RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR L. ROTH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Arthur L. Roth on June 11, 2009, in Boca Raton, Florida, with Shaun Illingworth. Also in attendance is …

Carol Roth: … Carol Roth.

SI: Thank you both for having me here today. I really appreciate you letting me into your home to conduct the interview. I also want to mention that, for this interview, the travel portion of this trip is made possible by a grant from your class, the Class of 1942, and also a travel grant from the Class of 1949. To begin, Dr. Roth, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Arthur Roth: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, May 13, 1922. I lived in Brooklyn for five or six years, and then, moved into Newark, New Jersey, for a few years, and then, back to Brooklyn and, finally, to Newark, where I went to Maple Avenue School and Weequahic High School.

SI: Do you know why your family moved back and forth?

AR: My family moved back and forth because my father was a merchandise manager and he worked in … department stores, Bamberger's, Kresge's in Newark and Bloomingdales in New York. So, the family moved with his profession.

SI: What was your father's name?

AR: Harry Roth, Harry David Roth.

SI: What was your mother's name?

AR: Sarah Siegel Roth, maiden name was Siegel, S-I-E-G-E-L.

SI: Your father was born in the Bronx. He was born in the United States.

AR: He was born in Harlem, actually, which was a pretty sophisticated place in those days. He didn't finish high school, because he needed to get a job to help his family's finances. Can I tell you a little incident about that?

SI: Of course, any time you want.

AR: He decided that the Esterbrook Fountain Pen Company would be a good place to get a job. So, he took a subway down to Lower Manhattan. When he got out of the subway, he found that this was the Esterbrook Furniture Store, but he was there, so, he went in and got a job. … He was in the furniture business for the rest of his life. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

AR: His lunch was at a bar there where he could get milk and all the crackers he could eat free. He was very prudent.

SI: Do you know how his family came to the United States, or how long they had been here?

AR: They were from Hungary. Our grandfather was a hemp maker, H-E-M-P. I don't know how they got to New York. They lived in Brooklyn. My grandfather spoke no English; I spoke no Hungarian. My grandmother spoke a little English. She was a housewife. He did not work in this country. I don't know what they survived on. I suspect my father and his four siblings helped them along.

SI: What about your mother's family and their background?

AR: … My mother grew up in Harlem, also. She went to normal school. You know what normal school is? Normal school is high school which taught specifically for teaching. So, you became a teacher when you got out of normal school. It was strictly for women. [Editor's Note: Most normal schools were post-secondary institutions where high school graduates, both men and women, trained to become teachers.] I don't think she actually taught at any time, because my grandfather, who was Russian, had a restaurant in Harlem and my mother was a cashier for him.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

AR: No, they were a very conservative kind of people. I don't know any specifics on how they met. By the time I was born, the whole family had moved to Brooklyn. Almost all the siblings, her siblings, were in Brooklyn. One was still in the Bronx.

SI: Do you have any memories of growing up in Brooklyn?

AR: I lived on … East 14th Street. My grandparents lived a block away. My grandmother was a diabetic, and, when I was a kid, I learned how to give her insulin. The oral anti-diabetics were not discovered … at that time. I was very fond of my maternal grandfather. It was always a treat for me to stay over their house overnight, sleep with him. One of my mother's siblings was a teacher, he taught chemistry in high school, and I was very fond of him also. … When I could get away from school on any kind of holiday, I would go to school with him. That was in Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn.

SI: It sounds like you had some exposure to medicine and science early on.

AR: Really, not in any significant amount. I don't know when I got interested in medicine.

SI: Did you grow up thinking that you would want to be a doctor someday?

AR: I think I did, but I can't tell you any specifics about that.

SI: What did you think of your early schooling, your elementary school? What was your favorite subject? What did you think of it overall?

AR: … All of my pre-high school, I think, was in Newark, Maple Avenue School, [in an] all Jewish community. I liked school. I liked my Latin teacher. [laughter] I could walk to school.

SI: Could you walk to both schools or just Maple Avenue?

AR: Maple Avenue School; that was before high school. Weequahic High School was brand-new when I started there. I went there for four years. It was in the same neighborhood. Most of the kids were Jewish. All the stores that were around the school were restaurants, and so, were keyed to that kind of community. I had a lot of friends in high school, even though I was younger than most. In the New York City schools, I skipped three semesters and, in high school, I doubled up on some of my courses, so [that] I could get out in three-and-a-half years. So, by the time I was ready for college, I was only fourteen.

CR: Sixteen.

AR: Sixteen? Sixteen; … I was two years younger than all of my classmates, so that … when I applied to Rutgers, I was sixteen.

SI: Do you remember how the Great Depression affected Newark and your neighborhood?

AR: I lived through the Depression, but my father always had a job. We were never really poor. We weren't rich by any means, but we lived in a one-family house in a very nice section of Newark, the Weequahic section. There was no money to spare, but there was always food on the table.

SI: Did you have to work after school or during the summers?

AR: I worked during the summers, but not because I had to. My father knew some people who owned a furniture factory; in New Hampshire, wasn't it?

CR: Yes.

AR: Where in New Hampshire?

CR: White Mountain.

AR: Whitefield, New Hampshire, and, several summers, I went to the factory and worked at menial jobs. I've got a funny story to tell you.

SI: Please.

CR: I was working on a line where a table leg would come along. I punched a hole in it, boring. You couldn't smoke, so, everybody up there chewed tobacco, and about three feet in front of the table, … the moving table, there were spittoons. These guys could hit it every time. [laughter] One time, I got so bored that I took a chaw from one of the guys and started chewing tobacco. You can imagine what happened. My mouth filled up with saliva and tobacco, and I knew I

couldn't hit the spittoon. So, after doing everything else I did, I swallowed the whole thing, and I was sick for a week. [laughter] That was the only funny thing I did. I also, on that job, stood in a railroad car and the finished product came down a chute, which I stopped with my stomach, and stored in the railroad car for shipping. I worked with another guy who was a farmer, had a farm, anyhow, and he would bring raw milk every day for lunch, for himself and me. So, all those summer days, I drank raw milk, unpasteurized milk. [laughter] I knew better than that after that.

SI: This was while you were in high school.

AR: That's right.

SI: You were pretty young, working on the line in this factory.

AR: I had an "in." [laughter]

SI: Were the other men you were working with grown men or were they kids, like you?

AR: Oh, no, they were all grown men. I was a kid. There was a relative, a close relative, of one of the owners, had lived in a little brick building … next to the factory, with a couple of bedrooms in it and a kitchen. … We, he and I, he was probably ten years older than I, but we lived there and I had my first girlfriend up there, who was a Canadian, spoke only French, but we figured that we had something in common.

SI: Was that the first time you had really traveled outside of the New York/New Jersey area?

AR: I went to someplace called Totem Lodge, a resort, with my parents, up around …

CR: The Adirondacks.

AR: In the Adirondacks, but not far from Albany, a little bit north of Albany. [Editor's Note: Totem Lodge was located at Burden Lake, New York.] I can't think of anyplace else; Jersey Shore. Everybody went to the Jersey Shore, and I was always down the shore. You know, everybody from New Jersey went "down the shore;" you didn't go "to the shore." [laughter]

SI: When you were in high school, did you get involved in a lot of activities, like clubs or sports?

AR: I can't think of anything; no sports, except what you had to do. Oh, I started playing tennis when I was in high school.

SI: Okay.

AR: Not very seriously, but I did start playing tennis.

SI: Did you play for the team or as a hobby?

AR: No, hobby.

SI: Before you went to Rutgers, did you assume that you were going to go on to college? Was this something that your family wanted for you? What motivated you to want to go to college?

AR: Everybody from Weequahic went on to college. It was that kind of a community. There was no question in my mind, I was going to college. My uncle, the teacher, the chemistry teacher, went to Cornell [University]. I had my heart set on going to Cornell, but I didn't get in. Rutgers [College] was my second choice.

SI: Was that because of the Agricultural School or because of other things?

AR: By that time, I was pretty well convinced that I wanted to go into medicine, or at least something in the medical field. So, I wanted a pre-medical course. In my second year, I got interested in limnology, which is the study of freshwater lakes, and, for a brief time, I thought I … wanted to do something like that, but, then, I lost that interest very rapidly. It was too boring. So, I was back to medicine.

SI: What do you remember about your first few days and weeks at Rutgers?

AR: I was a little awed. I had a single room, what was the name of the [dormitory]? in a building in the Quad.

SI: There is Pell Hall, Hegeman Hall …

AR: Hegeman, single room on the first floor in Hegeman.

SI: Did they have any kind of freshman initiation or hazing?

AR: Well, yes. They poured alcohol under your door and lit it from the outside. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

CR: You're kidding.

AR: They did that to everybody. It was crazy. [laughter] No doors burned down.

SI: Who would do that, the sophomores?

AR: Yes.

CR: That's the first time I've heard that. [laughter]

AR: I imagine that kind of juvenile thing doesn't go on anymore.

SI: No, that faded away after World War II. [laughter] What other pranks or things did they do to you?

AR: I don't remember. I joined the fraternity, Phi Ep Pi [Phi Epsilon Pi]. They had the usual crazy things with paddles during that first year, had to do crazy things, had to go up to (Strickland's?) bar and get beer and hamburgers. At eleven o'clock every night, one of the freshmen had to go pick them up and bring them back for the whole fraternity. [laughter] … My second year, I moved into the house with two other classmates, … [William F.] Bill Gutter and [Royal M.] Roy Howard. Roy Howard had a huge dog, a mastiff, that laid down in front of our door. We never had any trouble with anybody getting in there at night. [laughter] It was a two-room suite, one single and one double, and we switched around, so [that] … nobody was in the double room all the time. … Our girlfriends slept in the fraternity house over the dance weekends and we moved out and slept in the dormitories someplace. That's where I met Carol. No, I met her before then. I went to camp as a waiter and she was a counselor in the girls' camp, and we met there, in the girls' camp at night. … We continued after we got back in school. She was only two years younger than I, but, somehow, it stuck. [laughter]

SI: Did you work there every summer?

AR: I worked there two summers, I think; trying to think if I had any other summer jobs. I may have been up in …

CR: In Whitefield.

AR: In Whitefield. …

CR: Your freshman and sophomore year.

AR: One of those summers.

SI: Okay, you were back at the factory.

AR: Yes.

SI: Do any of your professors stand out in your memory?

CR: Who was the one that was the head of the Sanitary Engineering Department? They used to sing a song about him at Rutgers. I don't remember his name; Nelson?

AR: Well, Thurlow Nelson was head of the Biology Department. I remember him for an onerous reason, which I'll tell you, but which I think should not be publicized. …

SI: Sure. In general, what did you think of the faculty at Rutgers and your classes?

AR: I enjoyed it. I really felt no great pressure. My grades were reasonable, "B-plusses." I don't know how they grade now. I had, it was a "1," "2," "3," "4," at that time, I think I was a "2-

plus," or something, average, and the courses were pretty hard. [Editor's Note: Under the grading system in place at that time, a "1" equaled an "A," a "2" a "B," and so forth.] There was a physics course where I actually had a "D," terrible course. I can remember, the final exam was about an airline pilot who threw an uncooked hotdog out of a plane and you had to figure out what the temperature was when the hotdog hit the ground. [laughter] Stupid question, but that was the whole exam, but I think physicists think that way. I don't know if you're a physicist.

SI: No, I am not. [laughter]

AR: But, I enjoyed Rutgers. We had a good time with the girls we were going out with at that time, Bill Gutter's wife, Ruth, and Roy's; was Roy going out with, what was her name?

CR: Mickey.

AR: Mickey. She came to the house with a small trunk, to stay overnight for a couple of nights. [laughter]

SI: Were there a lot of social events, at either Rutgers in general or at the fraternity?

AR: Yes, and Thor took care of most things, the dog. [laughter] He kept people out of our room and people out of the dining room in the fraternity house.

CR: This dog was bigger than you are.

SI: Really?

AR: I can remember D-Day. Was it D-Day? No, it was the day the world war [started].

CR: December the 7th, [1941].

SI: Pearl Harbor.

CR: Pearl Harbor.

AR: That's right, December 7th. I was sitting on the furniture in the fraternity house, listening to the Giants football game, and I immediately thought it was going to alter my life.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor was attacked, how aware were you of what was happening in the world? Had you been following the news out of Europe and the Far East?

AR: I knew what was … happening in Europe. I knew what was happening with the Germans. I had a hint of what the camps were doing, I mean, what was happening in that. There was talk about it, nothing in the newspapers, but the *blitzkriegs* from the German Army, … everybody knew about that. Israel didn't exist at that time, but … what was going on with the Jewish population in that area was known.

SI: Where was that discussed? Was it among the community back in Newark? Did you go to a synagogue where it was discussed?

AR: It was in school. We knew the handwriting was on the wall, I think, by December 7th.

SI: Do you remember meeting any refugees, anybody who had escaped from Europe and had settled in either Newark or near Rutgers?

AR: I don't think so. We were together a lot, at that time. I don't think so.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, there was a significant debate in America between isolationists and people who wanted to get involved in the war. Do you remember discussing that with people or people expressing their opinions on those issues?

AR: Yes, there were a lot of isolationists. Most of the college people, … that I came in contact with, were isolationists, you know, America for America. [Editor's Note: Dr. Roth may be referring to the popular isolationist group America First.] Nobody thought that Germany could cross the ocean and attack America. Nobody thought about Japan at all. I think it was a great surprise to … everybody, but that ended pretty quickly. … Once Japan entered, everybody knew that we were in a world war … with two great enemies, and I think we were very lucky that Hitler turned around and went toward Russia when he did, and then, they ended up in Stalingrad and that finished the German Army.

SI: Before you heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, had you thought that the war would come to the US or that you would be involved in the military at all?

AR: I worried about it, but I didn't conceive of Japan having the navy or the air force to do what [they did]. It was really a surprise.

SI: Had you been in the ROTC?

AR: Yes. That didn't mean anything.

SI: Had you just gone in for the first two years?

AR: Yes. I don't know why.

SI: I think it was required then.

AR: Maybe, may have been. I don't remember.

SI: Do you recall anything about your ROTC training and if you thought it was useful or not?

AR: The guy who taught ROTC was stupid. He really was dumb. [laughter] He always used to say, "Never stop and help a wounded man." [Editor's Note: Dr. Roth pronounces "wounded" incorrectly.] He couldn't even pronounce wounded. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were just talking about the beginning of the war and how you heard about Pearl Harbor. When the news broke about Pearl Harbor being attacked, was there any kind of panic at first or fear among the people at Rutgers or yourself?

AR: Well, everybody was worried about it, because this was right on our shores. So, the Navy became a more important part of the Armed Forces. I worked. After I graduated, I worked at the American Platinum [Works] Corporation as an analyst, metal analyst, but I only worked for about a month or two before I enlisted. When I enlisted, they sent me to "ninety-day wonder school." [Editor's Note: To help satiate the expanding need for naval officers, a US Navy Reserve Midshipman's School (under the V-7 Program) was established at Columbia University in April 1942.] I went to Furnald Hall at Columbia for a month, [to] have an introduction, and then, I went to John Jay Hall for three months of naval training. The naval training was getting up at five o'clock in the morning and running around the block at Columbia University, in the bitter cold, and trying to figure out how you could beat the system somehow. [laughter] It was tough. They were really tough. After three months, I got assigned to a CVE [escort aircraft carrier]. … It was a tanker that had been converted. They were tanker hulls that had been made that were converted into carriers. I didn't want that. I was down in gunnery school in Washington, and I wanted to try and change into a different kind of vessel. I wandered around the Navy offices around there; I don't remember what building it was in. [I] went in and I asked a young sailor that was there if he knew … how I could change my duty. He said, "Sure, I'll take care of it." [laughter] It was silly. He said, "What kind of a ship do you want?" I said, "I'd like a destroyer;" pulled a card out, put it into place. Two days later, I got a change of orders. [laughter] It was really funny. Anyhow, I was assigned to the USS *Wadsworth* [(DD-516)], which was being built in Bath, Maine.

SI: Did you ever actually serve on the CVE?

AR: No, never got [to] the CVE. I went to gunnery school in the Atlantic for a couple of months, bitter cold, learning how to put shells into guns. … I'm trying to think of some other schooling I had. Anyhow, I went to Bath, Maine, and we're building three destroyers. At that time, they were the biggest that we had. We had three five-inch guns, two batteries of forty-millimeter guns, and then, machine-guns …

SI: Were they fifty-caliber guns?

AR: Yes, fifty-calibers. I forgot where I was. Oh, it was a building, three floors, and each floor was assigned to one of the three destroyers … that were being built at that time. … All the information and all the goods that came in for that ship went to that floor. Each floor had a young ensign who stayed in the building all night and went over everything; turn off the mic for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: All right.

AR: Yes.

SI: You were at Bath, Maine, getting the ship ready to be launched.

AR: Cold as a witch's tit in the Klondike. [laughter] We used to get a bottle of scotch, tie a string on the neck and pull it through the snow, so [that] it would be cold and you wouldn't have to use any ice when you drank it. [laughter] We drank whenever we could.

SI: What kind of duties would you do every day to get the ship ready to go?

AR: I wasn't doing much. There was correspondence that I pigeonholed, and I didn't have to carry anything aboard or anything like that. That was all done by [enlisted men and civilians]. I was an ensign. I was an officer by that time, so that, during the day, there were enlisted men that could transfer stuff, also shipfitters, even lady shipfitters.

SI: The ship was launched in April of 1943.

AR: Yes. I have a picture of the launching someplace. It's in that book. It was launched, and, … before it was commissioned, we went down to Boston, where it was commissioned. Turn that off.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Okay.

AR: Just incidentally, I want you to know that when I tried to enlist in the Navy, I was overweight. I weighed 172 pounds. Over the course of three weeks, I ran around a track, played tennis every day, lost twenty-two pounds, got down to 150, and then, I passed. Then, I stopped dieting, [laughter] but I was pretty trim at that time, when I was in the Navy.

SI: Was the Navy your first choice?

AR: Yes.

SI: How did you learn about the officers' training program? Was it the V-7 or V-12 Program?

AR: V-7. V-12 was the Air Force, Naval Air Force. [Editor's Note: The V-7 was the Midshipman Training Program and the V-12 was the Navy College Training Program.] It was popularized in all kinds of literature, no trouble going to the Navy office, downtown New York, and finding a place to sign in. Where were we?

SI: I forgot to ask; were you actually able to graduate from Rutgers or did you graduate in absentia?

AR: No, I graduated from Rutgers. I wasn't in such good shape for graduation, because I had been drinking for about a week. [laughter] I didn't know whether to put my program on the floor and throw up on it or throw up on the floor and put my program on top of it, see.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I will turn this back on.

AR: Yes, I graduated from Rutgers; trying to think of who was President.

SI: Clothier? [Editor's Note: Robert C. Clothier served as the fourteenth President of Rutgers University from 1932 to 1951.]

AR: Clothier; very banal, not a great teacher, I don't think.

SI: Okay, not very electrifying.

AR: He had no contact with the [undergraduates]. … We went to his [home]. He had a home "on the Banks," [along the Raritan River], on the other side. Actually, he had a cocktail party every once in awhile, but he had no real contact with the undergraduates.

SI: How soon after graduating did you go into the Navy and to Columbia?

AR: That was about a month. I got a job [in between graduation and enlisting].

SI: Yes, you were a metals analyst.

AR: That was a German company, incidentally, the American Platinum Works. I didn't find that out until I was working there.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: To go back to the USS *Wadsworth,* it was launched, and then, you went down to Boston for the commissioning.

AR: That's right, and then, went into the North Atlantic, on the Murmansk run. The troopships, ammunition ships and tankers were going over to [Russia], from the Atlantic to Murmansk, which is in Russia, but in via a northern trip, avoiding the … Northern Atlantic. We went and followed them, and the German U-boats were trying to torpedo them and we were trying to depth bomb the U-boats. That run took about four or five days at a time, as far as we went.

SI: When did you turn back?

AR: What?

SI: You did not go all the way Murmansk.

AR: No, we went about two-thirds of the way, and then, came back, then, went out on another run, and we actually hit two or three U-boats with depth bombs from the rear of our ship, with sonar. After that, we did that for about a month, and then, we went down to Guantanamo.

SI: When you were chasing the German U-boats and the ship was dropping the depth charges, what would you be doing during that period? Would you be helping them?

AR: On the bridge.

SI: You would be on the bridge.

AR: Or watching the sonar.

SI: Can you describe what that was like for you when you were hunting a sub?

AR: Well, we had a pattern of depth bombs that went off when you triggered it, and, as soon as you were over a U-boat, … they're pretty slow, you can slow down and, when you're right over them, let go.

SI: Is there a lot of pressure on the bridge during that time? Is it a very hectic atmosphere?

AR: Sure, but there was a lot of pressure being on an ammunition ship. When they got hit with a torpedo, it was a sight you'll never see. The whole sky opened up.

SI: Did your ship also have to help survivors?

AR: There were no survivors from those things. No survivors in the North Atlantic; it was so rough, you couldn't walk on the deck without being hooked onto a wire that went around the deck, [or else you would go] right over the side. My first emergency post was in a box above the bridge armed by three men, an officer, two enlisted men, and we could control the five-inch guns … from this box, arm them, point them, fire. To get into it, you had to climb up a ladder on the outside of the box and … drop down in. It was terrible in the North Atlantic. You're up way above the bridge, [you] get the full swing of the bridge when you're rolling. I knew I was going to be sick, so, I took a bucket up with me. When it was full, I took it down and emptied it, then, went back up again. It was terrible, [laughter] but I was only seasick for about three or four days. In the wardroom, where the officers ate, there was what they called a "fiddle board" on the table. There were stanchions by each chair and you locked yourself into those stanchions with whatever you were eating, and holes in the table, so that that stuff wouldn't be flying all over the place every time you're [rocking].

SI: During this duty, would you have to be out on the deck at all for watches?

AR: Sure, four on, four off, all the time.

SI: Would you be soaked during that period, with the water coming over the bridge in the rough seas?

AR: Sure, but the bridge was pretty watertight. … You didn't have to go out on the wing of the bridge; you'd get flooded. [If] you'd go down into a wave, the wave goes over that box I was telling you about.

SI: How did you feel during these first combat engagements with the German U-boats?

AR: Scared.

SI: Seeing the ships explode.

AR: Scared; they knew where you were, too. They didn't want to waste torpedoes on destroyers unless they had to, but, if they were in trouble, they could.

SI: How many ships were lost in that convoy, that you saw?

AR: Dozens, a lot. We lost a lot of ships.

SI: How many destroyers and other warships were there to protect the convoy?

AR: Only destroyers; half a dozen, maybe.

SI: Once a U-boat started attacking the ships, how quickly could you begin responding, get over to the area, try to attack the U-boat and drive it off?

AR: As soon as they got within torpedo range. So, we were about three miles away from the tankers and they have to get in through a ring of [destroyers], as much as you can, put a ring of destroyers around, but our sonar is on all the time and we're going back and forth. They're slow, so, we could go back and forth.

SI: You would get pings on the sonar, and then, head over to that area, but they would still be able to get off some torpedoes and sink some ships.

AR: Sure.

SI: After that duty was over, you said you went to Gitmo for your shakedown cruise.

AR: Yes, yes, in Guantanamo, in Cuba, and then, we went through the Panama Canal, and then, to Hawaii.

SI: What was the trip through the Panama Canal like?

AR: Beautiful. [laughter] I don't know, a lot of it is big, huge lakes and a destroyer is narrow enough not to come as close as you would think to the sides of the canal. We [he and his wife] went through the canal in another boat that was very close.

CR: Yes.

SI: During this time, during the shakedown and the trip out to Hawaii, as a gunnery officer, what were you doing? Were you just drilling with your men?

AR: Well, we were training, you know. There was a little rest and [relaxation], R&R, wasn't too bad, but it wasn't long, either.

SI: In Hawaii?

AR: No, in Cuba. We weren't very long in Hawaii. … Actually, in Hawaii, we were anchored out and Bill Gutter's ship came in, and I signaled them that I would be coming over. By the time I got halfway over, they lifted anchor and left. I missed them.

SI: After leaving Pearl Harbor, where was your first duty station or your first assignment?

AR: Kula Gulf. They had a big battle there, … near Guadalcanal, where the Marines were already ashore. There were Japanese cruisers going up and down the gulf north of Guadalcanal. At one time, we had a row of Japanese cruisers going one way and two lines of American destroyers going across, going in the other direction. So, we couldn't fire at them, because we couldn't take the chance of hitting our own ships that were on the other side, but there were a lot of destroyers and Japanese cruisers that went down.

SI: That was off of Guadalcanal.

AR: After Guadalcanal was taken, there was an island where we [went], it was a little bay, Purvis Bay, where we could go and anchor and go ashore, drink our warm beer, go back to the ship. That was R&R. Then, we went to Bougainville [Island]. We were the lead ship going into the Bougainville [operation]. They didn't have any maps or charts. There was an old British soldier we picked up on an island. He was on the yardarm. He knew the topography of going in. So, we were the lead ship. We were the first ones that got strafed by planes. All the rest of the fleet was behind us. My position for emergencies, at that time, was on a little platform on the second stack, smokestack, two smokestacks, fifty-millimeter on each side. You sight through a glass box with crosses on … both sides. As they came in, you shot at them. I was on one side, shooting, pulling the triggers, and I stopped and gave it to the enlisted man and ran around to the other side. In the meantime, a Jap plane came through strafing and strafed the place where I had just left; bullets, through the glass box, took the guy's head off. That was the enlisted man. … He died instantly, of course. He had carved a nut that he picked up in Panama and carved a skull on it. His ordinary job was in the engine room. He had that skull, with a keychain, hanging on the engineering board. Nobody would touch it for the rest of the time that I was on the ship. That was terrible.

SI: That was the first man you lost.

AR: That was the first man we lost. We lost a couple more at Bougainville. Then, we went to Green Island, and then, we went to New Guinea. There, we got into a battle, again with cruisers. We did the best we could and left. We never landed. We were trying to take New Guinea at that time; never made it.

SI: Going back to when you were facing the cruisers off of Guadalcanal, you said that, because of the way the ships were positioned, you could not risk hitting American ships. Did you exchange any fire with the Japanese, or were they firing at you at that time?

AR: They were firing at us. We tried to get through as fast as we could, because they were firing at us. They had nothing to lose. [laughter]

SI: Were you trying to get through to Guadalcanal or were they trying to get through to their forces on Guadalcanal?

AR: I can't answer that. I don't remember.

SI: Did any of the hits come close? Did they hit any of the other destroyers?

AR: I don't know if anybody got hit there. We did not get hit.

SI: I know your ship went through several air assaults at Bougainville. That first one was obviously very memorable, but do you remember any of the other air attacks?

AR: Same kind of thing. We didn't get hit again. We did knock down some planes. These weren't *kamikazes* yet.

SI: Was that unusual for you to be firing a gun? From what I understood, officers did not normally do that.

AR: One officer with two guns; that was not unusual. …

SI: Does anything stand out in your memory about Green Island and that operation?

AR: [No].

SI: The ship also did some shore bombardment in Bougainville. Do you remember any of that? Were you involved in that?

AR: Just haphazard bombardment, because it was a totally Japanese island. The troops, our troops, came in afterward.

SI: I mean at Bougainville, after the landings had taken place.

AR: We were still bombing over their heads, took them awhile. It's in far enough, so [that] we couldn't help them anymore, but they had a lot of troops in there.

SI: They would use the five-inch guns to help in the shore bombardments. Would you be part of the crew that would be firing them?

AR: I don't know if I was a gunnery officer then or not. I think I was a gunnery officer. I had several different posts. One that I told you about, … I was a gunnery officer, I was a CIC officer, combat information [center], for over a year, then, I was first lieutenant. On a ship, first lieutenant is the third in charge. He's in charge of all the rigging on the boat and all the deck stuff, all of the anti-fire equipment. One time, I stuck my fingers in a … 400-volt receptacle. My nails rolled back. They turned black and rolled back and fell off, but grew back. … 440 doesn't kill you, 110 kills you. That's interesting. So, first lieutenant, I was on the deck. There was one incident on the deck, which happened much later on. I'll get to that when we get to the radar picket jobs.

SI: You mentioned Green Island, which you do not really recall much about. Then, there was that operation near New Guinea where you engaged with some of the cruisers. Do you recall what happened after that?

AR: I'm losing my train of thought about what happened what time. I don't remember when we went to Iwo Jima.

SI: Before Iwo Jima, there would be Guam, Tinian and Saipan. I forget what the island chain was called. It is not the Marshall Islands.

AR: The Marshalls, we didn't do much at the Marshalls. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about the Marianas Islands, Tinian, Saipan and Guam. Do you remember those operations?

AR: I don't.

SI: What about the battle we were just talking about, the Battle of the Philippine Sea, where the aircraft carriers fought each other. Do you recall that?

AR: I don't think we were involved in that; were we?

SI: I think your ship was screening for the aircraft carriers at that time.

AR: We were screening, a lot of screening for Halsey [Admiral William Frederick Halsey, Jr.], and who was the other guy? Halsey was one, and, when they changed, it was the same carrier squadron, Halsey had it at one time, when it was called [Task Force] 34, and then, somebody

else had it [Admiral Raymond Spruance]. The next time, it was called [Task Force] 54, but the same carriers and the same destroyer screen.

SI: What was involved in screening? Was it just going out ahead and sweeping for aircraft carriers and trying to detect aircraft?

AR: Aircraft, mostly aircraft [at] that time. The Japs didn't have a lot of submarines. The ones they had were pretty small, not like the U-boats. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: In a typical day, when you were not engaged in any kind of combat, what would you do during your duty hours and your off hours?

AR: You slept every chance you got, and the officers' berths were two rooms, or one room, two beds, one on top and one on the bottom, and a desk, and a curtain across it, … underneath was a tray for each bed where you kept your clothes, … but, because of fire risk, everything was zipped in a fireproof cover. So, as soon as you got out there, this was the South Pacific, you know, everything was eighty degrees, as soon as you got out [of bed], you zipped it up. When you opened it up again, all the sweat was still in there. You got back in and slept three hours again, not much rest, saltwater showers. We could make our own drinking water, but not our showers.

SI: Would you usually get your supplies from a battleship, or would you be in port enough that you were able to be supplied from land?

AR: Mostly from carriers, and they gave us what they didn't want. [laughter] I learned to love raw rutabagas.

SI: Rutabagas?

AR: Yes, raw. I ate them raw, a crate of rutabagas. Nobody wanted them; I ate them. [laughter]

SI: Would there be long periods of time when you would not have fresh food, or fresh fruits and vegetables?

AR: Sure, long time, long periods. We had powdered milk, we had fake butter, which tasted like cheese, powdered eggs, never ate a fresh egg, Spam, no meat, no poultry.

SI: You were in some major invasions, such as Guam. When a ship like yours is involved in an invasion, what would you be doing? What would your role be in the invasion?

AR: We would be bombing a grid, so [that] they got ashore. Once they were established ashore, … we didn't have range to get over them. So, it was early on that we were [involved], probably a thousand yards offshore.

SI: After the Guam operation was finished and the operations in the Marianas were finished, then, you made your way back to the West Coast for repairs and an overhaul. Do you remember if they added anything that affected your work, or if you were involved in that, making sure new equipment got aboard or new things were installed?

AR: The crew, we were there for thirty days. [The] crew split in half; half had leave for fifteen days and the other half was in the navy yard. I got home by NATS, Naval Air Transport Service, got home. We got married. Then, we rode back, because we had one lower [berth] for the two of us, came back by train, and we spent fifteen days in a Quonset hut. They were really pretty nice, big Quonset hut, split in half. Each half had a little porch and a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and a bedroom. So, that was pretty nice. … That was our honeymoon. Then, I went back over again, left her in San Diego.

SI: How much notice did you have to plan the wedding and notify people that you were getting married? Did he just call you up one day and say, "I will be there in a few days and we are getting married then," or were you able to arrange it by mail at all?

AR: I sent her mail from Peleliu and Palau, from there. We were there, but there was nothing to do. There were no Japs in there. I sent her a letter from there, saying … I was coming home and I'd like to get married. I didn't know how long it was [going to take].

CR: … He had about three weeks, I think.

AR: Was it three weeks before I got back?

CR: I think so.

AR: There was not much to get ready.

CR: Just called everybody up.

SI: With the rationing that was going on, was it difficult to get anything for the reception, or a wedding dress?

CR: No, I didn't have a white wedding dress.

AR: We didn't have much of a reception.

CR: No, … the wedding and the ceremony, the ceremony and a supper, whatever it was, was at my aunt's house [in] Perth Amboy.

AR: I can't hear you.

CR: You were there. [laughter]

SI: Maybe I should ask you, Mrs. Roth, did you find he was a different person when he came back from having been in combat in the Pacific?

CR: Yes. He was not the jolly guy that left.

SI: Do you feel you had been changed by your time overseas and how much you had seen?

AR: I was convinced I wasn't coming back.

SI: You had become fatalistic.

AR: Sure. There were too many near misses.

SI: In that first half of your Navy experience, before you came home to get married, what were some of the closest calls you had? You described where the man was shot right after you had left, which was pretty close. Were there other similar experiences that you recall?

AR: When we were in battle, we used to swing our boats over the side. The davits were hung over the side, the boat hanging on the davit, so [that] you could get the boat in the water quickly if you started to go down. We had a *kamikaze* come down. … I was standing right on the deck next to the boat. *Kamikaze* came down, hit the boat, take the boat off, clean, and go down into the water; shrapnel all around me, not a scratch.

CR: … What about that knife you used to carry with you wherever you went, a penknife, or something?

AR: Oh, that was, I carried it around for good luck or something.

CR: Yes, you wouldn't go into battle without it.

AR: Yes. I would be up on deck, general quarters [sounded], I ran down to the room, got my little penknife, took it back up to my [station].

SI: It was a good luck charm.

AR: That's it. …

SI: How did you feel about having to go back out into the Pacific?

AR: I really felt like I was not coming back. There were too many near misses, and we were going back to the worst part of the war. Okinawa was the worst part of the war for destroyers.

SI: Before we talk about Okinawa in depth, does anything stand out in your mind about Iwo Jima, in that period?

AR: We got hit at Iwo Jima, again, just a nick. At Iwo Jima, we were bombing our grid [and] we lost communication. The Captain said, "Roth, go ashore, find out where our grid was." I took a motor whale boat, got as close as I could, climbed across LSTs, LCVPs. The island is volcanic dust. You get on the island, you go up to your knee in black, volcanic dust. I got a guy; twenty-five yards in front of me, they were dug in. I found a guy who gave me the information I needed and I got … the hell back on the ship as quick as I could. That was a very successful operation, and it was very tough. There was practically no ground.

SI: When you went ashore, was that just a few days into the invasion or was it the first day?

AR: It was the day of the invasion.

SI: The first day, wow, because they only got in a few hundred yards maybe, just like you described.

AR: Maybe less.

SI: Was there any artillery landing in the area where you were trying to find somebody to give you the coordinates?

AR: No.

SI: Could you hear gunfire?

AR: Sure, but I couldn't tell whose it was. I didn't spend much time there. [laughter]

SI: Does anything else stand out about your time at Iwo Jima? You were there for a few days, providing direct support. Do you remember seeing the flag go up on Mount Suribachi?

AR: No, I don't know how long we were close enough to see that. That was probably a week in before that happened.

SI: I was also reading, just before you left for Iwo Jima, there was an incident where your ship stopped a Japanese raid on an island that you were covering. Do you recall that at all? It happened at night. It was by Peleliu.

AR: … Peleliu? That was the island, … I didn't think we stopped there. I thought there was nobody on the island.

SI: From what I read, you were patrolling between …

AR: Palau and Peleliu, two little islands close together.

SI: Yes, and there was a group of fifty Japanese soldiers in a small boat. They were going to land on Peleliu, blow up airplanes and try to wreck the airfield, but the USS *Wadsworth* spotted them and attacked them.

AR: I don't remember. That's when I wrote to her; [laughter] maybe that's why I don't remember.

SI: Okay, maybe you were busy writing the letter. After Iwo Jima, you were in the Philippines for a little while.

AR: Yes.

SI: Does anything stand out about that? You were doing support operations.

AR: We were in a southern island, not in the major island. We didn't see any real activity in the Philippines that I can remember. We knew there was a lot going on, and there were ships that were on both sides of the Philippines, but we were in a waterway between the southernmost island and the rest. … I don't remember any action in the Philippines, *in* the Philippines. Around the outside, there was a lot of action with cruisers and carriers, and one of the Japanese carriers got hit there, didn't they?

SI: Do you mean at the Battle of Leyte Gulf?

AR: What gulf?

SI: Leyte Gulf. That was where the two fleets came together in a "T" and the Americans basically blew away the Japanese surface fleet.

AR: Yes.

SI: After this brief time in the Philippines, then, you got ready to go to Okinawa. What do you remember about the invasion of Okinawa?

AR: Well, it was a tough place. The invasion was tough. That's where [American journalist] Ernie Pyle got [killed], on a little island off Okinawa [le Shima]. The southern part of the island got taken pretty quickly. Naha was the name of the city, but, then, the Japs started … the *kamikaze* trips down from Japan to Okinawa. So, they took the destroyers and put them on radar picket duty, so that we could pick up the planes on radar a couple of hours before they could pick it up from the ground, so [that] they were prepared. … There were two ships on every radar picket spot on the top and side of the island. They were coming down from Japan. They started *kamikazes* on the destroyers. We lost dozens of destroyers. One time, I was on picket, and, when you're on a radar picket, you're ready for anything. We were on with this ship that I … had some friends on, [and a] *kamikaze* came straight down, hit them right on the bridge. They went down in five minutes. There was nobody in the water to pick up. That was tough to watch, but we were there for a long time, a couple of weeks; lost more destroyers there than in the whole rest of the war.

SI: Your ship was there for quite awhile, about a month-and-a-half or so, from late April to early June, and fought off a very high number of attacks. You described the incident with the whale

boat before, where you were next to it. Do you remember anything else about that day, when you were attacked and that plane kept making passes at the *Wadsworth*?

AR: I don't think that the plane made more than one pass, because he was coming straight down. *Kamikazes* came straight down, and, if you looked up, you knew they were coming straight down, even if they were a half mile off. It was a terrible sight, made you want to run.

SI: Had you seen *kamikazes* before then? Had they used *kamikazes* against your ship?

AR: Once, … but they [were] putting *kamikazes* [in the air] every day. We could pick them up [as] soon as they took off from Japan.

SI: The first time you saw this, what went through your mind?

AR: That it was crazy, suicide.

SI: In this kind of heavy combat, was anybody unable to take the stress of it?

AR: … Our forty-millimeter guns were bulged out on the side of the boat. We had a guy who was on that gun [who] jumped off the boat. When you looked up there, it always looked like it was aimed right at you. He jumped off, didn't survive, only one.

CR: What about the doctor?

AR: Oh, we had a doctor onboard who was psychotic. … Part of his duty was … censoring mail; wouldn't do it. He wrapped himself up in canvas jackets before he would get out of bed in the morning. He wouldn't do anything except take care of sick bay, nothing else. He ate practically nothing.

SI: Your ship received the Presidential Unit Citation for its work off of Okinawa as part of the radar picket.

AR: That was late in the war.

SI: Was there any kind of regularity to the attacks? Would they attack at a certain time of the day or was it all hours of the day and night?

AR: No, not at night. They couldn't see well at night. It was usually early in the day. By night, they couldn't see well enough.

SI: Were there usually very few survivors when a ship was hit? Were you involved in rescuing survivors at that point?

AR: We never picked up any survivors. They were pretty accurate. The one that hit that motor whale boat just missed by a hair. They did a lot of damage when they hit, no matter where they

hit. Sometimes, it took the destroyer a couple of days to go down. Those people were saved, but we never went after one of them.

SI: They had other ships that would take care of that. After Okinawa, then, your ship conducted operations off the Chinese coast.

AR: Yes, between the Chinese coast and Okinawa. We used to pick up junks. We got so we could tell the Chinese from the Japanese. The Japanese, we incarcerated; the Chinese, we let go.

SI: Were they Japanese military or civilians?

AR: Not military.

SI: Would you keep them prisoner?

AR: Prisoner until we could dump them someplace.

SI: Would you sink the *sampans* or would you take them in?

AR: No, we'd sink the ship. Of course, … some destroyers couldn't determine whether they were Japanese or Chinese. We didn't want; it's better to get (ship more than a ship?).

SI: Do you think they were doing that on purpose or that they just never figured out a way to determine it?

AR: Well, the Chinese had no fleet at all. Even in the South China Sea, there was no real traffic from the Chinese, but you had to determine who they were. You couldn't tell by just looking at the boat.

SI: Would you do any shore bombardment at that point or was it just these anti-shipping operations?

AR: Anti-shipping, no bombardment. What was the bay that we got into just before the end of the war?

SI: Was it in China?

AR: It was in Japan.

SI: The first record I found of your ship going to Japan was when you went to Nagasaki after the war.

AR: That's right, Nagasaki. We picked up prisoners that had been in camps, not people from H-bomb; there was another place we picked up.

SI: Was it Sasebo?

CR: Sasebo.

AR: Yes, Sasebo, ex-prisoners, POWs, we picked up, took back to Okinawa.

SI: When did you first hear about the atomic bomb?

AR: I think at Nagasaki.

SI: That was about a month after that. Did you hear about it at the time that they dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

AR: No.

SI: Do you remember getting the word that the war was over on V-J Day?

AR: We didn't believe it.

SI: When did it sink in?

AR: I'm thinking of … a place, a big bay where a lot of American ships were, Nakagusuku Wan. You come across that at all? … That was before the signing of the treaty.

SI: Are you talking about the surrender in Tokyo Bay?

AR: … It wasn't Tokyo Bay, Nakagusuku. The Japanese name was Nakagusuku Wan. "*Wan*" means "bay." It was a storm came up; … what do we have here?

SI: Was it a hurricane?

AR: Hurricane.

SI: A typhoon?

AR: Typhoon came up and we had to get out of there. Of course, all the ships were at anchor and it was terrible weather, the worst of the whole war. [Editor's Note: On October 9, 1945, a severe typhoon caused major damage to the US fleet anchored at Nakagusuku Wan, also known as Buckner Bay.]

SI: I know a lot of ships were wrecked in typhoons towards the end of the war, particularly around Okinawa.

AR: But, we got out of there, and, after the typhoon, we went to Japan, south of Yokosuka. We were in Yokosuka when the treaty was signed. That's right outside of Tokyo. We were pretty wary, even after that.

SI: There were fears that the Japanese might go back on the surrender.

AR: Yes. In Yokosuka, we got ashore and we went to a bar, barroom. I drank some sake, too much. I fell backwards out of a window. They carried me back to the ship in a litter. I can remember waking up in this litter [laughter] with them taking me up onto the ship.

SI: Was the bar abandoned?

AR: No.

SI: Were there Japanese serving you?

AR: Yes. Luckily, I was with some guys that were either teetotalers or held a lot of alcohol. Sounds like I'm a drunk, but … we got so little alcohol, out of all the time. Even in Purvis Bay, … we carried cans of beer.

SI: It was the weak beer.

AR: 2.3 or so.

SI: Just in general, how long would you go without setting foot on land? What was the longest stretch you went without going ashore somewhere?

AR: We could go three months without getting any fresh food. Sometimes, we could get fuel, but nothing [else], fresh food, for as long as three months.

SI: Did you ever make it to the full three months without fresh food?

AR: I guess that was about the longest [stretch]. The crew wasn't happy. Everybody got a little touchy.

SI: Were there any R&R options on the ship?

AR: Yes, we had, I think, a week in Australia.

CR: I think that's where you fell out of the window.

AR: No.

CR: Yokosuka?

AR: No, that was in Yokosuka.

CR: Well, in Australia, you drove a streetcar.

AR: Yes.

SI: Okay, that sounds interesting. What happened there?

AR: Four of us got a sixty-gallon tank of airplane gas. We rented a car when we got to Australia. We rented a house, with a room for each guy. They fed us breakfast in the morning, the people who owned the house. One night, we started driving around, ran into a bus, thought we were in trouble. We got out; one of the crew was driving the trolley car. [laughter] They got the trolley car driver drunk. He was in the back and they were running the trolley. So, we took off. [laughter]

SI: When you were at sea and you were not in combat, did you have to deal with boredom a lot or did you always have something to do?

AR: There was always cleaning to do. You know, salt water does everything; always something to do.

CR: Didn't you play cribbage or checkers or bridge?

AR: We played cribbage. I played cribbage and I played, late in the war, I had a bridge foursome, played some in the wardroom, played a little bridge.

SI: You do not have to give me exact figures, but just roughly, as you remember them, how many of the officers were like yourself, coming out of the midshipmen's schools, and how many were Annapolis men or Reservists?

AR: We had about thirteen officers, I think. I think only two or three of us were midshipmen.

SI: The rest were Annapolis men.

AR: Annapolis, or enlisted men who got promoted.

SI: Were they called "mustangs?"

AR: Yes.

SI: Was there a split with the regular Navy officers?

AR: Sure, they were snobs. They looked down at us.

SI: Would they not socialize with you or give you bad duty?

AR: Well, I always hated the Executive Officer, because of what happened in the beginning. The Captain [John F. Walsh] didn't stay long. He became squadron commander, and then, another guy, by the name of [Raymond Dennis] Fusselman, came on. He was much less capable than the first captain.

SI: What did he do that made you think that he was less capable? Do you remember anything specific or was it just a general sense?

AR: He had to depend on the Executive Officer to make decisions. … He was never on top of the ball. Captain has a berth right behind the bridge. He could take his time getting up if there was something going on. He just didn't seem to be on the ball.

SI: What about the relationship between the enlisted men and the officers? Was it kept pretty strict on a destroyer?

AR: It was distinct. There was no problem. Even the, what do they call the; there's something between an enlisted man [and an officer]?

SI: Warrant officers.

AR: Warrant officers, yes. I knew it had a "W." We had a warrant officer, a couple of warrant officers. They were respected by everybody. Of course, those were real salts.

SI: You would not socialize at all with enlisted men.

AR: No, none.

SI: Did they always have to salute officers, even at sea, or in combat?

AR: Never any [problem]; took orders.

SI: How often would people from the crew leave, and then, new sailors or new officers come in? Was there any turnover?

AR: Very little. I was on the same ship the whole time I was in the service.

SI: It was pretty much always the same men.

AR: Enlisted men, yes. There was turnover in the officers.

SI: Would there be a reason why they would leave the ship? Did they want to spread out seasoned officers?

AR: Well, the doctor left and a new doctor came on, but I think that was done for his good health.

SI: Going back to Nagasaki, when you picked up those prisoners, could you see the destruction that the atom bomb had caused?

AR: [No]. [Editor's Note: Dr. Roth shakes his head to indicate, "No."]

SI: Did you go ashore there at all?

AR: [No].

SI: Did you get to interact with any of the prisoners who came aboard?

CR: They can't see [you; say], "No."

AR: No.

SI: Before the atom bombs and the end of the war, had you thought the war would go on for much longer?

AR: No, I thought we … had them pretty well licked by that time, by the end of Okinawa.

SI: After that brief period in Japan, then, you were sent back to the United States.

AR: I made my own way back. I had enough points. I had more points than I needed to leave the ship. I left the ship in Japan. I packed everything up and I had the ship's carpenter make me a box. I sent the box home with all my belongings, took what I could carry, got off in Japan, went back to Okinawa. In Okinawa, I picked up a troopship that was going back to Seattle, got on. It was terrible. … You had to stand in line for a meal and, by the time you ate, it was [time to get] ready for the next meal, so, you had to stand in line again. Fortunately, I found a guy who I knew, as a civilian, who was an officer on that ship, and he took me into his stateroom. I slept on the floor, but I ate in the wardroom. So, the seven or eight days it took on the [troopship] to get back was painless. Then, I got into Seattle, and there were a number of officers in Seattle who were trying to get to New York to get decommissioned. We tried everything. We finally got the railroad to give us a sleeper. A sleeper had twelve berths. We had eighteen guys. So, two guys could sleep in all the lowers and one guy in the upper. So, we hooked on to a train going to Chicago. The first train didn't go further than Chicago, but we had a porter that was assigned to that one car out to Chicago. They took our car off in the Chicago railway, out in the boondocks, all alone. So, we found a guy who took us into the railroad station, and they said they would have a train for us to hook up into in two days. So, we all went our [own] way. Two days later, twelve guys showed up. The other six were gone. [laughter] I don't know what happened to them. That train took us into Philadelphia, got off late at night, carrying a rifle and some belongings on my back. Carol was living with her stepmother at that time. [I] took a train to Newark, got off, took a cab to Millburn, where she was. … I rang the doorbell. Carol, you don't want me to tell this?

CR: It's not important anymore.

AR: … What was she, your stepmother?

CR: Yes.

AR: [Carol's stepmother] opened the door and she said, "I hope you don't think you're going to stay in my house." So, I told Carol to get her clothes, kept the cab and went back down and got a hotel room in New Jersey, in …

CR: Newark.

AR: Newark. That was my trip home. … I was not actually discharged. I was on some kind of a …

SI: Were you put in the Reserves?

AR: Reserves, yes, the Reserves, for a couple of years. I was already in medical school by that time.

CR: You were honorably discharged in '55.

SI: Okay, ten years.

CR: Yes.

SI: This is jumping ahead a little bit, but, when the Korean Conflict broke out, were you afraid that you would be recalled to active duty?

AR: I don't think I would have been [recalled].

SI: You were not concerned about it.

AR: No. I was in medical school at that time, too.

SI: What did you decide to do first, once you got back to New Jersey and settled down with Mrs. Roth?

AR: I wanted to try to get into medical school. I was lucky. NYU [New York University] accepted me right away, Duke [University]. That was, I think, in April or something. I was going to start in September. … First of all, I had been away from school for so long that I …

CR: You went back to Rutgers.

AR: I went back to Rutgers. They told me I could take some courses, sit in on some courses, and I did, for several months. I also had a part-time job in a milk purifying business in New Brunswick. … I did that for the whole summer and, finally, enrolled in medical school in the fall.

SI: Did you take time off between being discharged and finding work?

AR: No. I found the work … in the milk laboratory right away, and Carol went back to the …

CR: No, I worked for the Rutgers University Press, when we were living in New Brunswick.

AR: The guy who ran the Rutgers University [Press] …

CR: Was Earl [Schenck] Miers, [who] you probably know [of]. …

AR: But, he had a kind of a disease.

CR: … I think he had palsy.

AR: Yes, cerebral palsy. [Editor's Note: Earl Schenck Miers helped found the Rutgers University Press in 1936 and directed its operations for many years. He suffered from athetosis, a form of cerebral palsy.]

CR: But, he was fantastic.

AR: Brilliant guy, wrote some books. … We lived in a rooming house. The floor that we were on had four rooms, ours and three others, and one bathroom in the hall. That was a happy time for Carol. We had a hotplate that we could cook coffee on.

CR: That was fun.

SI: When you started at NYU, did you move into the city or did you continue to commute from New Jersey?

AR: Moved into the city. …

CR: We got an apartment on East 66th Street.

AR: Do you remember what happened before that?

CR: Yes, but it's …

AR: Somebody got us an apartment in a …

SI: Do you want me to turn off the tape?

CR: No. We don't have to go into that.

AR: … In a janitor's apartment in a mid-rise in Brooklyn. So, we moved stuff in, went out to eat, came back; there was a black rodent carpet on the kitchen floor.

CR: Cockroaches. [laughter] So, we didn't move in.

AR: We didn't move in. We lost … what we had to pay to get the apartment. Anyhow, we got a decent apartment on East 66th Street, and I could walk from Bellevue, at 32nd Street, all the way up First Avenue, with my box of bones, without worrying about them falling out on a subway or a bus.

SI: What stands out in your memory about your time at NYU? You mentioned that you were worried that you would have difficulty getting back into the swing of school. Was that a problem or did you pick it back up?

AR: First day, we walked into the anatomy lab and there was 120 of us and there were thirty cadavers. … The professor stood up and said, "There are five of you at this table. At the end of this semester, only three of you will be left." So, the cadaver was going to be used up and one of the students would be already kicked out.

SI: Were most of your classmates there also veterans?

AR: No, very few of them, and I studied like you wouldn't believe. Carol couldn't rustle a newspaper without upsetting me. I really crammed. I studied so hard. Do you remember those days?

CR: [Yes].

SI: Was there a particular area or specialty you were focusing on?

AR: I was always interested in cardiology, but it was a long haul. First, I had to get through four years of school and a year of internship, and then, two years of residency before I could pick a specialty.

SI: You did your residency at Bellevue Hospital and Brooklyn Veterans Hospital.

AR: Yes. … At Bellevue, I was getting a GI Bill [stipend]. I was getting …

CR: Twenty-five dollars a month.

AR: Yes, but … I got five hundred dollars of my tuition for the four years, I think, from the GI Bill, twenty-five dollars a month … for my internship. My residency, I got a hundred dollars a month, I think. … No, I got seventy dollars a month, second year. [At] the VA, I got twelve hundred dollars a year, worked all the time, hair got gray; mine fell out, her hair got gray. [laughter]

SI: Particularly working in the veterans hospital so soon after the war, as a doctor, did you see any lasting effects of the war in your patients?

AR: I didn't see any psychiatric patients. I saw mostly cardiac patients.

SI: You saw no impact there, like veterans' cardiac systems being affected by increased stress.

AR: I couldn't put my hand on it. …

SI: Then, you started your own practice in Perth Amboy.

AR: No. While I still was in residency, … we moved to Metuchen, New Jersey, and I started covering a couple of internists', cardiologists' nights, when I wasn't on at the hospital. I drove every day from Perth Amboy across the river to the VA hospital, stopped and picked up one of the other residents there who lived on Staten Island, back and forth every day, except when I was on at night. When I got through with my training, I went to work for those two guys. By that time, I was making 17,500 dollars a year. Is that right?

CR: [Yes].

AR: Here I was, how old?

CR: Thirty.

AR: Yes, thirty.

CR: Thirty-one, thirty-three.

AR: Carol had a stillbirth in my fourth year of medical school; telling me not to talk about this?

CR: It's all right, but it's immaterial. … We're up to [when] you were in practice with Jack, and with (Cleft?) and (Margarette?), and then, (Cleft?) got sick, (Margarette?) …

AR: I'll make it short. She had two more unsuccessful pregnancies. We went to a doctor, … a well-known hematologist, who told us she was not going to have a child, we should adopt if we wanted a child. We decided not to. She then got pregnant again and went to bed for nine months. … I bought our first television set, and she had a successful pregnancy. In fifteen or sixteen months, she had a second child, and I was thirty-three when the first one was born. He is now an interventional cardiologist in Milwaukee, very successful. Our daughter went to Rutgers for her master's degree. What's her degree in? What's Amy's degree in?

CR: Molecular biology.

AR: Molecular biology. She's a gene cloner in Detroit. Her husband runs the lab. … They live on grants from the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. She was just here, went home a couple of days ago.

SI: You mentioned that you were working for these two doctors in Perth Amboy, and then, they invited you to join their practice.

AR: Well, I'll tell you what happened. At a certain point, the older one had a heart attack. I went to his house, took him to the hospital and he never went back to work fully after that. [The]

second one smoked two packs a day, had emphysema, COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], never went back to work again. So, I worked solo for how long?

CR: I don't remember how many years.

AR: I don't know, for a number of years. Then, I took a young guy in with me; a year or two later, I took another one in with me; a couple of years later, another one, and they all became partners in three years. I treated them very well. … The first year, they worked for me; the second year, they got a third of the practice; third year, they got an equal part of the practice. When I was seventy-one, in 1993, we had already owned a place down here, where I came down weekends [that] I could get away. In January of '93, [we] came down here intending to spend three months here, and then, go back and work April 1st. I was here a month [when] we decided not to go back, bought this house and retired.

SI: You obviously had a very long career in medicine and we cannot get into all the aspects of it, but, in general, what was the most interesting or enjoyable part of your job?

AR: I was a pioneer in the recordings that you could take in a CCU, cardiac care unit. I organized the first CCU in Middlesex County. The first monitor that was bought was bought by my mother and father. I was Director of Cardiology there for a number of years, until they hired a full-time cardiologist. … I continued with my practice, but the full-time man they brought in always respected me and cleared things with me before he did them, which was rewarding.

SI: Was there a particular incident or something that caused you to realize that you needed to create the center?

AR: Just that I was reading about what was going on all the time. I took courses constantly. Three or four times a year, I was away for a week or so at Heart House down in Washington. [Editor's Note: Heart House is the headquarters for the American College of Cardiology.]

CR: You were also president of the Middlesex County Heart Association.

AR: Yes.

CR: Which you were busy with.

AR: Well, that was kind of an honorary thing.

SI: Just from what I could see in news clippings, you were very involved in the Middlesex County Heart Association, the national association and the American Medical Association.

AR: American Heart Association.

SI: Yes. Would you like to say anything about your involvement with any of those groups, or any aspect of it that particularly interested you?

AR: Not really. I wasn't doing any teaching on that level. I taught interns and residents. I was busy enough with that. There was something else. I also had a job at a county hospital.

CR: Roosevelt [Care Center].

AR: Where I had a cardiac clinic once a week and I read all the cardiograms for the hospital, and I got paid a salary. I know, after twenty-six years of doing that, my salary had been going up and up, because it was a Civil Service thing, and they wanted me to resign and they would give me four more years of seniority, which made my salary, what was it?

CR: I don't remember.

AR: Astronomical for …

CR: Retirement.

AR: Made my pension.

CR: And, now, you're paying for his pension.

AR: I made my pension over forty thousand dollars a year. …

CR: And he's paying for it.

AR: Yes, you're paying for it, [laughter] and my pension is still going up.

SI: That is good.

AR: After they did this, they rehired me, fee for service, because they had nobody else to do the job. It was really ridiculous. I was getting the same pay and … my pension was way up. The pension keeps going up every year, even though the pension [fund] is broke. …

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say about your career, or any part of your life that we skipped over?

AR: My parents were unusual people. My father was the most moral man I ever knew. There was nothing they wouldn't do for me, both of them. Unfortunately, when my mother was dying, she was almost comatose and my associate was trying to put a catheter in to keep her alive. I didn't want that. She would have suffered longer. So, I went there and I asked him to leave and I stayed with her until she died. She was eighty-eight.

CR: Eighty-six.

AR: Eighty-six years old when she died. My father lived to the age of ninety-five and died in his sleep. He had an aide who stayed with him all the time and treated him very wonderfully. He read vociferously. Every Sunday, he would pick up the book review, make a list of the books

he wanted from the library and he would send her there during the week to get the books for him. He read constantly. I can't minimize what they did for me. Neither of them had more than a high school education. He didn't even have a high school education, but they were wonderful parents.

SI: Is there anything that you think we should add to the record?

CR: No, I think we've had a very wonderful life, and hope it continues without any (wars?).

SI: That is good.

AR: I have peripheral neuropathy, [which makes it] hard for me to walk. I get around, [but] I need help. I do everything I can. I fell and broke my right humerus, approximately right up here, in January. I was in a straightjacket, like this, for six weeks. I had such a great recovery. It was a wonderful. I can do this; I can touch my ear.

SI: That is good.

AR: I do exercises every day. I go for therapy two or three times a week. I try to keep going.

CR: Well, you're doing a great job.

SI: Yes, I hope you both continue to do well.

AR: You're doing a great job, because you're doing all the work.

CR: And you've done a great job.

SI: Thank you. If there is anything you want to add, we can either add it now or, when you get the transcript, you can write in sections. Thank you very much for having me here and for giving me so much of your time. For now, this will conclude our interview with Dr. Arthur L. Roth. Thank you again.

--END OF INTERVIEW---

Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 12/14/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/14/10
Reviewed by Arthur L. Roth 9/18/10