

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD N. ROTH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Richard N. Roth on June 9, 1999 in Somerset, New Jersey. I'd like to thank you, Mr. Roth, for taking time to give us this interview today. To begin the interview, I would like you to tell me a little bit about your father and his family's background.

Richard Roth: My father, his name was Jacob Roth. I imagine he was born in New York City. My father ... was born in 1894 and he died when he was sixty-two years old, approximately, and he was primarily in the meat business. I worked with him for a short time between the time I finished high school and went into the service.

SH: Was this in New York?

RR: No, in Newark. We lived in Newark. He was born in New York. He grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and we lived in Newark. However, for a short period of time, we lived right here in New Brunswick for maybe a year. The way it worked out, my mother died when I was two years old, and my father remarried right away, and I lived with my grandparents in Elizabeth for a little while until he remarried. Then by that time, I think, I went to kindergarten right here in New Brunswick. In fact, the street is not even there anymore. ... Then we moved to Newark with my family, to Newark, and we lived there in a couple of different locations in Newark. ... The first school I attended was a school in Newark called South Seventeenth Street School. Then we moved to another section of Newark, and I finished my grammar school in a school called Maple Avenue School in Weequahic. It was the Indian-named section of Newark. ... Then I went on to, in 1937, I went to Weequahic High. We moved up to Clinton Place in Newark, and I attended Weequahic High. I was a student-athlete or an athlete-student. I loved that stuff, and when I graduated in 1941, I just about got my draft notice, and then I thought, "I have my draft notice. I don't want to be a foot soldier." I attended a school called Casey Jones School of Aeronautics, which might ensure my getting into the Air Force. ... It was very, it was the beginning of flying, primary, and they tell you, "This is a wing, this is an engine." ... I attended that and I worked part-time for [my father], he was still in the meat business, and then I went into service. You want me to continue?

SH: Let's step back and talk about your mother's background. Can you tell me your mother's name?

RR: My real mother's name was Flora Book. She died when I was one year old. I really never knew that name until I went to get my driver's license at age seventeen. ... My father had remarried when I was only two years old, and he married a woman, her name was Minnie Kennedy, not connected to the Kennedy family, but she was sort of a Yankee from Connecticut and she was my mother really. The name of Flora Book was just a surprise to me.

SH: So you never met any of your mother's parents or family.

RR: Oh, yes, I did. They were introduced to me throughout the years. "Oh, this is your uncle, this is your aunt, this is your cousin." ... Then at age seventeen, when I went to get my driver's license, I said to my father, "Who was Flora Book?" and then he told me. ... Then all of those, my mother's original relatives I didn't know, and I did see [them] throughout the years, not on a

regular basis, but I do know them [and am] able to call them up and speak with them, go out with them once in a while.

SH: Was your father active in the Jewish faith? Were you part of a temple?

RR: He was. I don't recall the name, because I'm not very religious myself, although I was confirmed at age thirteen. I don't say he was active. He was not active. He attended the temple, and I attended, but I never followed through.

SH: Your grandmother that you lived with in Elizabeth, was that your father's mother?

RR: My father's father and mother, yes. William Roth ... was like an icon in Elizabeth. He came here when he was around eight years old from Hungary, and he became a very big businessman, also in the meat business. In fact, he had one of the top jobs with Swift and Company in New Jersey, Swift and Company, which is a well-known company. ... He started the kosher division, and him being a Hungarian Jew, whatever he was, and he probably had the background, I never knew that. He ... had that job. My father also had seven brothers, six besides himself, and one sister, very large family, all in that meat business in one way or another, and my grandfather was very instrumental in the Jewish life. In fact, he probably built one of those temples in Elizabeth by himself.

SH: It was that big a family.

RR: Yes. Some of the uncles, I remember were, they were sort of religious. My father ... took it as it was, went to the temples on holidays ... I think my mother, she was a little more religious than my father. She did observe kosher at the beginning of my life, but as she got older and my father did lose his sight, probably around six or seven years before he died. I remember him going to a doctor in Morristown, and then my mother at that point went to work. She worked in a store in Newark called Kressge's Department Store, which is no longer there. I like Newark. Newark was a great city, but it's another story why it's not great anymore.

SH: When your father met Minnie Kennedy, was he traveling? Is that how he met her in Connecticut?

RR: Probably. Maybe it was sort of, you know, you meet him and you meet her. I don't know if he was traveling. He wasn't a traveling salesman but ... he was in that business anyway.

SH: How did the Depression affect your grandfather and the meat business?

RR: Oh, yes. My grandfather, he was okay. He happened to be very wealthy, you know, at that time, and my father was always in business. I didn't even realize there was the Depression going on. I just lived, myself, and my three brothers.

SH: Were you the youngest of your three brothers?

RR: No, I'm the oldest.

SH: So then these are like your step-brothers.

RR: You could call them half-brothers, but I don't really look at it like they were half-brothers. I looked after them when they were growing up.

SH: How much older are you than they?

RR: ... My brother, Sorrell, is about five years younger than I am. My brother Sid, he passed away. He was about seven years younger than I am. My youngest brother Charlie is about ten years younger than I was. I was like the hero of the family.

SH: Had your grandfather or father served in World War I?

RR: I don't think so. No, my father wasn't. I think he worked for the railroad during that time, and I don't think he was old enough, but maybe he was, but he worked for the railroad at that time, but he wasn't in the service.

SH: In 1941, you graduated from high school.

RR: High school.

SH: You graduated from high school in Newark.

RR: Yes, '41, 1941.

SH: Okay, I'm sorry, and then you went to the aviation ...

RR: That Casey Jones School of Aeronautics.

SH: From Casey Jones, where did you go then?

RR: Well, by that time, you know, during that time, that was probably ... six months or eight months, and, by that time, between June of '41 [and] when I graduated here [in] April 1943 I was inducted into the service, hoping that that stint with Casey Jones would help me get into the Air Force, because, I don't want to repeat myself, I didn't want to be a foot soldier.

SH: Did you receive your draft notice when you were at Casey Jones?

RR: No. ... Maybe it's four or five months after I left high school.

SH: Where were you inducted?

RR: Yes, Fort Dix, April 24, 1943.

SH: Where did you do your basic training?

RR: I did basic training there. After leaving Ft. Dix, I went to Atlantic City for Air Force basic training in the Air Force. I remember marching up and down the boardwalk in Atlantic City. [It] was really beautiful, not like it is today. ... We had a room in the Hotel Dennis, right in front with a porch, patio, courts, six men to a room, very plush room, and we did our training. We did our marching down the boardwalk. We marched down the boardwalk up to Atlantic Avenue singing these songs, out to Brigantine. Brigantine is like hard sand. We'd march, stop for a while, take a drink of water, march back, singing these songs, do KP, you know, like any other. ... The KP was unique because it was in one hotel, there was a bunch of hotels that had the recruits in there, and one hotel, I'm not sure if it was our hotel, but anyway, there were like four or five stories, and you had to go up to the top floor, get in line, work your way down to get your meal, and they served like 30,000 meals. There were a lot of people, all of them in one hotel. I believe it was our hotel. The worst thing you could ever do is get KP. I remember goofing off from KP or trying to sneak out on the beach, and the MPs would see who you are and take you in. It was really funny, as you remember the barracks. This is a plush hotel and they walk down the hall at two o'clock in the morning waking you up, "Go ahead, time for KP," and everybody lined up on the hall to go do their duty. This would last from two o'clock in the morning till the next day sometimes, so it wasn't very funny.

SH: Were the recruits from the area?

RR: I believe so. I have pictures of the graduation class, and I do recognize a few people in our graduating group. ... One of them is a dentist, too, that my wife used to frequent just not too long ago. He is in the picture.

SH: The Casey Jones school must have worked. It got you into the Air Force.

RR: I like to think so.

SH: Where did you go then from Atlantic City?

RR: From there ... we went up to college. It was a military school called Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont, and there we took regular college classes for about five months, you know, science, geography ...

SH: Was this part of the ASTP program?

RR: No, it's called CTD, College Training Division (crew members), that was it, and we got flying time in, I had ten hours of flight training with a pilot ... through the hills of Vermont, which was thrilling. I've never been on an airplane before.

SH: You wanted to go into aviation, but as a young man growing up, did you ever show interest in flying?

RR: No, I never did. The thing I, maybe feared, I'd rather do something that seemed to me a little more dangerous than to have been a foot soldier, and if I had to lose my own life, I'd rather go down like the song *In Flames*, rather than slog through in mud.

SH: We've had some gentlemen tell us that as a young teenager, they thought the notion of flying was romantic, but they quickly changed their minds.

RR: I still believe that I would not, I don't want to be any kind of a foot soldier after what I've seen. I mean, dying in an airplane, you either disintegrated in some way or another, and I thought that that was the quickest way out. ... I went into the service. That's my duty as a citizen.

SH: As a young man in high school, were there any courses or professors or high school teachers that influenced your decision at all?

RR: No, no. It's strictly mine. I liked athletics. I played on all the teams. I liked art. Art, I feel, is my real avocation. While I went to early grades of high school, I did attend an art school on Saturday mornings with my portfolio. I was probably twelve years old. Living in Newark, you take the bus and go any place. I attended Art High School in Newark, and I enjoyed the models. You know, they weren't nude models, but they were models, and it really developed my interest, figures are very hard for me to do. I can do buildings. Figures are basically tough. That's why if you look at any of these paintings, there are hardly any people.

SH: What sports did you play in high school?

RR: I played on the baseball team, the basketball team. The football team coach, who was sort of tough dude, guy, he said, "You're too skinny, you'll get killed in it," so he turned me off. I weighed about hundred and sixty then.

SH: Let's go back then to Norwich.

RR: Oh, yes. That was Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont, which, like I said, I got the flight training. We went to classes on science, whatever class. Not having ever gone to college, we did take classes, regular classes, and I do have a diploma. ... The one claim to fame there was Admiral Dewey attended that school. It was a pretty well known military school. I have mail coming from there, cards. I have pictures of all that stuff. I remember our physical training instructor was a man named William Keck. It stuck in my mind. William Keck was our athletic instructor, and he was quite heavy, you know, quite heavy, and I can remember him chinning himself with one hand, which stood out to me. ... He was also, I do believe, an All-American football player at Princeton, and that his name stuck as our physical training instructor, running through the hills of Vermont.

SH: So flying was the most fun for you.

RR: Yes, the flying was exciting. I had ten hours of it with a pilot, probably a hot-shot pilot, who came back from combat, and it gave me a thrill, "You take the controls, you can do this,

land on the side of the mountain,” you know. The first time I almost lost my cookies, but then I was up to it. ... I think that lasted for about five months, the whole course, with the drilling and eating in a military style, you know, like they do at West Point. You eat like this square meals. If you want something, you don’t just grab. You ask permission, like a course on etiquette.

SH: Did you have anymore KP?

RR: No, the KP, don’t remember having KP in there. I don’t know who did it.

SH: From Vermont, where did you go?

RR: Vermont, then, you know, this is called College Training Division (aircrew), so I had my choice to go to radio school, engineering school. I decided to be a radio operator, so they sent us to Nashville, Tennessee for redistributing. Okay, I went there on October 10, 1943, and then I selected radio school. I went to Scott Field, Illinois. That was November 10 of 1943, and I learned to be a radio operator, Morse code. You know it was very interesting. One of my hobbies is jazz and I like music, and there’s sort of a rhythm to it, rhythm for the Morse code. You can almost sing a song when you’re going.

SH: How was it coming from Newark and going to the Midwest?

RR: Well, going to the Midwest, Illinois was flat as a pool table. ... I recall, there’s another thing about mess hall. In this school, it ran twenty-four hours a day, teaching Morse code and whatever, how to repair radios, repair, change a tube, you know, whatever you could do in the air, whatever. ... Midwest, a way it turned out, there were a couple of boys from the Midwest in our crew later on. However, I didn’t meet them till later. So we did get to visit the country. We visited St. Louis, went to see Peggy Lee at the Kiel Auditorium. I remember all those places.

SH: Was it kind of a cultural shock going from Newark to the Midwest?

RR: The thing that I recall seeing in St. Louis was, at that time, was the restrooms were separate in St. Louis. I’m not saying this about Illinois. This was Missouri, which is right on the line, you know, drinking fountains were separate.

SH: Were there any other signs of segregation that you’d not seen in Newark?

RR: No, because you’re sort of cloistered. You get out all night, and go and see what you want to do, but you’re not in East St. Louis. There ... is like a red light district. You know, it was a rough spot. But St. Louis is right across the river and I did get a chance to visit. The people, I don’t know, I do remember, this comes later on when we got together with our crew, and one of them became my best friend, and this was way later on, when our crew got together. His name is Dean Humprey. He lived in Iowa. ... In fact, I saw him after the war. He said he never did see anybody Jewish, you know, did I have wings, but we became good friends ... That was Scott Field and then I became a radio operator. I had to do Morse code. I was the radio operator/gunner. My gun was in the waist. You report back the target you hit. Fifty percent you missed it or threw bombs in the water or whatever. If you were shot down, you could give a

signal, you know, give a signal, hope that somebody will pick you up, and if you're lost and the navigator goes to sleep, you can find your way again. [laughter]

SH: Did you think your training was adequate after you stepped back and looked at it?

RR: Oh, yes. I was a pretty good radio operator. I could do twenty-five, thirty-five words a minute. In the air, it's a little difficult, but I could do it sitting at a desk. I can't do it now. I can't remember all the characters.

SH: How often were you allowed off the base?

RR: Well, we had our times off. Like I said, I went to St. Louis a couple of times. This mess hall was going twenty-four hours a day, and what I remember about it, it was a three story building, all glass, big, square, glass building. You can almost see through it, if it was lit up at night. People were always eating there. That's what impressed me about Scott Field. Anytime you can go and you get a meal. The classes were going continuously.

SH: Were the pilots being trained on the same base?

RR: Oh, no. That was just for radio operators, and then after Scott Field, we went to Yuma, Arizona, June 9, 1944. Yuma, Arizona was a gunnery school. I had never seen a gun in my life, and I'd never, even in basic training, we never, it was mostly marching. We went to gunnery school, which is good, you know. It was something exciting. The training consisted of learning how to take a gun apart blindfolded, .50-caliber machine gun, take it apart blindfolded as part of your training. Another part was they had a big track, like a racetrack, and they had jeeps. You would ride on a jeep, and they would have like a skeet shooting. Anyplace along the track, they would pull that and the clay pigeons would fly across and you can shoot at them. That was a lot of fun. What it did was to give you an idea of how to lead a target, follow the target, you know, something that's flying across, you don't shoot it where it was, you shoot it where you think it's going to be, and that was the reason for that. Then we also did air-to-air machine gun practice with another plane pulling a target. Now, the guys that get to pull the target were usually guys that screwed up somehow, but usually, that was their job, you know. If they had any infractions, you know, for whatever they did, court-martial or whatever, but that's what we did. There was a 500-foot tow rope with the target and we'd shoot at that. ... We flew in B-17s to do that. ... The desert was dry and hot. We lived right in the middle of the desert, Yuma, Arizona, hot, hot as hell.

SH: You got there just in time. If you went off base, where did you go?

RR: Well, we did go to, I remember going to El Paso, Texas, and I recall, you know, Texas even then, there was a lot of Mexicans in Texas, and guys sitting in the doorway with their sombreros. ... We went out there a couple of times, walked around and came back, but mostly it was just the hot desert.

SH: Were there any incidents that you remember?

RR: Funny, dangerous? I don't know, it was sort of, we went through all those courses, take a gun apart, put it together, a little shooting. We lived in tents ... and it was real hot. You ever been there? It's like a 120 degrees but like an oven, baking, and we lived in that tent and ...

SH: Had any of the people gone with you in Yuma that you'd had at Scott Field?

RR: No, this is another school.

SH: Where were some of the guys from?

RR: I can get to that later, but I have a couple of other schools.

SH: I just wondered if there was anyone in your tent or your group that was in training with you before.

RR: Not 'til then. Then I went to Westover Field in Massachusetts to do our training for a crew. Now, at that point, you had a pilot come in, a co-pilot, a navigator, bombardier, and they went to their own schools someplace, and armorer, engineer and tail gunner and so forth, everybody, all assembled there. That was our crew ... ten people, ten guys, and ... I remember a lot of accidents that happened up there training the whole crew. One crew hit a mountain in New Hampshire. ... [It was] a lot fun if you could get off the ground and everybody doing it together, and we used to take a lot of trips, like fly from Massachusetts down past Washington, out to the Bahamas, turn around, and we did that.

SH: Was that your training personnel on board with you?

RR: Oh, no. That was our crew. That was our crew, the pilot, by that time, wherever he went to flight school, he knew how to fly, and we got our co-pilot, wherever he went to school, was proved to be wrong. I don't know how he ever got through school ... Everybody, the whole crew, they all came together, and I have all their names and all their autographs in this book, where they're from, Iowa, Alabama, Boston. ... One of our crewmembers was a fellow named Sinclair Weeks, Jr.. Sinclair Weeks, Sr. was the Secretary of Commerce under President Roosevelt. When we left later on, when all our training was done, we went to Mitchell Field, Long Island. We were supposed to go to Europe. In fact, we all had passports made up in civilian clothes with some writing in Italian in case we ever were shot down. You know, we had regular suits on. We would have a passport to go through the underground. But then at the last minute, I remember that Mr. Weeks came, the Secretary of Commerce, came out to see us off, and he brought us each a little stove, Bunsen burners, you know, he brought ten of them for each of the crew members, but at the last minute, they switched our plans and we received orders to go to the South Pacific. But before that, we had to travel across the country, you know, by train.

SH: So when you were assembled as a crew, you weren't assigned a plane yet.

RR: No, it was just a plane that we trained in.

SH: How long did you train as a crew?

RR: As a crew, we got there on August 17, 1944, and I arrived at my house on November 5th for a rest leave, I guess, before we went to Mitchell Field, I get there on November 23rd, so it was from August to November '44 ...

SH: When you came home on that, you still thought you were going to Europe.

RR: Yes, I didn't know where. I know when we got to Mitchell Field and when we thought we were going to Europe, but I guess the things were coming to an end there.

SH: Coming back to Newark after going through all the training, I mean, for a kid that has never done anything but the Jersey Shore, now you'd been all around the country.

RR: I was proud. I felt like a hero that didn't do anything but go to school and had gone all over the country, and it was like a travelogue. I felt good about it, and I had to report over to Mitchell Field, and from there, we went to a railroad station.

SH: Had you met any veterans coming back from the European Theater?

RR: No, I didn't.

SH: I just wondered if your training involved people who had already served.

RR: The only one, I think, [was] this pilot up in Vermont, he must have been involved. I think he was a pilot who came back from Europe, because he could fly that thing, you know. I did meet someone else. Remember (Gene Raymond?), the actor? He looked good in a uniform with a leather jacket. I think he was a flight instructor in Yuma. Also when we got overseas, I can get to that later, I did know Sabu, the Elephant Boy, 1940s movies. He was a tail gunner. You can picture Sabu in a loincloth. He was a tail gunner on another group. We were the Long Rangers, and they were the Bomber Barons, across the road. We'd go into play cards and usually when we play cards, guys would curse. He would say, "Don't curse at me," in his high voice, in Hindi, but that was just being in the Army.

SH: How aware were you and your family of what was going on in Europe before the Pearl Harbor attack?

RR: Well, my father was still involved in that business, and I was helping him out, you know. I used to deliver lambs and veal to the different butcher shops, and I remember we were both listening to the football game when Pearl Harbor was announced. It was on a Sunday and we were listening to it. I think it was the Redskins and the Giants. And then I got my draft notice.

SH: Had there been any talk about what was going on with the Holocaust, as we know it now?

RR: In Europe?

SH: Yes. Were there any discussions?

RR: I personally believe nobody knew about it then. Nobody knew about it, and, you know, they talk about it, the Holocaust, I don't think anybody knew about it until it was discovered by our troops. There was no ...

SH: There was no discussion of any kind of atrocities.

RR: No, just like they say, it's going on, you know, television now they say all these people are being killed, but I don't remember. I don't remember there being a big talk about people being slaughtered. It was happening. Of course, the media then is not like it is today, and I don't think, if it was, they wouldn't be allowed there anyway. It wasn't discovered until, you know, during the war, of the atrocities.

SH: I just wondered if there was any talk ...

RR: No.

SH: So now you had gotten your Bunsen burner to go to Europe and then ...

RR: Then ... we get on that train and we went to Hamilton Field in California, December 9, 1944. ... We left Hamilton and arrived at Hickam Field at Hawaii by C-54.

SH: You got to fly finally.

RR: Yeah. We got to fly, and then the trip by train was exotic, you know, going across the country, you know. You could go anyplace you want on the train, play cards, and it was like three or four [days], I don't know how long it took, playing cards, looking out the window and seeing the scenery. We passed Salt Lake, which was exciting, you know, going through Salt Lake.

SH: What did you think of the Rockies?

RR: Yeah. That was like a tour, going across, and Salt Lake impressed me. Everything looked like it was floating, floating, floating.

SH: Did the train stop often?

RR: No, it kept on going. It kept moving all the time. We ate on the train, whenever they gave us whatever, but we didn't get off the train. It just kept on going. ... We got to Hamilton Field on December 9th and December 15th we arrived at Hickam Field via C-54 Air Transport Command, December 15, 1944, Barracks Twenty-one. What I remember about Hickam Field was seeing the boats turned over in the harbor, not head-on but from the air. I never had that much contact except seeing it from the air, because we moved over to another field in Honolulu called John Rogers Field in Honolulu, and we left John Rogers Field January 6, 1945. I feel like a tour guide. This is like a, we arrived at a place called Casady Field on Christmas Island,

January 6, 1945, and I can remember about that place. There was one tree standing there. It was just an airstrip and that was it.

SH: The Hawaii Islands are quite lush compared to what Christmas Island was.

RR: When we were in Hawaii, we did get a chance to get out and go into Honolulu and see the locals walking around there, you know. Downtown Honolulu, I haven't been there since then, but it was like, that main street there was like a big bazaar with sailors and Hawaiian girls all jumping. It was really exciting. We did get out to a couple of good restaurants there, which I always like, a place called Trader Vic's in Hawaii, which I have been to so many times since then, only in New York, but they're not there anymore. That was good, the short time we were there. We got to stay on the beach in front of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, which is not a skyscraper. It was only about four stories high, but I understand from what people say that had been there now that it's like Broadway, you know, with all the big buildings there, but at that time, any place you look, you can see blue sky, trees and ocean.

SH: Did you have fun in the ocean at that point compared to Jersey Shore?

RR: Yeah, that was nice. We went on the beach, went in the water ... and spent the afternoon.

SH: What kind of interaction between the services, the Navy and the Army and the Air Force?

RR: Well, at that particular time, we had our crew together. The enlisted men and the officers would rarely go out together. The officers, naturally, go their separate way. A couple of officers were a little more friendly. One of the officers happened to go to Seton Hall and he came from Boston area, also, and the other pilot came from Texas, co-pilot from Louisiana, and the other members of the crew, Iowa, Illinois, Alabama, New Jersey, Ohio.

SH: Were the officers in your crew the pilot and co-pilot?

RR: Navigator and bombardier, also.

SH: Both of these were officers, and the rest of you were enlisted. What rank were you at this point?

RR: At this point, I was probably a corporal or sergeant, and I moved up to, when I quit, when I got out, I was a tech sergeant, three stripes. Next highest you could go would be a master sergeant, which as it turned out, they offered me that, to stay at that island, when the war was over, but, I'd rather go home. ...

SH: What did the enlisted men in your crew do for entertainment when you had time off?

RR: Over there? Well, we would stick together and go out ... I remember when we were in Hamilton Field, we did get to, San Francisco, that was on our way back. We had a little trouble at the top of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, got a little unruly. That was on the way back. ...

Continuing on, Casady Field, Christmas Island ... we next arrived at Canton Island, another little spot in the ocean.

SH: When were you assigned your plane?

RR: When we finally get over there, and, in fact, we didn't have the same plane all the time. It depended on what was available after each mission. ...

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

SH: This is side two of tape one. You were talking about the planes.

RR: The planes, we never, after we get over to our final destination which was Morotai, we never had any one plane, for many missions. Usually, you know, something along the lines of an engine getting knocked out or a hole in the wing or a piece of shrapnel coming up through the floor, you know, you just used another plane. You had those pictures with the women painted on the front. I did see a book down at Barnes and Noble called *Nose Art* and a whole book of that kind of a thing, and I probably have about fifty of them, no, not fifty, maybe about twenty-five of them with me standing on the side of the plane, with all different pictures.

SH: I was going to ask you, did you use your artwork to paint your plane?

RR: I did that, if you saw that jacket, I did that. I painted that jacket, which is a picture of an airplane with a cloud and a name. I did that and always decorated our hats. That picture there, which probably, in the newspaper *Star and Stripes*, I think we were all interviewed when we left. We left in a hurry because of what happened later. I told you about the suicide of my co-pilot and we were supposed to do forty missions in it. As soon as that happened, we were on our way home. This is after we did thirty-six missions, so I don't really know. That's what bothers me about this whole thing. I don't know if there was a plot going on, but that's the way it happened.

SH: Okay, now, from ...

RR: From Christmas we went to Canton Island, which was another dot in the ocean. Of course, this one had an airstrip and a few natives and ...

SH: I wondered if when you were at the different islands ...

RR: This is a short time like a half an hour. In fact, the next place we went, it was like a travelogue, was a place called Hawkins Field in Tarawa, which was a ... bloody scene. I recall the bunkers that the Japanese had in those islands there, pictures that I took, you know, because their cannons sticking out towards the ocean and all the crosses row on row, and then left there, which was only a short time, to Carney Field in Guadalcanal. Another thing where I had the, you know, getting back to what I said about being a foot soldier, you could see row on row, in whatever direction you looked, of crosses, cemetery plots. ... Then we left there, we were only

there a short time, just probably to refuel or whatever. We left Guadalcanal January 11th, and we arrived at a place called Nadzab, New Guinea. That was already flattened, we were there on a, for an overnight, more than an overnight to live in the jungle, to teach you how to survive in a jungle. We had the Australians, who were very instrumental in all of those islands. Being in close proximity to Australia, they acted as lookouts in all those islands, and they taught us what not to eat, what sounds to listen for, and we slept in a hammock, tell you what leaves not to touch and all of that stuff, which was to me useless, because later on we were warned, "Don't ever get shot down on land. Don't ever do it," because most of those islands were inhabited by Japanese. ... Like I told you before, they were isolated, and we might have had a landing strip, which is where there's guards around it, and every once in a while, you would see them come down out of the mountains with a Japanese guy with a little, like a diaper on them, and most of those islands were jammed up with Japanese soldiers. So if you risk landing on an island, the chances are, you couldn't defend yourselves. ... Cannibalism was popular, and, in fact, I know ... some of the natives that were trapped on this island with the Japanese, I don't know if they're telling stories or what, but they would say that he killed Japanese and they would eat the people. I did see natives when we were on Morotai, our base. Women and children would come over, you know, in their, that was formerly a Dutch East Indies. They would get in something like little dugout logs, and we'd see a woman and a child, the child all bitten up by whatever is living in the jungle, you know, just corroded, and the women. ... I don't know whether they were coming over to sell canes ... They have all these carved wooden masks, and I don't know if that was a ruse or that was true, but we did see many of them go over to our island. Maybe they came from the other end of our island, but they did come, we lived on a beach. But to get back to this, Nadzab is where we did that overnight or over a couple of days. Yes, we were there, and then we went to an island called Biak. That's on the way over also, another little island, February 7, 1945, by C-46. We left there by C-47 and we arrived at our island called Pitoe, airstrip in the island of Morotai, NEI. That's Netherlands East Indies. That's the original name, and our group was the 307th Bomb Group of 370th Bomb Squadron, heavy. We did our missions and during our missions got a chance to go and on rest leave. ... We left Pitoe airstrip, went to New Guinea in Merouke, New Guinea, refueled and took off, and we arrived at Rockhampton, Australia, July 25th at the Scarif Hotel, Room Twenty-three, at the Swan Hotel, Room Six, and we left there, you know, running around town. ... What I recall about Rockhampton, Australia was it was like the Wild West of 1890, you know, with the overhanging stores and the saloons and the wooden sidewalks and the dirt street. Now that's Rockhampton. I don't know how the other part of, you know, like Adelaide or whatever those big cities are, but this is on the east coast of Australia. ... It was rest leave, but we also picked up supplies to take back to the island, like mutton and sneak in some liquor, you know, sneak that back to the island. You can sell that to the troops.

SH: Can you talk about your overnight training by the Australians? How did they treat Americans?

RR: Oh, they were okay. In fact, Australians, as our missions went on, they were stashed up in the mountains in a lot of these places, like Borneo and some of these islands that I have names of, that were all infested with Japanese, and they were up there with the radios trying to give information or telling you what happened. On one particular mission, we found out that we killed 250 Japanese, and my remarks in my diary were that we probably caught them in the mess hall, one shot. But they were instrumental, and we would see the Australians ... They had nice

uniforms. We had our khaki uniform, and they would wear, you know, those hats and they had emerald green, real dark, forest green shirts with epaulets. They're really nice, so we used to trade clothes, and they were great at making jewelry out of airplane parts, you know. They were all aluminum. They would make wristwatch bands out of aluminum, nice. You put your watch in there, and they would sell and we would trade, trade uniforms. Yeah, they looked nice and they were in and around our island, because I know they were up in those mountains, but they would come down every once in a while, drag down a Japanese, like I said, in this little diaper. They were all okay.

SH: How rowdy did you get on leave?

RR: Well, you know, you'd have your steak and eggs, do traditional things, steak and eggs for breakfast, and in Australia itself, when we first got there, you know, we weren't too welcome really, but in general, they would say, "Here comes the goddamned Yanks again." You know, that was in Australia, but we did get tossed out of one hotel, for I don't know what reason, maybe making too much noise or whatever. I'm not a rowdy guy, but it was nice. I did get a chance to go to a soccer game there. We went to the racetrack there on Rockhampton. In fact, I have a program from there. I don't know why I kept it, but I have it, and I recall, I like to go to the racetrack now. ... Down there, they would have the guys, I don't know what they called them, they wore shirt and tie with a little elastic around their sleeve. They'd have a derby and they would take your bets, give you a slip ... I don't know if they still have that in England or Australia or what, instead of the pari-mutuel, I don't know. But that was exciting going to the racetrack and drinking warm beer. It was interesting, and then we loaded up our plane with the food, whatever supplies we were to pick up, and we went back.

SH: You said you had a little market going on where you take some extra liquor back and ...

RR: Yes. In fact, when we left Australia, we had to sort of double time it to get on the plane, you know, because the authorities would sound like they didn't want you to do that, but we did it. We had a load of liquor, you know. We'd get a lot of money for it.

SH: You were well greeted when you got back.

RR: Yes, and that was, you know, whoever was in there was all planes loaded with Air Force guys plus kitchen help. We never had KP over there, and there were very few nurses. ... On our island, we had a nice outdoor theater, a basketball court. It was nice. The basketball court, you know, most of those islands were coral, just like cement, and they had smoothed out a nice basketball court. We had a baseball diamond. Also, we used to fly about twice a week, two to three times a week, and in between, we'd go down to the beach. Sabu would be there with one of his buddies, and they dug out a, they had a, like a jettisoned gasoline tank from a fighter plane, and they'd cut off the top and it was like a canoe ... You couldn't walk into the water too much because of the coral. You'd cut your feet up, couldn't walk out. In certain spots, if you're careful, you could go out, but you couldn't actually go swimming there. They were all coral reefs. That's what they are.

SH: What about the creepy crawlers?

RR: Oh, yes. ... In our tent, we had six people and we had a big coconut tree outside, and storms used to come up like in the middle of the afternoon, you know. You'd get like a typhoon, and some of the trees will fall off. The coconuts would drop down and you'd see water running through your tent, but it dried out. ... We had the GI shoes. You might find a salamander in your shoe, and every once in a while a little guy would creep in. ... It's funny thing, I don't how funny it is, but, anyway, a little incident happened. Our tent was closest to the officers' latrine, the way it worked out, to get to our latrine, you had to walk down little boards, maybe a hundred yards, you know, through muck and mire and trees and everything and all these noises, so it was more convenient to go to the officers' latrine. One day, I was in there and I was in the officers' latrine, and an officer walked in and he said, "What are you doing here, soldier?" What was the obvious answer, and I gave him that answer, and I wound up getting a company court-martial, because, you know, I gave an honest answer, but he didn't like the fact that I was in there. ... My job was to dig another latrine, as punishment, dig a latrine, probably eight feet by four feet by six feet deep at night with lights with a jackhammer, because, you know, it's like cement. ... I had a couple of natives helping me throw out the stuff, and they were dressed in their native garb, you know, shorts, funny hats. ... That was my punishment, and it took about two or three nights to do that, but that was a funny experience over there.

SH: When you were on your R&R, was there any USO activity in that part of Australia?

RR: No, but we did have on our island, we did have ... our own theater, which I have pictures of too, outdoor theater, you know, logs with boards across it, a nice stage. ... I do believe I remember an actress, she was in *Kiss Me Kate* a long time ago. I don't remember her name, and sometimes I talk about it to Barbara, where I can remember her name, and they had a troupe coming through there, I mean, and that was nice. When we first got over there in February 1945, there was a big celebration. It was the second anniversary of the formation of the Thirteenth Air Force. They had a big celebration and I have all printed things of what they were saying of all the exploits of this Air Force. How they were bumped out of, they were formed in Henderson Field in Guadalcanal and chased out by the Japanese and had to go all the way through to those islands and finally wound up, back there again after the war. It tells of all the Japanese tonnage, boats, that were sunk. I have it written as part of my little book, my little script I have. It tells of the exploits and all the medal missions and the interaction with the Navy, how the Navy told them to not hit certain targets, or we hit too many targets. They had a very fierce reputation, this Thirteenth Air Force, long range, and they were all over the place. We came in [and] we just continued it. Of course, the war was coming to an end. ... I'd say each mission is dangerous, just getting off the ground and landing and flying long distances of fourteen hours in flight over water. I mean, you're going seven hours, unload the bombs some place, and have somebody shooting at you, and hopefully you didn't get hit or killed or wounded and lucky to come back and fly across ... all these little islands in the Celebes Islands, fly across, and there were gunboats by these islands. You wouldn't fly back as high as 20,000 feet. You fly down lower and be on the alert for any gunboats, you know. They look like, could be fishing boats, but they will pop back, and they would start shooting at you. I have pictures of that actual activity and all that, and we did sink a lot of those. ... You don't want to get knocked down on one of those islands over there. The other part is going down into the ocean; there are those sharks. So that was one of the greatest periods of this flying over those great distances. Our plane, an airplane,

which is considered almost un-airworthy, B-24, which is a flying truck, you know, as compared to a lot of other airplanes. In fact, there was 18,800 B-24s made. There's one in existence now! It travels around. They call it the International Air Force, I think, and they had resurrected that airplane from India, and they spent like 750,000 man hours to rebuild it into a B-24 again. ... It appears in a lot of fairs in airports, and it's like a living history museum for the pilot to come out and get this big spiel. The last one I went to, they were in Toms River ... because there's only one left, and they're all shot down. You could see them, you know, once you're hit, you fold up like a butterfly wings, you know. Get hit in the wrong place and you go down.

SH: You talked earlier about the crewmembers and where you were from and the different interaction. Did you continue to get closer as your missions progressed?

RR: Oh, yes. We were together, we ate together, we went out on the beach together. We were provided with sidearm, .45, a .45, which was probably useful, you know, and they gave you ammunition that was not ammunition but like buckshot, you know, buckshot pellets in there. ... We would go out on the beach and find a log and try and play cowboys and Indians, you know, and we would, there's no place to go, you know, we were around there. We go eat together, get our clothes washed and whatever. There was no KP. I don't remember any KP going on there.

SH: What about the ground crew? Was there a specific crew that worked on your plane?

RR: No, it was just a ground crew depending on what happened to your plane, you know. You can have a bunch of holes that were shot on your wings, you know, going through those kind of things. It would be like flying through an antiaircraft fire which enough of it. That was the worst part. We only saw one Japanese fighter, Zero, that we got a chance to shoot him up. That was probably on our second mission. There were no planes around. They were all knocked out, to speak of, but there were a couple hidden. They were hidden just like those boats that were still around. Battleships, we used to go searching for battleships, but ... having gone through "ack ack" is like, if you weren't hit with it and exploded apart, it was like taking a handful of gravel thrown out on a tin roof. You would feel that. A storm would come out. They weren't tight, the windows were open. You'd see water coming down through them, you know. My little desk, I had a desk for where my radio was, and I used to prepare the sandwiches we used to have on each mission. They gave us a box of maybe provolone. We did have some fried rabbits, and bread, whatever, and I would make sandwiches.

SH: Not that mutton that you brought back from ...

RR: No, that was bad enough to eat in the mess hall.

SH: You think getting off the ground was probably the most dangerous part ...

RR: And landing, plus the middle, plus getting near the target.

SH: How many of you would go at one time?

RR: Well, we fly in formation, certain times, in formation, usually six. In my diary, yes, a couple crashed, on take off. I said to you before, I don't know whether it was the pilot's fault or what, but before each mission, you know, it was like you go around and kick the tires. I would go around, look at all my antennae, see if they are in good working order. The pilot would look at certain things. They had a checklist of what they had to do, just to see if it's right. Then we would get in, take a seat, or stand, run up the engine and let the brakes go. But if you have a co-pilot heading for the side of the runway, it looks like you're never going to get off, you're going to get near the side of the runway and start screaming into your intercom and listen to the pilot to the co-pilot, "Let go, let go, let go," and he's sitting there and finally we got up. ... As a reminder of that, on our little island, this strip ended right up by the ocean, and there were planes right in that water down there. ... I don't know if that happened or what, where you don't get enough power to get off the ground. They weighed 60,000 pounds fully loaded, and that was heavy in those days.

SH: When did you begin to doubt the capability of the co-pilot?

RR: Well, it happened two or three times. It happened probably on the third or fourth mission and maybe on the fifth mission, and we said to the pilot, you know, after it happened a couple of times, "We don't want to fly." Because there's something I don't really want to say on here as to his personality. I don't know if that has anything to do with his inability. I don't know if he is a psychological case or something else. I don't really want to say on this, but he was very strange, let's put it that way, and after a while, we were scared, you know, scared of taking off, scared of landing. ... For maybe a stretch of, I'd say the last twenty missions, twenty-five missions, he was just carried as a passenger. He wouldn't touch it, but then you always had the thought, "If something happened to that pilot, he'd have to do it."

SH: Did you have any feeling that the pilot was trying to get him moved out?

RR: No, I don't know how far up the chain he'd got really, you know. We would complain to the pilot, or we would complain to the navigator and the bombardier, who had more of a rapport with us, and they would, you know, they would recognize that, too. ... I don't know how far up the chain it got, whether it got past the pilot, whether it got to the commanding officer or whatever. But the final blow was when the last mission, he didn't appear, and when we came back, I told you what happened. We never saw him; we just saw the funeral. ... For the longest time, he was carried along, but still there's always that thought, "Geez, if something does happen, then he has to," or, "Where are we at?" and that was our fear.

SH: These different missions that you were on, where were your targets?

RR: Oh, yes. I have a whole bunch of these things, and there are all, a lot of names. It might sound strange, but they're still out there, and they're all inundated with Japanese, wherever, and that was what we had to do in conjunction with the Navy. Most of these missions we flew, especially we were in on every invasion of the Philippines from Corregidor all the way down and even in some of the out islands like Borneo, which seems like nothing, Borneo. But right now the richest person in the world lives in Borneo, the Sultan of Brunei, and you're flying over Borneo, you see oil fields that you wouldn't believe. They called it the Ploesti of the East.

Ploesti was the famous oil field in Romania where many, many guys lost their lives trying to knock that thing out. I'd say of the same ilk, you know, with the protection it had, all those anti-aircraft guns. Some of the places were like Jessellton Aerodrome in northwest Borneo.

SH: Was this coordinated by the Navy?

RR: Well, the Navy was ... especially noticeable in the Philippine landings. The others were the same, because not only the bombing but the shelling. I could see those rockets coming off the battleships and whatever the name of that sea, they were all different names, and the rockets coming off, and the next thing that would happen would be a landing. As compared to what's going on now, they could bomb till doomsday, you know, unless they wanted to really flatten the place, but they're trying to pick it, this so-called thing that's going on. [Mr. Roth is referring to U.S. military action in Kosovo.] Try to pick and choose and people are going to get hurt. In those days, many people got hurt. When we left from the Philippines to come home, we had occasion, we left by ship. The boat took us thirty-one days to get to San Francisco from the Philippines, stopped in every little island, not very reliable. ... While we were in the Philippines, also in the camp, you could see the devastation of Manila, people scavenging garbage cans, people running around. Everything was flattened.

SH: Now you're talking about the Navy shelling the beach and you're going over dropping bombs ...

RR: It can't happen one way. It's only part of it. The Navy, I'd give them a lot of credit for that. Boy, they were sitting out there and you could see those rockets coming off. I think on one mission, I'm not certain, but I think General MacArthur was in his silver plane flying along on one mission. I'm not sure, but I think he was. A lot of them are convoy cover. You know, fly around in a circle, constantly, for twelve hours and thirteen hours. There were gunboats around, and there were still Japanese naval battleships around, which we were on a search for.

SH: Did you ever find them?

RR: No. Oh, yes, we did find them and along with the antiaircraft from that Borneo target, which was a very small island called Balikpapan, B-A-L-I-K-P-A-P-A-N, in Borneo. That was the worst one that we had. We went to that place about seven, or eight, or ten times. That was the toughest.

SH: Was that a supply area for the Japanese?

RR: Oh, yes, they had it, all those islands. We went on a shipping strike. If you look at the map, it's south, southern Celebes Island for fourteen hours and forty-five minutes. There was no action taken, but, you know, except for an occasional somebody shooting up at you, but looking for ships, that was what we had to do, along with the bombing, different things. The names are strange, but they're, you know, they roll off my tongue, because I'm used to them, and I've sort of written them down in a map. There's thirty-six of them and most of them are places like Donggale, D-O-N-G-G-A-L-E, Airdrome in the northwest Celebes. That's probably just a dot on the map, but still it's a viable Japanese place. Brunei Bay in northwest Borneo, Labalong,

Brunei Bay, northwest Borneo, twelve hours and forty-five minutes. Well, it took six hours and a half to go drop your bombs and get out of there and six hours coming looking for boats and wondering if you're going to be able to land. You may be running out of, one time, running out of fuel, we only had a 2,800 mile range, but things can go wrong and maybe they didn't put enough fuel in. There was about, I'd say 30,000, 24,000 pounds of fuel and maybe three or four tons of bombs. The rest of it was the airplane, about 60,000 pounds total.

SH: Of all the missions that you flew, thirty-six missions, which was the most memorable?

RR: The ones that stand out were Balikpapan, as far as combat. We received quite a few medals, and they were Air Medals. Now, Air Medal is not the highest award in the Air Force, but I think it's the third highest. I have three.

SH: Can you tell me about how you received the medals?

RR: Well, they have a way of rating it. They call a medal mission, that depends on how much damage you faced, or what you faced. I know that Balikpapan Harbor was ... terrible ... to go through that, you know, you go on a bomb run like for thirty seconds, and you see things going off around you and popping, and then you hear ... like gravel on your roof. Hopefully, if one hits you, you know, it doesn't take much to knock, as I said before, knocking all those planes down. There was about seven to ten, which were [similar to that]. The others were, like we call some of them ... just milk runs. Some of these islands were just flattened out, but there might still be Japanese there. Japanese, Japanese, Japanese all over. To this day, I won't buy a Japanese car. Being as it may, all the parts to our cars are made in Japan, but it's a matter of principle.

SH: Did you ever have any personal contact with any of the Japanese?

RR: No, the closest one I came to, like I said, there was an Australian dragging one out of the mountains, you know, dragging him down, walking. He was about five foot two, you know, with a diaper on. I never saw any actually Japanese soldier in action. I didn't see the results of it in some of those islands like at Tarawa, but I know what happened there. Those Marines that went on to those places, that was something.

SH: Did your captain ever come back and talk to you when you were given these medal missions?

RR: No, it was just something that appears on, I have them all in the box. It appears on your discharge whatever awards you received. Of course, everybody gets a Good Conduct Medal and I ... never was unfortunate enough to get a Purple Heart.

SH: Were any of your crew ever hurt?

RR: Only the guy that ...

SH: Took his own life. Did you have a briefing before you went and a debriefing when you came back?

RR: Usually in the morning, we'd just go out, get in a jeep and go out to the airstrip and check out the plane and go. Sometimes, they had a briefing the night before, and other times when we came back, they would say, "What's going on? What happened?"

SH: How aware were you of how the entire Pacific Theater was progressing? Was there talk of the invasion of Japan?

RR: Well, at that point, you know, you heard that the B-29s were starting to come into [Japan]. In fact, we had a couple there on our landing strip, B-29s, and, I guess, I don't know the exact dates the atom bombs were dropped. I guess we were on our way home by then. I remember President Roosevelt died while we were on our way home. ... I can imagine what's going on there in Yugoslavia. They have all these exotic bombs, laser bombs, and they can pinpoint your rooftop or pick out your time on your watch or whatever. ... There are still going to be accidents for whatever reason and the plane moved. This goes wrong and people will get hurt, like I said, unless they want to level it. I don't know why they're doing it. They started whatever, call it a war, and it's like going into a war with one hand tied behind your back, if you call it a war. The object is not to lose any personnel, but that's already happened and just accidents.

SH: Did you have any bombs that went astray that you were aware of?

RR: Oh, yes. I note one in my diary how the bombardier missed the target. Fortunately, the bombs landed in the water, and on that particular mission, we were supposed to drop propaganda leaflets, dropped those right behind us into the water. I mean, those bombs could go astray easy. I mean, he has this thing, the Norden bombsight, which is supposed to be so secret. He used to walk around with a little case with it in there. Whether he could use it or not, I don't know, but he had it. He would have control of the airplane for thirty seconds, you know, trying to do a little, see these puffs and smoke, try and to do a little evasive action, still keep your target line and then get out as quick as you can. I know if you're flying over the ocean, it's always water, water. You can see from the map ...

SH: As a radio operator, what were the more interesting messages that you sent out?

RR: You could say, "Forty percent of the bombs hit the target," or, "Eighty percent hit the target. We're running low on fuel, we might have to ditch or get out of here," but the fuel lasted and, "we got holes in our wings." They used to have a thing to back up these missions, being that there were no fighter planes around, called the flying duck. It was a seaplane, supposed to follow up these missions. Anybody who would get knocked down, they would get that boat out. I've never seen it happen.

SH: Did you ever see the flying duck?

RR: I did see something that looked like a seaplane, but I don't know how successful they could ever be in the ocean.

SH: Who flew the flying ducks?

RR: There was a couple of pilots or some rescue guys. They could probably pick people up. I don't know, because these planes couldn't stay afloat for five minutes. There's nothing to them. The wings on these B-24s, like I said before, not counting me, but a lot of people say it was a totally ... unairworthy airplane. You look at a B-17, the wings are wide ... but on a B-24, they were narrow. You can almost span it with your hands like this and very narrow. When you're taking off, you can see them flipping at the end. There was nothing to it, just like two sticks sticking out there, whereas the B-17 had these wider wings, and they could even coast if their engines were shut down. This thing was almost, if you had an engine shut out on one side, one engine, if you had two engines shut out on one side, forget about it, you know, so if you had one engine shut out on each side, you can manage, but it was such a balance on that thing. They were big engines, 1250 horsepower Pratt and Whitney engines, made in Connecticut.

SH: Were there any pecking orders in who flew what craft?

RR: No, we had our, I guess, we were basically assigned to a plane, but we could be in any different plane because of the damage. These were not brand new planes. We're that far into the war, you know.

SH: If you were flying a B-17, then somebody came in, say a fighter pilot, would he have better grade?

RR: I don't think it's the way it worked out, because they were made in Detroit, I guess, in the big Ford factory, most of them. There was no particular order, who was assigned to what. I know, in Europe ...

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

SH: This begins the second tape of an interview with Mr. Richard N. Roth on June 9, 1999 in Somerset, New Jersey. We were talking about the assignments to the planes and how that came about.

RR: I don't believe there was any assignment to a plane. It's just time sequence. If you're in the service, when the B-17s were popular, you're a B-17. If you look in the war in Europe, B-17s, I believe, bore the brunt, and you could see in all the films. Of course, the B-24s, they're in, I believe, in North Africa and also in Europe, but there were no particular assignment to a plane. ... A fighter would be a fighter pilot, a bomber pilot would be a bomber pilot and in the plane he was assigned to.

SH: As part of your crew, you had the four officers and then the six enlisted men. Was there any rotation of crew ever?

RR: No, we always stayed together as a crew, you know, except for that one mission when our co-pilot didn't participate, thirty-sixth mission. We're all together every mission.

SH: What about mail? Were there newspapers? How aware were you of what was going on?

RR: My family, when I was overseas, my mother, she kept that mail coming, packages and mail, you know, a real soldier's mother sending me whatever delicacies from home, cookies and whatever. Mail, never had any problems with that. I'm not too great a writer, but I always managed to, I tried to get off some mail. The mail service was pretty good at that time, no problem with that.

SH: Had you girlfriends back home in the States writing?

RR: Sort of, yes, but nothing in particular.

SH: Did your brothers write to you or had they joined ...

RR: I would write to my brothers. In fact, I have some, a couple of cards I had that I did send asking for ridiculous ... I was up at that college there, I would send, I have a card with the barracks, which was actually an old building, you know, ivy covered building, you know, cadet style: check your bed, bounce a quarter off it, keep your shoes there and your locker straight. ... I would send home to my father, "Daddy, please send me a baseball glove," or some stuff like that. I would do it. I remember all this time in the States training, my family coming to visit me in Atlantic City when I was down there, and my mother coming up to Vermont to visit me. But that was a lot of letters. I was in exactly two and a half years, two of them, two years was spent on training and waiting till I finally got there and six months of combat. ... When I did get to go home, I really had enough points to stay home for another, because the war was winding down, I had enough, they call it points, I don't know how, whether it's the amount of hours you put in. ... You have to maintain, I think it was forty hours a month to maintain your flight pay status, something like that, forty hours a month, and we racked up enough points to, when we went home to stay home for another month before they ever called me to come down, because they had no place to send me. I had enough points to get out, but I wanted to get a discharge at that point.

SH: When you came back, did you come back as a crew?

RR: Oh, I didn't go through that one. We left ...

SH: Just before we start on the next travelogue, I wanted to ask you, you flew this thirty-sixth mission without your co-pilot. When you came back and you found out what had happened to him, how long were you at the base before they started sending you home? Was there any sort of investigation?

RR: I think it's almost immediately. I don't recall, but I think it was a, we were, if I look at my diary, I was planning on doing forty missions, not like it's going to the grocery store, but that

was our plan. But at the thirty-sixth mission, after that incident happened with the co-pilot killing himself, we went right home.

SH: Was there any investigation? Were there any questions asked of you?

RR: Not that I know of, not that I know of any of our other crew members knew of. All I know is we went to Manila.

SH: You completed this thirty-sixth mission and you came back. How soon did you find out that you were leaving to go to Manila?

RR: I believe it was a couple of days, couple of days or a week at most, and we were off to Manila.

SH: Did you fly to Manila?

RR: We flew to Manila, because at that time all those air bases were secured.

SH: Were you flying the planes yourselves?

RR: No, we were probably in a C-46 or C-47, you know, sort of passenger military plane

SH: Did you know that you were being sent home?

RR: I knew where we were going. We were going home. We were going to Manila, and we had our orders were all written out we're going to Manila to wait there, not wait there, that wasn't too long either, and then we were on the ship. The name of that ship was the *Cape Douglas*, and we slept in the brig because there were only 200 of us going back at that particular time, and you could sleep anywhere you want to. You know, you could sleep in the hold downstairs. It was cool in the brig and sitting in the sun all day and watch the birds go by.

SH: The other 200 guys who were coming back, they had finished their ...

RR: Yes, they had finished in various places. I don't know if they are all Air Force, but they were coming back this way, and they could have been Marines or whatever. ... Our group, a few people that went back, our crew, we like stuck together, sunned, washed our clothes together. I lost all my clothes, I remember. We used duffel bags of clothes. We got the bright idea of, they had these on the ship, I was never on a ship either, big ropes or lines and we tied all the laundry to the lines, so we threw it overboard, you know, those big thick ropes and thought maybe that the pulling in the water, in the ocean, would clean them, you know. They all went off. So when I came home, I just had what I was wearing then.

SH: When did you lose your jacket that you painted?

RR: I don't remember. I wish I had that, though. I can't remember when I lost that one.

SH: You were talking about the things you liked in Manila ...

RR: Just a lot of devastation. I recall little of Manila girls. They would come up into the tent area. They would offer to do your laundry. I don't know what else, but I won't, they all looked so clean and nice and they all seemed to wear white dresses. ... Then we went out at the town, you know, carefully, and we could see what happened there, total devastation, garbage laying all over the place, people scuffling for that garbage to eat. There weren't any dogs left around. The people in the island, certain things about Filipinos, they have a reputation for eating dogs as food, but I'd seen a lot of natives eat a lot of different things ...

SH: Can you tell me about some of those?

RR: Well, you know, anything that's moving. Whether it's due to their culture or whether it's due to starvation, I don't know. I don't know which came first. I do know that cannibalism did take place on those islands between the Japanese and the people of the islands with strange customs and practices.

SH: Now you came back on board ship, the *Cape Douglas*.

RR: The *Cape Douglas* and we arrived in San Francisco on August 31, 1945.

SH: Did you continue to stop, to pick people up?

RR: We did stop at a bunch of islands on the way, maybe to refuel, or drop things off, or whatever, but it was a thirty-day trip to San Francisco. ... Manila to San Francisco is probably 6,000 miles, maybe more. It's probably 8,000. That's a long trip, anyway, a long trip by ship, boring. Then when we arrived in San Francisco, where we had a good time celebrating, like I said before ...

SH: Did you buy more clothes?

RR: No, I had enough to get by, enough to get by. Most of them were lost. You can always pick up a shirt or something. I didn't lose it all. I did have a, being in the Air Force when I was in Arizona, we used to go to this place, downtown Yuma, and they used to make custom-made uniforms. Now, we were in the Air Force, they weren't too strict on your uniform. You looked at the crushed hats and, you know, flyboy, and we had these custom-made out of Palm Beach cloth, and we would wear them. I had those. I didn't lose those, because I didn't throw those overboard, it was just the khaki stuff, but they were nice. We did have fun in San Francisco for a few days, and then we went by bus to McClellan Field in Sacramento and took off on a C-47 and stopped at Tucson, Dallas, Nashville, Newark and then to Fort Dix by train. We arrived September 2nd, and we left September 4th, and I was home September 4th. I was home from September 4th to October 20th. That's about a month and a quarter, a half, and we left Newark on October 20th and arrived at Greensboro, North Carolina at the AAF separation center at barracks 746. I received my discharge and left Greensboro, October 29th, and arrived at Newark on October 30, 1945. ... The whole time was like a, I don't know, you could call it a camping trip ... It was a good experience. I mean, I really learned discipline for my own self, how to work

with others. It was the whole thing, traveling. It was like a travelogue. From what I've told you here, I've been halfway around the world, practically, in thirty of the forty-eight states, including Hawaii, and it was exciting. I've never, like I said before, the farthest I ever went was Belmar or Bradley Beach, or maybe up to Connecticut to visit my mother's parents ...

SH: When you came back, what kind of a welcome did you get?

RR: Yes, I was greeted as a hero. I walked around in my uniform for a year. Yes, you know, that was good.

SH: Did you join any veteran's organization?

RR: No, I did join a group once, but I don't believe in that, because it's the same as I'm talking to you here. The veteran's organizations, to me, are just a place to have a couple of beers and shoot the breeze. ... The farther away you get from the action, the farther down in time you get, the more important, I don't believe anybody won the war themselves. You know, you hear that kind of stuff, and I don't believe that I didn't know what I did, and not that I don't want to share it with anybody, but I don't like to hear it. I didn't win this war all by myself. I did ... what I had to do. ... When you get together a group of veterans, it's a, even people like me, I don't like to hear that because it's like a, "Who won the war?" "I held up a bridge and if it weren't for me the Battle of the Bulge wouldn't happen." Well, you were a little part. If you're wounded, you hear all that stuff, which I don't care for.

SH: Had you ever gone to any of the reunions for your bomb group?

RR: I don't even know where they are, and I do believe that the headquarters for this Thirteenth Air Force, 307th Bomb Group is located in Wichita Falls, Kansas. In fact, I read an obituary and I saved it. It was from our commanding officer. That's called McClellan Field and he and his two brothers, two of them were killed in action, one in New Guinea and one someplace around there, and they named that field, McClellan Field, and that was his name and they had his obit there. I had it for about two years. He was seventy-six. They went over about the same time as I did, except they were unlucky enough to get killed. But I believe that's where their headquarters is. I guess it's still, right now, they're, it's more of a weather group, you know, they check the weather.

SH: When you came back, did you use any of your GI benefits?

RR: Just the GI Bill, except the fifty-two/twenty bill, where they paid you twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. Well, that was fun and I ...

SH: Did you ever think about going to college on the GI Bill?

RR: No. In fact, I was glad to be home and then my family, my father and mother and three brothers, between the year of 1946 and 1950 moved to Connecticut. My father went into a business venture and I stayed in Newark. I stayed at a friend of mine mother's home. He went off to the university, to Southern Cal, and, coincidentally, he did the same kind of stuff that I did

and he was a radio operator. I don't know how it happened, but he was in the China-Burma-India Theater, and he's really my best friend and I see him about once a year. He lives in California, and I speak to him a couple of times a year. I never wanted to go college. Oh, I said my family moved to Connecticut, and the type of business, that meat business, I didn't, he was in that in Connecticut. I didn't want to be in it. My really first job, officially as a human being, since then I've never stopped working, I worked as a credit manager. I got a job, and I was able to look nice and I worked as a credit manager in a jewelry store, and that was one job I held up for two years. Then something happened. Well, you know, it happened and I always like the retail kind of stuff, which, I went to work in a men's haberdashery, which I liked. I liked clothes and art. I like clothes and I liked that. I worked there for two years, and then my family decided to move back to Newark, and, yes, I moved back, because I was really, didn't like the idea of going to Connecticut, but it's my family, you know. I felt that's where I should be or wanted to be, not being a solo kind of person. So then we moved back to Newark and ... for a short time after they moved to Connecticut, I stayed in Newark and worked in a shirt, custom-made shirt shop, which I also liked. I liked selling stuff, clothes. Then I just moved. I didn't like the idea of living in a room there, scuffling around to find something where I was going to eat. I just had the room, so I moved back to Connecticut, depressed, you know. I moved up to Connecticut and I got these two jobs, and then, by then, they decided to move back to Newark. My father lost his eyesight by then and moved back to Newark, and I went to work in another clothing store, selling children's clothes, which I liked, boy's clothes and men's clothes, with a company called Larkey's in Newark. It was a famous company in Newark, and during that time, I met my wife. My wife, Barbara, worked for the City of Newark at one time. She also worked for a couple of lawyers. She's very talented and she also was an entertainer, which she should be. She used to entertain at the Stage Door Canteen in Newark, you know, not as a job but as a hobby, and she worked for a lawyer. Then she worked for the City of Newark. ... While I was working at Larkey's, she was working in a toy store during Christmas, and that's how a friend of mine and a friend of hers, we met and we were okay. We met then. That was in 1952.

SH: Had you been in the Reserves, when you came out?

RR: No.

SH: So you didn't have to worry about getting called back in for Korea.

RR: We got married in 1953 and, no, ... in fact, this month is our anniversary, forty-sixth. We have one girl. ... Then after we got married, I had to get a real job and I became an insurance salesman. I did that for five years. Now we're up to, never missed a day. Now we're up to 1958, and Barbara's father owned a trucking company in Newark, primarily working for New Jersey Bell, Western Electric, Bell Atlantic, name it, any of those companies. ... In my spare time, as an insurance salesman, I worked with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, hated it, carrying a debit around, and I didn't like that. I used to help out part-time, go up to the trucking company in Newark, do payroll, do various things, help out, and then he died, my father-in-law, in 1958 and her brother was running the business. He was running the company with his father, but he just wasn't for it, and I purchased the company from him. That's what I did from 1958 until 1993 ... I worked mostly ... for a telephone company and General Electric, but after 1984, the telephone company broke up. I mean, if you gear all your business doing work for them, you

know, anywhere from seven to twenty-five guys working every day. The telephone company broke up, and I lost a lot of contacts that I knew in the company to keep my work going, you know, and in 1993, I decided to close down, and I still own the company, technically. It's inactive right now. In fact, during 1982, there was a movie made. Remember that picture with Peter O'Toole? There was a picture made, "My Favorite Year." In that scene, where he comes out from the theater, I rented some of my trucks with the name on the side. I had to block out some of the, this picture was supposed to take place in the '50s, and they needed the big trucks to block out any kind of new business or modern kind of business in Forty-fifth Street in New York. I got a picture I can show you later with Peter O'Toole, and Richard Benjamin directed it, and I have the film. I bought the film, and I could see the truck. Peter O'Toole comes out eating a hot dog. You look across the street, and you can see the first four letters of the name of our company, E-M-L-E-[R], so you can see the truck and that was pretty interesting. In fact, it was a 1948 White, which I wish I had today. It was like an antique and it was in mint condition and we hired out. There's a company in Bellville, New Jersey, which I never knew. I found out about it that time. They rent movie equipment, taxicabs. If ever a scene needed police cars, you would rent, he would rent them that. ... I saw that in the paper, and I called them and sure enough, a little while later, he called me. He said, "Yeah" ... and I got the pleasure of riding over there and watching the film go on, Forty-fifth Street, stopping traffic. It was exciting at that point. But I ran that business a long time, thirty-four or thirty-five years. Here I am now. Now it's 1999.

SH: You were saying your hobbies are ...

RR: My hobbies are art. That's really my avocation ... and also jazz, food, cooking and good cigars, but I have a good collection of all jazz albums. I have an exotic record player, which you can't even find today. I happen to have a turntable that comes from a radio station, which this friend of mine owned in California. He owned some radio stations. He got a brand new one he sent me and I use that, perfect.

SH: Do you ever go around in the jazz clubs anymore?

RR: I have been in every one that you can name, New York, wherever. Name it, I've been there.

SH: Did you ever play any instruments or anything?

RR: When I was in high school, I fooled around with the drums. I liked jazz above anything else.

SH: One thing I wanted to ask you, spanning your military career, too. You had said that on your trip to the Midwest, you met somebody who wasn't Jewish and he wondered whether you had wings or horns. Were you aware of any other anti-Semitism at that point?

RR: Not at that point but before. My first visit to Camp Dix, when I first went in at Fort Dix, I was on KP there, and the first thing I heard from the chef that was on duty, the cook, whatever his name was, he called me a couple of names. He didn't even know me. I just appeared there and I looked dark, whatever I am, and then I swung him up the head. ... Also working for a big

company, a telephone company, those people are well ingrained, and there's always that underlying sense ... Not that I'm religious, but I do know the president of New Jersey Bell, which means nothing to me, like anything else, trying to get into schools and we were pretty well indoctrinated into that company, because we were reliable, cost wise, because we did the same type of work as the telephone company did. If they had trucks going out to pick up, we had trucks going to pick up, only they didn't have enough trucks. We were just doing the same work that they did, mainly our job was moving big reels of cable, transporting them around, even having them trucks, when they started, to put in fiber optics, digging up copper cables. We had a truck following along to cut those cables in 4 foot lengths, put them in, take them back to the facility, and maybe in the next day, when there was enough, we would take those same scraps over to a smelter in Staten Island, but it was always resentment. I do know that, because I had a deal with negotiating contracts, which weren't little. They were pretty good-sized contracts. This was a performance contract. If you didn't do the work, forget about the contract. You're always on the edge of your seat because of it. During the time, I branched out and did work for General Electric, Light-Olier, big companies, because in that particular business, if you don't know, it's a matter of getting your money for, you don't want to have to worry about that, because for one thing, if the telephone company owes you ten million dollars, you get it.

SH: Did you ever run for political office?

RR: No, I am a very simple man. I don't like lawyers. I've been more or less of Republican-bent.

SH: What did your family think of FDR?

RR: Yes, I guess, he was a Democrat, and they said a lot of other things about him. He was the big father of whatever at the time ...

SH: You said that you were actually making your way back to the States when you heard that FDR had died.

RR: Yeah, on the ship. I don't remember the exact date of the death, but it seems to me that during those thirty days he died.

SH: What was the reaction around you when you heard that the bomb had been dropped?

RR: ... If you look back, you know a lot of people criticized Truman for giving the word, but look at the other things. I mean, the Japanese, why did the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor? What given reason was there to come 8,000 miles or whatever to attack our country? I happen to be pretty patriotic. Why? For what? Some people say, some people knew about it. You know we were sending scrap metal all those years, but who'd think they would become bombs for whatever damn reason and to take over the whole Pacific Ocean? They didn't take over Australia or any of those other islands ... In fact, I recall that they attempted to drop some bombs in the western part of this country with their airplanes or whatever, and they were doing it. It's unfortunate that the Japanese people were interned at that time. That's maybe a knee-slap decision to do that. The fact remains they came in, and my own answer to that is if you're going

to hit me, I'm going to hit you as hard as I can and remove you, and that's the way you have to do it. Can you imagine if we ever had to invade Japan? It would be horrendous, I mean, in statistics. The military can prove that out. So what is it worth? Why isn't it worth it? You hit me, you're going to pay, whether you're a civilian or not. It's hard to determine the Japanese. I'm not saying all Japanese people, Japanese with that mysticism of Japanese in general, the people, you know. You're soldiers and their certain fanaticism was shown during the war, the kamikaze bombings and stuff like that. So why not? It stopped the war and who knows how many Americans were saved, were not killed or injured, wounded, whatever. That's my thoughts on that. I don't regret that.

SH: Do you remember where you were when you heard this?

RR: I guess we were back. I don't know the exact date, when Truman took office. I don't know that exact date. I'm usually pretty good at dates. Those two things happened, him dying and dropping the bombs weren't too far apart. See, the thing about General MacArthur is he wanted to be emperor of Japan, whatever he wanted to do.

SH: If there are any other questions that I forgot to ask you ...

RR: I don't know. What else? We went through my business career, and I did not attend any other schools and I'm here now. I have one daughter, which we are very proud of. She was in that school where the kids did all that shooting in Colorado. [Shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, April, 1999.] She was at a historical museum doing training for her history. She was just there a week before with, who ever heard of Littleton, Colorado? Where do you come from?

SH: Wyoming.

RR: Oh, Wyoming. Whoever heard of that place? It was just coincidental whoever heard of that. That's an awful thing that happened to that office building. I don't know the answer to that.

SH: Well, I thank you for taking time today to answer the questions and again, my thanks.

RR: Okay.

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Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy 9/28/01

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/10/01

Reviewed by Richard Roth 11/01