... As a school age kid, there were many outings, fostered and sponsored by the fire department, police department, other organizations, that would haul us in busses down to Keansburg, Keyport, Cliffwood Beach, nearby beaches at the time, which were popular and clean. Just go for a day of swimming, and they would provide the lunch, a box lunch, and that would take at least one day a week, [that] we would be on some excursion like that, and the other activities. As we got older, there were activities at our church, where we had an athletic group. They were called the St. Ladislaus' Lyceum and that was mostly athletic. We sponsored baseball teams, basketball teams, and had a lot of social affairs, at least one dance a month, some Friday night, or Saturday ... night, we would have a dance, and all the young people would come, stag, boys and girls, and we would have a chance to meet. That was a real good hunting ground, and we had live music, and had dances. That was a lot of fun.

KP: I have been told that New Brunswick had some great movie theaters. How often did you go to the movies at this time?

JR: At least once a week. ... However, I was fortunate to have an aunt, Anna, who was unmarried yet, came to live with us, was my mother's sister, and she was in her late teens, or early twenties. She did get a job working in the cigar factory, also, I think it was. ... She loved the movies. After supper, she would want to go to the movies, but, she needed an escort, didn't have any boyfriend, so, she would take me, as a fourteen-year-old, to escort her, and we would go to the movies at least twice a week, at night. She was really in love with the cinema.

KP: Which theaters did you go to?

JR: The Bijoux, the Empire, the State Theater, sometimes to the Opera House on Liberty Street, and, when I went alone, without my aunt, I would go to the Strand Theater, corner of George and Albany Street. I can picture them yet, but, you'd have to see them on a photograph to see what they looked like, because, now, everything's gone.

KP: Except for the State Theater.

JR: The State Theater's the only remaining one. There were also the Rivoli, the International. We must have had seven theaters. That was pre-television, so, people really frequented the movies.

KP: Did you watch American films? Was there a theater in New Brunswick that showed Hungarian films?

JR: There was one theater, corner of Scott Street and Somerset, the White Eagle Hall, and that showed Hungarian movies about two or three days a week. I think, every Sunday afternoon, they had a matinee performance, then, they had, maybe, a Friday night Hungarian movie. Mr. Vasvary was the manager. ... He was an entrepreneur from the old country. ... He showed Hungarian and other imported films. I went to see many of them, sometimes with my aunt, sometimes with my mother. ... I guess those were the only time I went, when they took me.

KP: You grew up in the '20s during Prohibition. Do you remember hearing about any speakeasies or anyone making their own wine?

JR: ... Most Hungarians made their own wine at home, except my father, because he was too busy in the store, but, almost every business had a back room where they sold liquor by the glass, you know, not bottles, just by ... the drink. About every fourth customer that came in, he wanted his shot first. It was shot and chaser in the back room, ... which my father would have, and it was illegal to sell it, but, everyone was doing it. Fortunately, my father never got caught. We never were raided. I don't know if the authorities didn't care or they overlooked it because it was so prevalent, but, ... we were involved in it, too. It didn't make much money, but, it still helped the business. ... I remember, the beer was near beer. It only had about one percent alcohol, or, minimum, .5%, maybe. So, you could drink beer like soda, never get drunk from it. I worked up a taste for that near beer, too, and I remember when the Prohibition was abolished by President Roosevelt, 1933, perhaps, and then, the regular beer came back, and ... all the speakeasies became saloons.

KP: Are there any local former speakeasies that are still in existence?

JR: I think it was the Park Grill on Bristol Street and Easton Avenue that was a speakeasy at first. Of course, they called it a restaurant, or a luncheonette, at the time, but, then, it became the Park Grill, ... an open bar. That was one of them, that I remember, because I knew the owner and he shopped at our store. You want names on these? ...

KP: Oh, yeah.

JR: Mr. Michael Huszar, a good man and Hungarian community leader.

KP: You went to the church grammar school and your teachers were Sisters of Charity.

JR: Correct.

KP: How good was your education?

JR: I thought I was very well prepared. I'd have [no] ... trouble making the continuation into public school. I had all the rudiments, even of English composition, ... not much on literature, but, on composition. History and math were right up ... to the mark.

KP: Were you able to keep up with it? It sounds like you were well prepared for New Brunswick High School.

JR: I was.

KP: Did your parents expect you to go to college?

JR: No, they did not. ... They thought I might go to work when I was sixteen, the earliest age, but, then, I prevailed to go to high school, at least. When I was ... near the end of my sophomore year, the tenth grade, my friends were talking about going to college. I hadn't thought about it until then. I thought it would be out of my reach, but, then, when some of these [fellows] were talking ... that they could make it, I said, "Maybe, I have a chance." So, I had to switch courses in high school. ... I was in the general course, and then, I had to switch to the scientific, and I had to go to summer school for at least one summer, maybe two summers, to make up courses. After the tenth grade and after the eleventh grade, I went to summer school to make up courses, so I could convert and graduate with my class in the scientific class, scientific curriculum, which qualified me for college entry, but, I didn't think of it, really, until I was near the end of my tenth grade, and it was because of my peers talking about it. However, ... my parents, as well as all parents in their group, wanted the children to go to work, to help support the family and produce income, early. They didn't look ahead. ... Well, to them, college was almost an unattainable goal and we were of that opinion. I mean, the children, too, were of that opinion, until we got to be [older], later in high school, which was almost too late.

KP: Was there anyone among your high school friends who got a scholarship that made you reconsider going to college?

JR: Well, Van Allen was my close friend and ... he got the idea of going to college first and studying engineering. I didn't even know what engineering was. I didn't know how to spell it. [laughter] Anyhow, he was worse off, financially, than I was, yet, he was able to work some. He did get some scholarships. ... I received one small scholarship, but, he received about two or three partial scholarships that enabled him to come, even with his reduced economic circumstances. So, that gave me inspiration. "My God, it's possible, it is possible."

KP: You knew Van Allen growing up. When did you meet and become friends?

JR: We first met in second and third grade, Washington School. Then, for fourth to seventh grades, I attended St. Ladislaus' Grammar School. Then, Bill and I met again in junior high school.

KP: Junior high school.

JR: Well, at that time, the eighth and ninth grades were part of junior high school and I became aquatinted with him there. I may have met him on one or two occasions, through Boy Scouting, earlier than that. So, in high school, when we were thrown together again, we were friends already.

KP: I remember that he had a tough childhood, because he lost his father very early.

JR: ... He did. Bill was raised by his mother.

KP: You were a Boy Scout, as well.

JR: I was a Boy Scout as a tenderfoot, but, I didn't continue it. However, I kept up my relationships, or friendships, with other boys that were in scouting, and, particularly, Van Allen. I would go to camps with them, summer camps, winter camps, but, I didn't work at it as a scout.

KP: You were very involved in athletics even before high school. In high school, did you take part in any athletics?

JR: Intramural and class activities, like, in football, I was on the JV football team. I wasn't big enough to play on a varsity, but, I played on a junior varsity. That was ... like the maximum of the athletic events that I played. The others were intramural basketball and softball, but, I didn't really make ... a major effort at it in high school, 'cause I was underage, undersized, underweight.

KP: Did you take part in any other activities in high school?

JR: I played the violin in the ... high school orchestra. We had rehearsals, ... at least three times a week, and we played for all the assembly periods, general assemblies of the school, and at special plays. ... Class plays, we provided music for it. So, I enjoyed playing the violin.

KP: Did you keep up the violin?

JR: No, after I got to college, I dropped it. I was not that proficient towards pursuing it.

KP: Given your father's musical talents, did he and your mother encourage you to play it?

JR: Yeah, definitely, ... they encouraged me to play the violin. Paid for lessons when I was a pre-teener and until I was about thirteen, anyway, maybe fourteen. Up to thirteen, I was taking lessons, and then, my father tried to teach me the cimbalom, but, I had so many other varied activities that I didn't make music my principle pursuit. I learned to play the cimbalom for my

own pleasure, ... to let off steam, frustration, but, I enjoyed playing it. It's fairly difficult to play it.

KP: Do you still play it?

JR: No, I don't have it. I just listen to other players, or tapes that I have of other players.

KP: You switched from the general course to the scientific course, the college preparatory course. How difficult was that?

JR: It was difficult. I didn't have sufficient language. That was one of the requirements. ... You had to have ... two languages, two years of each or three years of one language. So, I selected German. I thought, maybe, my father could help me with that, and, at the time, German seemed to be the most advanced technological language, or the language of technology and science. So, I decided to take German, and then, I could fit in the three years of German, with one year of summer school added. So, it was difficult. I had to cram in some of these. Algebra, I had to cram in early, and double it up in summer school, and ... it didn't come easy.

KP: Are there any high school teachers that stick out in your memory as particularly helpful?

JR: My history teacher, Mr. Robinson, because he used to intersperse the lessons with a lot of anecdotal stories, not that he, personally, went through, but, that he knew of, of the famous presidents, ... some of their weaknesses and some of their pitfalls that they had. He would explain them, and go into it, and some of the gossip that was around at the different places, not in a mean way, but, just to spice up the history lesson. He was one of the most outstanding [teachers] that I remember.

KP: What did your parents think of Roosevelt?

JR: They loved him. They thought he was the best man for the job and the greatest president that [the] United States ever had.

KP: Were they Al Smith supporters in 1928?

JR: No. They weren't very politically minded, first place, the parents, and the Democratic Party had the greatest influence in New Brunswick at the time, so, ... their friends were Democrats. The ones that got ahead in local politics, Hungarians that got ahead, were associated with the Democratic Party, it was almost one hundred percent Democratic, and the Republicans didn't seem to appeal to the working class, as I would say.

KP: Did your father or mother belong to a union at either the cigar factory or the Michelin factory?

JR: I don't think that they had unions or ... didn't speak about them. The cigar factory definitely didn't have a union. At Michelin, I don't recall any union activity there, either. The Michelin

Company was a very advanced company and they had a lot of benefits for their workers, bonus pay for extra work, good vacation pays. They even had a pension plan. So, the workers had no complaints, and, of course, during the First World War, my father was there, they were working, like, double shifts, so, they made very good money there. That's how my father was able to save money to be able to buy the store and the business.

KP: Your father did not serve in the Army during World War I.

JR: No. ... That may have been a reason why a lot of the young men came out of Hungary, too, to escape the draft over there, the military conscription. They didn't want to serve, because they thought that was lost time, and they would get into bad habits, and they would be rooted, then, into Hungary. So, they tried to come over here before they were eligible or ... somehow circumvent it, and, when my father came here, he was not a citizen, and, maybe, because he had the job, by the time the war broke out, with a defense industry, ... the people that worked at Michelin Tire Works produced tires for our military at that time, ... and they were exempt from the draft.

KP: You had the idea of going to college. Did you know what line of work you might like to go into or had you not thought it out that far?

JR: ... Prior to that, I had no inkling of what vocation, or what profession, or what field. However, ... as I said, when my friends were talking about going to college, ... a few of them mentioned engineering, and I found out what it was, I began to [think], "Oh, yeah, they design things, make things. ... I've been making model airplanes, and I've been working on my father's car, and doing things, and if I'm going to learn more things about mechanics and scientific theories, that's for me," and that's when I decided that was the field that was closely allied with my likes and dislikes.

KP: Did your father always have a car?

JR: No, ... but, when he bought the store, there was a car came with it, a Ford delivery truck, a small van, and that was his first car. ... He hadn't driven a car before, but, had to learn to drive it, and even that van had to be started with a hand crank. He didn't like the car, because, once, the crank slammed backwards as he cranked it. It almost broke his jaw. [laughter]

KP: People have told me similar stories.

JR: ... Until we got self-starters, he didn't like the cars, but, he did buy another, a new car, after about three years, ... bought a Studabaker, a four-door, big Studabaker sedan, and that was the family car.

KP: He bought this car in 1930.

JR: I think he bought it about '28, 1928, and kept it for about eight years, 'til we ran it into the ground ...

KP: Since you knew you wanted to go to college, did you know which college you wanted to go to?

JR: Well, for economic reasons, also, ... I had to go to the one that we could afford, and the nearest one was Rutgers, because I could live at home, wouldn't have to pay the room and board, and I liked Rutgers. I used to come to their football games, because at that Nelson Field, which is where the field house [was], there was an end stand where the children, ... grammar school students, anyhow, were allowed in for free, into the end stand, and ... we used to come to almost every home game for that reason. ... That got me started with this Rutgers spirit.

KP: You remember coming to football games long before you were a student here.

JR: Yeah, at least five years before ... I matriculated, that I was coming to the football games already.

KP: Did you apply to school anywhere else or only to Rutgers?

JR: It was Rutgers that I applied, ... and Newark College of Engineering, also, but, when I was accepted to Rutgers, ... that clinched it, that I'm coming here.

KP: You received a small scholarship.

JR: A one hundred dollar scholarship per year, provided by the county. The county was giving scholarship assistance to county residents.

KP: Were your parents able to help you with tuition for college?

JR: Definitely, but, even they had to borrow money. I think, the first year, my mother borrowed, from her brother, perhaps, \$200. I had summer [employment] earnings, scholarship assistance, plus, the \$200 from my uncle, that made up the \$400 to pay the first year's tuition, one whole year, two semesters. The next year, we were able to borrow from a bank to help pay for tuition, plus, ... I did work summers.

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

KP: Where did you work?

JR: ... After my third year in high school, for example, I worked for a leather factory down on Water Street, Lefkowitz Brothers, making luggage handles for valises and suitcases, and was a job that I had, polishing up these handles. I'm trying to remember what it paid, twenty cents an hour, eight dollars for forty hours a week. ... At that time, it was in the depths of the Depression, yet, it was good money for a young [person], and I could practically put it all away into a savings account. So, I was able to build up, maybe, fifty dollars by the end of the summer, and then, maybe, some other odd jobs, also. ... That was one place I worked. Then, another summer, I

worked at the Kingston Trap Rock Quarry, in Kingston, New Jersey, where they blow up the granite cliffs with that ... gray gravel. ... That was a dusty, dirty job, but, I had a good job. I was the water boy, the first year. [laughter] [I'd] go to the spring, and fetch pails of water, and just go around to all the workers, and let them drink out of the dipper, common dipper, with this pail, but, it was good, cold water, and they enjoyed it. ... My job was to make at least two rounds in the morning and at least two rounds in the afternoon. ... I mean, ... [bringing water to] about fifty men in different locations around the quarry about two miles a round trip. ...

KP: You worked during the summer while in college.

JR: Yes, into my first year, my freshmen year, I worked for a wholesale ... grocer, Lefkowitz and Elias, on Handy Street, by the railroad siding there, and I got the job because they supplied the groceries to my father's store. That was hard work, physical work, hauling hundred pound bags of sugar, two hundred pound bags of salt even, to unload railroad cars, and then, also, making deliveries on the trucks to the stores throughout the county. That was one whole summer. I don't know what I did the second summer. ... Many odd jobs lasting a week or two.

KP: Did you work during the school year?

JR: No, only helping out at my father's store.

KP: So, you were mostly studying.

JR: Mostly. I tried to round out my college career with other activities besides studying. We were in Murray Hall, the ... College Of Engineering building. It was almost all in that one building, and we would come down in the evenings, do our homework there as a group, all of the locals and the commuters, stayed there after supper and group worked on our homeworks, help each other a little bit, but, mostly, individual efforts. The calculating machines were there which we could use. Besides that, though, I tried to get in as much athletics as I could, in the school here.

KP: In the yearbook, I read that you were on the one hundred-and-fifty pound football team for two years, you ran track your first year, you boxed during your third and fourth year, and you played water polo for your first two years. You were also involved with the AIEE.

JR: ... American Institute of Electrical Engineers, ... student chapter, yeah.

KP: You were also active with the Newman Club.

JR: Correct. ... I did take part in their activities. It was for Catholic students.

KP: Also, you sang with the Neutral Glee Club.

JR: Yes, that I enjoyed, singing. I didn't join the ... regular glee club because it took more time than I could afford and it also involved expenses. You had to buy a tuxedo and you had to pay

for trips. If they went on any trips, you had to pay for it out of your pockets, and I didn't want to burden my parents, and I didn't want to take it out of my pocket, either. So, I didn't go for that, but, my idea was to learn as much as I could. ... I didn't have that much physical talent, or physical size, to be able to be good at anything, except boxing, because that was by weight class. ... In water polo, the weight didn't matter too much, [laughter] so, those were two of my favorite sports, ... and one hundred-and-fifty pound football, because that was limited, also, to the size. So, I tried to learn about as much sports as I could, and to take part in them, and to develop friends.

KP: Did you ever regret that you could not live on campus? Even though you were living in New Brunswick, did you wish that you could live in a fraternity house or a dormitory?

JR: No, because I felt like I was living on the campus. I spent almost all day and evening on the campus, because it was only a twenty minute walk home from Murray Hall to my house on 52 Robinson Street.

KP: Did you think of joining a fraternity?

JR: I did, I was thinking of it, but, I never was tapped.

KP: You were never asked?

JR: No. I wasn't too keen about joining, because I didn't approve of their activities too much. It was ... very social and it would have been taking time away from my studies. I felt that my grades would suffer if I did.

KP: Engineering was a pretty tough course.

JR: It was a demanding course, right, with a lot of projects and a lot of homework.

KP: I know that a fair number of engineers started out their first year and did not make it too far and went into other areas of study. Do you remember that?

JR: Yes, I'm trying to remember the figures. ... I think there were about a hundred freshmen engineers that started out and, I think, only about half finished the four year course. They transferred to other courses or dropped out.

KP: Do you remember Dean Metzger at all?

JR: Yes, he was the dean up at the Old Queens office, and he would address the student bodies at Kirkpatrick Chapel, we had assemblies there, and, also, we had to see him every once in a while about some business. ... I didn't get to be friendly with him, because he was very highly respected, and ... he had to be distant from us students, to maintain the discipline and the proper atmosphere.

KP: I have been told that he was a very stern figure.

JR: That was our impression, that was my impression, too, of him, ... that he wasn't the father or the uncle type. He was the warden. [laughter]

KP: What about President Clothier? I know he was more distant.

JR: No, I considered him less distant.

KP: Really?

JR: He tried to be more friendly with the students, and, always, on the campus, if you passed him accidentally, he always greeted everyone with a hello and a smile. ... He was our consideration of being a first-class college president. He was the epitome of a college president. That was our impression.

KP: You entered college in 1932, which could not have been a bleaker time, economically. How tough was it? You were able to get through college, not easily, but, you were able to swing it. I have been told that many people could not make it.

JR: ... They couldn't raise that four hundred dollars, or five hundred, by the time I was in the fourth year, plus room and board fees.

KP: A lot of people dropped out after a year or two.

JR: Yeah, I had a classmate, Bill Sauter, ... he made it that route. He went the freshmen year, and then, he dropped out for a year, and he came back for a second year, and dropped out a year. ... He was, like, three years older than we were by the time we graduated and that was the only way he could make it. He lived in Highland Park. His parents were of Greek heritage. ... He was just one of them, that I have in mind, that did it that way.

KP: Professor James Slade was your favorite professor. What do you remember about Professor Slade?

JR: His beard and his mustache. [laughter] ... He was an imposing figure, however, he was a very earnest teacher, and he wanted to make sure we understood the subject, and he would go over it twice, and ask questions, and he'd repeat. ... He wanted us to learn, and we could ask him questions, and ... he welcomed questions, even if they seemed stupid. He welcomed the questions to help clarify the precepts, or the concepts, of this engineering that he was putting over that day. He was friendly, but, not in a jolly way, but, more friendly, ... like a father would be. ... He didn't lose his temper, he wasn't harsh on us, so, that's why we liked him.

KP: Were there any professors that you did not like?

JR: That I didn't like? ... I don't think there was anyone we didn't like, but, we liked some less than others. [laughter] Professor Twill, I think he taught English, ... he was difficult to understand, and he seemed to be way above us, and we couldn't follow him quite as well, at least I couldn't, and he was one of the more difficult ones to learn from. ...

KP: Do you remember having to attend chapel during the week?

JR: Yes, and we accepted it as a part of the college curriculum, the college life. I was excused from Sunday chapel because I attended a local church. ... I had to bring a note from our pastor to the chaplain, or the dean, to prove it. So, I was exempt from Sunday chapel service.

KP: Were most students Republican or Democrat?

JR: I think they were a-political. ... We didn't get involved in discussions ... of the political nature, definitely not on local politics, and, even on a national scale, we didn't have much. Well, we had only one president, that was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, all of our lives, it seemed, [laughter] all of our college lives and after, so, we thought he was doing well. We thought he was trying to help the country, and bring us out of the Depression. That may have been the only discussion, political discussions, we had, but, there [were] no political rallies supporting one party or another. We used to have Norman Thomas come down, the Socialist, talk to us, either at the gym or at Kirkpatrick Chapel. That was a given, every year, [laughter] but, even then, we took that more as a philosophy ... lecture, rather than a political lecture.

KP: What about Paul Robeson, did he ever come back and perform when you were on campus?

JR: No, not while I was here on campus. ... We saw his photographs on the walls of the gym, and we knew about his career, and we knew he was in ... disfavor with the secretary of state, or the ... State Department, but, I did hear him come back to McCarter Theater in the thirties, late thirties, to sing at a performance of *Othello* they put on, and I heard him singing that at the McCarter Theater, which I thought was a very good highlight of my artistic participation, anyway, to have been able to hear him in person, see him on stage.

KP: He really had a magnetic personality. His voice was just tremendous.

JR: His stage presence was great, impressive, yeah, his voice ... filled up the room. No matter where you were, in the back row or anywhere, you could hear his singing. He was an artist! He didn't just sing out loud, he sang it with inflection and with volume control, ... to suit the role and the part that he was playing at the time. ... So far, we've been talking about everything else but the military. [laughter]

KP: You had to take two years of ROTC.

JR: It was compulsory, for the first two years, for the entire student body, except for medical reasons, to take the first two years of ROTC.

KP: You decided to take advanced ROTC.

JR: Yes, I did, because there was some pay connected with it, [laughter] and I figured it was an opportunity to learn some more, and to go to camp, and get a commission.

KP: Did you want to join the regular Army?

JR: Not to join as a private. ...

KP: Were you offered a commission when you graduated in 1936?

JR: I was. I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Reserves.

KP: In other words, you did not join the regular Army.

JR: No, it was in the Reserves.

KP: In the thirties, there was an active peace movement. Do you remember any activity at Rutgers?

JR: No, ROTC was a welcome addition to the curriculum, and the student body favored it, and they turned out for all of the parades that we would have, or special assemblies. Our Military Ball was very well attended by all students.

KP: My students have read the *Targums* from the '30s and '40s and one of the things that has struck them is how active the social life was on campus.

JR: It seemed that, every week, we could go to some dance or ball on the campus, even if they were of the informal type, mainly ... at the Rutgers gym. Of course, we had the four class dances, I forgot what the freshman was, the Sophomore Hop, the Junior Prom, and the Senior Ball, Military Ball, the Cap and Skull Ball, and some other All-Fraternity Ball. ... Every month, there was a formal ball, and, in between them, the American University Women, ... or whatever, they would sponsor another ball, and some other faculty wives would ... sponsor a dance. ... They didn't call it a ball, but, a dance, or a party. It seemed that, every week, we could come to some social affair, dancing was primarily the thing, and they would attract some big bands, at least to the class dances. We had some of the leading bands at the time. So, it was a very active social life here, and the student body was more close-knit, and it was easier to arrange these affairs. ... There were fewer legal complications. ...

KP: You had some incredible bands play here, particularly at the Junior Prom and the Senior Ball. Do you remember the names of any of those bands?

JR: Yeah, the trombone player, Russ Morgan, Glen Gray, Tommy Dorsey. I can't think of anymore right now. ...

KP: In the 1936 yearbook, your description reads, “Here’s John, the pugilistic pride of the engineers. Although an easy going, genial chap, he often surprises us with stentorian outbursts.”

JR: Stentorian, loud yells and singing.

KP: Thank you. “He is well known for his many and varied athletic interests. More over, the difficult engineering course did not interfere with his social life [laughter] as many of the fairer sex can testify.” It sounds like you were well known to the fairer sex and that you dated quite a bit.

JR: Well, my philosophy, at the time, was, I didn’t want to get married, I didn’t want to get serious with any one girl, I didn’t have a job, I wanted to wait until I graduated and had a permanent job before I ... would make a commitment with any girl. So, I tried to get a different date every dance. ... I may not repeat until the following year with the same date I had the previous dance and that was one of the jokes amongst my friends, “Gee, Rosta can’t keep a steady girlfriend.” ... They were coming with the same girl most of the time, whereas ... I was coming with a different girl every time. ... I didn’t want to make a commitment and I figured, “I have a chance to ... spread my goodwill amongst a lot more girls,” because everyone of them was grateful to be able to come to a college dance. So, I developed a lot of good friendships by dating a lot of the girls. Van Allen and I double dated local girls. Fortunately, my parents permitted me to use the family car for our dating.

KP: Did your dates come from NJC or did you date girls from town?

JR: The community, mainly. ... For me, it was a little more difficult to get aquatinted with the girls at Douglass. The engineering courses didn’t permit us the time to really go there and socialize and we didn’t have too much contact. We had very little contact, actually, with the girls from the Co-Operative School, or what they called it, Co-Educational School. ... Co-op somehow degenerated into Coop. [laughter] So, most of my dates were local girls from the community.

KP: How did you find your first job? You entered into a pretty bad job market in 1936.

JR: Well, I did get an appointment to serve in the Army for a year.

KP: So, you did serve in the Army.

JR: Yes, under the Thompson Act, from ‘36 to ‘37, right after graduation. I didn’t have a job, but, here was an opportunity [for] gainful employment, so, I looked upon it as gainful employment. Van Allen took the same option. We reported together.

KP: Where did you report to?

JR: That was serving on active duty with the regular Army, Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, which is now the Staten Island end of the Verrazano Bridge.

KP: What did you do in the Army?

JR: It was an infantry outfit, so, ... we drilled, and we had courses there, too, but, it was mainly running the company. I was a platoon leader, in charge of one of the platoons of the company, and we tried to simulate the Army spirit, and the Army methods of doing things, and we went to camps, went to Camp Smith, ... just above West Point, and down to Fort Dix. We would go on shooting [trips], when we wanted to shoot our rifles, for example. They didn't have a shooting range at Fort Wadsworth. So, we had to go down to Fort Dix to do target practice and maneuvers.

KP: The Army before World War II could be a very ritualistic affair. For example, when you came to a post as an officer, you had to drop off your engraved card.

JR: If you went calling at another officer's house, or one of these social parties, or anything, yeah, we had little name cards, business cards, but, name cards, mainly. That's right, they still followed that old tradition. The biggest disappointment with the Army was that it was still structured like it was in 1917, 1914. ... They were using horse and wagons for hauling supplies. ... Tanks were still only rarely used, and they were ... "the mechanized cavalry," they called it already, but, still, they were depending on horses more than on the mechanical transportation

MR: You felt the Army was using obsolete materials.

JR: Yes, the Army was way behind times. What the hell, they're fighting like they did ... in World War I.

KP: You sensed this in 1937?

JR: Yes, the Air Corps was considered as an arm of the infantry, similarly as artillery.

KP: You were the platoon leader. What was your sergeant like?

JR: Yes, there was a Sergeant Rice and he was cooperative. He was like ... an instructor, but, in a subdued way. I mean, he acknowledged that we had the rank and he was a non-com, but, still, he was our teacher. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you picked that up pretty quickly, that he knew what he was doing.

JR: Indeed, and I had to depend on his advice and ask for his recommendations.

KP: I take it that he was an old, grizzled Army veteran.

JR: ... He was not old and grizzled. He might have been about forty at the time, fit and clean shaven. ...

KP: However, you were a young second lieutenant, twenty-one or twenty-two.

JR: Twenty-two, twenty-three, maybe, at that time, yes. So, I knew, ... even though I had the rank, that I had to depend on my non-coms. I couldn't try to lord over them or I'd be cutting the ground under my feet, [laughter] because they could so easily embarrass you, or get ... you in hot water, so, I'd tread lightly with them, and tried to cultivate their goodwill, and their favor, and friendship.

KP: Did you know anything about the backgrounds of any of the men in your platoon?

JR: Very little, very little, except that they were all volunteers. The Army was all volunteer at that time. ... A lot of them were good men, but, a lot of them ... never got married, couldn't get married, couldn't hold a job, didn't have a profession, didn't have any good trade. You know, so, they were hard workers and willing, but, they ... [were] not people that had a lot of initiative. ... They were almost like robots.

KP: I have read that the old peace-time Army was a hard drinking lot.

JR: Definitely, there was drinking, right, but, after hours, after duty hours.

KP: Yes, after duty hours.

JR: In the evening, after you were off duty and had a chance to sleep it off, but, everybody had a cocktail after duty. ... After five o'clock retreat, that was the first call, happy hour. You'd go to the ... officers' club or go off to somebody's house and have a cocktail, one or two before supper, and then, you had a drink with the meal. It was pretty tough to try to resist that, because I was not a drinker at the time, and I'm not now either, but, I drink more now than I did at that time.

KP: There was a high percentage of alcoholics, because, as you mentioned, there was a lot of drinking. You ended the day with a drink or two.

JR: That was to relax. [laughter] I mean, that was the ... attitude, that you had to relax now from all this rigid attention and being on duty. Now, you can let go, and relax, and a drink would help your mind also calm down, but, then, if I drank, I wouldn't want to do any other physical activity. I didn't like to drink, because I was still looking forward to the night life, or some other trip somewhere, to the city, or doing some activity, and driving. I didn't like that idea, myself.

KP: Did you stay on base when you were at Wadsworth?

JR: Yes, we lived there in officers' quarters and Van Allen was there with me at the time. So, that's where we cemented further relationships, traveling, double-dating together. ...

KP: You were both platoon leaders at that time.

JR: Yes, I in Company B and he in Company E.

KP: Had you thought of staying in the Army?

JR: ... I would have liked to have stayed, and I put in an application, but, the Army was still very selective, restricted, not even so much selective, restricted by funds, that they couldn't build up their manpower, and they could only take in a very limited number of ... officers. Van Allen was fortunate. He was offered a regular Army commission. ... I don't think he took it, though. ... Either he wasn't sure or he didn't wish to stay in, at that time, because he went to work for Philco Radio Company, down in Philadelphia, the way I remember. Within a year, he accepted the commission in the regular Army and made it a career. I would just take temporary jobs around town, here, for a couple of years. In 1939, I ... had an opportunity to go into the CCC camps as an officer. I was on duty for about six months with a CCC camp up in northern New York State, on Lake Ontario.

KP: This was in the late thirties?

JR: It was in 1939.

KP: What was it like to work in a CCC camp?

JR: ... I enjoyed it, because it was outdoor work. Our camp was rebuilding a state park, and we had regular duties, but, we ran it like an Army company. ... It was run ... under orders and [with] the same structure and formations as an Army group, with platoons and companies. ... My job there, ... was the mess officer, that was my main duty, but, I had about three other duties besides that, run the base exchange, a post exchange, and do some other administrative duties, but, the main job was being a mess officer, make up the ... daily menus for a month ahead, for three meals for about two hundred and fifty men, and then, order the supplies, based on that menu plan. That was some pretty good, rigorous training, but, the engineering came into good effect there for making the estimates and calculations as to how many pounds of sugar and how many dozens of eggs we need, how many pounds of beef, and whether it's going to be chopped beef or hindquarters. There was, like, a quarter of beef and we had to cut it up at the camp. Our butchers cut it up in the mess hall, to make different cuts, and, also, to chop the meat, but, we had to figure out when we [were] going to use chopped meat, and when were we going to have steaks, when we were going to have roast beef, or pork, or fish. So, that kept me on my toes, and then, to oversee the ... kitchen, ... that the cooks prepared the food right and served it chow-line style.

KP: How was this operation structured? Did you have an Army sergeant running the mess halls, in terms of divvying out the work?

JR: Yes, a grizzled sergeant, a World War I veteran. ...

KP: The CCC workers were his cooks?

JR: The young kids. Yeah, right, his assistants were the CCC members, the young men, whom he taught.

KP: I have not interviewed many CCC workers, but, the few I have were very positive about their experiences. From your perspective, what were the CCC people like, because some of them came from pretty tough backgrounds?

JR: Well, you're right. We didn't have the strict discipline that we had in the Army with ... these kids, because they were ... volunteering, but, they were boys. They weren't men, they were boys.

KP: Yeah, they were pretty young.

JR: Like high school age kids, and ... we could try to discipline them, and we tried, but, there were more of those who broke the rules than in a regular Army, and, when they broke the rules, you really couldn't throw them in the jail or you couldn't fine them. ... They didn't have money, so, you could [not] fine them. So, you'd penalize them by taking away privileges, [like] leaving camp or taking part in some other activities, but, I found it a good, practical experience. I was, also, the utilities officer. I made sure the water systems operated, and the electric distribution systems operated, and [if] the sewage systems clogged up, get it freed up, and find out where the trouble was, or call in specialists to work on it, or a plumber. ... The main constriction, though, was finances, ... that we had a tight budget to work with and we couldn't go beyond those budgets.

KP: Food is a big expense. You must have had to do some calculating to make sure you kept within the budget.

JR: The Army had some guidelines, right, to help, but, it was a lot of original ... planning, on my part, to make sure we had enough meat and we didn't exceed the costs.

KP: How well did the project go at the state park?

JR: That was pretty good, the actual work, the ground work, was under civilian technicians that were hired by the Army, or the government, and they directed the physical work on constructing dams, or damming up a creek, or building walks, or stone walls, or clearing land, underbrush, or planting new trees. That was under the direction of these civilian directors. They were called directors, whereas the officers had the administrative jobs of running the camp, and make sure we had the food, and the lights, and the water, and the medical services for the members of the CCC.

KP: How many officers and NCOs were at this CCC camp?

JR: At this one location, this camp, we had about five, only five reserve officers on active duty.

KP: You had five officers for two hundred and fifty CCC members, which is not many officers.

JR: No, but, as I say, the physical work of directing the daily activities was done by the civilian directors. So, they would take the place of the ... officers in a comparable Army unit.

KP: How many NCOs did you have?

JR: I would say at least fifteen, between corporals and sergeants, but, ... also, they were not Army men. Of the regular Army men, we only had about four Army men on duty there with us, and the rest were the civilians that were appointed, ... like a cadet sergeant or a cadet corporal.

KP: Did you leave the Army when this CCC project ended or did you leave the project while it was still going on?

JR: I think it began to phase out about that time, and my six month term was running out, and I don't think I was allowed to reapply or renew it, but, by that time, jobs were becoming available in the engineering field, also in manufacturing, so, I was just as glad to leave it, to get a permanent job.

KP: You had a tough time getting a job in 1938 and 1939.

JR: Right, in 1938 ... and part of '39, I couldn't get a permanent job. I applied to a lot of industries and engineering offices, but, they weren't hiring. They just didn't have any openings.

KP: What type of jobs would you pick up?

JR: Selling appliances, working in an appliance store was one of the primary ones, that I remember.

KP: Was it discouraging, not being able to get a steady job, because you had studied very hard in college to get an engineering degree?

JR: It was difficult and frustrating, but, I was not the only one in that position, so, that made it ... easier to accept the situation, that it was a wide-spread situation, where we just have to wait our turn. ... When Hitler invaded Poland in '39, then, our country began to sell, and manufacture, war material to England and the other Allies, who weren't our allies, yet, but, they were in the market for our goods. So, our factories started to convert to all this war-time industry and they were starting to hire engineers. One of my first jobs was with the Hyatt Roller Bearing, a division of the GMC Company, manufacturing bearings for all the heavy trucks, tanks, railroad cars, even. ... I worked there in the inspection department.

KP: This was in 1940?

JR: I think at the end of '39, when I came out of the CCC camp, maybe, like, in November. That is when I got the job with the Hyatt Roller Bearing, and I worked in Harrison, New Jersey. I got married in May of 1940, because I had this permanent job already, and did find my wife, Marge, a girl that I had admired for many years. ... I found out, when I came back from the CCC

camp, from New York State, that she was still single. She had been keeping company, ... dating, regular dating, but, she hadn't gotten married, yet. I figured, ... "My God, here's my chance, she's open game." [laughter] I made a play for her, and she was ready to get married, and, course, she knew me from high school, because we were in high school together, and I was working. She had a job, and I had a job, so, we could ... establish a household. We got married in May, 1940. ... I was working for Hyatt Roller Bearing, but, ... they really were not considered a war industry in 1940, and ... I would have to go into the service, ... like almost under the draft, but, as an officer.

KP: You faced the possibility of getting called back into the service.

JR: ... The Civil Service was actively advertising for engineers and for the different services. So, I applied for ... aircraft instrument inspector for the Air Force Material Command. They were looking for engineers who could learn to be inspectors and supervise inspections of aircraft instruments. I took the job, it paid well, it was a jump in pay, so, I took that, and I felt it was contributing to the war effort more directly, worked up in Bendix Aviation, in Caldwell, and was transferred to a new plant they opened up in Philadelphia. ... By 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, our Army was starting to really grow and they were ... calling in every officer. ... I got called in June, 1942. ... Well, I was called into active duty on June ... 5th, to report to a unit up in Cape Cod. It was an amphibious engineering outfit that was operating landing craft, to carry troops from the troop ships to ... hostile shores, to land them. They had been training up there. By the time I got there and was assigned to the unit, they ceased training and they were ordered overseas. So, thirty days later, after I'm on duty, I'm going overseas, over to England, with this unit. They weren't fully trained and, here, I had no training with them. My commission was in the infantry, so, here, I'm going over with this engineering unit, ... because they were under the Corps of Engineers, over to England, without training, and here was a different mission, a new mission, and then, the mission was changed. They took it away from the Army, the War Department took that mission ... from the Army and assigned it back to the Navy, that the Navy would operate these landing craft, to take the troops off the troopships and land them on shores. So, here we were, a unit without a mission now. They converted that whole corps into ... a port unit, port units for unloading cargo from the cargo ships and hauling them out ... to the depots, distribution points, ... wherever they might be, overseas. ... My unit became a cargo handling unit, and here I was, assigned to a new unit. ... Most of the unit's men were from Texas, and here I am, an Easterner assigned with this Texas unit. I was an outcast in the unit. ...

KP: What were the Texans like?

JR: Well, they were a very close, provincial group, the way I saw it. I found out later that they ... were so close, they favored each other and protected each other's territory so much, ... that they looked out for each other ... as if ... we were their opponents, from the East, or ... anybody other than from Texas, was their opponent.

KP: Was this originally a National Guard unit?

JR: No, I think they were former Reserve officers, also, that were called to active duty.

KP: The Army just happened to clump these Texans together.

JR: ... Right, and they were looking for every opportunity for promotion for themselves, and they favored themselves, and, as I say, I was one of the few outsiders that ... didn't come from Texas, didn't train with them, didn't have anything to do with them before. They didn't know me and ... I was a threat. Well, I made friends with them openly, but, technically, and for getting ahead, or for getting assignments, ... they were very provincial and anti-un-Texan.

KP: Where did you initially report to when you rejoined in 1942?

JR: Cape Cod, Camp Edwards.

KP: You joined the unit on their way to England.

JR: From there, we came down to Staten Island, port of embarkation. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with John G. Rosta on October 18, 1997 at Rutgers University with Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak. As you were saying, you left for overseas in 1942.

JR: That's right. On July the 5th, we sailed from New York and landed in ... Northern Ireland, Belfast, and we were, then, sent to a camp in Northern Ireland. It was a holding camp. We didn't do any training there, and we were just trying to fill in the day with exercises, lectures, but, the idea was that ... the Allies were amassing a force for the invasion of Africa, and we didn't have much training to do. They couldn't ... let us go to the ocean port, because they had the civilian workers there in England, and they wouldn't let us replace them. Then, we'd really have a war, [laughter] a civil war. So, they had to keep us in the barracks until we sailed to North Africa.

KP: How long were you in Northern Ireland?

JR: About three months, and we were getting stagnant there, and we didn't have an opportunity to go on maneuvers, ... only one opportunity ... to fire weapons, so, we went to an English barracks, seaport barracks, in Liverpool. No, this must have been from Belfast. When they were getting ready to ship us, amassing the troops, we went to Liverpool for three weeks. Then, we had a chance to shoot our guns, first time. I pulled out my pistol, and I'm shooting at the target practice, and it wouldn't go off, and I thought I had cleaned the pistol thoroughly, and, here, it wouldn't shoot. I'd been on duty, on the troop ship, coming across, and then, in Northern Ireland, ... my gun wouldn't have fired. ... It still had some of the cosmoline, that grease, protective grease, in by the firing pin, which I neglected to take out or I wasn't aware of. Then, I got cold feet, that, "My God," ... you know, "I've been depending on this gun and ... it was [just] a piece of metal, a club." [laughter]

KP: So, you learned an important lesson on how to clean your gun. [laughter] You were among the first troops in Northern Ireland and England. Most troops would not arrive until 1943 or 1944. England was not yet overrun by Americans.

JR: Yeah, because they were getting ready for the Normandy Invasion, ... in the later part of '43, and then, '44, but, this initial invasion was for invading North Africa, to drive the Germans out of Egypt and out of Tunisia, Algeria. ...

KP: What did you think of England and Northern Ireland?

JR: Well, I didn't get to see much of England and I didn't get to see much of Northern Ireland, ... because we were out in the Army camp, out in the country, and not allowed to mingle with the local people.

KP: You were never allowed to leave, to go into the local towns, into the pubs, while off duty?

JR: ... No, we were discouraged from mingling with the civilian population. They didn't want to upset the local economy too much and they were afraid that information would leak out, ... of spies being in the local area. In England, I found the people friendly, yeah. They went out of their way to make us feel ... welcome, that we were welcome allies, and they wanted to be friendly, but, the officers were more aloof, the British officers. ... We were officers, too, but, we were a different class, a lower class. We weren't professionals like they were. That was the impression they gave us, anyhow, but, ... in '42, this invasion of North Africa was the main thrust, and we were ill-prepared, really. I thought we weren't, really, fully trained for that operation and we had infantry troops coming in, also. My unit landed in Oran, outside of Oran, at a naval base, Meres el Kheber. ... Our ship was held outside the harbor for two days, because our Marines were trying to get in first, to land and secure the port, and the guns up on the high hills surrounding the port were still manned by German, Nazi soldiers, together with the French Foreign Legion, and the French Foreign Legion was under the influence of these German troops. They fired down on our landing craft coming into the harbor with the Marines in them, picked them off like sitting ducks, and killed about 200 of them, maybe 300, on these landing craft that had about forty Marines on each one. So, when we did pull in, by negotiation, and by showing force, the Nazis pulled out of there. The French became our allies, but, they were so indecisive when we ... first landed there, they didn't know whether we were enemies or friends, or, they were afraid of the Germans. They were Nazi sympathizers or cooperators, the French Foreign Legion was, at the time, there. ... Our first duty, when we came into Oran, got off the ship, was to fish out the bodies of our Marines that were floating up to the surface, the bloated bodies.

KP: That was your first job?

JR: ... To snag them with hooks, and pull them up onboard with long rowboats, bring them to shore to an undertaker detachment. That was gruesome, but, that was a good introduction, I mean, not good, an impressive introduction to war, that this is really serious business, that, here, we are pulling our ... own troops out of the water, dead bodies that had been dead for three days now, and bloated up by that time, and they floated. Before that, they sank with all their heavy

equipment on their backs. After we cleaned out the harbor of the bodies, ... we were still waiting for action. Then, we were assigned to unloading ships, but, the harbor was cleared, also. In the meantime, the Navy came in, and removed sunken boats, raised them, and pulled them away from the berths that the Germans had sunk to deny the use of the ports to us, the port of Oran, near by. Our unit was put to work, unloading cargo ships, and stockpiling, on the dock, equipment, food, weapons, ammunition, clothing, medical supplies, and, later, ... dispatching them on hired trucks, ... French civilian truckers, to take them out to the various depots. ... Field depots were established around the town, maybe five miles outside of town. ... As an officer, I had to direct dispatchers, assign what berth, and to make sure that they made out the dispatch slips correctly as to what ... equipment was being unloaded, how much of it, and ... where was the trucker taking it. He was assigned to deliver it to a certain depot. We didn't do follow-up. The Army security had follow-ups on that, that the material did get to those depots, ... and they followed up with the truckers as to what happened. ... Our job was just to work in the port. So, I did that for about ... six months there, at that port of Oran. ... After the Germans surrendered at ... Tunis, Cape Bon, our units ... didn't have much to do. ... Then, I became restless again and I said, "What the hell, I'm not going to get anywhere with this unit, with these Texans. They aren't promoting me and I'm not getting any choice assignments." So, I figured, "I'll rely on my ... civilian background as an aircraft inspector," and ... got permission to go to the airport near by that we had, the Army airport, LaSenia Airfield, I should say, ... to see if they ... were doing any maintenance work, or doing any repair work, or calibrating of instruments, that I could help out on, help set up a shop, and, maybe, run it. The officer in charge was sympathetic, says, "Yeah, we could use help like that." He says, "All right, put in for a transfer." So, I put in for a transfer, and then, I transferred from this Corps of Engineers unit, the port unit, to the Air Force Service Command at the airfield outside of Oran, and I did work there, but, ... there wasn't much repairing being done. ... If the instruments were bad, they cannibalized them from damaged ... planes or they had new shipments coming in. So, instead of repairing them, ... faulty instruments were just discarded. So, then, I was given a job as a utilities officer with the headquarters squadron, to help maintain the landing field, setting up the water supply systems, the gasoline depot systems, ... put up the generators, and hook up wiring overhead. ... Not do it myself, [I was] in charge of platoons that were doing these different jobs, trades. ... I worked at that, as a utilities officer, for the rest of [my] Army career.

KP: Going back to the engineering unit, it sounds as if the first few weeks of the invasion were very busy, in terms of unloading.

JR: Yes. As soon as the harbor was cleared, our cargo ships came in, overwhelming our facilities.

KP: You mentioned that the invasion was not that well organized. Could you tell us more about the problems you saw with the invasion, particularly during the first few weeks.

JR: You mean on a national scale, like, on a diplomatic level?

KP: No. I mean, for example, were all the supplies where they were suppose to be? However, please do comment on the diplomatic problems you saw.

JR: That the French Foreign Legion hadn't been won over completely, ... that they would be on our side against the Germans, ... so, that was a cause of some large casualties, until we finally convinced the French Foreign Legion that we were their allies and that they should fight for the Free French. That was one. The other, as far as material goes, we were shipping an excess amount of material. ... I guess, the Army ... and the Air Force, and Navy, didn't know what they would need, so, anything they could get, they were just dumping it in there, ... and our quays, the berths where the ships docked, and the depots, were clogged up, the dock areas started to get clogged up. We had piles ... of material and it looked like a dump. ... It was a dump, but, in the good sense of the word. ... The material remained at the ships' docks, instead of going out to the depots. We were sending too much, ... and, maybe, not the right stuff, for what was needed by the Army, the Marine Corps. ... That seemed to be one problem, that ... it was a case of, "They don't care how much more it is, but, make sure we have it," ... and we got clogged up there.

KP: What did you have an abundance of that there was not much need for?

JR: Ammunition, maybe, because, later, as we moved on, as the units moved out from Oran, towards Algeria and Cape Bon, well, there were a lot of abandoned ammunition, that we could see. It was stored, and it was supposed to be under guard, but, it wasn't moved forward, and I think a lot of that stayed there until the end of the war [or] it fell into unwanted hands. ... It wasn't well coordinated as to what was needed and how much of it. Some things we were short on and some things we were over on.

KP: What were you short on?

JR: Medical supplies was one shortage. Food, we seemed to have enough, not always the right kind, but, we had plenty of canned Spam, and we had emergency rations, it was all preserved food, hardly any fresh food. The meats were all the canned meats.

KP: Where was your unit based in Oran? Did they have buildings in town or did they have a separate camp?

JR: There were some of these office buildings in the port that were abandoned and we set our sleeping bags right on the floor. ... Men and officers were ... just laid up on the floor in these office buildings. We didn't have sanitary facilities, didn't have running water, didn't have toilets, and that was one of the damned things, that we couldn't take showers, couldn't even do a good sponge bath. You didn't have the privacy where you could ... wipe yourself clean all over and we were beginning to get problems with sanitation there, that way.

KP: It is a pretty warm climate to not have showers in.

JR: Yeah, it's hot and dusty. ... So, that was one of the trials that we had to go through, that we didn't have adequate quarters, we didn't have adequate facilities. Then, when we moved ... further out of town, and we had to be bused back and forth, or trucked back and forth, between the base and the port where we had camp set up, in tents outside the town. It wasn't much better

there, but, at least you had privacy. I mean, in the port, it was open to the public, and there were public characters doing business, commercial people, as well as French Army people, the natives that lived there, the Arabs, and there was, as I say, a lack of privacy.

KP: What was your impression of Oran?

JR: Well, Oran, to us, it was a big city. It's like a metropolis, like Newark, or, ... it's a port city, so, it was more like Philadelphia. ... One of the funny things was, after we landed, we did go into town, and we were walking through town, and I saw, ... I guess it was, a Western Union Telegraph office open, and I said, "What the hell, is this still operating?" ... This is Allied territory, but, ... we don't have open communication, and, here they were, still open, doing business. I said, "Can I send a telegram?" "Yes, you can send telegram. Where do you want to send it?" I said, "To America." "Yes, we can take care of you." I sent a telegram to my wife, and that telegram was delivered, ... but, I had to be careful what I said in it. I said, "I'm well, am in North Africa, and we had been going through some fire and some hazards of war," ... and, maybe, I didn't even say that. I just said that we're well and that we're going to be here for a while, or something, but, we had to say it so it wouldn't be of any value to the enemy. I assured my wife ... that I was well. ... She hadn't heard from me for about two months at that time. The letters were stopped coming from her, because we were on the move and at sea. She didn't receive any mail for two months, didn't know what was happening, didn't know whether I was in England, Ireland, or where, but, it was surprising to us that, hell, we could send a commercial telegraph ... from a war zone to home, and I did. [laughter] 'Course, those telegrams stopped about two days later. They closed up the office and it was no more ... used by the troops, ... the telegraph office was out of business for the duration.

KP: What else could you do in Oran?

JR: Restaurants were off limits. Again, we had to eat at the Army camp, at the Army mess, in the first place, to make sure we ate good food and not contaminated food, and, second, not to upset the local economy, again. There were food shortages there, too, and the natives needed the food, so, whatever food was at the restaurants, ... even though it was for sale, and they would like to have sold it to us, they said, the Army's ... policy was, "No patronizing the local restaurants." You eat at the mess and ... let the locals have their food at the restaurants," but, we were allowed to go to theaters, and we did go to some theaters when we were off duty, and to, maybe, some night clubs that were still flourishing, and ... it was an interesting night life there. ... In fact, some officers were quartered at hotels, small hotels, and, after work, we would either walk or get a ride up into town from the port, and bunk at our hotel, and then, after supper already, because we had supper down at the port, at the port mess, the Army mess hall, we'd be off duty until the following morning. We went back to the port in the morning, either walking or getting a ride on some Army vehicle for breakfast, and start the day's activities at the port, again. ...

KP: What would a typical day's activities entail for you?

JR: ... On the base, on the port?

KP: Yes, at the port.

JR: Supervising this unloading. The actual work was done by the ships' crews, and, ... on the wharf side, by our men. ... We also had some civilian help that was hired on the spot to help with this unloading.

KP: Were these temporary workers Arabs?

JR: Arabs, mostly Arabs, and, ... with the Arabs, they ... had to be treated with suspicion. They smiled, and they were pleasant, and ... they did their duty openly, but, there was always sure to have some cargo net rip or drop. ... So, there was always some spillage that they could pick up, and grab, and stuff into their ... cloaks that they had. That was one of the problems, to keep their pilferage down, and breakage. ... That was one of the jobs we had, to keep overseeing this, ... the safety, also, of the personnel, and then, [that] our dispatchers were on the job, ... and the material was being properly handled and loaded, either on trucks or wagons. ... One time, I was given a special assignment, ... when the quay was all loaded up, and, for about two weeks, we were just getting clogged up, more and more. ... Well, the administration, ... our superior officers made a concerted effort to clean off that quay. They lined up a lot of truckers, and even had Arabs, with their wagons, and horses, and mules, hired to come that night, ... and I was given a job in charge of that night's operations, to ... get as much of this material off the dock as I could. The dock was about ... 200 yards wide and, ... at least, a quarter of a mile long. I mean, you can line up three ships on each side. So, I got into the spirit of it, and it was a hot night, I just had my shirt on, shoes, and shorts. I had a jeep, an open jeep, and, man, I just kept, like a cheerleader or a coach, going up and down the sidelines, encouraging these truckers to get going as soon as they're loaded, get out, and get the dispatchers loading them, and get these trucks loaded, and work on this pile. ... We weren't even unloading ships, just ... loading these piles of merchandise. It was thirty feet high and we didn't have forklifts. You know, it was almost all hand labor, to ... get this material on trucks and in the wagons, and, as I say, that was one of my best nights, 'cause I was like Knute Rockne on the football field, you know, directing these guys, helping the wagons [that would] get stuck. I'd get my jeep, and have a rope from the wagon to the jeep, and pull it, and get it started, and get it out of a rut, or get it off the rough road on to the pavement area. I had these guys really whipped up, even the Arabs. They got into the spirit of it and, "Oh, yeah, go, go, go." ... As far as I was concerned, I didn't care where the hell they were taking the material, you know, whether it was taken to their homes, ... but, it had to get off the dock. It was up to the MPs to see that it got to the proper place, and, my God, the next morning, daylight came, the dock was damn near empty, and, man, I was complimented. "How did you do it?" You know, how did I do it? How did I get that dock cleared off that much? Well, because it was teamwork. It was good teamwork from the dispatchers, ... and the non-coms that were out on the dock there, and with these local carriers. My superior officers were really amazed. ... They thought I had some secret way of doing it, but, ... I said, "It was just getting gung-ho about it and getting good cooperation." Well, I didn't get the credit for that, my officers got the credit. Well, I mean my superiors, [laughter] the Texans. That was not a typical day, but, that was one particular experience. The other days, it would be unloading the ships, ... and getting them docked properly, giving instructions.

KP: You mentioned the problem of Arabs breaking cargo nets. How did that happen?

JR: There were crane booms on the ship that picked up, ... loaded, these cargo nets, about half the size of this room, and they were rope nets. Well, they would get loaded down in the ship's hold, they would raise up out of the hold, and the boom would swing over to the wharf side, and lower it, and, sometimes, they'd swing too fast, or, sometimes, they'd lower them too fast, or, ... as they lowered the net, instead of letting it hit the ground, ... they would pull one side of it first, ... with the guise of helping it, pulling it into place. ... I don't think they'd deliberately cut any of the ropes, but, they would tilt it enough so that stuff would spill out. Canned milk, boy, that was a big commodity for those Arabs, give them canned milk, for example, and they could recognize this. After a while, they recognized the insignia, and the marks on the cartons, and there would be sure to be at least half a dozen cases, during the day, of canned milk busted.

KP: Were you or any another officer responsible for the manifest and all the unloaded goods?

JR: ... It was not tight control, it was not tight accounting, not accounting for every last drop, because it was almost impossible to do it and it would be a wasted effort. ... Even if there was some, it would be difficult to accuse anyone of it, or of convicting them of it, and, even if you did, ... if it was a civilian, you could fine them, but, it was such a big effort that you couldn't do it precisely. ... That was acknowledged, that there was going to be some, but, try to keep it to a minimum amount of damage and pilfering.

KP: Were there any problems with theft on the part of your men?

JR: There was some, but, it was not widespread, and it was very limited, and there were a few soldiers that were punished for it, but, generally, it wasn't. ... Even in the mail service, US Army Postal Service, there, you ... shipped stuff home, jewelry, ... things that you'd buy, ... small packages ... of high value. About a third of that would disappear, never get delivered home, but, you could never track it down as to where it happened or who got it.

KP: Did you ever lose anything you sent home?

JR: I sent some jewelry home, Arab jewelry, and it didn't make it home, and I tried to trace it back through the postal service, I had a receipt for it and all, but, they couldn't track it down accurately, [and ended up] telling me to forget about it.

KP: Was there any tension between the French authorities, civilian and/or military, since this was a French colony, and the GIs?

JR: No. ... Openly, we didn't have any opposition or uncooperation. ... They were cooperative. ... There were some French officers I got to know and we were quite friendly. One of them invited me to his quarters, and I met his wife and children, and we went shooting together, after hours this was, ... to show how they did want to be friendly. ... The French wanted to become acquainted with the Americans.

KP: Some people have said that, sometimes, Allies hated each other more than the enemy. [laughter] Tom Kindre told me an amusing story once. He was in a bar, and an Australian and a British soldier were fighting each other, and he was shocked by this knock-down, drag-out fight.

JR: ... I had one experience like that in Oran, went to a night club, soldiers, Allied soldiers, Australians, and, ... as it was, I had a date, some French WAC or somebody. Anyhow, we went to this night club, and, somehow, an Australian, ... it was crowded, bumped into me. ... I didn't think it was deliberate, and I excused myself, he excused himself and all, but, some, American soldiers, saw this. I didn't see what happened then, but, the next day, I'm going down to the port, and I recognize this Australian soldier. He was on one of the boats down there and he's beat up. ... "What the hell happened?" He says, "Your buddies beat me up." I said, "What?" He said, "Well, after we came out of the night club, we had a fight, a gang fight." The American troops, ... about a dozen or more American soldiers, were fighting the Australians. They said, "He ... insulted an American officer," [laughter] and, God, the poor guy was beat up, but, fortunately, he didn't have the animosity against me and it was our troops. ... What the hell were they fighting about? There was just an excuse, you know, but, they were just spoiling for a fight.

MR: You mentioned that there was some sporadic gunfire when you first arrived.

JR: ... There was fighting outside the port, we could hear it, that the Germans at St. Cloud, I think it was the name of the place, ... were being pushed by the Americans, but, they were retreating very slowly, and fighting back, to protect their flank, and protect their positions. They kept pulling further away, towards Algeria and towards the east, but, we did hear that fire-fight. Then, there were a couple of air raids on the port of Oran by the German Air Force. I don't know if it was a real raid or a make-believe raid, but, it was to demonstrate our antiaircraft fire, 'cause the sky lit up like fireworks. We had all these ... [guns] with the antiaircraft fire, and we had ... the bullets with the phosphorous in them, I forget what they called them now, oh, tracer bullets, and some flak bursting up in the air. ... We ran undercover. We were afraid we were ... going to get hit by our own firepower, falling back on us. [laughter] There might have been a couple German planes there that were out just for observation. I don't know if they actually bombed us, but, ... this was the demonstration, to show that we could defend ourselves.

KP: Did your men ever get into any trouble or go AWOL? You mentioned one fight.

JR: It wasn't just that one Australian, I mean, he had his gang, too, but, I didn't hear of any other widespread desertions or problems with our troops, Americans troops, getting into trouble there with the civilians.

KP: What do you remember about your Army commander?

JR: He was a Texan, also. ... I think he came in with the unit as a first lieutenant, and, within three months, he was a colonel. Now, they looked at the table of organization, they said, "Hey, ... this outfit deserves a colonel at the head of it, so, let's keep working up," and they kept working themselves up until he became colonel. About a year later, ... he tried to be friendly, but, I was not a brown noser. That was one of my weaknesses, I was too damn independent. I was not a

brown noser. I didn't realize ... [whether] he was trying to get friendly, or that he wanted to sound me out, ... to see whether I had any animosity towards him, or what it was, but, ... he didn't impress me as being friendly, anyway. They thought Texas was the only state in the Union, you know. It was another country. [Tape Paused] ... You were asking about the Texans again.

KP: Do you remember anything else about your commander?

JR: I think they all went to the University of Texas and they all got commissions as reserve officers through there. ... They weren't all of the same age, but, they were all University of Texas graduates, or Texas A&M, and they would talk about Texas, and everything was related to Texas, and they'd talk about their towns, and I should come down to visit them after the war, but, don't bother them now, just do my duty.

KP: Before going into the military, had you traveled much beyond New Jersey?

JR: No. ... The farthest west, I think, was Cleveland, Ohio, to Camp Perry, ... in the Reserves. ... I think that was the furthest west, and, maybe, Montreal was the furthest north. The furthest south may have been Philadelphia. [laughter] I had an uncle in Phoenixville, so, we had to go through Philadelphia to get to his place, near Valley Forge, but, I hadn't traveled much out of the North-east, you're right.

KP: What did you think of North Africa, which must have been a very exotic place?

JR: Once we got out of the big, metropolitan town, the city rather, I thought I was a thousand years back in history, the way the Arabs lived there, with their donkeys, riding on the donkey. ... For example, they rode on a donkey, and they had a little stick, I don't know how the hell they whipped that donkey with that little stick, I wondered. Well, they used to stick him with it, prod him, and you'd look at the donkey, and you'd see he had, like, an ulcer from where the stick always hit him, so, as soon as he touched it, the donkey would jump, and start to gallop, but, they had no concern for the animal. ... The men walked together, if there were two or three of them, or with us, if we walked, their wives had to walk about five paces behind us. The wives were treated ... like in ancient times. They were second-class citizens. ... Sanitation they had was very primitive. I mean, it was like living out in the wild. They tried to be clean, I guess, with their hands. How the hell did they do it? ... The one hand was always washed. ... One hand was tried to [be] kept clean for eating and the other hand did all the dirty work, ... because of the lack of sanitation facilities. ... As far as the Arabs, when we were out in our bivouac area, where the camps were, and had Arabs around there, you had to watch all your belongings, because they pilfered, and stole, and it was not a sin for them to steal. It was a sin to get caught. ... Whatever they could get, walk off with, that was all legal, as long as they didn't get caught.

KP: What happened when you caught an Arab?

JR: You only threatened the Arabs, threatened them, or you tried to get it back forcefully, but, ... all you could do is threaten them. We didn't want to have our ... throats slit in the dark, at night. [laughter]

KP: What did you do when the flow of supplies into Oran decreased?

JR: You still take your positions ... at the port, and wait for ships to come in, or there was always some ship there, but, you'd concentrate on one or two ships, instead of six ships at once. You'd just hang around, talk Army talk, and talk about what could be happening, or what would come tomorrow, or talk about something you did last night, some escapades you may have had in town. ... It was not all excitement, you're right. There were a lot of boring times.

KP: I get the sense that boredom often led to uneasiness and mischief.

JR: That's true, yes. When they were busy, had things to do, you had better discipline. You had a purpose, and then, ... they tackled the job. ... When you didn't have, then, the idle hands would get into trouble, ... but, the kind of trouble, ... getting into fights, losing their tempers. ... I wouldn't say they drank on the job. ... That was very well controlled, self-control or the Army control, but, when we didn't have anything to do, ... you wrote letters. Then, you tried to catch up on the letter writing at home, even if you did it out in the open, on the dock, and find a place to write, V-mail.

KP: How often did you and your wife write to each other?

JR: I tried to write about three letters a week, because they were small letters, what they called "V-mail," about the size of one sheet. You could write on it and it was thin paper, but, we didn't even have ball-point pens, I don't think. We had regular fountain pens and you had to be careful not to splotch the paper or penetrate it. ... Sometimes, you wrote in pencil, but, then, it would be hard to read, you fold it up, and that sheet became the envelope, also. So, you couldn't write too much, I mean, not more than one page at a time, and then, you were limited to what you could say, not to be giving away your position, or your Army unit, or even what you did last week, or ... where you might be going. ... That was pretty well censored, and if it was caught, you'd be reprimanded, fined, or even put in jail if you were convicted of serious [crimes], but, inadvertently, you might give out information that was just censored out. ... So, my wife did receive some letters, where words were blocked out in black ink.

KP: Did you do any mail censoring?

JR: No, I didn't have to do any censoring myself. ... I don't recall that we had that as a duty. It seemed to be some other security unit in the Army, ... attached to the postal service, that would spot check mail and censor it, but, as I said, I tried to write about three times a week, every other day, try to send a short note. Couldn't do it all the time, because we'd be on the move, or we didn't have the facilities, ... or, even if we wrote it, it wouldn't go out.

KP: Did your unit move to other parts of Africa?

JR: Well, when I switched over to the Air Force in Oran, we did move to another field, near Algiers. My port unit, also, was moved to some other port, later, that I left behind, and I did meet

up with them sometimes. With the Air Force, we moved to an airfield near Algiers, and then, as the troops moved closer to Egypt and to Cape Bon, we moved to another field, near Tunis. So, we were always behind the front lines, I don't know how far behind, maybe 100 miles behind the front lines, but, we kept following them that way, and we serviced fighter squadrons, aircrafts and airfields.

KP: What was it like to go from the Corps of Engineers to the Air Corps?

JR: Well, I don't know if I can define that, but, it was the Army Air Corps. The Air Corps was part of the Army, so, it was not such a big step out, although, duty wise, it was very different, except, in my case, as a utilities officer, I still had to deal with the same things, orders, systems, electrical systems, and having crews lay down these landing strips, the perforated metal landing strips, on the soft ground, where the planes could land and take off, landing strips. ... Again, I found myself an outsider there, because I hadn't trained with that unit. I didn't go across the ocean with them. I was a newcomer there, too. I was given a lot of temporary duty assignments away from the unit, to investigate some problems or to deliver some information, as a courier. ... I couldn't get in solid with any unit, even there. I did get assigned to a, as I say, headquarters squadron, and I had more administrative duties ... that were like a historian for the unit, writing the daily record of what had happened the day before, and I was a mess officer, again, at one of the places. ... I can't remember any other specific details, ... but, we had duties every day, ... as a routine that we followed through. ... This was now in Italy, because, from Cape Bon, the Air Force went over, ... briefly, to Sicily, and then, after about two weeks, we moved up to outside of Naples, at Campo-Di-Chino Airfield. We had to maintain the airfield and as the mess officer, too. When we moved up, we still had an airfield, but, our duties were more administrative than they were operational. ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with John G. Rosta on October 18, 1997 at Rutgers University with Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak. Where, in the middle of Italy, was your unit based?

JR: Grosseto, and this was sometime in late 1944 and early '45. When General Patton was making his big push across France and his tanks were starting to run low on fuel. ... So, he mobilized a big supply system behind him. ... He had different airfields flying fifty-five gallon drums of ... diesel oil and gasoline. ... I was given the job of assembling workers and ... these oil drums out to the airfield. At dawn, ... we would have carrier planes, transport planes, and we got our men there, our manpower, and the civilians, also, to get the drums out to the landing strip and get them on board the planes. ... It took about two days to get this all ready. When we were loading the planes, a couple of them had taken off, loaded with these fifty-five gallon drums, we got orders to stop the operation. "Stop the operation." ... Patton was told that he can't advance any further. He wasn't allowed to advance into Germany. He was given orders not to go into Germany, wait for the regrouping of the British and they would try to go in together, ... and give the Russians time to come in from the east. ... Here, we had one big operation going, and we get it going full swing, and, in the middle of it, we were told to drop it. So, that was very discouraging. ... Hell, we knew Patton wanted to go. We wanted him to go, with the Third

Army, with his tank corps, and we wanted him to have this gasoline and the diesel fuel, and, yet, we ... were told to stop. We felt it was a political move and not a military move.

MR: Even though your unit was an Army Air Corps unit, all of the men admired Patton

JR: Well, I think he was admired because of his aggressiveness, and for his push, and that he wanted to end the war. He wanted to defeat the enemy and end it as quick as possible, even though it lost lives immediately, but, in the long run, it would be fewer lives lost, and all these stories that we heard, about him slapping a soldier, it didn't bother the troops over there. We said, "What the hell? The soldier had it coming to him," and, maybe, that was a good, psychological way to snap the soldier out of it, out of his melancholy, depression. ... We thought that was a proper course of action from the General, and we didn't hold it against him, like the press over here made a big deal out of it, that, oh, God, a general slapped a soldier personally, a sick soldier. Hell, that was probably the best therapy for the soldier at the time.

KP: When you were attached to headquarters squadron, how many people reported to you? Did you have a sergeant reporting to you?

JR: I had a sergeant and three corporals and it was about forty people all told, about forty people, one platoon.

KP: How many bases did you have to take care of, as utilities officer?

JR: One base, just that one base where we were stationed.

KP: How big was the base? How many men, total?

JR: Well, we had the service command, the units that did the ground work, all told, we were, maybe, three hundred, and then, attached to the unit were the fighter planes, and their pilots, and their crew chiefs.

KP: How many would that make it, total?

JR: Maybe a thousand.

KP: So, basically, you were running a town, in terms of the utilities, of a thousand people and you had forty people to do it, which was a lot of responsibility.

JR: ... In addition to the regular Army personnel, we also hired a lot of civilian personnel. The plumbers, the pipe fitters, carpenters, and painters, and, also, these machine operators, although most of the machinery was operated by American soldiers, the tractors, the ... sheep's-foot rollers, for breaking up the ground, and then, for bulldozing it, and rolling it, smoothing it, and compacting it. Most of the machinery was operated by American troops, but, ... the labor for moving stuff and carrying was a lot of civilian labor that we hired on the spot there. ... They were glad to get the work. So, it might have been another two to three hundred civilians also

working there, at that airfield, whether it was at Naples, or Grosseto, or, well, mainly in Italy. In North Africa, ... we didn't have that many natives. We didn't want to hire the Arabs. Either they didn't have the skills or capabilities and there weren't that many Frenchmen available. They were all involved in their own war effort.

KP: Italy was devastated by the war and many Italians had a tough time. Do you remember any of that, if they were eager to work on the base?

JR: Yeah, all right, their industry seemed to be at a stand still, for one, and their food production was also reduced. ... As we moved from one place to another, we're going through the towns, we could see, like, up in the hills, the Apennines, that ... half of the town was demolished, the buildings, ... either from bomb raids or from artillery fire, from fighting against the Germans as they retreated. ... They didn't give up a yard without firing back, and our troops had to blast them out. The buildings easily collapsed, because they were just stone on stone, with little cementing, so, any jarring, ... the buildings come down, like in the earthquake last week, and the buildings fall apart, because they're not reinforced. They're not really cemented together tightly. They'll stand forever as long as the earth doesn't move, or if there's no vibrations, but, some of these towns, you're right, we could see where half the town was knocked down.

KP: I had an officer tell me that one of the problems he had in Italy was keeping his men away from prostitutes. Did you have that problem in any part of Italy?

JR: Well, even in North Africa, there were brothels that ... seemed to be, especially in North Africa, that were government approved or sponsored. They were like a business. ... Our troops lined up after hours, in the twilight. You could see two blocks of soldiers lined up, waiting their turn to go into the brothel, you know, with the prostitutes, have their turn at the prostitute, and that was a common sight. ... That was not quite so common in Italy. They didn't have the open brothels. The prostitutes operated privately, I guess, but, you couldn't see it. There was a lot of propositioning on the streets. You could almost pick out which girls were on the make, or in the business, propositioning the soldiers, but, it was not a disciplinary problem. It was not something that ... upset the regime or the operations.

KP: I have been told that the Air Force was a little more casual than the other branches.

JR: They tolerated a lot more lack of discipline, and a lot more lack of routine, and formality, that's true. I don't know if it's due to their mission, because they were flying more dangerous missions, and that they ... didn't know whether they were going to live from day to day, the pilots, especially, ... but, the crew chiefs, too, ... were also very diligent about the maintenance of the plane, and the safety of the plane, and the loading of it, but, there was more leeway and overseers saying, "Hey, do it right, whether ritual says, or ... discipline says, 'Do it this way.' If this is a better way, now, out in the field, here, you do it this way, because that's the best way to do it, right here and now." ... The Air Force was more tolerant of that than the Army would be. The Army would more "go by the book." Well, they had a newer book and more incomplete book in the Air Force, so, they didn't have any such strict rules and established traditions to go by.

KP: When moving up the Italian boot, was your base ever attacked, either by an air raid or by enemy fire?

JR: Air raids, yeah, we were subjected to, at least, three air raids, maybe four, where we were bombed, and the airport, like, at Naples, that was bombed twice while we were there. ... It was not such heavy bombing ... and it was not so accurate. The casualties were not heavy from the bombing.

KP: Did you lose a lot of pilots?

JR: I was not closely connected with that part of the operation, so, I can't really comment on that, but, we had ... damaged planes coming back to our fields ... from other fields, that they couldn't make it back to their home fields. ... They landed at our field, the field outside of Naples. Campo-Di-Chino was like the West Point of the ... Italian Air Force, their training field. Well, we took that over, the Americans did. ... One time, there were planes coming back from the Ploesti oil field raids, bombers, two-engine bombers, and ... we had a fighter plane that also had come back, and had almost crash landed on our field, and it was burning at one end of the runway, and, before that could be cleared off, these bombers were coming back. So, our ... airport controllers, they were going by the book. ... If there's a damaged plane on the landing field, others can't land until it's cleared off, and here are these bombers coming back with, maybe, one engine out of four operating, or one out of two operating, or two out of four. ... They set off some kind of distress signal flare that they had either a dead body or a very serious injury on board. Damn it, our control operators waved ... this bomber off that was coming down. So, he climbed slowly, and it was banked to make a turn, to come back for another try, and, in the damn bank, the ship just crashed, slid down to the ground. It fell into a quarry that was just outside of Naples. Well, that made us feel that, goddamn it, it was poor judgment on the part of the controllers. The hell, there would have been much less damage, or chance of injury, if those injured planes had landed. There were about three planes, two of them did get away, and one landed later, but, because they followed the book, they caused more casualties. So, in some places, they didn't exercise good judgment. ... That saddened all of us, damn it. Then, we had to go get those bodies out of the wreck.

KP: When you were in headquarters company, who did you report to?

JR: To the company commander, Captain Charles MacKinnon, and he reported to the battalion major, but, I reported to the company commander. ... The battalion commander would have requests for different jobs, and he'd relay them, supposedly, through to the ... captain, ... but, sometimes, he talked directly to us, to give us his wishes, or his orders, something that didn't require a lot of manpower. If it required manpower, then, it had to go through the captain to coordinate it. This was the 316th Service Group, Twelfth Air Force Service Command.

KP: You transferred into Air Corps Material. How long were you in material and how long were you with headquarters company?

JR: I think, like at Oran, when I was with that port unloading unit, about eight months, with the Material Command in Algiers about six months, and with the headquarters company about twenty months.

KP: How long was your first Air Corps assignment?

JR: The first assignment was about half a year, and then, with this second unit, it was another year-and-a-half.

KP: You had this assignment where you were in charge of aircraft maintenance for quite awhile.

JR: Of the field, and the ... landing strip, and the camp utilities, but, not the aircraft. ...

KP: You mentioned that you threw out a lot of materials.

JR: ... Oh, that was with the aircraft instruments from aircraft that were damaged.

KP: How long were you in that position?

JR: That was about two to three months, a short time. ... We found out that it didn't pay and that we could get new instruments on time or we could cannibalize good instruments from other planes.

KP: So, you spent most of your time in the Air Force creating bases and making sure they ran well.

JR: The landing field, and the utilities for that field, and the camp.

KP: Where were you on V-E Day?

JR: V-E Day was about April or May. ...

KP: May of 1945.

JR: I may have been here in the States, sent home for a visit. ... No, I wasn't. I was in Italy. When President Roosevelt died, I was here in the States.

KP: You were back in the States.

JR: Yes, for a thirty day leave, and then, ... when the leave was over, I had to go back, and I was in Europe when V-E Day came, actually.

KP: So, you got a leave back to the States.

JR: After, I don't know what it was, thirty months or two years, we were granted a thirty day visit home.

KP: How long had you been gone?

JR: Two years, at least, by that time. It could have been thirty months, maybe it was ... closer to thirty months, and then, I came back for a month. I had to go back, and then, V-E Day occurred while we were back in Italy, getting ready, actually, to go to the Pacific Theater of Operations. ... We were getting ready, and we were packing, and then, V-J Day came, with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

KP: What was it like to come back home with the war still going on?

JR: ... Well, I was glad to get home. I was very happy to see my wife, and my son, John, had grown. He didn't recognize me. My son was two-and-a-half years old by that time. He didn't know me. He knew the man upstairs, John Eggressy, the landlord, but, he didn't know me. The landlord was his "father." That was one disappointment. Yes, my own son, Jackie, didn't know me. ... He thought I looked great in a uniform, I'm a soldier, but, he didn't know I'm his daddy. He thought I was a visitor. It was good to get back with my wife, and she was glad, but, we knew I had to go back again. The war wasn't over yet, so, that was heartbreaking, but, we had lived that long through it already. We figured, "Well, another year or more." ...

KP: What did your wife do during the war, besides raising your son? Did she work at all?

JR: Marge worked at the Raritan Arsenal on maintaining and calibrating instruments, range finders and compasses, as an assembler, and cleaner, and tester, different departments. She did that for ... about two years.

KP: Who took care of your son when she was working?

JR: At first, my sister, but, then, the Army set up nurseries, child care centers, where the women could drop off the children in the morning. The babies, or children, would be fed, and taken care of, take their nap, and play games, and then, be picked up after work by the mothers, and taken home. ... That was pretty well coordinated, she said, and, of course, relieved her anxiety, being able to work, and contribute to the war effort, but, it wasn't a pleasant experience, by no means.

KP: When you finally came back after the war, how long did it take your son to realize that you were his father?

JR: That I'm home permanently now? ... I think it took him over a month, between one and two months, six weeks, maybe, before he finally accepted me, because he was more closely attached, fortunately, to a friend, who was also the landlord, lived upstairs, and, really, was a foster father to him. ... My son got very much attached to him, as a three-year-old. So, it took him, as I said, about six weeks to realize that the man upstairs [was] not his father and that I was his father.

KP: You were set to go to Japan. When did you think the war was going to end?

JR: Oh, we figured it would take at least another year to two years, one to two years, before we would defeat the Japanese clear out of the Pacific. That's the way it looked before the atom bomb was dropped. ... We had heard of all this fighting. My brother, Joe, was there with the Marines, and we kept up with it from the newspapers, radio reports on how tough going it was, and how tenacious the Japanese were, and ... we were going to have to fight them in their homeland, that that was going to be a bloody battle. ... We figured it would be, at least, a year yet, and that it would be over within two years. So, we weren't anxious to go out, but, it was part of the regime, part of the game.

KP: After V-J Day, when did you get back to the States for good?

JR: I think it was in December of '45, ... because the war ended. ... Even after V-J Day, the Army was still suspicious of the Russians, I guess, that we would have to have some holding actions in Europe. So, they weren't anxious to send us home, and they kept us there, as I say, until October before we finally started getting orders sending the units home for disbanding, or, at least, discharge.

KP: Did you go back home with your unit or did you go home separately?

JR: I think the unit came back the second time. I came back with the unit.

KP: How did you come home? Did you fly back?

JR: No, we came back by troop ship, to Norfolk, and, at Norfolk, we disembarked, and took a train to Fort Dix, and then, at Fort Dix, we were separated from the service.

KP: Had you thought of staying in?

JR: Not at that time. No, I wanted to get into civilian life, the sooner the quicker.

KP: Did you stay in the Reserves?

JR: I did for about ... one year, and then, I let that lapse. I didn't think there was going to be any more war, and I didn't see any future to it, and I didn't want to devote the time to it. So, I dropped out after about two years, at the max. I think it would have been better ... staying in, though. However, I was anxious to get home. In fact, I had an opportunity to stay in Europe for another six months, because I spoke Hungarian. The Army was looking for officers to send to those occupied countries in ... mid-Europe, ... where our planes had been shot down, and the bodies of our troops had been interred, or even land units, infantry units, that had been killed and buried temporarily there, to go there, and to track down the bodies of American troops, and crew ... members, and pilots, to locate where they are, and then, arrange for their shipment back to the States. So, for Hungary, they wanted officers that could speak Hungarian, and I was tempted to stay there, to serve another six months, but, as I say, by that time, I had had a taste of, six months

before, ... being home, and, "What the hell? I don't want to be more involved. I want to get back to my family and my wife." If I weren't married or if I didn't have a son, I might have stayed there, but, then, by that time, being in the family way, I figured, "I've got to get back. I want to get back." So, I didn't stay for that other six month tour. ...

KP: Did you do any sightseeing in Italy? Did you ever make it to Rome, for example?

JR: ... I made a lot of sightseeing trips and I got to Rome three times in the period of two years, sometimes passing through, because our unit was going near by and I would go through Rome, but, at least twice, I just took off a weekend, ... or two days during the week even, to get into Rome and see all the sights that I could. I got to see quite a bit of Rome that way. ... I mean, of Italy, also. I did get up to Venice on a sightseeing trip and to Pisa and Florence. Of course, they weren't too far from our airfield at Grosseto. We could take a jeep, and drive down, and maybe, in one day, of course, stay overnight at some Army camp there, and then, come back the next day. So, I got to see Rome, as I say, three times, at least, and some of the other main sites. The Isle of Capri, for example, the Army ran a rest camp there. So, I was fortunate to get a three day trip to Capri for recreation and rest, R&R. I got to see that part, and some of Pompeii. Mount Vesuvius erupted while we were stationed ... near Naples, and we could see. I mean, it was less than ten miles away, only about five miles outside the town, Vesuvius, and, at night, after it erupted, we could see the lava flowing down, and, at daytime, just ashes would spew up, five miles up into the air, or at least thirty thousand feet, like a black cloud. When that settled, it settled on some of our fields we had near Pompeii, covered [them] with dust. Now, I had to make a trip down there to one of the airfields of Pompeii, in an open jeep. By the time I got there, I looked like a minstrel. You know, I had a black face and only my teeth and my eyes were white. [laughter] ... Only about a month before it erupted, I had taken a sightseeing trip up to Mount Vesuvius. We went right up to the rim, and we were looking down into the rim, where there was smoke coming up and some ... boiling, not erupting, just boiling. If it were erupting, we wouldn't have been able to get up, but, then, a month later, it erupted. Then, we realized. ... Although, it doesn't erupt all of a sudden, you know. ... You have a couple of days in advance notice that it's boiling up, getting worse and worse. Our planes, some of them were damaged by the falling rock coming out of that Vesuvius, and the airfields were covered with the soot, black ash, that we had to bulldoze off, and try to sweep off, and clean the planes, too. So, that was another experience there, that eruption, which occurs once in a hundred years, happened while we were there. The sightseeing was interesting, because I had read a lot about Italy, and about Pompeii, even, a part of it that was being restored and excavated, and we went through a part of that, also. That was not far from our airfield at Pompeii, our satellite field.

KP: I meant to ask you this earlier, but, when you went over in 1942, the battle in the North Atlantic was raging. What was that voyage like, knowing how severe the threat was from U-boats? Were you aware of the threat?

JR: ... We were aware. We had lifeboat drills everyday. [laughter] We had lifeboat drills and we could see our destroyer escorts trying to protect us. In the daytime, anyhow, we could see where they were, patrolling ahead of us, along side of us, to intercept any submarines that might come

along, and we even hit a storm, going over, one of those North Atlantic storms, although, it was in the summertime, but, it got rough and a lot of the troops got seasick.

KP: Did you get seasick at all?

JR: Not at that time, but, I did on a subsequent [trip]. I got seasick on the crossing from Belfast to England on the ... Irish Sea. That was rough. We were on a smaller boat and I couldn't keep it down. I really got sick on that one, and I got sick ... another time, going from Sicily to the mainland on an LST, because they were high up out of the water. We didn't have much of a load. We had our vehicles ... and it rocked with the waves. We got caught in a storm there, too. Not a real bad storm, but, enough to rock the boat. Most of us got seasick on that trip.

KP: What was the food like when you were in the Air Force? How well supplied were you?

JR: By that time, we were getting more ... refrigerated ships bringing over fresh meat, so, we were able to get a better variety of ... eggs, and butter, and fresh meat, at least. Vegetables, there were only the staples, potatoes and onions, but, like, leafy, green vegetables, we didn't have any of that. We had to try to supplement that with any local fruit. Well, the Army would buy local fruit, in quantity, and distribute it through the mess hall channels. So, we'd get apples, maybe, and oranges, but, we didn't have much leafy vegetables. It was beans, onions, and potatoes. However, as I say, by the time we were at the Air Force, the supply lines were better, and we had built refrigerated ships, and were able to bring over fresh food, and we had the system setup on land, too, that distributed this refrigerated food, but, for the first year, ... didn't have that. It was all canned food. Canned corn beef, canned Spam, reconstituted eggs, dried egg powder, you know, for eggs.

MR: The fighters stationed at your base, were they providing fighter escorts for the bombers going into the ETO?

JR: Yes, well, in North Africa, they also provided support for the ground troops, but, in Italy, it was mostly protecting the bombers, although, they also had a lot of strafing runs, too. ... Even the higher fighter planes carried some bombs, too, for strafing and bombing ... railroad cars, railroad trains, and convoys that they found on the road, but, ... it was mainly for bomber protection, though.

KP: Did you ever encounter any black troops when you were in the service?

JR: Not as a unit, but, occasionally, there was some black officers in our outfit, but, only about one out of twenty, and troops, I don't think I encountered any, only some black officers.

KP: What were the black officers' responsibilities?

JR: About the same as ours, same as mine, although, they were more administrative. As I think about it, they were more administrative, working in the headquarters offices.

KP: While you were in Europe, did you travel anywhere outside of Italy? Did you ever make it to France, or to Germany, or any other countries, particularly after the war ended in Europe?

JR: Yes, the Army ran these R&R trips for soldiers. Every six months, you were entitled to one of these trips. So, I did get to, one trip, ... go to Switzerland by train, ... from the Grosseto area, I guess it was. By train, it went up through Milan and up into ... Switzerland, which was a neutral country, and we had to remove all our insignias. We could wear the Army clothes, but, had to take off all insignia, anything that identified with the Army, because it was a neutral country. We were allowed in as neutral visitors. I was able to get five days into Switzerland and see parts of Switzerland, some of the big cities. One other time, on the next one, I did go to southern France, Nice and Cannes, for about three days, and they put us up in a hotel, and they organized sightseeing trips, the Army did. It was ... run like a travel bureau. I mean, even the trip to ... Switzerland was run like if you would go through a travel bureau. It was the Army travel bureau, but, we were still monitored closely, and kept track of, so nobody would get lost, or desert, or ... killed by some other party in a foreign country, by a mugger, for example. We were closely watched and monitored that way, reporting in. That was two of the trips that I was able to get. Well, three altogether, with the one in Italy, the Isle of Capri. The other one was up to Switzerland, and then, the other one to southern France, Cannes and Nice.

KP: Have you ever been back to where you served?

JR: No, I never went back. I wouldn't expect to find it the same. As I see changes here in this country, in my hometown, I expect changes took place like that there. Like Thomas Wolfe says in his book, "You can never go back home." You go back there, but, it's not the same condition anymore. People are different, the localities, new buildings, new roads. I bet I wouldn't be able to find some of the camps ... where we had our airfields. They either got homes on them, or an industrial site, or, even, they've been plowed under as a farm again. I wouldn't be able to identify it, but, I never ... went back. I've had hankerings to go back, yes, some longings to go back, curiosity wise, but, then, there's always something more worthwhile, either sightseeing in this country or, like, I took the trip to Hungary in 1984.

KP: When you came back, you joined a VFW post and you became fairly active with the VFW. What led you to join the VFW?

JR: Its membership requirement to have served overseas in a war zone made the exclusivity more appealing. Well, other friends that were joining, and the VFW older members, the veterans of World War I, they were active in recruiting us by phone calls, or visiting us at our home, and telling us about the VFW, and they'd join it, and then, all our friends were joining. This New Brunswick Post had over four hundred members in 1947, '48, up through ... the '50s. ... Then, the satellites, the suburbs, started organizing posts. We had men coming from Edison, for example, going to the New Brunswick post, but, then, they organized two posts in Edison. They organized one in ... Franklin Park, Highland Park, and so, then, our membership in New Brunswick dropped. Even though we were getting members from New Brunswick, it was not enough to make up for that loss. ... It was a regional post at the time, but, then, it became a local post, competing with other local posts. ... I've been active with the VFW, all but for a span of

about ten years in the '60s. Maybe from '65 to '75, the post became dormant. We were all occupied with our families and didn't have the time to devote to it, but, then, in '76, there were some real gung-ho members that re-activated the post, and then, I rejoined.

KP: Are you still active with the VFW?

JR: Yes, we had a meeting last night. I'm the quartermaster-adjutant, which is the treasurer/secretary of the post. We have eighty members and we meet once a month. Our post home on Little Albany Street was bought, by condemnation, by Robert Wood Johnson Hospital and converted into their parking garage, and our membership was not big enough then to warrant buying a post home, or finding land in New Brunswick with sufficient parking that we could afford, so, ... we sold the home, and kept the money, and conducted our meetings in Gambino's Restaurant, at different places. Chick's Inn, first, and then, Franks' Place, because they were members, and then, the last fifteen years now, at Gambino's Inn.

KP: Do you have any Korean or Vietnam veterans at the post?

JR: We may have three Korean War veterans and two Vietnam veterans and the rest are all World War II veterans now. We lost our last World War I veteran two years ago. So, ... the bulk is World War II veterans. We haven't been able to get the Vietnam veterans, have not been successful in recruiting them, nor the Korean War veterans. It seems that those veterans wanted to disconnect from the Army and anything connected with the Army, or military, or veterans' service all together, although the Vietnam vets have formed ... their own organization, but, they wouldn't join [the VFW]. ... They were anti-establishment. The VFW was an established organization. They were afraid that they would just be stepping back into the Army again. So, that's been disappointing to us.

KP: You said that the World War I veterans campaigned to get you to join, but, it sounds like you did not need a lot of convincing.

JR: Well, there wasn't too big of a span. There was only about a twenty-three year span there, so, they were still all active, ... in their fifties, late forties, and ... most of them were alive and we were still gung-ho. World War II was a different experience than Korea or Vietnam. We were heroes, and so, we were welcomed to join it, and we felt that we had somebody to fall back on. ... We were still organization oriented. So, most of the ... World War II vets did join, but, not so with the Korean and Vietnam. ... They were anti-any organization and [the] span, though, between World War II and these other wars, was not greater. The age differences were not greater than it was between World War I and World War II veterans. It is a mystery.

KP: Did you think of using the GI Bill to go back to school for graduate training in engineering?

JR: I thought about it, but, I didn't really take advantage of it. When I came back, I thought I would go into the construction industry. So, to try to get some use out of the GI Bill, I did enroll with the International Correspondence Course in building construction and I did take some

courses with them for about three or four months. That was the extent that I used the GI Bill of Rights for. Now, I wish I had come back and gone for a Master's degree.

KP: At that time, you also had a family.

JR: Yes, I wanted to go concentrate on money making, earning a living, support my family. My second ... child, Gilbert, wasn't born until ... '47, although, that was fairly close after the war. I had two children already, by that time, so, I didn't really want to come back to the campus.

KP: You used the GI Bill to buy your home?

JR: I don't think I used it. ...

KP: Really?

JR: No, I didn't. ... Either I couldn't use it or I didn't find it advantageous to use it. ... I purchased an older home and the seller extended a favorable mortgage to me.

KP: Well, it is not a significant point.

KP: Did you go to Mass when you were in the Army? Did you see chaplains very often?

JR: Yes, we were able to go fairly regularly. The Army had chaplains, ... of the three major faiths, anyhow, Protestant, Catholic, and ... Jewish. So, almost every weekend, we had a Mass somewhere that we could attend. There were, sometimes, ... like onboard ships, [when] we didn't have a chaplain, and we didn't have a Mass, but, still, some of us gathered together. I wasn't an instigator of it, it was some of the other, maybe older, veterans, and we had, like, a church meeting. We read from the Gospel, and said prayers, sang some hymns, but, without a Mass, and there were some times when we were out in the field that we couldn't have a chaplain, couldn't have a Mass. However, ... out of a month, ... we had at least two, maybe three, Masses, anyway, and Mass was not said daily, only on ... Sunday, to keep the Sabbath.

KP: When you came home, you wanted to go into construction. Did your plans for construction work out the way you expected?

JR: No, they did not. I tried it for a two year period, and I found out that ... I didn't have enough capital, or I didn't have the opportunity, to really make it pay off, and, with the family, I couldn't go very long without a steady income, and my wife didn't like that, not having a steady income. So, I had to go back to work for someone else.

KP: You wanted to go into business for yourself.

JR: Yes, that was my intention, to go into this construction, try to use more of my background, but, the civilian construction was not quite as easy, or the same, as the military construction.

KP: If it had not been for the military, because you were practically in the construction business in the Air Corps, do you think you would have chosen that field?

JR: I don't think I would have. I would have gone into more of the engineering field, electrical engineering field.

KP: Although it did not work out the way you planned, the Army, in many ways, gave you the idea of going into construction.

JR: Into construction, right, and I tried it for a two year period, but, it didn't produce a steady enough income, and it was ... too nerve racking, for my wife more so than for me, [laughter] but, then, I was able to fall back on my previous job that I had before the war, going back to ... the Air Material Command as an inspector, mostly of aircraft instruments. ...

-----END OF TAPE TWO SIDE TWO-----

KP: This continues an interview with John G. Rosta on October 18, 1997 at Rutgers University with Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak. Initially, you returned to work where you had worked before the war.

JR: Right.

KP: Then, you tried to get into construction.

JR: An opportunity came. It was a neighbor who was also going into it, who had been, ... a chief of maintenance at one of the factories around New Brunswick, and he went into the construction business. So, I was able to ... put five thousand dollars of my own money into it with him, and went in as a junior partner, and we worked at it for about two years, but, ... it was a critical point in the construction industry, where there was a shortage of materials, and we couldn't get the material fast enough to build houses, to complete them in time, and we got into a cash flow bind. We didn't have enough cash coming in to keep the operation going, and, yet, ... we had to keep going, in order to pay for material and labor. So, we muddled through that, but, then, as I said, my wife didn't like this business of not having ... a dependable income. So, I dropped out of it and was able to get an engineering job with Mack Motors, in their maintenance department, plant engineering department, actually, and I worked there for a year-and-a-half to two years, and then, an engineering and design company that was doing a lot of work for Mack went through with this operation of moving from New Brunswick to Plainfield. ... After that was completed, the workload decreased and this engineering company made me an offer. Wigton-Abbott Corporation, out of Plainfield, an engineering and construction company, made me an offer to go work for them as an electrical engineer, electrical design engineer, and I felt that was the real good, first opportunity to get into electrical engineering. So, I took it and I stayed with them for a period of ten years, until they were going out of business. ... The owners had died, and I went with another company, Tectonic Associates in Somerville, and I was with them for over twenty-five years, twenty-five years constant, and then, on a part-time basis after that, and I retired from there. It is an architectural, engineering, and surveying firm owned by Donald Pantel, AIA.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed being an engineer.

JR: Very much. I obtained my professional engineers' license to practice in New Jersey.

KP: You fulfilled your dream of being an engineer, with this sideline in construction, which is a form of engineering.

JR: Yes, because engineering was something tangible. Here's an idea, you put that on paper first, and you have to work it out on paper, and you write the specifications, and then, to see that come into fruition as a physical object that's useful, ... people are using it, factories, schools, ... I got a lot of satisfaction out of that, besides the pay. ... It was interesting to work with people, because we had to design, usually had the job to go and inspect it, as it was being constructed, work out any inconsistencies or problems that come up, conflicts, work them out with the contractor, and that was another challenge, to be able to get satisfaction out of that, and then, to see the completed building, or the completed project, it was very gratifying. So, that was why I stayed with it. I made good friends, and, with this Tectonic firm, it was a smaller company of about fifty employees. It became ... a real team, like teamwork, with the architects and the other disciplines of engineering. ... I was in charge of electrical design. I had to work with the heating-ventilating, and the plumbing and piping, and then, with the architects. It was a good team there we established. It did a lot of jobs around the state of New Jersey, and, also, outside the state, Philadelphia and Brooklyn Navy Yards. My wife says, "Everywhere we go now in this state, you tell me you worked on this job. ... Oh, you remember when you worked on that job ... or you were at that site." ... I didn't realize we got around that much until she's pointing out to me, "Hey, everywhere we go, you've been here, you've been there, you know this town, you know that company."

KP: You had one son who had served in the military, John L. Rosta.

JR: Correct, my ... first child, the one that didn't know me. [laughter]

KP: He served as a second lieutenant in the Armored Corps.

JR: Correct. He attended and graduated from Saint Peter's College, which also had an ROTC course. So, he took it there for four years, got a commission as second lieutenant in an armored division, armored corps. ... He was a year on active duty with them and he was in a unit being shipped over to Vietnam. They got as far as San Francisco when the hostilities were reduced, or they decided the tank corps was not so effective over there. They didn't need as much, and so, his unit was ordered back to some camp, ... Fort Campbell, or whatever, and, at the same time his one year service was up, he got out of it. He got married while he was still on duty. ... He figured he'd get married before he goes overseas. So, he did get married in his uniform. After he was married, the Vietnam War was winding down, but, still hazardous. He was glad to not to have to go over and his wife was happier than Jack.

KP: However, your son almost went to Vietnam.

JR: He was on the way. ...

KP: How did you feel about the Vietnam War?

JR: At that time, I thought it was a just war and that we were duty bound, by the treaties, to do our part there. At that time, I felt that way. I don't feel that way today, though. I think it was a wasted effort. I think it was fighting against a regime that wanted to retake their country from the French, and, here, because France was our ally, we were helping France hold on to one of its colonies, which, in retrospect, I don't think it was right. The Vietnamese wanted to regain their own country from French domination, like India did it, peacefully, from England. In Vietnam, they were not that fortunate. They had to do it violently and we were on an opposing side. I think it was a needless loss of lives.

KP: When did you come to believe that, because in 1965, you thought it was good?

JR: Not until about eight years ago. I don't know what triggered it, but, when the revelations came out, ... after the Vietnam War ended, by ten years, anyhow, and, in retrospect, finding out what had happened, who Ho Chi Minh was. He was the George Washington of Vietnam. ... If you could call him a communist traitor, you'd have to say the same thing, concerning George Washington. He was a British traitor, but, for us, Washington was our hero. He was a founder of our country. ... Now that I look back on it, I feel that Ho Chi Minh was the same thing for Vietnam. He was trying to do the same thing and we rebuffed him, because we were siding with our former ally, France, to keep a colony. Well, as I said, it was only about ten years after the war that I began to contemplate on it and learn more about what went really on there, what caused it.

KP: You have been tied to the New Brunswick area for a long time. What has changed and what has stayed the same? There is still a very large Hungarian community in New Brunswick.

JR: ... Well, it's certainly changed in almost every facet. The Hungarian population has decreased. ... At one time, it was about thirty percent, thirty-three percent, sixteen thousand out of forty thousand. As the Hungarians prospered, they moved out into the suburbs, so that ... the Hungarian population, ... within the city limits, has been reduced to, I think, about ten percent, but, as far as the county-wise, it's still probably the same percentage. Even at our church, we have lost members who have moved out to the suburbs and joined other churches. So, that's another big change. ... I witnessed this wave of 1956 freedom fighters coming over from Hungary. ... They were young men ... in their twenties, early twenties. In fact, I had a cousin come over who was only nineteen. They got married, and got jobs, they got educated, and they moved out to the suburbs. They'd become Americanized, even though they tried to keep their Hungarian traditions. They have become more assimilated into our system here. ... Our church members have declined in number dramatically. So, that's another change. Of course, the town itself has changed, with all the buildings, the rebuilding going on downtown.

KP: I first came here in 1983 and it was a lot different even then.

JR: I witnessed the change constantly, so, it's not so dramatic, but, if my father were to come back, he wouldn't believe he's in the same town, until he got back to the old neighborhood on Ball Street. If he were to come down through George Street, Albany Street, ... French Street, even, it wouldn't be the same town anymore, and the University, too, has changed dramatically, expanded with new construction. I can't find my way around here, altogether.

MR: The students cannot either.

JR: Busch Campus, you need a map. I need a map when I go out there.

KP: What is it like to be a newlywed again?

JR: I think the pleasures and advantages outweigh being single. [laughter] I was fortunate. I was married to my first wife, Margaret, for fifty-four years. We celebrated our fiftieth anniversary with a large family gathering, and she lived to be ... age eighty, and, fortunately, she was not bed ridden. Although she was a diabetic for the last thirty years of her life, she learned to live with it, and cope with it, and ... it did curtail her life only in the last ... eight years. Eight years before she died, she had open heart surgery to replace the aortic valve. She kept active and we had a good, full life. We had three children, seven grandchildren, and she saw all of them. None of the grandchildren married though, not yet. We had a good, happy life, a full life, raised our children, and went through all the problems and pleasures, and, fortunately, she was not bed ridden, not an invalid, and died in the hospital ... [after] going in for some tests, September, 1994. Then, two years after she passed away, I re-married to a woman who we knew and socialized with for thirty years to forty years. My second wife's first husband, Joe Polgar, was an usher at my first wedding. Joe's uncle was married to my first wife's aunt. There was a relationship there, by marriage anyway, between my wife and Joe Polgar, who married this Sally, and they lived together for twenty-six years. Well, Joe was a chaplain in our VFW post. ... Our motto is, "We honor the dead by serving the living." ... The VFW, one of its missions is to look after the widows and orphans of our departed comrades. So, here, I was doing my duty, looking after the widow of my departed comrade and friend. Joe was one of my best friends. ... He died a year after my wife died, and I was helping Sally with her problems, transportation-wise, ... with her financial papers, and with the death certificates, and getting settlements made. The more I helped her, the more I liked her, and the more she liked me, and the chemistry clicked. ... I began to court her and it took six months ... for her to consider marriage. A year and a month after her husband died, she said, "All right, let's get married, rather than just pretending we're married or having you go back to Rossmore every night after dates in town," a fifteen mile drive, one way. We got married on November 30th of 1996, not quite a year ago. ... She didn't want to move out to Rossmore, because there were too ... [many] things and people attached to her house, where she had been for twenty-six years with her first husband. I married a known person and she knew me. ... We knew each other, and trusted each other, and had a lot of things in common, and we've hit it off quite well. It's not a hundred percent. We both had to give in to some concessions and we still have some problems, but, we're working them out very well and we find we're compatible. She's healthy and energetic, and, fortunately, I have my health, too. She likes to travel and dance, and I do also.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

JR: Yes, we didn't have lunch. [laughter] Mark, do you have any questions?

MR: Just one more. In the advanced ROTC program, you were required to go to different camps during the summer.

JR: One camp, six weeks, after the junior year, in a US Army reservation known as Plattsburg Barracks in New York State, on Lake Champlain.

MR: Did it have a specific name, like basic camp or advanced camp?

JR: Yes, I would say you have to call that basic camp training, because we learned to shoot rifles and pistols, and maneuvering out in the field, and, also, close order drill. Well, close order drill we had here on the campus, but, the field work, bivouacking, pitching tents, setting up a camp, we learned that in the camp there.

KP: Well, thank you very much.

JR: I feel a little exhausted, mentally, here.

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

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