RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL B. RUGGIERO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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COLUMBUS, NEW JERSEY
JANUARY 28, 2013

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Michael B. Ruggiero on January 28, 2013, in Columbus, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today. I appreciate it. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Michael Ruggiero: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, at the Newark City Hospital on December the 14th, 1919.

SI: What were your parents' names?

MR: My father's name was Peter. My mother's name was Florence.

SI: Both sets of your grandparents were born in Italy, and then, came to the United States, you indicated in your survey.

MR: That's right.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, do you know anything about what their lives were like in Italy before they came to the United States?

MR: Well, I really don't know, but I'm guessing that they were [in] farming, probably, doing that sort of thing, but, other than that, I'm not certain about what they did in Italy at the time. The thing that surprises me is how they got from the small town, on my father's side, anyway, because the town was built on the side of a mountain, how they got from there to the Port of Naples and to this country is beyond my comprehension, but the point is that they did.

SI: Do you know the name of the town?

MR: Yes, I do. The name of my [grand]father's town was San Fele, S-A-N F-E-L-E, and that's located about thirty-five or forty miles east of Naples. My mother's side, do you want me to talk about them?

SI: Sure.

MR: My mother's parents were born in Calabritto, C-A-L-A-B-R-I-T-T-O, which is about the same distance from Naples, but in a different direction. My mother's folks came over here in 1885 and I'm guessing that my father's folks came over in approximately 1890, which is quite a distance back when they came over. At that time, the City of Newark was really a city of maybe five or six different nations. Why do I say that? Well, they had one section of town was where all of the Jewish people settled, another where the Irish settled, the Italians, the Polish, the Germans. That's the way it was and they gathered together not so much for the security, [but] because, well, this is where they were comfortable. They spoke Italian most of the time and they learned English. At the time, of course, there was no television, no radio, so [that] they never did get a grasp of the English language. My father's parents had eight children and my mother's parents had approximately the same, I think six or seven children. They settled up in Connecticut on my mother's side. My father's folks settled in the Italian section of Newark, called the First Ward, which is the way they divided the city, into ward sections, and I was born

into that. Now, most of the sections there had tenement buildings. That's what they had then, but we were sort of at a little higher level. We had a house, which was considered desirable. So, I lived in that house with my grandparents and my mother and father. I had a very happy childhood.

SI: Did they own the house when you were born?

MR: Yes.

SI: What street was it on?

MR: It was on Stone Street, 120 Stone Street, Newark, New Jersey. As a matter of fact, my son took me up there, drove me up there, and I talked to the people that lived in the house. They were surprised that [there was] somebody who had been there back in, well, in the 1920s, when I was four, five years old. The house is still there.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

MR: I have no idea.

SI: Okay.

MR: Well, my mother's family, and, of course, my mother lived in Newark, in that same section, prior to their moving to Connecticut. They married very, very young. I had a brother who died in 1917 when the Spanish influenza epidemic swept the world. He passed away and I was the second born. [Editor's Note: Between twenty and forty million people perished in the influenza (also known as "Spanish Flu") pandemic that swept the globe from 1918 to 1919, following the end of World War I, including an estimated 675,000 in the United States.] It's interesting to note that the naming of the children, at that time, was very customary to do that, now, the first child, if it's a male, was named after the father's father. The second child is named after the father's father, okay. My brother was named Bartholomew, after my father's father, but, since he passed away, I was named after my mother's father, whose name was Michael. That's how my name came about. My oldest sister, she's about six years younger than I am, was named Theodora. Well, she hated the name, [laughter] named after my father's mother, but the second born, a girl, Dolores, she wasn't named after anybody. My mother rebelled against that custom, I guess. My brother, who was about a year-and-a-half or two years younger than I am, was named Raymond after the doctor that attended my mother's [delivery], when she gave birth to my brother Raymond. So, that custom went out the window. Basically, that was it. The point I'm trying to make is that I was raised and there were certain customs that go back a thousand years, I guess, in Italy and I grew up with that, until I grew up to a point where some of the customs I still respected and, others, I didn't bother with.

SI: Did you live with your father's parents or your mother's parents?

MR: Actually, my grandparents lived on the first floor and we lived up on the second floor of the house and it was very, very interesting. [laughter] As I say, I was very, very young and it was a wonderful life as far as I was concerned.

SI: Was your other set of grandparents still in Newark?

MR: No, they went up to Connecticut.

SI: Your mother's parents were in Connecticut.

MR: They lived in Connecticut.

SI: Were you able to get any stories from them about why they came to the US or what that trip was like?

MR: No, they never told me that. I never did know why. My grandfather on my mother's side played clarinet and he was in one of the orchestras over there. According to legend--I'm not certain about this--on my mother's side, my maternal grandfather came over to the United States and he played with the Ringling Brothers Circus. He played in the band there. Then, when he saved enough money, he sent away for his young wife. So, that's the legend in the family. Now, whether or not that's true or not, I don't know, but, when he came here, he abandoned any interest in music and he became a cobbler. He made shoes. He was a cobbler. He didn't repair them, he actually made them, made them to order.

SI: What did your father's father do?

MR: My father's father, in those days, it was very fashionable to get your shoes shined and my father's father had a shoeshine parlor with about four chairs. People would come in there and have their shoes shined or they would send their children with the shoes to have them shined. Then, they'd take them back home. My father's brothers, including my father, particularly on the weekend, on Saturday and Sunday, would assist my grandfather in shining the shoes and that's how they earned a living. They really did. It was interesting.

SI: Was that shoeshine parlor in the First Ward or another part of the city?

MR: It was in the First Ward. Actually, it was in the Bell Telephone Building on Bloomfield Avenue and Crittenden Street in Newark and they were there for many years, until my grandfather stepped on a nail and contracted blood poisoning. He died from that. Of course, they were ignorant about medicine. If a doctor was called, I mean, it had to be somebody practically on their deathbed. So, he never bothered and blood poisoning killed him.

SI: What did your father do for a living?

MR: He was into music, but he didn't do much of anything, really. He did painting and odd jobs and things of that sort.

SI: What type of music did he play and what instrument?

MR: He played guitar, played guitar. As a matter of fact, his very, very good friend, a friend of the family, named (Ernest Ventura?), played with him and Ernie sang in a falsetto voice. This is something that's interesting. Frankie Avalon [Frankie Valli] of The Four Seasons came from that same neighborhood. So, he had heard Ernie sing in a falsetto voice and he said, "Would you mind if I try it with my group?" He had a group called The Four Lovers, later called The Four Seasons, and that's where it started. Even more interesting was the fact that my sister sang with them.

SI: Growing up in your household, was music important?

MR: Oh, yes, yes, very much so. As a matter of fact, during the [Great] Depression, we didn't have much of anything. It was impossible to get a job, for my father, at the time, and we were [on], well, it was an early form of welfare called relief. We'd get a check every month, every week or so--I think it was eight dollars a week or something like that--for food. Despite all of the, well, all of the bad times, I guess, at the time, my father and Ernie would get out on the back porch there and they'd start singing and all the neighbors would come in. So, there was a way of getting over the sadness of the Depression by singing. I used to sit there and listen to them sing and my sister would sing with them, interesting.

SI: Your earliest memories are of growing up in this house on Stone Street. What was it like living in that kind of community? Were most of your neighbors on that street Italian?

MR: Yes, they were.

SI: Yes.

MR: They were. Well, if someone had a job back then, they were very, very fortunate. That part of the street--it was just a short section of that street--the people who lived there had their own individual houses. So, it wasn't so bad, but the tenements is where they really had a lot of problems as far as getting along and surviving. It was just about the time when the cities, the country, was transitioning from horses to cars. So, every day, the milk wagon would come along to deliver milk and the vegetable wagon, deliver ice, and so on. That was a source of a social gathering there, too, because, when they came there, it was a way of all the ladies in the street getting to know each other, because they'd gather by the vegetable wagon or by the milk wagon or whatever. It was a sort of a way to get socially along. Another thing that was interesting is the fact that everyone had chickens in the back; not everyone, but we had chickens in the back, chickens. My grandmother had a little vegetable garden and she would augment that by buying the fruit and vegetables from the vendor. They didn't have enough money to purchase fertilizer, so, what they would do is, they'd gather the horse manure from the street. It was interesting, because, when the horses came by and they left [laughter] the fertilizer there, the women would dart out in the street with coal--what did you call them?--scuttles and pails that they'd put the coal in. They wouldn't fight, but they would compete to get the manure. They'd take that back into the backyard and season it, and then, they would use that for the vegetables, but this was another way of them getting to know each other. The thing was that there was total respect in the

families, within the families and interacting with the other families, and I was grown up that way. The first thing my father taught me is how to say, "Sir," "Yes, ma'am." So, it wasn't the way people thought, that there was a lot of criminal activity. Of course, they had the numbers rackets, too.

SI: When you were growing up, was Italian spoken at home? Was it a mixture of Italian and English?

MR: No, no, we never spoke Italian.

SI: Okay.

MR: Never. As a matter of fact, my mother, of course, was raised in the family and she spoke a dialect. It wasn't pure Italian back then. You have to remember then that Italy, back then, before 1870, was actually a country of city-states. In the *Risorgimento,* all of the city-states gathered together, became Italy. So, each area had their own dialect. So, in the neighborhood I lived, the people had a Sicilian dialect, they had the Neapolitan dialect and they had this, that. Sometimes, it was difficult for one to understand some of the expressions, some of the things that were said by the other persons from the different areas.

SI: Between people whose families had come from Sicily and people whose families had come from Southern Italy, were there distinctions within the neighborhood? Were there lines that you did not cross or distinctions made?

MR: Partially, partially. Actually, everyone lived and they all got along well together. In all the time I was there, I never saw or heard of an argument between one family and another, because people were trying to survive. They came over there and most of them got jobs working on the railroads, building railroads and things of that nature. That's the way it was. [laughter] It was a friendly rivalry. For example, my father's folks came from San Fele and many of the folks that came from that same town would gather together in a little social club, store-front type thing. They talked and they'd get together and talk about where they came from, and so on. Then, another group that came from Sicily would have their own little social group. So, there was a friendly rivalry, where they kidded each other about where they came from, but there's nothing vicious or anything like that at all.

SI: When you were growing up in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the Great Depression period, did you have a lot of friends in your neighborhood? What would you do for recreation? Did you have to go out and work at an early age? What were you doing personally when you were a child?

MR: Well, when I was a child, I went out to play. We played in the streets. There were no playgrounds then. I think they may have had one in the school there. We'd play in the street. We would take a broomstick and chop off a six-inch piece and sharpen that and use that as a ball and play stickball or, [if] we had a rubber ball, we'd use our fists to hit the ball, instead of a baseball bat. So, we found ways to amuse ourselves and there was nothing illegal about any of

the things that we did. That was when I was very, very young. As I grew older, things got a little bit different.

SI: Were there other traditions from Italy that were kept up in your family, things that you did?

MR: My father and mother were first-generation Italian-Americans, from Italian extraction, and they weren't as tightly knitted to a lot of the customs as the parents were. This was the start of the breakaway from that. Of course, being second-generation, we never paid much attention to most of that, either, but the one thing that the Italians did, back in those sections--and they were very religious people, most of them--on a certain saint's birthday, they would have what they called a feast around the church there. All the Italians would gather there and they'd have food and they'd have drink, and so on, and they would enjoy themselves thoroughly. Then, they'd have a saint, an idol, which they pulled through the streets with dollar bills on them, which was donated to the church. This was the only--well, I guess there were a couple of other customs. For example, Christmas Eve, they all went to church, Christmas Eve, and they came back and they had dinners, but mostly with fish, not meat, but my parents didn't do that, no. We were an American community, so-to-speak. We moved many times throughout the Depression. It was difficult. When we couldn't pay the rent in one place, we had to move out and go to another. We did that maybe half a dozen times.

SI: Were all the moves within the First Ward?

MR: No. We moved to different parts of the city and, well, some of the moves were [within the First Ward]. Then, we moved up into the Forest Hills Section, where my father got a job selling motorcycles and boats and things of that nature. We lived in the Forest Hills Section, which was the nicer section of Newark. A lot of the Irish and English people lived in that area. It was a very happy time for me, because my father would load my brother and I into a motorcycle sidecar and take us up to a hill where we'd watch the races between the Harleys and the Indian motorcycle drivers.

SI: You moved around to different areas of the city during the Depression. Can you describe how the Depression was affecting the places you lived, the city as a whole and your family?

MR: Well, it didn't affect my mother and father too much. It's a different place, but doing the same thing, but, as far as the kids were concerned, when I moved from the Italian section, I moved down into the Ironbound Section, which was mostly inhabited by the Polish. There was a Polish group there. That's when I found out that there are different ways, different things that people ate when they went home and different customs. It was just an enlightening educational experience for me. The only thing that I regretted was the fact that I would make friends in each place and, when I moved there, it was kind of a sad thing to see them go. One of the benefits of that was, because I moved around so many times, I learned how to get along with people when I met [them] for the first time, interact with them. I would try to react to the [situation]--well, if they had different customs and different experiences and different likes and dislikes, I would understand what they were. I would never have a problem with it. I'd just sort of meld into their culture.

SI: Do you think most of the people you interacted with had that kind of melting-pot attitude or was there any friction between different ethnic groups?

MR: No. There was no difference. As a matter of fact, pizza, the only place where you can get, let's say, a pizza, for example; by the way, pizza, the Italian word for "pizza" translated into English is "pie," so, pizza is actually pie and that's a pizza. There were only two or three places in the Italian section there. Well, actually, there were two Italian sections in Newark. One was in one part of the city and one was in another. It was interesting, but there was never any negative interaction between the different groups there. As a matter of fact, we used to go into the German neighborhood, where they'd have a German restaurant, or a lot of the people would come into the Italian neighborhoods just to get a pizza. They were just going back from one area to another. There was another little section where they had Orientals. We had, I think, two Chinese restaurants and it was considered a wonderful evening if you go to a Chinese restaurant. For a dollar, or less than a dollar, you can get a wonderful meal, but we were poor most of the time. We're just getting along, until World War II.

SI: Do you remember different methods you would use to make the family budget stretch?

MR: Yes, of course. Well, I had a newspaper route and I wouldn't make much money there, during the week. Then, at night, I would go down to the City of Newark. I think the papers were selling for two cents back then and we'd get maybe fifteen or twenty papers for fifteen to twenty cents and sell them for two cents. We'd walk along the streets. I remember that, during the wintertime, it was cold, because I didn't have any gloves, couldn't afford any gloves. I sold papers, doing it that way. My brother got a little box with the shoe polish and brushes and he'd go out and shine shoes. He was making more money than the other kids who were doing the same thing. They could never understand why my brother Raymond was making more money. So, I said, "Ray," I says, "you seem to be making a couple dollars more, two or three dollars more, than some of these other kids." He said, "Well, that's easy." He says, "I go up to outside the cemetery on a Sunday and the people go in there and get their shoes all dusty. When they came out, invariably, they were in a very gentle frame of mind and a lot of them would want their shoes shined. That's how I did that." I learned to get along with the different cultures. Of course, the Jewish folks were very religious and they had a lot of their own customs. Usually, the group of friends we had [were] a mixture of different kids, a Polish kid, a kid from a Jewish family and the Italian kids and the Irish kids. We'd get together and go out in a lot somewhere and play ball, baseball or things of that nature.

SI: How old were you when you had to go out and work? Did you have to give what you earned to your mother?

MR: Well, I started when I was about eleven, twelve years old and I did all of these different things, a few dollars here and a few pennies there. It was kind of tough. Of course, when I was a teenager, after high school, I'd go and set up pins in a bowling alley. That was the time when you had to put the pins [up]. You had a lever there and you'd step on these little iron pegs with them up and you put the pins on there. I would do my homework in-between games. It was a heck of a thing. Then, as you note there, that it got so bad, my father wasn't working. He couldn't work. He was sick half the time. My mother said, "There's an organization called the

Civilian Conservation Corps." So, I didn't know what that was. I said, "Well, what is that?" She says, "Well," says, "let's go down and find out." So, she took me down to a building down in Newark there. The Civilian Conservation Corps was something that was created by Franklin D. Roosevelt in order to put a lot of the young men to work. The whole idea was, they'd go out there and they'd build bridges and they'd go into the forest and chop down trees, build roads and things of that nature. If you joined the CCCs, you would earn thirty dollars a month, twenty-five dollars of that, which was a mandatory thing, sent home to your parents and five for yourself. So, they sent me up into the wilderness area of Northern Idaho and I was there for, I guess, a little less than a year. I had to leave school, leave high school, to do that and the money that I made that was sent home would pay for the rent, and so on. [Editor's Note: The Civilian Conservation Corps was an agency that was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which employed young unemployed males in outdoor conservation projects from 1933-1942.]

SI: I want to ask more in-depth questions on your CCC experience. First, can you tell me a little bit about your schools in Newark, the schools you attended and what you enjoyed most about school?

MR: Well, I started out at the Franklin School, which is a block away from where we lived, kindergarten. Then, from there, I went to St. Michael's School, which was nearby, and I stayed there for three or four years. Then, we moved around. Gosh, then, we moved to the Polish neighborhood and I went to Ann Street School, where a lot of Polish kids were going to school there. As a matter of fact, in the churches, they said their Masses in Polish. Then, I finally went to Central Avenue School, where I started there in the fourth grade and I went there through the eighth grade. Well, they had a city-wide intelligence test or something at the time and that was in the sixth grade. I don't know what happened, but, evidently, I made exceptionally high marks in it. From that point on, I never went to class. They would use me to mimeograph stuff or do anything, things of that nature. I could never understand why. They said I had the intelligence of--was it first or second grade [of] high school?--when I was in the sixth grade. I used to go down to the Newark Library when I was in the elementary school. I'd bring home four or five or six books at a time, read all the classics. I'd go up into the adult section to read all the classics. I had a thirst for knowledge. Well, [when] I graduated from there, they gave me a commendation medal. I don't know what that was about. So, evidently, then, they thought I was exceptional in that area. As a young boy, I didn't realize that. I said, "Well, this is a pretty good deal." I'd go to class, I'd take the exams and hardly ever even studying, because I'm so well read at the time, but leaving high school just about killed me, because I wanted to go to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], become an engineer. I was always interested in electronics and, unfortunately, I couldn't do that. So, I went to the "Cs." So, when I left the CCCs, I came back and I worked for, I guess it was the state highway department, working on there, carrying water for them. I was just a kid, carrying water for the fellows. I worked for a fellow that delivered oil. They had these five-gallon cans of oil, open cans, and I'd carry them up four flights of stairs in these tenement buildings. Most of the Italian families had their stoves, they graduated from using coal and they converted them for oil. They had a little gallon can and I would fill their cans with oil, and deliver milk that way. That's another way I earned a living.

SI: How long were you at Barringer High School before you had to leave for the CCC?

MR: Well, I guess I was in McKinley Junior High School first, there for a year, and then, I guess about a year in Barringer, pretty close to the third grade [junior year], I guess. Then, I had to leave, but I always felt guilty about that. I always had a complex about that, the fact that I hadn't finished high school. Of course, when I went to the service, they took care of that, I mean, got that squared away.

SI: You said you had an interest in electronics. Did you do anything that fostered that? Were you a ham radio operator?

MR: Yes, I am. I'm on ham radio [amateur radio] right now.

SI: Okay.

MR: Still am. I've been one for over seventy years.

SI: Wow.

MR: I was always interested in electronics. Oh, in another way, before the war, anyway, I used to go around repairing radios and stuff like that. People would take their radios to a radio store and they were charged maybe four or five dollars to fix it, which was beyond their ability to pay for that. So, I'd go around and I'd charge half that price. [laughter] So, I contributed money to the folks that way and did that and I eventually got my license, back in 1941. Now, when I was in the CCCs, if you're going back to that, we were in the wilderness area of Northern Idaho. We were building a road along the Saint Joe River and the reason we were doing that is because, in 1910, there was a forest fire, killed about eighty people. Firefighters couldn't get to them and the people that were there couldn't get out. So, one of the things that the CCC camp that I was in [did] was to build a road along that river, so that the firefighters could get into the area. Prior to that time, when I first went into the CCC camps, they had pack mules, where the prospectors were going up in the hills looking for silver or they had the pack mules that were taking food and rations up to the Forestry people who were living in those towers, checking for forest fires. While I was there, I became a radio operator. We were sitting, eating dinner one time, and the Lieutenant, who was the head of the camp--during the day, the Forestry Department had operational control of us, when we went out in the field, and, at night and on weekends, then, the military Reserve officers would take over. We wore military-type clothes and we would have military inspections, but it was a very loose type of thing. Anyway, the Lieutenant said he was interested in someone who wanted to go to radio school, so [that] we can set up a radio station. They had the [single wire] ground return telephone lines, the crank-type jobs [hand-crank generator]. In order to talk to the CCC headquarters, which was a hundred miles away, they had to go through these very antique telephone lines into the commercial system, and then, over to the headquarters. Then, the headquarters had what they called a screening room, where they went in there because they could hardly hear the fellows talking. So, they decided that they would set up radio stations with these camps around the area. So, they sent me up there and I had been in the Boy Scouts, very active in the Boy Scouts, by the way. That was one of the things that shaped my character, too, which is another story. They sent me to this radio school and I knew the code, because I had been in the Boy Scouts with the buzzers and the flags, and so on. So, I didn't have any problem with that. So, I became a radio operator and I was promoted.

They gave me another five dollars a month. That's where my interest in electronics, radio and electronics, continued.

SI: What was the trip West like?

MR: The trip West?

SI: Yes. What was it like going from Newark to Northern Idaho?

MR: Well, we were in a troop train. First of all, now, here we are and I was about seventeen at the time, just a kid. They sent us down to Camp Dix and they put us in these tents and they'd outfit us with all of these clothes. It was cold and half of us didn't have enough underclothing to keep us warm to begin with when we went there. So, the first thing we did was, you put on the winter underwear and the clothes and away we went. Then, we got our orders to go to the different camps around the country. Well, I was in the group that went out to Idaho. I didn't even know where Idaho was at the time. From my geography class, I knew it was out in the West somewhere. We were on a troop train and I slept in the upper berth. We would make stops along the way. They'd put us on the siding while the expresses went by and it took us about four days to get there. They would stop, stay overnight somewhere, put us on a siding somewhere. They had a car that was sort of like the car where they kept all the baggage, but, in this particular case, on this troop train, they had the cooks back there. They had these big pots and the trains, at that time, were swirling [swaying] back and forth. In order to keep the coffee or the soup or whatever from spilling, they took a block of wood and put it into the pot. So, sometimes, we were drinking, we'd have to pull out a splinter out of the cup. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

MR: It took us about four days. It was the first time I had ever been on that type of train. With my parents, we would go up to Connecticut to visit the folks up there and I was on the train. I was four in the train and five off the train. In other words, if you're five years old, you had to pay the full fare. So, my father said, "Remember now, you're four on the train and five off the train." So, one time, when the conductor came by and he says, "How old are you, son?" I said, "Well, I'm four on the train and five off the train." [laughter] Well, he never charged, but, I mean, he got a big charge out of that; just a little anecdote. Anyway, the troop train took about four days to get out there, which was quite an experience. I realized--the thing that impressed me was--how tremendously interesting and how wide this country was. As a young kid, you live in one small area and that's your world. Well, occasionally, we would take a trip to New York or something like that. My father or my uncle would take me to a ballgame and that was as far as we went. Then, getting to different parts of the country, you talk with people in the CCCs who came from the South, half the time, I couldn't understand them. The dialect and the accents were beyond me, but, after a while, [you learned]. Then, I began to realize that, in this country, you had different people, different cultures, and I made it my business, really, to try to understand how these people lived and what they believed in. If they believed in certain things that I thought would be interesting or strange, I'd go along with them. I said, "Well, that's their way of living." So, this sort of shaped my character and the way I thought about different things. When I came back home, I realized that--I don't know how to explain it--but that the folks that I left

were living in their own little world and they were ignorant about what was going on elsewhere in this country. Even the expressions, local expressions, were strange to me when I came back. I said, "Boy, they spoke differently."

SI: Do you remember any examples?

MR: Well, some of the local expressions that they used, colloquial expressions, were different. I can't remember offhand any of them, really, but the grammar, [laughter] instead of saying, "She doesn't know," for example, they would say, "She don't know." This is because, when they came here, the local Italians picked up the colloquial expressions of the people around them where they were. I saw that and I heard that and it bothered me a little bit. I said, "These people aren't speaking correct English here." [laughter] Here, I was just a kid. Anyway, I didn't think they were dumb or anything like that, it was just the way they spoke.

SI: Can you describe the camp out in Idaho? What was it like physically?

MR: Oh, yes.

SI: What was a typical day like for you?

MR: Okay. Well, the camp was [near] a little town called Avery and it was a stopover for the Milwaukee, St. Paul and Chicago Railroad there. They transferred from electricity to steam and they would cut through the hills there. We were about twenty miles or so from this little village, and then, from there, there was nothing. It was just a road there. Basically, the camp had seven barracks and each barracks had twenty kids, twenty soldiers, CCCs, not soldiers, for twenty bunks. They had one big stove in the middle and we would use these three-foot logs that were cut when we were chopping down these big trees. We'd fire up that stove with that. There was a fellow that we paid him twenty-five cents a month and he volunteered to go around each night and put wood in these stoves to keep the barracks warm. Then, every Saturday, we would have an inspection. There was a medical officer there. The camps were run by Reserve officers who were called to active duty or volunteered for active duty and we'd have a medical officer. We had a surgeon there. Captain (Bambase?) was his name and he'd come around and make sure that everything was clean and neat, and so on. Of course, they had a shower there and I don't know how they got the water, from a tank somewhere. The buildings were sort of in a semi-circle, and then, there was a big mess hall here. That's where we would go to eat, and then, [there was] the little headquarters, where I eventually established my little radio station there. I had three schedules a day, morning, afternoon and evening, and that's the way it was. We had about, I guess, about 140, 150. Now, basically, the mission of the camp was to build the road. Now, in order to build the road along the river, at that time, these trees were a hundred, 120, 130, 150 feet high, I mean, great, big trees. They'd have to cut these trees down. Then, the CCC boys were doing this under the direction of the Forestry people and they would take dynamite under all these stumps. They'd maybe blow half a dozen stumps at a time, get them out of the way, and they would build the road. Then, if we came to a rocky bluff, they'd hang us out over the edge of the bluff there with jackhammers and we'd drill maybe two or three feet and blast a little hole out until we went in about twenty feet. We called them "gopher holes" and expands a little bit, and then, fill that full of dynamite and blow the rock out. So, they had me out there and my job, I

was in the jackhammer crew. So, I was young. Most of the kids were a little bit older than I was, twenty-one or something, twenty, twenty-one years old. I took care of the compressor that provided the air to the jackhammer crews and I did that until they pulled me out and sent me to radio school. They'd build this road and they finally built that when I left there. It went all the way to a place called Red Ives. My son took me there about five or six years ago, to where the camp was. By the way, we used to play baseball and we had what they called a canteen. It was part of the headquarters building. In it, they had a pool table, they had a piano that was out of tune and they had a little area where the fellow was selling pipe tobacco and candy and stuff like that. We would get a chit book, three or four dollars, whatever we want, and we'd use these chits to buy different things. Anyway, we'd go out there and I'd play pool. The way they played pool was, whoever won would stay until he was defeated, then, the next group would come, and so on. So, camp life was very nice. It was really, really [nice]. We had retreat at night, with the flag, and so on. It was a military atmosphere, but it was very, very loose.

SI: Did the officers in charge try to impose discipline?

MR: No, no. It was self-imposed. I mean, if somebody got out of line, then, they would say, "We're going to ride tonight." Whoever got out of line, I mean, they took him, they threw him in the shower or they shaved the hair from his head. [laughter] We imposed this discipline upon ourselves. We never had a problem when I was there.

SI: Was there a set term that you were there for?

MR: Yes, nine months.

SI: Okay.

MR: After nine months, I wanted to go back home. I don't think my parents were [happy]. They [were] a little disappointed, because the money I was sending home paid the rent and the food. So, when I left, [laughter] that stopped. Then, because of that, we had to move to a place where the rent was less. I didn't realize that until later on. I felt kind of guilty about that, but I wanted to come back and get back and go to school again, but, when I came back, there just wasn't enough money. The welfare, at that time, wasn't really enough money to sustain a family properly.

SI: When you were working on the road, particularly in the jackhammer crew, were these dangerous jobs?

MR: Yes.

SI: Was anybody injured?

MR: Yes, oh, yes. They were dangerous. Well, you're dealing with a jackhammer, you're hanging by some straps and you're into this hole here and you're handling dynamite, caps and stuff like that. Here we were, young kids, young guys, and we were chopping down these huge trees, cutting them up, using powder and dynamite to blow them and no one got hurt that I know

of. We used axes, double-bitted axes. Some of the bigger guys did that, chopping the tree. They'd saw the tree part way. If you wanted, say, for example, the tree to fall this way, they'd saw part way with a two-handed saw, and then, they would chop, chop, chop, until the tree would lean over and fall over. So, they learned that. The kids became very, very strong. I mean, from a physical point-of-view, it was just wonderful. A lot of times, the kids would take their shirts off. When we took a shower, sometimes, the fellows that had been out there were all suntanned; they'd be tan on the top and white on the bottom, kind of interesting. We never had a problem, though. As a radio operator, during the day, when I wasn't operating, I was taking care of the library. Some of the people were taking courses with the University of Idaho. I took a couple in photography. They were non-credit courses. The one thing I always wanted to do was, I wanted to get back to school. I wanted to get back to school and I just couldn't do that. I had two little sisters and I said, "We have to go out and help support this family." My father'd go out and paint, go out and do some painting and things of that nature. It was just difficult.

SI: Did your mother ever work outside the home?

MR: Yes, sometimes she did, but, actually, what she did was to read tea leaves, fortunes. She'd tell a fortune. Now, all the neighborhood ladies knew that she would tell a fortune. You have to understand that, back then, the people really didn't have anything. They had nothing to look forward to at the time. So, one of the ways they gathered some hope was via listening to my mother read tea leaves. They'd come in there and she'd tell their fortunes and tell them all of the things they loved to know. Growing up was just moving from one place to another and going out and fixing radios and selling papers and things of that nature. The one thing that I did was, I went to the Newark Public Library. I think I read half the library. I started out where the kids department was, where the section was, and I would read from their books. Then, they gave me a special adult card and, here I was, like twelve, thirteen years old, I'd get up there and read all of the different classics, and so on. So, that was one of the things that impressed them at school, was the fact that my vocabulary was expanded, and so on.

SI: After you came back to Newark, you said you got jobs with the highway department and the delivery of oil to private homes.

MR: Well, that was after I came back. Yes, when I came back from the CCCs, I delivered oil with a fellow that he had an oil truck and he was a neighborhood guy. His name was (Dante, Dutch?), and he was later killed in Italy. Being young and strong, I would carry these oil cans. In the tenements, I had to go up two, three, four flights of stairs. I did that for a while and, when the season ended, then, I had to do something else. I just did all kinds of things.

SI: You also joined the Naval Reserve.

MR: Ah. Then, in 1939, I joined the Naval Communications, the NCR, they called it at the time. It was part of the Naval Reserve. They wanted people who were interested in electronics, and so on. So, I went up and I talked to this commander; Commander (Voorhees?) was his name. I said, "My name is Michael Ruggiero." I said I was a radio operator. He said, "Good." He says, "Well, go down and take your examination and your physical." So, I took a physical with a Marine Reserve doctor and he says, "You need glasses." He says, "Your right eye is, like,

20/25." He says, "It's almost 20/20, but you really should get glasses before we accept you." So, somehow or other, I got a pair of glasses, wore them. So, I joined it. I was in the Naval Reserve for about a year

SI: What motivated you to join at that time?

MR: Well, you have to understand, first of all, I was in the Boy Scouts. We wore a uniform. They taught us the Scout Oath and the loyalty and respect, and so on. It was an organized group of kids doing specific things, but all for the good of your character, and so on. Then, we went into the CCCs and there, again, I was in uniform, sort of a paramilitary atmosphere. I was very much interested in the military at the time. So, when I went to the Naval Reserve, it was, again, I wore a uniform when I was on duty. Unfortunately, when Roosevelt declared an emergency, I think--was it 1939 or was it 1940?--I forget which, because, at that time, Roosevelt very much wanted to help the English. [Editor's Note: In March 1941, the Lend-Lease program opened a steady channel of supplies and war materiel from the United States to the Allies. On May 27, 1941, President Roosevelt proclaimed an unlimited national emergency.] We had to be careful, because the country was antiwar, and so on. They didn't want any war back then. So, to get around that, Roosevelt declared a state of emergency. So, he could assist the English and he would send supplies over in convoys. So, I joined and I was in the Naval Reserve. So, they called me to active duty and they said, "You have to take a physical." I said, "Well, I already took a physical." He says, "No, you have to take an active-duty physical." So, I took the active-duty physical. He says, "We can't accept you in the active Navy." I said, "Why not?" He says, "Because you're wearing glasses." He says, "If you can step two feet back [and read this]," and I said, "I have to step two feet forward to read the letters on the card." I couldn't do that, so, I was discharged medically from there. It broke my heart to do that. Now, prior to the exam, I'd received my orders. I had received my orders and the physical took place later. It said, "Well, you're going to go to the petty officers' school up in Connecticut, and then, from there, you're going to be assigned to the light cruiser *Helena* [(CL-50)]." "Oh, so, that's wonderful," I said, "that's great." So, the commander says, "Mike," he said, "Michael, look, I'm going up to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The cruiser *Helena*'s there, getting refitted with radar." He said, "That's your future assignment. Would you like to go and visit?" I said, "Gee, I'd love to do that." So, he took me up there and I went aboard ship and I talked to the chief there and the operators. They said, "Yes, we'll be looking forward to seeing you here," but that never happened. Soon after that, I took my physical, and then, they discharged me. Well, as an addendum there, the *Helena* was at Pearl Harbor when they attacked and it was bombed. It was damaged. They repaired the damage and it went out to the South Pacific and, there, it was blown to pieces by the Japanese. There but for the [grace of God], for an eye problem, I would have been there. So, that was one of several times that that happened and my life was saved.

SI: During your year or so in the Naval Reserve, what did that commitment entail? Did you have to go to periodic meetings?

MR: I went to periodic meetings. Each of us would act as a ship, from a radio station. I didn't have my license at the time, so, I went to one of the fellows that had a license. Commander (Voorhees?) would be up in net control and he would send messages out as if we were ships. So, that was very interesting, because I said, "I can't wait to go." Of course, we had cruises with the

four-stackers [destroyers] going down to Cuba, but, basically, that's what we did. We'd have meetings on procedure, on naval procedure, radio procedure, so that when we were to be called to active duty, we would be familiar with everything. We'd fit in immediately. They wanted to send me to school, so [that] I'd become a petty officer, third class, like a sergeant, sort of, but that never happened.

SI: You said you were going up to see the *Helena* and it was being fitted with radar.

MR: I think it was radar, yes.

SI: Did you know about radar at the time?

MR: No. Well, it was pretty secret at the time; I mean, it's fairly secret. The British had been using it on the coast there. I knew something about it, but I was familiar with electronics, so, I had no problem fixing radios and stuff like that.

SI: Before we go further, can you tell me a little bit about your time in the Boy Scouts, since it had such an impact on your life?

MR: Yes. In 1932, I lived in an area--it wasn't the best area in the world. It was a very poor area. We had moved from Stone Street, where it was a little higher level of living. Some of the kids, they'd go around the town, steal bicycles and things of that nature. I didn't want to have any part of that and I had a friend, a friend of mine, whose folks came from Scotland, named Alex, and I became very familiar with him. One time, I says, "Come on, we'll play ball or cards at your house tonight." He says, "No, I'm going to the Boy Scouts." I said, "What's that?" So, he took me down to the Boy Scouts. I was there from 1932 until, I guess, 1938 or '39, in the Boy Scouts all that time. So, that's another thing. We went camping. I was familiar with camping and the rules and did our own cooking, and so on.

SI: Where was your troop based?

MR: Troop 19 in Newark.

SI: Was it in a church?

MR: Yes. We would meet in the basement of a Methodist church. Now, Alex and his family, of course, they were Methodists in the church. So, occasionally, I would accompany the parents and Alex down to the prayer meetings they had on Tuesday nights. Then, they had Bible school. He says, "Would you like to go to Bible school?" [I said], "Oh, yes, sure." I was Catholic at the time. So, I went to Bible school. Then, the Miss (Andrew?), who was running it, says, "Look, we're going to have a contest. The first one of you that learns and can repeat verbatim one hundred Bible verses will be rewarded to a trip up the Hudson River on a cruise." So, here I am, a Catholic man, I said, "Gee, I'd like to do that," and she said, "Well, do you have a Bible?" I said, "No, I don't have a Bible." [laughter] So, the Pastor says, "Michael," he says, "come with me." So, I went to the Pastor's house and he gave me his Bible and I learned the hundred verses and I won the contest. Here I am, a non-Protestant, and some of the kids were a little upset over

the fact that I won the contest. Anyway, I was taken on a trip up the Hudson to West Point. When I was a Boy Scout--just something else there, just to show you--I didn't have a uniform. We couldn't afford one. So, I wrote a letter to Dorothy Dix of *The Newark Evening News.* She was a columnist there. She was like a "Dear Abby"-type person. I said, "Gee, is there anyone out there who can help me get my uniform in the Scouts?" At that time, I was, like, twelve years old. So, it so happened that she printed that, printed my letter in the paper. I had put a telephone number, no, an address, and the people downstairs--we lived in the second floor and there was a store down below on the first floor--they had a telephone. So, Mary, who owned the store, said, "Michael," says, "there's some woman here that has a uniform for you." I said, "Well, where is it?" "Well, it's up in Glen Ridge," or somewhere like that. Well, she had a car, a big Packard. She says, "Come on, I'll take you up there." So, my mother, Mary and I went up. She had the uniform that her son had worn when he was in the Scouts, had grown up. So, I wore that uniform for a couple of years, until I grew out of it.

SI: Wow.

MR: Couldn't afford a uniform.

SI: When you would go camping, where would you go?

MR: We would go up to a place called the Scout Acres [in Boonton, New Jersey], which was a place where they'd let Scouts camp. There was a camp that the Newark, what they called the Robert Treat Council--that area, the headquarters of the Boy Scouts, they called that the Robert Treat Council, of which Troop 19 was part of--they had a camp called Camp Mohican [in Blairstown], which was up in Northern New Jersey. The camp had Indian teepees, it had lean-tos, it had different types of living quarters, depending upon which ones you wanted to go to. That's where we would go to camp. I'd go there, say, in the summertime, maybe a week at a time. Well, it taught me how to take care of myself. Once again, as the atmosphere [developed], you're with people and you have to learn how to work with people--and all of this was a buildup to my military [life]. So, when I got to the military, I mean, I had no problem with it at all, because I had had all this training, and so on. So, I was used to discipline of a sort.

SI: Was your religion, Catholicism, important to you? Were you active in your church?

MR: Well, when I lived on Stone Street, later on, I was an altar boy. I missed Mass one Sunday and I was fired. [laughter] Yes, I was sort of religious. I used to go to Mass every Sunday--not every Sunday, but a lot. My folks occasionally went. Later on, when I got into the military, didn't matter which chaplain said the services, whether he was Jewish or whether he was Indian or whether he was Catholic or Protestant--he was the access to the Almighty, so-to-speak, but that's another story.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor was attacked, it sounds as though you were following the news out of Europe and elsewhere pretty closely. Is that correct?

MR: That's right. Well, obviously I did, because I joined the Naval Reserve.

SI: Did you have any feelings on whether the United States would get involved or should get involved, either in Asia or Europe?

MR: Not that we should get involved, but that I had a feeling that we would eventually get involved. See, what Roosevelt was doing, he was skirting around almost a wartime basis in this country. So, when he declared the emergency, he activated the Reserves, the Army, the Navy, and so on. At the same time, they had the draft, what they called the draft, which was a World War [I] procedure that was established to get people into the service and he reinstated that. [Editor's Note: The Selective Service Act of 1940 required all twenty-one to thirty-five-year-old males to register for the draft. These age parameters were expanded to eighteen to forty-five years of age after the United States entered the war.] When he called the emergency, he was able to do that. Based on that, he established what was called the lend-lease thing. Well, he traded the English, he sent them fifty World War I destroyers, four-stackers, which he had in [reserve]--they were mothballed, so-to-speak. In exchange for that, he had the use of English bases around the world. We didn't get involved, but he did have our destroyers escort some of the ships going across. One time, the Germans torpedoed one of our destroyers, sunk it. It was at that time, I said, "It's only a question of time, only a question of time," until Pearl Harbor came along, which shook us up. [Editor's Note: The "Destroyers for Bases" agreement was a deal between the United States and United Kingdom to trade fifty World War I-era destroyers for land-rights to British bases in the Western Hemisphere, made in September 1940.]

SI: You were interacting with people from all different ethnic backgrounds and communities in Newark and elsewhere.

MR: Right.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, was the war debated, whether people were anti-German or pro-German?

MR: No. They had what they called the German *Bund*. They had organizations where the German-Americans would join, young men, American men. There was nothing against them. I mean, it was just something that was allowed. [Editor's Note: The German term "*bund*" means "association" and was used by a number of German-American political, social and cultural groups. The German-American *Bund* (based on the earlier Friends of New Germany) operated from 1936 until December 1941, when it was outlawed, as a pro-Nazi group.] As far as the Americans were concerned, that was something going on over there. Of course, I had a shortwave receiver and I used to listen to the British broadcasts, and so on, and I saw what Hitler was doing. I said, "My God, this is terrible," and I was just a young man, but most Americans were [antiwar] until Pearl Harbor. Then, all hell broke loose after that, but, at the time, Roosevelt was sending supplies, and so on, short of us [going to war], and, of course, he activated the Reserves, and so on. We were not prepared for war, at all. We were in bad shape.

SI: How did you feel about Franklin Roosevelt's Presidency at the time?

MR: Well, he was a liberal. [laughter] Overall, I thought he was a great President. He did a lot. He established the CCCs, the NYA, the WPA and all these different organizations and put

people to work. Whether or not all of those things that he established would eventually affect the country in a negative way, we never found out, because Pearl Harbor came along and that took care of that, then, of course, the defense industry, and so on.

SI: At the time of Pearl Harbor, were you still working?

MR: Yes. I was working at a company that was making electronic equipment.

SI: Okay.

MR: Okay. We were making transmitters and things of that sort, too. We were helping building them. Then, Pearl Harbor came along. What I didn't tell you was that, prior to Pearl Harbor, I received a notice to attend the draft--not the draft board--but go to the Newark Armory, there up in my section of town, where we would get a physical. Then, eventually, we would be drafted into service. Of course, I had that year of military service behind me, so, that didn't hurt any. Anyway, I was waiting to be called up, but I was never called, because, when Pearl Harbor came along, I mean, two days later, I enlisted, as did most of the country. You can't imagine, you can't imagine, the transition from peace-loving people who didn't want to get involved in the war and the way they felt after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Then, of course, the Germans declared war a few days afterward and the country, at that time, says, "Well, we're going to go and get those SOBs."

SI: Do you remember the name of the company you working for at the time that was making the equipment?

MR: No, I don't.

SI: What were you doing specifically in making the equipment?

MR: We were building transmitters.

SI: What would you do? Would you assemble things?

MR: Well, we would be wiring up the transmitters, and so on. So, I had a pretty good knowledge of electronics at that time and I had my--mine was radio amateur--I had my license, and so on.

SI: Tell me about the day of the attack and what you recall about finding out about the news.

MR: During that time, it was called the Big Band Era and, of course, they have rock-and-roll and they have hip-hop now and all that sort of thing. The Big Bands were in vogue, like Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and all those. We young folks used to like to go to dances and listen to these Big Bands. So, there was a girl called Ella Fitzgerald--I don't know if you ever heard of her--and she was singing with a band up in the Savoy Ballroom in the Harlem District of New York and we wanted to go and see her. She had made a hit record called *A-Tisket, A-Tasket*. It was a novelty tune. What they didn't realize was, she had a marvelous voice--of course, the rest

is history, I mean, after that. So, we were on a train, on the subway, going up to Harlem when somebody said, "The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor." I said, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" and he said, "Well, it's out in Hawaii." I said, "Well, what happened?" He said, "The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and there were a lot of casualties," because we didn't know, at that time, that half the fleet was destroyed, all the battleships. So, I put it in the back of my mind and we went up to Harlem and listened to Ella Fitzgerald. We went back and I picked up the newspaper and I realized what had happened. I says, "Well, those SOBs," and so on. All the young men, many of them, I guess over a million or so, went to the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, to join and I was one of them. I wasn't drafted, I enlisted. It made a difference. I was never [drafted, I was in] what they called the regular Army. When I enlisted, I was the regular Army and, when we went to Camp Dix, or Fort Dix then, they put me in barracks and the draftees were in tents. The fact that I had enlisted, rather than being drafted, well, they thought that was great, me doing that. [laughter]

SI: Do you want to take a break?

MR: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Do you want to continue?

MR: Yes, go ahead.

SI: Okay, thank you for the coffee and cake.

MR: That's quite all right, Shaun, pleasure.

SI: You asked me to remind you of something that happened before you enlisted.

MR: Yes, I wanted to get back to growing up. One of the things was the fact that when I joined the Boy Scouts and I knew that there was a world outside of where I lived, I said, "Well, I've got to get out to see this." It was sort of breaking out--going to the library, joining the Scouts, joining the Naval Reserve--and I just wanted to get out of that particular area there. So, that's why. I just wanted to make that point--and a lot of people didn't. They stayed within it. My sister still has the [speech pattern]. She uses the colloquial expressions and she never did get out of that area. She went to high school and everything, both of them did, but they didn't have the advantage of the experiences I had, traveling all over the world and meeting different people. The disadvantage of moving around from one place to another was kind of tough, but the one thing, it did teach me how to get along with people and to respect their likes and dislikes and their cultures, and so on. So, I had no problem with that at all. Getting back into the military, well, I met all of these [new people]. We had all these different people from all over the country. I was able to get along, until they sent me to officers' school, and then, that's another story. Anyway, when I was going to Central Avenue School--I'll get back to that for a moment--my mother would give me, it was a little can that people used to use to carry their lunch in, a little, round can. She would send me down to a soup kitchen to get soup. So, they would send us

home for lunch and I would walk down there and go into the soup kitchen and I'd get the can filled full of soup and I'd bring it back home. Well, that bothered me. I says, "Why is this happening to us? Why do we have to go through this?" I said, "Someday, someday, we're going to get [out of this]; hopefully, this country will get out of this situation," but I actually went to the soup kitchen and I was just a little kid then, young kid. People just, people today, have a difficult time [comprehending that]. My kids, my sons, they could never understand what the Depression was, terrible. I mean, people were on the corner selling apples. It was just a bad situation; anyway, let's get back to the [story].

SI: You enlisted just a couple days after the attack. Was the enlisting station packed? What was the sentiment in the air that day?

MR: Well, when I went down to enlist, I wanted to get into the Air Corps. I wanted to get into flight training, but they wouldn't take me into the Air Corps, because of my eye. Of course, later on, they relaxed a lot of these rules. I mean, you could be a blind guy and they'd take you. [laughter] So, I went to the Army and they took me, took me into the Army, but there was a line of people. I had to wait in line. It was about forty or fifty kids, guys, waiting to go into the enlistment place. It was that way with the Air Corps, it was that way with the Navy, Navy recruiting places, I mean that the men just responded. They just went. I came back home, my mom says, "Where'd you go today?" I said, "Well," says, "I enlisted in the Army," and she said, "Well, where will you go?" I said, "Well, I guess we're going to go and fight Germans and Japanese." She was a little bit upset about that, but my brother did the same thing. A few weeks later, he went, but the enlistment stations were very, very busy. So, they sent me down to Fort Dix there and they found out that I had an electronics background. So, they sent me to Fort Knox, Kentucky. While I was there, I went through the radio school and, while I was in the radio school, the Captain called me, Jewish, I think Jewish background, (Kosner?), I think his name was, nice, good guy. He called me, he says, "Ruggiero," he said, "we're looking at your records here. You have a very high IQ." He says, "Why aren't you going to officers' school?" I said, "Well, I didn't think I was eligible." I forget what the heck my IQ was, way up there. So, he says, "No," he says, "right after you graduate from this school, you're going to the officers' school on the post here at Fort Knox." So, I went to OCS, the Officer Candidate School, they called it at that time. There was the most grueling time of my life. Man, you talk about boot camp, oh. We had three or four hundred and, I think, maybe seventy or seventy-five percent never made it. You were, "Whoosh," out. I was fortunate enough to be [selected], to get through it and they commissioned me a second lieutenant in the cavalry. Now, you had two choices at that time when you became an officer--either you can go into the infantry or into the cavalry. Now, the cavalry no longer had the horses--I mean, they had some, a couple of horses left--but they were tanks now, armor. So, I says, "No, I'd rather be in armor, tanks." So, they sent me to the Eighth Armored Division. I was what they called a platoon leader of tanks. I had five tanks. We were in training until they sent me overseas.

SI: When you got down to Fort Knox, were you sent directly to radio school or was there a basic training course before that?

MR: I'm sorry, of course there was. It was basic training and that was there, and then, from basic training, went to radio school. From radio school, I went to officers' school, and then, from

officers' school, I was sent to the Eighth Armored Division. Now, it's not too common that somebody comes into the Army and, nine months later, from a private, they're a second lieutenant. So, I was very fortunate. I never thought about it, but I had never been assigned to a regular Army unit until I became an officer. Well, a lot of the officers that came in, I mean, when they were in the Reserve, they hadn't either, for that matter, but the fact that I got along so well with people, I had no problem with the troops, and so on. I'd conduct callisthenic exercises, and then, we'd go out on maneuvers and things of that nature. So, it was very easy for me to transition to the military life, had no problem at all.

SI: There was no problem with the discipline.

MR: No, none at all. I had none and I had a very fine relationship with the men. There was one soldier, one time--I was a platoon leader, and then, he was in the barracks--and he was sitting out front, crying, just to give you an example. I said, "What's the matter, son?" I said, "What's wrong?" He says, "Well," he says, "they make fun of me." I said, "Why?" He says, "Well," he says, "I only went to the fourth grade of school and they're making a lot of fun of me. They think I'm a stupid person," and then, I thought and I said, "Well, why did you get out of school?" He said, "Well, I had to get out of school and work in the mine, in the coal mine," this young kid at the time. So, I thought of myself, I says, "Here I am," I says, "I know the same thing happened to me, in a different way." I had to leave school, some way. Nobody ever ridiculed me or anything like that. So, I went in and I called the guys together. I said, "Look," I said, "this, this and this," I said, "try to cut him a little slack." As it was, he turned out to be quite a baseball player and he became very popular after that. Then, when Christmas came along, they gave me a clock radio, the group did. [laughter] Anyway, that's just a little story I thought you'd be interested in.

SI: You mentioned earlier that America was not prepared at first for war. Were there ways that that was apparent in your basic training or radio school?

MR: Yes. As a matter of fact, when General Patton was training his troops, instead of guns, he had two-by-fours. We didn't have the equipment. The uniforms that we first got were World War I, a lot of World War I stuff. We just weren't prepared. The camps started out with the troops being in tents. There were no barracks. They had some old World War I stuff. So, they built the barracks--I mean, how they did it, I don't know how they built it--with tremendous speed, all over the country. The regular Army was only about, I think, about a hundred thousand, something like that, and they had to build it up to over a million men or more and part of the Army was the US Army Air Corps, too. It was all part of that. So, we were ill-prepared for war and the military thinking was the thinking of military attacks of World War I or the old cavalry. Oh, when they sent me overseas, of course, some of the officers, the senior officers, had been in the cavalry with the horses. So, they thought they would use the same tactics that they used in the cavalry and it chewed up a lot of our tanks. We got a lot of guys killed because of it. Anyway, it was the Eighth, Eighth Armored. I was with them for a while, and then, they alerted me to go overseas. So, they sent me overseas and I wound up in Tunisia.

SI: How long would you say you were with the Eighth Armored Division?

MR: I guess about six months, and then, they pulled me out and sent me overseas.

SI: Before that, had you learned much about armored tactics?

MR: No. We improvised, actually, when we were out there. They believed--the Colonel and the General there--he says, "Well, you have to get your tanks in formation," like the old cavalry horses, "and overwhelm them with a frontal attack." We young officers, we said, I said, "These guys are nuts, because we're going to get picked off. We can get picked off this way, one by one, in detail." So, we tried different tactics, going over around hills and bends, and so on. So, although the tactics that were in the manuals at that time, your tactics were using the troops one way, the tanks one way, what we did was another. So, prior to me going overseas, they had the II Corps, which was the Army unit up there in Tunisia, because Rommel's Tenth and 15th Panzer Divisions were [there]--I think it was 10th and 15th. There was a tank battalion in the First Armored Division and their first contact with the Germans was at what they called the Kasserine Pass. [Editor's Note: The series of battles known collectively as the Battle of Kasserine Pass took place between February 19th and 25th, 1943.] What we didn't know was that the eighty-eight, this eighty-eight canon, which was originally designed for antiaircraft work, was a fantastic gun. At a thousand yards, it's an almost flat trajectory. It'd knock out a tank just like that, and so, what they did was, they sent [them out using the old tactics]. I think there was, when I went over there, I saw five or six burned out tanks and they were sort of in a line, like that. I said, "Well, what happened?" because this was afterwards [that] we got over there. We took over that territory--we blew them out of there. He says, "Well," he said, "the Colonel decided that they would attack this German position, but there was a house over there and what the Germans had done was that they put this eighty-eight through the house, through a window. As the tanks came within range, which was less than a thousand, about a thousand yards, and our weapons were [short-ranged], they were attacked before they even got into artillery range for their guns. The Germans would pick them off, 'Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang,' one at a time, knocked them out." From that point on, they realized that, "We'd better change this." That's when Patton came in. General Patton took over and he had different ideas. He had similar ideas that we had as young officers, and so, he changed all of that. He was our boss, by the way. [laughter] I was sent to a tank battalion and he would come down and the commander of our tank battalion was an old buddy of his. You could hear them all over the area, arguing about tactics.

SI: You said that, even when you were back in the States with the Eighth Armored Division, you and the younger officers were experimenting with new tactics. Were you just doing that on your own or were you reading anything that influenced you?

MR: We did it on our own; we did it on our own. Well, we'd discuss it with the non-commission officers, the guys that had been in service for many years, and we respected them highly, because they knew the military. I says, "There's a possibility that," we would sit around in a circle, "if we use these tactics, the frontal assaults, we're going to get creamed here." I said, "There's got to be a different way," and so, we finally come up with sort of a joint thing. "Well, if you break off," see, five tanks in the tank platoon, "you break them off into two sections, we'll put one over here, one over here. If we saw some tanks out there, try to occupy them here and try to get around behind the other ones." They were sort of crude tactics. We really didn't know what the hell we were talking about, pardon the expression, but that's basically what we did in

Africa. The Germans, their tanks were excellent, excellent, and they had one tank called a Mark VI. It had an eighty-eight gun on it and they called them Tiger tanks. We called them Tiger tanks. If they were near, we got the hell out of there. There was no way we could compete with them. Unfortunately, our tanks, the tanks that we had before we got there, were the M3 tanks. They had a thirty-seven-millimeter gun on the top and they decided that they needed a little bit more firepower. So, they put a seventy-five-millimeter canon on the right side, which was ridiculous, but that's what they did. So, when the guy had to load it, [Dr. Ruggiero bangs the table] and it only had a seventeen-degree traverse. Well, they realized that this tank was terrible, I mean. So, they came out with the M4 [Sherman] tanks. Do you mind if I go into what they were?

SI: Sure.

MR: I think they weighed about thirty-two tons, something like that, and they had four different models. The M4A1 had a Wright Cyclone airplane engine in it. They experimented with that, "Hmm," and then, they had the A2, which had diesel, diesel engines. They used some of those in warfare, but not too many. The A3 had two or three truck engines, I think, multiple truck engines in it. In order to change the plugs, you'd practically have to move one of the engines out of the way. Well, that wasn't the best in the world. Then, they had the A4, which was the one that I was [in], we had, which had twin Ford engines, using hundred-octane gasoline. The disadvantage of that is, then, the rear of the tanks and the sides is where the [fuel] tanks were and it didn't take long for the Germans to know where they were. They would go for that and one of those things, with hundred-octane gas, you had a lot of fire. The one thing I was afraid of was getting hit, and then, with a fire--contemplating that was the worst thing we could think of at the time. Well, anyway, General Patton came in there and he changed the tactics and he was a brilliant guy. Then, they finally sent him off to Sicily.

SI: When you were in the States, you were still working with the M3 tanks.

MR: Oh, we had tanks that went back to the '30s for training. The training that we got in the Eighth Armored--we didn't have tanks. They didn't have the tanks. The few tanks they had, they sent over to the British first. The American tanks were in combat before we even used them in combat, sent them over to the Eighth Army. So, we had tanks that went back to the '30s. They were just "Ramblin' Wrecks from Georgia Tech," so-to-speak, but they were enough to maneuver around, and so on. When we went to Fort Knox, then, we had the M4s for training and they were pretty good tanks. I mean, mechanically, they were fine tanks, but they were no match for the German Mark VI.

SI: When you went overseas, you had the …

MR: M4s.

SI: M4s. I wanted to ask more about OCS and what they emphasized in terms of performing as an officer. You said it was very physically demanding there.

MR: Both physically demanding and academically demanding. In Kasserine Pass, we got chewed to pieces. I mean, it was a terrible defeat, because we really didn't know what the heck we were doing and we weren't employed properly. Of course, you had the German Army that was in combat for years before that. So, they knew how to use their armor and they had armor and armor and infantry in coordination with each other, whereas we didn't know that. What was the question again?

SI: What they emphasized in officer training.

MR: Oh, yes, OCS.

SI: It was academically rigorous as well.

MR: It was rigorous, really. It was rigorous. I'd go into the john after lights were out, nine o'clock, and I'd study there until maybe midnight, twelve, one o'clock in the morning. You had to learn about weapons, you had to learn about tactics, you had to know this, that, and so on. In addition to that, you had to do a lot of parading out there and going out into the field and the woods, and so on. In the company I was in, I guess we had about a hundred of us and I think about forty-five of us were left. They just culled out the other ones, but, at the time, there was a shortage of officers. We lost quite a few over there in the early days of the war, over there in Tunisia. So, I was sent over there, along with some buddies of mine that we had in the same company that I was in, as replacements. We had tank crews and we were ready to go with the crews when we went over there. So, it was a very, very interesting time. When the Germans surrendered, there was about two hundred thousand-plus that surrendered. We had them boxed in. The [British] Eighth Army came from one direction, we were up in a different sector, over here, and the French were in there. We boxed them in. They surrendered. Oh, I think it was over two hundred thousand. So, we had heard that there were a lot of weapons piled up in the streets up there by the advancing troops there. I said, "Gee, we ought to go up and get some of those. We can use those for trading material. When the ships come in, we can trade them." So, I got in the jeep, we went up there. On the way, there were these German convoys, full of armed German troops, looking for a place to surrender. We would just go, "This way, back there, go back," and we went on our way to Tunis, picked up some rifles and some Lugers and stuff. Then, they eventually put them in huge, barbed-wire enclosures. The Italians were in one group and the Germans were in another. Anyway, getting back to OCS, it was very demanding, it was. All of the things that I had learned along the way in the Boy Scouts, in the CCCs, made it very easy for me on the military side of it. I had no problem with it at all, but some of them had a very difficult time. They just cracked under pressure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MR: Yes, go ahead.

SI: You were telling me about the seventy-five-millimeter canon.

MR: Yes, we had a seventy-five--well, first of all, we had light tanks, too, what they called the M5 light tanks. They had Cadillac engines and they were pretty good little things, but they couldn't compete against the German armor.

SI: What was the voyage over to North Africa like?

MR: [laughter] Yes. Well, at that time, the submarines were sinking ships then. They sank hundreds and hundreds of ships and we were on a ship that had been used--well, prior to the war, they had cruises to Cuba. For forty-nine [dollars and] fifty [cents], you can get on the ship and go down to Cuba and back, and get food, and so on. Of course, forty-nine-fifty was a lot of money back then. So, they used that as a troopship. It was sort of a luxury liner. It was a small thing and I was aboard that thing and they had bunks stacked four and five high in there. We didn't go in a convoy. We had the battleship *New York*, the cruiser *Brooklyn* and a bunch of destroyers. The one thing that the German subs didn't like were the "tin cans" [destroyers], because of the depth charges. So, we had a couple of sub alarms, but, fortunately, we had no problem getting over there. Other ships went over there, they got torpedoed, and so on.

SI: How many days did it take to cross?

MR: Well, at that time, the ships didn't go in a direct line; they zigzagged. By zigzagging, they'd throw off the German commanders' ability to [fire on them]. Their calculations couldn't cope with all of this moving around. So, you actually zigzagged across the ocean, basically, once you do that. It took us, I don't know, seven or eight days, I guess. We went through the Straits of Gibraltar and we landed at Oran, a place called Oran, and we disembarked there. There were only two, I think there were two, two ships with troops in them. There weren't that many, really, and one of the other ships had all the nurses aboard. Unfortunately, we didn't have any on our ship. [laughter] Well, it was an interesting, interesting trip across.

SI: When you landed in Oran, did you go into a replacement depot type place?

MR: We did. We used to call them "repple-depples," a place called Canastel. I was there for about week before we were alerted to go up to Tunisia. This was after the battle at Kasserine Pass. I mean, we were replacements, really, and they sent us up on a troop train and some of the cars were for forty-eight men or six horses. So, some of the troops were in there. We were in, the officers were, the regular cars, but the troops didn't mind at all. I mean, they were very adaptable and we traveled, took us a few days to get up there. We got up to a place called Bône [now Annaba, Algeria], which was on the border of Tunisia. So, we pulled in at night and, at the port, as we pulled in, it was a German air raid, was bombing the harbor. Fortunately, they didn't hit anything, but, before we got there, as we get there, we saw the lights, lights, bright lights all over the place. So, I said to the Captain, I said, "What in the world is that?" and he says, "Well," and he had been up there before, he said, "those are the British. The British are up there unloading the ships and they have all the lights on." Then, the lights went out when they had the air raid and we pulled in just as they had the air raid. So, we were about a quarter of a mile [away]. We were pretty far away. We were a quarter of a mile from where the bombs were dropped down, watching the fireworks. So, the Captain says, "We'd better get the heck out of here," okay. There was a whole line of railroad cars loaded with supplies, and so on. So, we got

underneath that and we're smoking a cigarette. When the Germans left--they didn't do any damage, really, they bombed a few houses--but we got up and looked into the cars and it was loaded with five-hundred-pound aerial bombs, fourteen cars. If they had hit one car, we would've been gone. [laughter] That was my first experience with fear. I thought, "Oh, my god, this is terrible." We all had the shakes there for a while, but true story.

SI: Before that, had you really considered the potential consequences of what you were about to get into?

MR: It was the unknown factor. We weren't sure, but the one thing that all of us, most of us, felt [was] that we were never going to go back home. It was sort of a fatalistic attitude. "So be it," I says, "we're here, four thousand miles away, three, four thousand miles away from home. How are we going to get out of this thing? Will we ever get back home?" So, we dispelled it from our mind, because it was too much for us to cope with. I guess it was that way with other soldiers, too.

SI: Do you remember hearing about the Kasserine Pass battle? How did you react to that?

MR: Yes, it was just a fiasco. That's when they relieved the commander there and they sent Patton in. We really didn't know. We knew that there had been some sort of activity over there, through military channels. It wasn't in the papers, but our troops, they were just in bad positions and, well, it was just a mess.

SI: Once you arrived in Bône, how quickly were you assigned to a unit?

MR: Well, we got into trucks after that. The trains wouldn't go any further up. We were there, I think, overnight, and then, they took us in trucks up to the unit. We didn't know what to expect. It was pretty close to the end for the Germans anyway. They were boxed in and, well, Rommel was the commander. We didn't know that, but Hitler had already--they evacuated him. He had diphtheria of the nose. I'd never heard of that one before, but that's what he had. He wasn't there, but the *panzers* were there, the German *panzers*.

SI: Where was your unit when you joined them?

MR: It was right up against the line there, it was right up. Well, we were right there, I mean, where the fighting was. We were near a place called--can't think of the name of it. There was one place called (Sukal Arbor?), which is where the Romans had had a village and it was perfectly preserved, really. I don't know if you ever saw the movie *Patton* or not. When he stopped at the ruins, that's where he was. In the movie, he said it was Carthage, but, actually, it was there.

SI: What unit did you join?

MR: I was with the 752nd Tank Battalion and we were actually an independent battalion in there. They had the First, Ninth and 34th Infantry Divisions there and we would go back and forth and support them, so on, and so on. [laughter] The one thing about the military was, there

was a lot of thievery going on. Well, we would steal jeeps from--not stealing, we would "acquire" jeeps--from one [source]. The Colonel would say, "Go out and get a couple of jeeps." So, they'd take a couple of rotors with them. So, the people that owned the jeeps would take the rotors out, so [that] they wouldn't be stolen, but our guys would come in, put the rotors in and come back with the jeeps. So, we had about maybe fifteen or twenty extra jeeps in the outfit, which we could use. That was primarily the reason.

SI: Did you have any time to get acclimated to your unit before you went into combat for the first time?

MR: No, it was right in there, man. I'll never forget, one night, we had our tanks in the bivouac area and I was officer of the day. In other words, that was my duty that night, to go around. It was very, very dark, couldn't see, and so, I saw one of the fellows in the tank. I said, "How is everything going?" They'd whisper and say, "Fine." Then, somebody tapped me on the shoulder, "Thump," and I turned around and jumped through my skin. I didn't know who the heck it was. I think he was a Gurkha or something, from one of the Indian troops. I didn't hear him at all and he came around. He says, "You have a cigarette?" [laughter] So, I gave him a cigarette and he disappeared, never saw him anymore. There were stories going around that these guys, they would be commanded by a British officer--this was just hearsay--and they'd go to, say, a German bivouac area, just put a couple of [them], four or five, to sleep with a dagger, cut off their ears and they would put the ears on the breast of a soldier who was sleeping. When he woke up, he'd have a chest full of ears. This was just a rumor. [laughter] I never could confirm that, but I heard some interesting stories, guys were with the Eighth Army. The Germans were scared to death of those guys. [laughter]

SI: When you joined the unit, were you a platoon leader yet?

MR: Yes, platoon leader, platoon leader and communications officer at the same time.

SI: When you are in a tank platoon, how many tanks and men were you, five tanks?

MR: Yes. The first guy that was killed was a fellow by the name of (Gifford?). [As] a separate tank battalion, we had a medical officer permanently assigned with us. So, they brought him into the tent there and they brought the tank back--I mean, the guys came back okay. The tank had been hit [by] a glancing blow by an eighty-eight, armor-piercing. They had armor-piercing plus HE, high explosive, glanced off the tank. The tank was able to get down behind a hill there and got away from the [enemy]. It was a Mark VI. It was either a Mark VI or a ground-mounted eighty-eight. Well, they find the [wound], inspected him, found a small sliver of steel in the back that had gone through his neck and into his brain, killed him. I was on a recon, reconnaissance. Colonel says, "Ruggiero," he says; this was toward the end of the war. The Germans were collapsing. I mean, they were getting boxed in. So, I came down the road and came around. There was a German eighty-eight just like this, with the barrel up in the air like this. I said, "That kind of surprised me," because we didn't have that [much air support]. Oh, we had some air cover, everything, but it was mostly further up the line. So, there were these Germans sitting around. They were drinking coffee or whatever it was they had. So, one of our fellows was a Jewish fellow and he could speak--Yiddish is pretty much like German--so, he was

able to communicate, said, "Why are you here?" He says, "Well, we were left here as a last resort," I mean, sort of a suicide group. They weren't about to have any part of that, so, they just pointed the gun up and waited until somebody could come up and capture them. That particular weapon is probably down at Aberdeen, Maryland, there, sitting out in the field, a museum piece.

SI: When you say they finally surrendered, you mean the surrender in Tunisia.

MR: Well, yes, Tunisia. That's before the Germans surrendered, but they were boxed in. So, north of us, they were trying to retreat in order and they put these different units out and they put this eighty-eight out. Coming around the bend, we were cold turkey in there. If he had had that pointed at us, we would've been nailed, but they weren't about to have any part of that. [laughter] So, they surrendered and we sent them back to intelligence and they took care of them.

SI: What do you remember about those first few weeks with your unit, leading them in combat?

MR: Getting to know what to do. I'd get the platoon sergeant or the non-commissioned officers that were there, I said, "What do you do in a situation like this?" He says, "Well," he said, "you don't go charging across there in cavalry formation," and he says, "The thing to do is, sir, arrange your tanks so that you can attack them from two different directions. Now, if you see a Mark VI, you're not going to be able to [beat it]. On a one-to-one basis, you're not going to win with a Mark VI, no," and our shells didn't do anything. Our shells weren't effective, bounced off the damn tank. He says, "Lieutenant," he says, "have your guy firing the cannon try to hit the tracks or the turret, disable the turret on the tanks." He said, "The ideal situation is to get around behind them, because they're vulnerable from the rear." So, the thing was, I listened to these guys. They knew what the heck they were talking about. You see in the movies where the officer is supposed to know all about what's going on--hey, he really didn't. I really didn't know what the heck was going on, but, fortunately, some of the stuff that we had been doing in Fort Knox [helped]. I said, "This is something like some of the stuff we'd been doing here," but they had refined it over there in Europe. "Get your tanks down in defilade, so that just the barrel is sticking out," and things of that nature, rather than being exposed. Then, the war [in North Africa] ended and I wound up in Italy. So, the war, it was pretty rough there.

SI: You described this one interaction with the Germans who put their gun up rather than fight. Did you have other interactions with German prisoners?

MR: Well, yes, we had a few. [laughter] There was one time, when I was in the tank, there was an olive orchard and there were a couple of Mark IVs, there was a Mark VI there and we weren't playing tag. [laughter] They were going this way. They had a pretty strong force, so, we decided that the best thing to do is get away from that Mark VI, because he would've picked us off before we even got in range. Another time, one of the things that bothered me, when you see the enemy at long range, all you're just thinking [is], "He's out there." When you see him close up--we saw some of the casualties that we caused--some of them were just kids, seventeen, eighteen years old. A couple of them were old guys, thirty, in their thirties. That's when the war became very personal. I said, "Jeez, they're just young soldiers like us," and this one young kid there, a young, blonde kid, he couldn't have been more than sixteen, seventeen years old. That bothered me. I said, "Jeez, is this war worth doing this?" Then, it gets personal.

SI: In this first experience with leading a tank unit, how did you find the challenge of keeping your tanks operational and functioning? How did that actually work in the field?

MR: Well, the guys were pretty good; the mechanics were pretty good. The things that we'd have, see, in peacetime, when we had the tanks in the States, they had rubber tracks, but, over there, they had steel tracks. The thing [was], every once in a while, you'd lose a track and they'd have to fix it, but, no, they were pretty good with the maintenance of the tanks, and so on. There wasn't that much of a problem. The Germans, I think they had diesels in their [tanks]; well, they invented the diesels. [laughter] So, their tanks were pretty well, mechanically, very, very effective.

SI: In Tunisia, did you have trouble getting the supplies you needed, such as gasoline? Did you ever have that difficulty?

MR: No, no, that didn't happen until Patton got over in Europe. He outran the supply lines. [laughter] No, no, we didn't have any problem getting supplies, not in Tunisia anyway, because, right, we were sort of, say, here's the water over here, where we were, and here's the line here. We're over here and you're there, near the water, and Bône was back in back of us--I forgot how many miles it was--where the supplies came in. Some of them came by train into Bône from Oran and from Algiers, and so on. They came in that way. I remember, they kept us there. We were the only combat unit left in Africa after the war ended. What happened was, a lot of the Germans, the surrendered Germans, went up into the hills and they lived with the Arabs and, a lot of them, after the war ended, they joined the Foreign Legion. Foreign Legion could care [less] where they came from, at the time, and they joined the Foreign Legion. They were over there in Vietnam and they were chewed up by the Vietcong, but that's another story. We were there, we were sitting there. They were getting ready for the invasion of Sicily and Patton was pulled out and our commander was pulled out. Oh, by the way, did you see the [1970] movie *Patton*?

SI: Yes.

MR: Remember when he was shooting at the airplanes?

SI: Yes.

MR: We were about three miles away in the tank battalion. I think the Stukas and I think the Ju 88s came over and they bombed Gafsa. We could hear them out there. We could hear. Well, we heard that all the time, off and on, and we were sitting out here. The planes never came over us, because all the tanks had fifty-caliber machine-guns on them and some of the trucks had fifties on them, too. So, the Germans didn't want to go over there where a whole bunch of fifties were firing at them. They went over to over Gafsa. So, they went over there and they chewed up [Gafsa]. They knew Patton was there, but it didn't hurt him. Anyway, he left and they pulled him out of this and he went to Sicily, in the invasion. [Editor's Note: The Invasion of Sicily, codenamed Operation HUSKY, commenced on 9-10 July 1943.] Well, we were sitting here and the port was up here, up in Bizerte, and they were sending all of the troops there. We were

about, oh, sixty or seventy miles down the coastline, in a little town called Tabarka. Our job was to track down these Germans that went over the hills, but they never bothered anyone. So, we didn't bother them and they didn't bother us, I mean. They were not an organized group. They weren't armed or, if they were, they never attacked any of the troops there. So, we just let it be. So, we were there for eight or nine months. So, remember those guns that I told you we had?

SI: Yes.

MR: We had a bunch of those. So, here comes the supply line, oh, about ten or fifteen trucks, and I think there were black troops [that] were driving them. So, they stopped and wanted to pick up some fuel and stuff. We had plenty of fuel and we saw these trucks loaded with supplies. Now, we were living on K rations and C rations. K rations was a little box with chocolate and toilet paper and a couple cigarettes or, C rations, they had meat and vegetable stews, beans and I think corned beef hash, and that's what we had to live on. That's what we ate. So, these guys were coming up with them and these fellows were going up to the hospital units. They had hospital supplies and they had better food there. So, there's one truck loaded with food there, and so, we struck a deal with them. I says, "Give us some of the stuff and we'll give you some guns," because these guys are going back to the rear. So, we wound up with the truck and the supplies, one truck and the supplies. [laughter] The truck was loaded up with chicken, I think boned chicken. Then, for years afterwards, I couldn't eat that, because that's all we had, was a truck loaded with chicken--a little anecdote. The Colonel says, "Go up and get a boat." So, they had hundreds of landing craft. They had more than they really needed. Our guys went up there and they picked up a little landing craft and they piloted it all the way back to the coast. They used it when our guys went swimming, as a shark patrol or whatever--little things that you don't hear about.

SI: When you would stop for sleep or to eat, how does an armored unit do that?

MR: They're scattered. Usually, you're in a bivouac area. You don't get close. You scatter out. There was a cork forest there, cork farm. Cork comes from the bark of a tree. I had a little foxhole; it was about two, two-and-a-half, three feet deep, with a little pup tent. That's where I stayed. In case of anything coming over at night or during the day, I'd roll over into the hole, but, fortunately, that never happened with us. We, our tanks, would be dispersed, camouflage nets and stuff like that, never close together. So, one night, the guys were very resourceful. They had pup tents and what they did was, they took the pup tents and sewed an Army blanket onto it and they made a sleeping bag out of it. For a couple cartons of cigarettes or whatever, the soldiers would make one for you. The guys down in the motor pool would do that. So, I had one. I had a little [sleeping bag] and I'd slip into it at night, because it gets very cold at night out there in Tunisia, in the desert. So, one night, I felt something down there, something warm. I didn't realize how fast you can get out of a sleeping bag. It was an asp. It was a poisonous asp. Usually, you get a bite and it's fatal and all that snake wanted to do was get to someplace warm. So, he went into the bag before I got in there. So, whenever I went to sleep at night, I would shake out the bag, I'd shake out my shoes, but we lost a few. We had some casualties. Fortunately, we had this doctor with us, a surgeon. He was a good surgeon, took good care of us, Dr.--what the heck?-- was a Jewish fellow, can't think of his name. I mean, we were very close to each other. When you get into a combat situation like that, there were fights. They'd have

crap games and things like that, squabbles, and so on. When push came to shove, I mean, the guys would risk their lives just to take care of each other. During the Korean War, I remember, there were many, many--not many, but there were a lot--of cases of fellows that would, when a grenade [was] dropped in by the North Koreans or a Chinese, they'd throw their body on it, of course, would kill them. They were automatically given a Congressional Medal of Honor. It was that type of thing, where the guys would sacrifice without thinking to help their buddies. Occasionally, some of them would crack up, I mean.

SI: Are you talking about World War II or Korea, where you saw men cracking up, or both?

MR: World War II. I only saw a couple of cases. We used to say--they called them "shell-shocked" in World War I. There was a good friend of mine and he was always clowning around and he just started crying one day. He kept crying and crying and crying. So, they took him away and they sent him back. They sent him back to the States. I think, down in Walter Reed, they had a special group there that took care of fellows like that. It was much more prevalent in the Iraq War and Afghanistan, people would crack up. We were more, not resigned, but it was an everyday thing to us, combat. Over in Iraq, I mean, you go to a house and there'd be some couple of people and [they would attack], but, over in Europe and in Italy and in Africa, they had a whole line of people in there. They were shooting at us, we were shooting at them, and so on. So, we were much more adapted to that type of situation.

SI: Particularly early on in your time overseas, how were these men treated? Was it viewed as a real problem or was it seen as cowardice?

MR: What do you mean? Who's that?

SI: How did the military, essentially, see men that could not handle it or cracked up?

MR: [I] never had that problem. It was just that one case that I remembered. Well, what they did was, the doctors, of course, recognized the symptoms and they would do everything they can, but, usually, what they did was evacuate them. "Not adaptable to a combat unit," they'd send him back. If it was just a lesser problem, they would send them back to division rear, which could be anywhere between twenty and a hundred miles back, or, in more severe cases--I just heard this on and off--they would send them back to, I guess it was Walter Reed or one of those hospitals in the area, for those special cases, but we never had [a case like that]. In all of the guys that I knew, I never had a case of that. Being afraid, yes, of course, you're afraid. You're scared.

SI: You were ordered to search for these Germans who had hid in the hills for quite a while.

MR: Not go search for them, but, if they caused a problem, to do something about it. I think that was part of the mission. We were the only combat unit left there. They left us there for a while, and then, we got shipped over to Italy, right after the invasion of Salerno in Italy [in September of 1943], but I never saw any. I did meet one lieutenant in the Foreign Legion, tough as nails, man. It was a Frenchman. I said, "What are you doing with the Germans?" He said, "They don't bother us, we don't bother them." Then, when the war ended, I guess, they [the

Germans] just, somehow, got into the French Foreign Legion and they became very good soldiers in the Foreign Legion. Some of them became non-commissioned officers, which was difficult to do in the Foreign Legion.

SI: When you arrived in Italy, was it after the Salerno Invasion and before Naples fell?

MR: No. The troops had gone beyond Naples when we got there. There was static warfare. There, it was not tank country. So, we used our tanks as artillery. We'd raise them [the guns] and raise the dirt there and use them as artillery, occasionally. We got along very well with the English. There was sort of a camaraderie amongst the services, way back then. There was nothing [like] one soldier killing another, the way they did in Iraq. I mean, they get off to Iraq and kill people, killed some of their buddies. We got along very, very well with the Allies, very well indeed. We had an English outfit, an artillery outfit, was to our right and the Germans were a couple of miles over. Every once in a while, they'd fire a few rounds and we'd fire a few rounds. It was static warfare back then. That's when they couldn't get through [Monte] Cassino, because of the defense line. So, there was sort of an unwritten law. I mean, we were up in the hills and a jeep would come up the hill and they would do nothing. The Germans would do nothing, but, if a truck came up, they'd try to get it, knock it out, because they knew the truck had supplies and ammunition. They didn't want that, but that's neither here nor there. [laughter] Anyway, this English outfit was over here. Now, the one thing that we found out about the English is that they had to have their tea. Now, North Africa, where you're moving troops around to get in our positions for the final assault, we had these convoys. So, they moved us in this convoy and it was grid-locked. The British convoy had stopped and they blocked the whole road. So, the Colonel said, this is I'm quoting what he said, "What the hell? What the hell?" So, they went up and they checked and they found out that the British were having tea. They said, "Well, we're having our tea, old boy, and we'll be through in a few minutes." After their tea, they went away and it was okay, but they had to have their tea. Anyway, this British outfit was over here and they were having their tea in the afternoon. They had their guns pointed up in the air. So, somebody over in the German side, [their] artillery outfit, made the mistake of firing over into the British outfit when they were having tea. Well, the British opened up with everything they had. Well, the Germans never did that again. [laughter] Now, when there was an offense or something like that, then, usually, before that, they have an artillery barrage or whatever, but this isn't war like in the war pictures, [where] they're killing each other every day. That's not the case at all. There are periods when there may be a month, weeks, before anything would happen. They'd have what they called, maybe, interdiction fire, where they'd fire on preset coordinates, on a crossroads somewhere, just fire every once in a while, and we'd do the same thing, but we're not killing people every day. That's not the way war works, but, when things do happen, then, things get pretty hot.

SI: In Italy, was it the same case where you were supporting infantry units?

MR: No, no. In Italy, we could hardly move at all, because of the mountainous terrain, and that was it. It was a different type of warfare there. Africa was ideal for tank warfare. In Italy, it wasn't the same. [When] the war ended, we ended up all the way into Northern Italy, south of the Brenner Pass, and we were told not to take any side trips. The war had just ended. We stopped up there, near a place called Lake Garda [near Milan], and we were told to stay in our

bivouac areas, not to go out. The reason for that was that the Italian partisans had taken over. They caught Mussolini and his mistress up in Milano and they tried them and they were going to execute them on the spot. It was in the gas station, near a gas station. So, his mistress was called Clara Petacci and she says, "I'm not going to leave his side." They said, "Please," she was a famous movie actress, they said, "Please, Mrs., *Senora*, Petacci, please get away from Mussolini." She says, "I am not leaving him." So, they shot them both and they hung them up by their heels in the gas station [on April 27, 1945]. Now, our command knew about all this activity. They didn't want us to get involved with that, because once the partisans got in there, they were knocking off people who had cooperated with the Nazis left and right. So, we didn't want to get involved in that sort of situation and the war ended.

SI: You were in Italy for over a year.

MR: Oh, yes, it was more than that. It was a little over a year, yes. When the war ended, then, they took us in convoy; oh, another little story on the side. There was a battle going on in northwestern Italy, back and forth, back and forth, for three or four days. So, later on, when we were down in Naples, we found out what had happened. There was a brewery that was stacked with beer and the Germans wanted the brewery, and so did we. [laughter] So, in the fighting back and forth, not one bullet hit the complex where they made the beer. The windup was, we wound up with the beer. They went in there and they were dispensing the beer in cases to the troops, a bottle of beer for each; a different story. Anyway, we went down to Naples and they were going to ship us back to the States for thirty days, thirty days' leave, and then, ship us over to the Pacific for the Japanese invasion, but, while we were there in the port, ready to get aboard ship, we had the news that the Japanese had surrendered. So, when the war ended in Germany, I said, "Boy, we made it, we made it," and one the guys said, "Yes, but we have to fight the Japanese and they're fanatical." So, once again, we weren't sure about ever getting out, but the war ended and that was that.

SI: For that long period that you were in Italy, you were deployed mostly as you described earlier.

MR: Yes. We'd go on reconnaissance and stuff like that or we were running supplies with a light tank; like, machine-gun bullets would bounce off the tank. They'd take the supplies up and the guys would be in some buildings and things of that nature, but, basically, that was all, that was it, until they finally broke through and the Germans retreated all the way up the line, but most of the fighting there was with the infantry. They had horrendous casualties from the Germans. As a matter of fact, at, I think it was the Rapido River, they actually called a truce between the Americans and the Germans, so [that] they could pick up the bodies from trying to cross the river. General Clark was the general and a lot of the soldiers thought that it was a useless waste of life, but that's another story. [Editor's Note: General Mark W. Clark commanded the US Fifth Army.]

SI: From what you said earlier, it sounds like you had a lot of respect for Patton.

MR: Oh, yes. He was a brilliant tactician, I mean. He was rough as they come. He was a very wealthy man. I don't know if you knew that. His parents were multi-millionaires, but he wasn't

in Italy. He was in Sicily, and then, he had that slapping incident, where he slapped a soldier, and they sent him over to Europe. They already had him set up as the commander of the Third Army. He didn't know that at the time, but people in the States wanted to get him discharged from the service, and so on, but he was too much of a good soldier. [Editor's Note: US Army General George S. Patton slapped and berated a US Army private at an evacuation hospital in Sicily on August 3, 1943, an event made famous after it was reported in the news.]

SI: How do you feel about Mark Clark?

MR: I didn't like him. I think that the strategy that he employed caused the loss of a lot of our soldiers, but maybe that's what he had to do, I don't know. I wasn't that close to their strategic planning, but he wasn't very well-liked over there. I mean, they didn't hate him, but I guess they blamed him for some of the heavy casualties we suffered there.

SI: One thing that a lot of Italian Campaign veterans mention is the effect that the weather and terrain had on their operations, particularly in the winter. Does anything stand out about how that affected your ability to fight?

MR: Well, mud, mud--some of the roads were impassible. We used to say, "Too thick to drink and too thin to," what was it? There was a saying that they used about the mud in Italy. All the mountains there, I mean, the Germans had a marvelous defense. It was mostly artillery battles, going back and forth, and reconnaissance trips. Then, at Anzio, that was a case where there was a conservative general [who] caused a problem. Churchill was the one that insisted that we have an invasion go further up the line. Well, when we got into Anzio--I wasn't there--when we got into Anzio, there was an opportunity to crack through the German lines and they would've pulled all the way back, but the General was very conservative. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Anzio, codenamed Operation SHINGLE, took place from January 22, 1944 to June 5, 1944.] He wanted to get all his troops into [position]. Instead of pushing forward, he was hesitant, maybe he was too conservative. The Germans built up a defense and that was the end of that. We couldn't get out of Anzio. I'll never forget, when we got up there, passed up there, we could look down on Anzio and, from the hilltop where the Germans were, we could see everything all the way down to the ships. So, our guys were pinned down there for a long, long time. So, it was a failure in one respect.

SI: When you would lose men, would you get replacements in a reasonable amount of time?

MR: Sometimes, sometimes. When we got them, they would be green as grass, as the old saying goes. [laughter] Yes, they came in. Well, sometimes, we'd have to wait maybe a month or, sometimes, maybe two months, to get all of the troops in, but, at the time, there was a lot of activity over in Europe, over on the European side. So, a lot of the troops were being sent to England and were replacements there. So, we had to make-do where we were.

SI: Did you run into a lot of German booby traps or mines?

MR: Oh, yes. We had to be careful about that. They'd booby trap everything, Jesus. The mines, we had to be careful of. We had the Corps of Engineers. Those guys were marvelous.

They'd go out there and get rid of the mines, and so on. We had to be careful of that, but the Germans would booby-trap everything. They were very good at it, too. For example, if you went there, you saw a picture at an angle, you didn't straighten it out, because it was booby-trapped or, if you went into a bathroom, you go to flush it, it was booby-trapped, things of that nature. Well, the one thing they did, early in the war, and this is before we got there, was they'd string steel wire across the road. This was in Europe and, when the jeeps went by, it would decapitate the guys. So, the next time you see a war movie, take a look at the jeeps. You'll find, in front of the jeep, they have about a five-foot steel rod and the purpose of that was to cut the wire, so [that] it doesn't hurt the troops; little something that people didn't know about. So, when you see a war movie, look out for that, see if you can see that.

SI: Did you have many opportunities to interact with the local civilians?

MR: Yes. When the war ended in Italy, there were claims by some of the Italians that American artillery or American fire had damaged their farm or caused a problem. So, what the American Army, Fifth Army--I was in the Fifth Army then--what the Fifth Army did was that they would appoint an investigative officer. He would go and write a report and, if the report showed that the Americans, in fact, caused [damage], then, there would be compensation for the farmers.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MR: I lost some good friends over there. One of them in particular was a fellow by the name of Harris and his family, they came from the Hamptons, I guess up in Long Island. It was a pretty wealthy family and we had gone through OCS together and became very close, very tight. So, one day, he says, "Mike, I'm going to go up to the," so-and-so, up at the crossroads up there, to get something or other. I said, "Harris, don't go over there. They have interdiction fire there. I mean, you've got to be careful." So, the Germans would fire a few rounds in, just randomly. Unfortunately, he went into the crossroads when the Germans did that and he was killed and I lost one of my best friends that way. That's how I lost some of the others, too, for that matter. Another time, I was in a jeep and I had to urinate. I had to go to the bathroom. So, my driver was a fellow by the name of (Altabelly?). We used to call him "Apple Jelly." I said, "(Altabelly?)?" He says, "Yes." I said, "You ride shotgun. I want to go over there," and I usually had an M-1 [Garand] rifle there. We carried forty-fives all during the war and they issued carbines, but they weren't really as effective as an M-1 rifle. So, I had an M-1 rifle. So, I said, "I'll leave the rifle here." So, I went to the building, on the side of the building, and I did my thing. As I was walking around, here comes a German soldier and I ran right into him. He was a young guy, at most eighteen or nineteen years old. Well, he saw me and I saw him and the jeep couldn't see us, because it was on the other side of the building. [laughter] So, he took off in one direction, I took off in another. Evidently, he was with a German reconnaissance or something like that, checking things out. I never did find out where he was. So, I got the hell out of there and we radioed back that there was some German activity in this area. G-3, the operations people, later on, said, "Well, they're just doing some probing to see what we have here," said, "Don't worry about it." They had reconnaissance where there no intention of killing each other and they had reconnaissance in force, where, if they did come into someone, then, they would engage, but, normally, wouldn't, because they didn't have the backing or anything to

support them. I'll tell you some interesting stories about what happened in Korea, but that's something else. We didn't get there yet.

SI: Can you tell me any stories about going on reconnaissance missions in Italy?

MR: Well, I never went on recon, just a couple of times, that this one time was where we had the eighty-eight that was sticking up in the air. We're doing some recon and we walked right into that one. That was stupid. I should've checked it out before I went around that curve, but that was a mistake that, fortunately, didn't backfire on me, you see.

SI: Did you get any chance to go on R&R when you were in the war?

MR: Yes, absolutely. We were sitting up there--we were up on the line--I forget where. We were north of Rome and they set up a deal. What the Americans did was, they acquired the hotels, so-to-speak. The Excelsior Hotel in Rome was the best one. They had that for the officers and they had another one for the non-commissioned officers, they had another one for the enlisted people. The officers and the men, when their [name on the] list came up, was sort of a lottery-type thing, they'd send them back to Rome for five days, which was very interesting to us. I mean, some of the most beautiful girls in the world live there. That's where we were interested in going, back to Rome. They're having a good time. So, we went back to Rome and, one time, I went back there. In Rome, of course, they had no food. There was very little food, because the farms in the north didn't supply them. In the south, they didn't have many farms that were really back in business again. In front of the hotel, at night, there'd be a whole bunch of girls, with their bags, and the guys would go out and pick a girlfriend. They'd stay in the hotel with them for five days, but what the girl would be doing every day was, when we ate, we had plenty of food there, she'd put the food in the bag and excuse herself, take the food back to her family, then, come back. These were nice kids. I mean, they were really prostituting themselves so that their family could get some food. So, there was a place they called Broadway Bill's. This was down the street from the Excelsior Hotel. It was where all the officers went. Each, the non-commissioned officers, the enlisted men, they all had their own little places to go to. So, there was no animosity or anything about that at all. That was just the way it was. So, this Broadway Bill's, you went down the steps, this was sort of a big nightclub and a lot of tables. He had the French officers, British officers and American officers. So, I had gone out with a gal, a blondie gal, on one of my previous trips. She saw me and she was sitting with a British officer, a big guy. She says, "*Chi-chi*," [laughter] which, I guess, was a term of endearment back then. So, I came, sat down at the table. She had just met this guy and she had known me, so, she decided that she was going to stay with me. He said, "I say," he says, "I'm with this lady." He says, "Please, leave." I said, "No," I says, "it appears to me that she wants to stay with me." So, he stood up and I never thought he was going to stop. He said, "I think I will knock you down." So, I hit him and all he did was shake his head and a bunch of pilots, American pilots, were sitting over at a table. They were half in the bag, "Fight, fight," and they all jumped on this guy. She said to me, she says in Italian, she said, "Let's go," and she took me out the back way. The British MPs and the American MPs came here and they fined everybody fifty bucks. They didn't do anything, just fined them. In the meantime, we had escaped through the back; true story. Then, we went back to the unit and we weren't sure we were going to go back again the next time, but, whenever we went down, we really enjoyed ourselves. The Germans did the same

thing. They had their [R&R spots]. You had to have that. Most times, we didn't take a bath for, God, a couple of months, I guess, wore the same uniform. With the tanks there, we had this hundred-octane gas and what we used to do is strip and dip our clothes into the gas and clean them that way, which was a stupid thing to do, I mean, [laughter] but we did that.

SI: You described the food earlier. Did you ever get hot meals on the line or was it usually K rations and C rations?

MR: Well, it was K rations and C rations until we [stopped]--if we were on the move or when we had an activity going on or a campaign going on, then, we had the C rations and the K rations. Then, they had the five-in-one rations, where they had fruit and stuff like that, but, usually, whenever possible, we did have hot food, yes. They would bring their trucks up. They'd have hot food and I carried a spoon in my pocket, just a regular spoon with the mess kit. I had the mess kit, just a spoon; I didn't have a fork or a knife. I just used the spoon and that's what I had in my back [pocket]. I had the forty-five in one side and the spoon in the other.

SI: What was your opinion of the other officers in your unit, those above you and those on your level?

MR: Very closely-knit. Of course, a superior officer we respected as a superior officer. We didn't have any "A-holes," so-to-speak, in the outfit. They were all good guys. We were very closely-knit. The chain of command was there and you have to remember, then, that there was a division between the enlisted people and the officers, but what people don't realize, there was more of a separation between the senior non-commissioned officers and the men. When the guys became sergeants, and so on, they didn't bother with the guys too much, but we had respect for them, especially for the guys, the officers, who had been there a long time and knew what they were doing. If they'd say, "We'll go out and recon," or do this or do that, we had every faith in what they had come up with, what they wanted us to do. We're just young officers. We're just very closely-knit and all of the fellows that I knew, the ones that survived, I had been in contact with them for years and years until they all passed away. I'm ninety-three now, so, I outlived all of them. [laughter]

SI: Did you have, or at least try to keep, the same tank crew throughout your time there?

MR: No, a couple times, we had to change them around. Some of them got promoted. I recommended some of them for promotion and they make them a corporal or a sergeant, whatever the case may be, but they pulled us back in the reserve and there was training going on all the time. We trained all the time and they pulled us back in the reserve. We were down south of Naples there for a while, getting new tanks and things. We set up a school there. As a matter of fact, I set up a communications school where I was teaching the new recruits coming in, these replacements you're talking about, teaching them all about radios and the Morse code and things of that nature, or maybe we'd go out for rifle practice or pistol practice or whatever.

SI: Did you or your men make any kind of modifications to your tanks?

MR: I didn't, but some of the guys did. We didn't, no, not in my tanks. What they would do is, as I said, in the back, you have these hundred-octane gas tanks, vulnerable. So, what some of them did was, they got some steel plates--I don't know where the heck they got them from--and they'd put them over there as added protection, but, once an eighty-eight got on your butt, that was the one thing you were afraid of. I have to show you something.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You said that you were getting ready to ship back to the States when you heard that the war was over entirely, that the Japanese had surrendered. Where did they send you then?

MR: Oh, that's when I got out of the Army. Well, the first thing I said was, to a redheaded lieutenant I had never known before, I said, "We made it," and that's when he said, "Well, the Japanese are fanatical. We made it this time. Let's hope we do it the next time." [laughter] Anyway, that's what happened. They sent us back to the States. We landed in Boston. The ship landed in Boston. Well, they had a troop train that went from Boston down to Fort Dix and the strange thing, Shaun, there wasn't a word spoken all the way down. We were just sitting there looking out the window, looking at the different things going by. We were home. We were back and there wasn't a word spoken. It was the strangest thing. We got off the troop train and they processed us out and I was discharged; not discharged, but released. So, they said, "You officers, we want to keep you, if we can, if you join the Reserve." So, I said, "That's fine." I said, "Well, can I change my branch of service from Armor to the Signal Corps," which I'm interested in communications, and so on. He says, "Absolutely." So, I went into the Reserve, Active Reserve, as a Signal Corps officer and, of course, for the next five years, I would attend meetings, and so on, and be active in the Reserves, until I was called back in, but that's another story. Anyway, that's what happened. So, I went into civilian life and I got a job with American Airlines, in communications. We were experimenting with airborne radar and things of that nature that the military had used. A lot of it, of course, is in the system that exists today. So, I was with them for about five years in communications. We'd go on test flights and things of that nature.

SI: When you were in the service during World War II, is that when you completed your high school diploma work?

MR: No, that was after I was recalled. I wanted to go back--oh, when I got out of service, I wanted to finish high school. I only had a few credits left, but I was engaged. I was in love. I said, "Well, I want to go to college," and so on. So, two things stopped me--one, I wanted to help the family out, continue to. Oh, by the way, all during my service, I had sent an allotment back to my family. I continued trying to help them and I also sent a ten-dollar allotment to each of my sisters each month, which was a lot of money back then. When I got back, I got married, and so, I had to delay my going back to school, but I never gave up on that. So, when they called me back into service and I wound up, eventually, at Fort Monmouth, they had an education department there and I took the various tests. The Army had a program where they wanted all the officers that hadn't completed college to have a two-year college equivalency. So, they had a program where you took different courses and stuff. So, I went through that and that's the way I started off.

SI: How did you meet your first wife?

MR: Well, my mother was friends with some people up in Nutley, New Jersey, and they had a daughter whose name was Rose, Rosalyn, and my mother said, "I have a son over there in Europe." She said, "Well, do you mind if I write him a letter?" A lot of the girls did that, write letters to guys, and she said, "Sure." So, we corresponded back and forth and, when I got back to the States, I met her and the rest is history. By the way, when I was first in the basic training, to go back to that, there's an old saying amongst the soldiers of World War II, "Oh, I just got a Dear John letter." A "Dear John" letter was when the girlfriend that you had before you went into the service told you, "Forget about it, Charlie." So, I was going out with a girl and she sent me a "Dear John" letter. Of course, I felt badly about it, but that's just the way it was. When I got my commission, she had heard about it and she decided that she wanted me to resume relations with her, which I wouldn't do anymore. When you become an officer in the Army, back then, that was a whole different level of living. With the uniform on, as an officer, you can walk into any level of society and be accepted. I saw a different world as an officer and I said, "This is wonderful." I said, "Now, I probably get the same respect [as] if I had a college education." So, I decided then, with every opportunity, I was going to go to school. Now, some people would be satisfied with just earning a living, and so on. I said, "No, I'm going to make it, somehow." So, I had no intention, at that time, of getting into the doctorate program at Temple, but I just wanted to get a college degree. So, I went to four different colleges, taking courses and courses and courses. So, then, the Korean War came along. Of course, I was working for the airlines and they called me back into service.

SI: Were you working out of Newark Airport?

MR: Newark Airport, that was with American Airlines.

SI: Was it difficult, with all of the returning GIs in 1945, to find a job?

MR: No, not in my case. Some of them had a problem, but I went to American Airlines and I had an amateur radio license and some radio background, so, they hired me on the spot. I worked out at Idlewild, which is now Kennedy, for getting acclimated with the equipment on the aircraft, and so on. It was a good job, a good paying job. So, in 1950, they called me back and I received orders. It says your MOS [military occupation specialty number]. Now, my MOS was 0210, which is Signal officer, but they sent me my orders and it says, "1542, infantry rifle platoon leader." I said, "They've got me back in the combat arms again." I said, "This is not right," and I wore the Signal Corps flags [branch insignia]. So, when they called me back in, I went down to Fort Dix and I was there for about--I was the executive officer of a company--thirteen weeks, going through the training with the guys, until they sent me to Korea. Well, I went to Korea as an infantry officer. I called up [Washington], I said, "Why are you doing this?" He said, "Well, we lost a lot of officers in Korea." This is when the Chinese broke through and we came all the way back and they killed a lot of our guys, including a lot of the officers. He says, "You have a combat officer background." I said, "Yes, but I'm in the Signal Corps." He said, "Yes, but we need combat officers, guys that had been in combat." He says, "You'll go over there as an executive officer or a company commander of an infantry company." I said,

"Hell, I don't know anything about infantry tactics. I have an idea." I said, "Now, if you put me in a tank or something, I might know something about that." So, they sent me over as an infantry officer. So, I was in division rear in Seoul, about a hundred miles back, and they were up near the 38th Parallel, in that area, 24th Infantry Division. I was assigned to the 24th Infantry Division and I went through personnel, way back in division rear. They said, "Yes, we're going to make you executive officer of an infantry company." I said, "Well, I was never an infantry officer." He said, "No, but you have combat experience." I said, "Yes, but that was five years ago. Things may have changed since then, tactics, and so on." So, while I'm there, there was an officer with the flags on, a Signal colonel, and he said, "I see you have flags on you. Are you a Signal officer?" I said, "Yes, I was in the Signal Corps Reserve." He said, "Well, what are you doing here? Are you getting processed?" "Yes, sir," I said, "I've been assigned to an infantry company." He says, "An infantry company?" He said, "Let me see your 201 file." So, I said, "I don't have it." I said, "The clerk over there has it." So, he looked at it. He says, "Just what I'm looking for, a radio officer." He says, "Our radio officer was killed." They overran his [position], where he was held with one of the radio trucks. The North Koreans or Chinese overran it and killed them all. So, he needed another radio officer and I happened to be there at that particular spot. So, he went over to the colonel there that was heading the personnel thing. He says, "I need this officer." He says, "Well, sure, go ahead and take him." He said, "We can get some other guys to go to the company, infantry company." So, I wound up as a Signal officer, radio officer, in the 24th Division. It just so happens that he happened to be there when I was there. Otherwise, they would've sent me to an infantry company. I had flags on, but the guys have rifles on. Then, I got decorated there after a while, but you saw the citation.

SI: Do you remember what month it was that you arrived in Korea?

MR: I think it was April.

SI: Okay, probably April of 1951.

MR: Yes. I think it was April. I'm not sure. We went over on a troopship from Seattle to Japan and we're processed there. Then, we went over in a ferry to Korea. There's a fellow by the name of (Johnny Chrisanti?), whose parents owned a bar down there, the Osprey, down along the shore. I says, "Johnny, let's go into town." I wasn't married. Was I married at the time? Yes, I was married. Yes, of course, I was. So, I said, "Let's go into town and get something to eat," and so on. A lot of the other officers that were there were deep in thought, because, here, they're getting ready to go into a combat outfit there the next day. Of course, we had been all through that during World War II. [laughter] So, we went into town, we enjoyed ourselves and had fish, and so on. Then, we went up into Korea. I was with them for about a year, and then, I was rotated back. I decided to stay in after that, because they interrupted my life twice. They sent me back for a thirty-day leave and I had two small children by that time. Then, I received orders to go to San Diego. I had had a year of combat experience in Korea, so, that was considered what they called an undesirable assignment, an undesirable tour. When you had an undesirable tour, they made sure that you went to a place where it was not undesirable for the next tour. So, they said, "You've been assigned to Amphibious Group One out in San Diego, California." So, I talked to the fellow down in the career branch down in the Pentagon. He says, "Mike, you've got a plush job. You're going out to San Diego. The weather's beautiful." I said, "Boy, that's great."

So, when we got there, I said to the Navy people out there, I said, "Where is Amphibious Group One?" He said, "I don't even know what that is." He said, "Oh, that's Admiral [W. E.] Moore's staff." I said, "Well, what's Amphibious Group One?" He said, "Well, they do all the planning for amphibious invasions and future planning, and so on," and he said, "They're on a ship out there at North Island, called the *Eldorado* [(AGC-11)]." I think it was the *Eldorado*. So, I went out there and I boarded ship. I talked to the chief of staff, who was a Navy captain, and he said, "That's fine." I was a captain at the time. He said, "What was your last assignment?" I said, "Well, I was with the 24th Division in Korea." He says, "Oh," he says, "that's wonderful." I said, "Why is that, sir?" He says, "Well, we're going back out to Korea with the taskforce out there." I said, "Well, I just got back from there." [laughter] Now, what the career branch didn't know was that this staff was aboard ship and they went back out to the Pacific again. So, excepting for the thirty days, I was away from my family for two years. I was aboard the ship for two years. Then, I came back, and then, I continued my career with Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, as an instructor, and so on.

SI: Looking at your tour on the ground in Korea, you were assigned to the Signal Company in the 25th Infantry.

MR: 24th.

SI: You were in the 24th Infantry Division.

MR: Yes.

SI: What were your daily activities like once you were assigned there?

MR: Well, at first, I was the radio officer. We had these big trucks with communications [gear] and we had communications with division rear, which was a hundred miles in back of us, and in-between was nothing in-between. I mean, all the civilians had been evacuated. It was like a desert country. That's the way it was back then. My job was to keep the communications going between them and division rear and with corps headquarters, the superior headquarters. I would also assign the frequencies, on a periodic basis, to the different units. Then, they took me from there and they made me the head of what they called the radio relay officer. We would have a division here and we had three regiments, okay. Now, in order to communicate with these three regiments, there would be a hilltop and put a radio relay station on the top, maybe up on a three or four-thousand-foot hill, and communicate down to these different organizations. Basically, that's what I did and that's when I got the Bronze Star there, because we had troops up on this hill. They had taken over the bunkers, bunkers that, evidently, the Chinese had used, the North Koreans used, then, we were up there and we used them. They were up there and I would go up there periodically to see how they were doing. Now, we had to get power units up there, gasoline up there and there was a trail that went up there. We had Korean laborers that would break down the power units into the generator, and then, the gasoline engine. They'd pack them on their back on A-frames and go up the hill. Well, it got to the point where they moved to a hill, in order to get there, we had--the Chinese had booby trapped and had booby traps all over the place. That's when I got up there. They had a lot of artillery fire going on during the offensive at Kumsong. [Editor's Note: The 24th Infantry Division engaged in Operation

NOMAD-POLAR near Kumsong from October 13 to 23, 1951.] I had to get up there and see these guys and tell them what to do, and so on. That's when they gave me the Bronze Star. People were trying to kill you. Just a side story, the guys on top of the hill, we were up on a four-thousand-foot hill. It was Thanksgiving and the Army had arranged to get turkey sent up in what they called reefers, the trucks that were refrigerated. They would bring turkey up to all of the different units. On Thanksgiving, all the guys had turkey, except for my guys up on the hill, see. I couldn't get up there, because they were dropping a lot of mortar fire all over the place. I said, "Look," I called them on the radio, I said, "I can't get up there, gents," I said, "but I'll get you some turkey. I'll bring something up to you." Well, I had gone up there, oh, a few weeks before and they had an owl, but it had a broken wing or something. They had that owl as a pet. They had a pet in the bunker. He would be up in there. I don't know how the owl survived. He must've eaten mice or rats, whatever they had up in the bunkers. So, I finally got up there; I couldn't get up there at Thanksgiving, so, I got up there after Thanksgiving. I don't think I could bring turkey up at that time, but I brought them something. I brought them some food. I went up there and I says, "How are you guys doing?" He says, "Okay." I said, "I'm sorry about the turkey." I said, "By the way, where's the owl?" Now, these guys were from the South, Mississippi and Alabama. He said, "Oh, we ate him." They ate the owl. He said, "We had to have some sort of bird. You guys had Thanksgiving. We had the owl." So, I've got some pictures somewhere showing some of the [times] I was up there.

SI: In most of your positions, how far away would you be from the frontline and the enemy?

MR: [laughter] Well, which one, World War II or Korea?

SI: Korea.

MR: Well, I'd say we were pretty far back. We were about a mile back. We were right up there. They had what they called the MLR, main line of resistance, here and they had no-man's land in-between. They had the North Koreans and the Chinese on the other side and we were right behind them [the US Army]. We were just about a mile or so behind them and we were in what they call a draw. The road would go up this way and they'd have these roads that went in there. Between the mountains, there were very, very narrow valleys, very narrow. That's where we were, so, we were pretty close. Of course, when you get up there and we got up on top of the mountain there, we were ahead of the regiments. Sometimes, we were ahead of the infantry. We had to contend with the communications down to the regiments, so [that] they could give their battle orders and things of that nature. So, it was important that we get this stuff up there. Sometimes, we were up there and they knew that we were somewhere in the area, but they had bunkers all along there that had been occupied by the American forces, whoever was back and forth. They knew we were up there and they would sporadically drop mortar and artillery on the different hills, hoping to knock us off. [laughter] Fortunately, they had a few drop and they were pretty far away. About fifty yards away, they would drop some stuff in; that was quite a distance away. So, you ask how far--well, we were right there, so-to-speak. Of course, in World War II, we were right there, too, but that's different. In Korea, we were up there and, basically, it was pretty quiet. We could see all the artillery firing going on, a different war. We had the same uniforms, the same equipment. Today, I mean, the stuff that they have today is--we didn't have any overshoes. I mean, the weather went down to below zero in the wintertime and all we had

were the regular boots, leather boots. We didn't have any winterized shoes or anything like that, that they'd come up with later on. So, they issued us galoshes to wear, but they didn't do much good. Your feet were just as cold. A lot of people had trench foot and things of that nature; a different war.

SI: Was the main threat from artillery attacks and mortar attacks? Were you there for any infantry charges by the Chinese and North Koreans?

MR: Yes, yes, we were. One time, they attacked us and they came across in cavalry formation, so-to-speak. I wasn't there, but we could hear it. It was really a turkey shoot; it was really terrible. I mean, these Chinese, they had sneakers on in the wintertime, gym shoes or sneakers. It was a combination of North Korean and Chinese and they came across. We were sitting back here in what they called "Artillery Valley." We had 105s, 155s, eight-inch howitzers further on back and we had that all zeroed in. What they did was, prior to the attacks there, they [the American artillery units] would fire one gun, another gun and zero that one in, see, until all of them were zeroed in. All they had to do was fire them and they knew precisely where that artillery was going. The battlefield was about, I think it was about a mile apart or so, maybe a little more than that, about a mile apart. They were on their one side and we were there. There was no-man's land in-between. The Chinese were especially, not the North Koreans so [much], but mostly the Chinese, they'd send them out in the cavalry charge and the artillery would get them. Then, when they got close enough, then, they'd open fire with small arms, machine-guns. It was just a "turkey shoot." It was terrible, terrible. They would continue to do that from time to time. One time, I was in the tent. We were having a morning briefing with the commanding general. You don't mind if I tell you side stories?

SI: Please, go ahead.

MR: All of the different staff officers would make their reports, G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4. G-1 is the personnel guy, "So many people killed, so many wounded." The G-2, the intelligence guy, says, "Well, we think that this Chinese outfit's here and that outfit's over there." The G-3, the operations guys, were the ones that planned the [attack]. They came up with the tactics to attack, and so on. The G-4 was the logistics that would bring the supplies up. So, the medical officer got up there and he says, "Well, we had some deceased soldiers and we had some wounded soldiers, and so on. We had two soldiers with VD," venereal disease. So, the General, who was Blackshear M. Bryan, he says, "How did they get VD?" He says, "Well, they acquired it here." There were no women between us and Seoul. There were no women. There were no ladies there at all. "How did they get this?" So, they couldn't understand it. So, finally, they asked these guys. [laughter] They said, "Where did you meet the gals that gave you this?" He said, "Oh." Now, in-between the Chinese and the North Koreans and the Americans, there was a line and there were these two prostitutes that set up business in-between the lines. Now, what happened was, when the American recon guys [would] go out on reconnaissance, they'd go out and these gals would service them. Then, they'd pay them with Korean money, or we had scrip then, and take off. Then, the North Koreans or the Chinese would come in, do the same thing. There was sort of an unwritten law. I mean, they didn't fire at each other, so, they took turns. Now, they got these gals. The General heard this, he was very upset, [laughter] because he was a very religious man, very conservative. So, they got these gals out of there and they found out they

had American money, Chinese money, Korean money, and so on. [laughter] They sent these gals back to Seoul, but, here it was, there was somebody doing business in the middle of a war and, the unwritten law between the Americans and whoever it was there, they didn't want to spoil this deal. [laughter] Usually, recon outfits didn't fire at each other anyway. They just went up there to see what was around. Other than that, we lost fifty thousand guys over there. That's a lot of people.

SI: Would you say that you suffered heavy casualties in your unit?

MR: Yes, in the 24th, there was, until we got in an established defense position; it wasn't too bad [then]. Those fifty thousand American boys, for what? They're talking [about how] in Afghanistan, they lost--I forget how many they lost there, maybe three or four thousand over a period of time--but it's a different type of warfare, just as dangerous, though, for those kids over there in Afghanistan or Iraq, but they're isolated incidents. I mean, it wasn't a mass of artillery and soldiers on one side trying to kill you and we're doing the same thing. It [the Korean War] was like cavalry charge and defense, like the old days. The Civil War was that way; [Robert E.] Lee had his people on this side and we [the Union Army] had these people on the other.

SI: You said earlier that when you went over to Europe for World War II, you had a very fatalistic attitude. You thought that you were not going to return. Did you have a similar attitude during the Korean War?

MR: No, no. It was a little different. It wasn't a fatalistic attitude, but maybe it was a resigned attitude. I said, "What the hell?" I said, "We're over here." I says, "What are our chances of coming back?" The casualties, a lot of people are over there with white crosses over them that never came back. We survived and we were lucky, but, when we went to Korea, I didn't have that feeling at all, excepting, [laughter] one time, the Colonel sent me over to this ROK division, Republic of Korea division. They needed some telephone equipment. So, he says, "You want me to send anybody? Do you want somebody to ride shotgun with you?" I said, "No." I said, "There's nothing in-between there." There was a gap of maybe a quarter of a mile between either the Tenth ROK or one of those divisions and the 24th. I said, "I'll drive in a jeep behind there." I says, "There won't be any problem." So, I drove over there and dropped off the equipment and came back. On the way back, I had to come up a steep hill and, somehow or other, there must've been some guys with mortar fire. The Orientals were fantastic with the mortar fire. I mean, they were deadly accurate. So, I was in this jeep and coming up this narrow hill. It was only just wide enough for the jeep to get up there. They dropped a round behind me. I said, "Oh, boy." [laughter] So, I couldn't speed up the jeep. I was going slow, in low gear. So, I pulled up and another one dropped behind me and they kept following me up the hill. Finally, I got near the top of the hill and it stopped. I guess, where they were, they were blanked out by trees or something or whatever. So, that was the only time when somebody was directly trying to kill me, but I was fortunate that I got ahead of them. [laughter]

SI: In World War II, you had fought in an all-white Army and, in-between, the Army had been desegregated. How did you see desegregation working in practice in Korea? Would you say that there were a good number of African-Americans in your unit? Were things going smoothly? How would you characterize that?

MR: Well, you see, in Korea, Korea wasn't really a war. It was called a "police action," even though we lost fifty thousand troops, and so, it is a war, really. In Korea, the United Nations had declared that a police action, so, we had the Turks, the French, the Americans, the English. We got along with all of them. The [South] Koreans had their own division, too, and we never trusted them.

SI: The South Koreans.

MR: South Koreans.

SI: Yes.

MR: Not that we didn't like them. They were okay as far as that's concerned, but the Army wasn't trained as we were. In a couple of instances, they broke and they went back and we were exposed. Fortunately, I mean, I guess the Chinese and North Koreans didn't realize that that happened, the extent of it, until we covered up. We covered it up with artillery fire, and so on. So, we never trusted them after that. We got along well with all of them. There was no animosity or anything like that at all, that I remember.

SI: Do you have any thoughts about how African-Americans were treated?

MR: Oh, we didn't have any African-Americans in our unit.

SI: Okay.

MR: That's another story. When I was growing up, you remember I was telling you about the City of Newark had the Chinese, the small Chinese [population], the Italians, the Germans, the Polish, and so on, there was a small Portuguese group? They had one place called "Up on the Hill," they called it, where they had all the African-Americans and a lot of them worked for the Americans. They worked as janitors and [in] menial jobs, mostly. So, we looked upon them as people that did that sort of thing. There was no animosity against them at all. Well, some people didn't like them; they called them [racial slurs], but that was few and far in-between. In all those years, I knew a lot of African-Americans. Of course, when I was going to school at the elementary school, half of them were African-Americans, never had a problem with them. As a matter of fact, some of them were really good friends. During World War II, they were treated like second-class citizens. Like, we would be in barracks in our training and they would be in tents, for example. In Italy, they had a division called the 92nd Division, which was an African-American division, and they were pretty good. They had the Tuskegee group, had aircraft and they were flying P-51s and they were outstanding pilots, outstanding pilots. When the war ended, the black fliers, for example, who were officers, went back to civilian life, there was still that, "They're black and we're white. They stay there; we stay here." There was no such thing as intermarriage or the things that you see today, black and white girls, which is acceptable today. I thought that was sort of unfair. After the war, though, Roosevelt [President Harry S. Truman] established a commission where he integrated the blacks with the whites and that's when there was a lot of problems at first, especially amongst the Southern boys--the Northern guys didn't

care--until the African-Americans proved themselves in combat. They died just the way the Americans, the white guys, died. So, they were treated as second-class citizens. In the Navy, the African-Americans were either cooks or they did menial things, but you never saw black pilots in the American Navy. [Editor's Note: In July 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, ending segregation in the Armed Forces.]

SI: In your unit, in the 24th Infantry Division, it was all white. The division had not been integrated.

MR: It was all white. It was all white.

SI: Yes.

MR: They did have African-Americans driving trucks in transportation, go back and forth. The guys were good, too. We never thought about it at the time. Well, I met a number of African-Americans in Italy, with the 92nd Division, who were African-Americans and I got along fine with them. I had no problem with them at all. One of the things that I'd learned traveling around, when I was a young man, from one place to another was getting along with people. In a couple of places, there were some African-Americans, so, I got along with them. So, instilled in me was the thought that all men are equal. I mean, who cares what they were? I only saw two African-Americans in my area when I was in the Italian section [of Newark]. One of them was from Ethiopia and, of course, Mussolini had gone in there and wiped out a few of the tribes. It was terrible and they settled in to occupy there and a lot of the Ethiopians spoke Italian. So, this African-American was from Ethiopia and spoke perfect Italian and he got along beautifully with the Italians. He would go to all of the Italian feasts and he was accepted. Then, there was another fellow by the name of "Boots," who lived around the corner from where I lived with an Italian family. He, as a baby, was found on the doorstep. This Italian couple, a young Italian couple, couldn't have children or something. They took him in and they kept him. I don't know if they adopted him. At that time, they just kept him until he grew up and he grew up in this Italian home and he spoke perfect Italian, the dialect. It wasn't pure Italian. His name was Boots and he was accepted. He was the only one that was accepted in the Italian neighborhood. Otherwise, you never saw them go through there. It was the segregation. Of course, when I was going to Central Avenue School, a lot of them were African-Americans, so, that was my exposure to quite a few of them. So, I always had a very liberal attitude about that. Some of the Southern boys that I knew in the service, they were telling me that they got along very well with the African-Americans, "They'd had to go work in the cotton fields, and so on, and they were fine, no problem. We never had any problem like they had up in the North there," they used to say, "where they shoot a white man, they shoot a white cop or something like that. We never had that problem." Of course, they had the Ku Klux Klan down there, kept them terrified. So, you asked me about the African-Americans in the service. They were treated as second-class citizens, as far as I was concerned, but, when I saw them out there, I thought, "Well, that's just the way it is. That's the way the Americans are. They'll never accept them as equal to the white people." I had no animosity against them at all.

SI: When you got on the ship, did you say it was the *Eldorado*?

MR: Yes, at first, it was the *Estes* [(AGC-12)], and then, it was the *Eldorado*, yes, yes.

SI: The ship went out to …

MR: South …

SI: Did it go to Korea?

MR: Well, the South Pacific, because you're actually with the fleet. Basically, what their mission was, they had Task Force 90, was all the amphibious ships all throughout the South Pacific, the APAs [attack transport ship] that carried the troops for an invasion, for example, the AKAs [attack cargo ship] that had all of the supplies, and so on, the landing ship, dock [LSD], the LSTs [landing ship, tank]. This was under Task Force 90 and I was on the staff and our commander was an admiral. On that staff, we had Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines and our job was to plan amphibious invasions for the different landing areas. They would send in the UDT teams [underwater demolition teams], which are now called SEALS, and they were part of our force. They would land on these different beaches all throughout the South Pacific, unbeknownst to the countries. [laughter] They'd survey the land, they'd come back with reports. Based on their reports, we would go ahead and make a plan, so that maybe in some future time, maybe twenty years from now, there may be an invasion, but we have all the information. So, that's what we did. As I said, the UDT teams would go in there and check things out and come back. Then, we would go up. We traveled throughout the South Pacific and into Korean waters, too. There were a couple of times when we had "Bedtime Charlie." There was a North Korean or a Chinese, I guess it's North Korean, it was a recon plane. He'd fly around at night. We could hear him [flying] over the ships. [Editor's Note: Dr. Ruggiero makes the sound of an airplane.] We were near--there was a Red Cross ship with all the lights around with the big red cross on it. Well, evidently, this aircraft was there just to see what was in the harbor, what troops were around, and so on. So, finally, they set up an air [patrol]--I guess it a Marine pilot, or was it a Navy pilot?--to find him. They put the landing gear down, the flaps down and they shot him down. So, we never did hear [it again], but that was the only time when I heard anybody of the other side fly over us. Other than that, there were no submarines or anything like that we were worried about.

SI: What was life like on the ship?

MR: Different. You talk about separation of ranks, the Navy was--I'll give you an example. The Admiral had his mess and he had his mess boy, usually a Filipino. I said, "Well, why a Filipino?" He says, "Well," he says, "we have to pay them," the Admiral has to pay them, "and they're cheap, because they eat a lot of rice," okay. The Captain of the ship has his mess, his own private mess. The senior officers have their mess--this is the commanders and above--and then, I was a captain at the time, we had our mess. They had the chiefs' mess and they had the enlisted mess. In the enlisted mess, they had tables for the non-coms, like the sergeant equivalents, and the enlisted people. These are all these different messes onboard the ship. [laughter] This was on one ship now. The captain of the ship, of course, was "God Almighty." He was "Jesus Christ," as they used to say. There was a very distinct distinction between the ranks. There was a separation between the officers and the enlisted people, but there was more

of a separation between the enlisted chiefs and the [other enlisted] Navy personnel. I remember it as a very distinct division. I mean, the chiefs would not bother with them otherwise, but they were respected. There was more of an observed distinction between the chiefs and the other enlisted personnel than between the officers and the enlisted men.

SI: As an Army officer serving on a Navy ship, did you find yourself on the outside …

MR: No, no.

SI: Or were the others welcoming to you?

MR: Oh, no. They used to kid me along. They even made me an honorary boatswain's mate and a boilerman's mate and I even have certificates that show that upstairs. No, no, when I was aboard, it was a mixture of the joint [services]. They had what they called the ship's company. That's the Captain and his crew that ran the ship. We were tenants aboard, the taskforce. Of course, the ship's company and the taskforce, the amphibious group there, staff, we would all eat in the same mess room. Of course, some of our guys would be up there with the senior officers' mess. We got along fine. Of course, I had to learn that you don't say "ceiling" or "floor," you say, "Overhead, deck, bulkhead," and it was a whole different language. Of course, I was aboard for two years and, on a number of occasions, where Navy enlisted men, mostly, came aboard and a couple of officers, too, they got seasick. I would take soup to these guys or food to these guys. He says, "But, you're an Army officer--you're supposed to get sick." I said, "No." [laughter] I said, "I've been aboard this ship for two years." I said, "There's no way in the world I'm going to get sick." Of course, we hit a typhoon. We were on the edge of a typhoon one time and this was Tokyo Bay. We had our ship facing this way and the typhoon was coming this way, the tail of a typhoon, just the edge of it. We had both anchors out, full speed ahead, and we were being pushed back. We were at general quarters. The Admiral was right next to me. My general quarters was up on the flag deck, as they call it. That was the only time when I thought we were going to [ground], that we were going to go on the other side, on the rocks there. The wind was well over a hundred knots, well over a hundred miles an hour, and it subsided, just the edge of the typhoon, but it caused serious damage elsewhere.

SI: What was your role in all the planning that you were doing?

MR: Oh, well, I had two jobs. First of all, they would put me on watch, with the Navy staff, on what they called communication watch, in addition to my other duties. What I would do, I would go into this communications center, where they had all the cryptographic [gear to] break down the secret stuff, but they had another little room, separate room, with the communication guys where they had all the cryptographic equipment. Now, the enlisted people weren't allowed to go in there. That shows you about this division of ranks. I thought, "This is ridiculous," because, in the Army, the enlisted people and the officers were together in these crypto rooms breaking the coded messages, and so on, but, in the Navy, at that time, only the officers were allowed to do that. So, I'd go in there and close the steel door behind me, I'd be in there alone. I'd get in front of the machine. Top secret stuff would be coming in, I'd break it and, if it was secret, I would take it out to the guys out there and they would handle that. If it was top secret, then, I'd have to take it up to the Admiral myself. That's the way it was. I couldn't get over the

fact they had such a distinction between the enlisted and the officers. I mean, some of them, the Navy guys, were really snobby, some of the Annapolis guys. Most of them were pretty good guys, but a couple of them thought they were God's created creatures on Earth. They were very formal with the enlisted personnel.

SI: You came back in 1954. Between the time you left for Korea the first time and when you came back from serving overseas for two years, you had really only seen your family for about a month in that time.

MR: When I came back from Korea, the combat over there, I had thirty days' leave and they assigned me to San Diego. The people in Washington thought that it was a shore-based assignment. They didn't know that and I didn't have the sense enough to think about it, to call back Washington and tell them. Now, after the second year and I came back, they were going to go back out again. We came back and I took a bunch of different courses in different schools, Navy schools, and they're going to send me back out there. It was a three-year assignment that I had. I said, "I don't want to go out there for a third year away from my family." We were only back for a short time. So, I called up Washington, I says, "Gee," I says, "I don't want to go back out again." So, Jimmy down there, he says, "Mike," he says, "what are you talking about?" I said, "Well, we're going to go back out to the Pacific." He said, "What do you mean going back out to the Pacific? When were you out in the Pacific?" I said, [laughter] "I've been aboard the ship for two years and we were out there," in what they call WESTPAC [Western Pacific]. He was shocked. He says, "Oh, my God." He said, "We didn't know that." So, in two days, I got the orders and I was sent to Fort Monmouth. I was sent there originally to teach amphibious warfare and communications, because of my experience aboard the ship and all of that. Then, I became an instructor in the officer department. They had an enlisted department and the officer department. We taught tactics for using communications and things of that nature. I taught amphibious warfare for a while, until they reduced the hours on that.

SI: Where had your family been living while you were overseas?

MR: Nutley, New Jersey. I was away from my wife and kids for almost two years.

SI: When you were assigned to Fort Monmouth, did you all live on the base?

MR: Yes. We had nice quarters there. While I was teaching, one of the students was taking the advanced officers' course, communications, at Fort Monmouth. He was up there on temporary duty, and then, going back to Washington in the personnel [department]. He was the guru that made all the assignments of the Signal Corps officers. Of course, when the different officers in the different classes heard about it, they tried to wine and dine him and everything else to get plush assignments after that, including some of the instructors. [laughter] So, just a couple of days before he left, he says, "Mike," he said, "you've never come over and asked me where you wanted to go." I said, "No," I said, "that's your decision to make." He said, "Where would you like to go?" I says, "Well, I don't know." I said, "I'd love to go to a nice, warm place." He says, "How about Italy?" I said, "That would be lovely." I forgot about it. So, after my three years was up in Fort Monmouth there, in the Signal School, I got orders to go to Italy. I was there for three-and-a-half years in the missile force there. Then, from there, I was sent to Staff College.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, I was there at NORAD, North American Air Defense Command, and we were target number one in the event that those missiles [launched], war started, because NORAD controlled all of the defense of the United States with the missiles, and so on. We had the DEW Line, Distant Early Warning Line, radar, and then, we were checking the Russian radar and they were checking us, and so on. [Editor's Note: In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.]

SI: I want to ask you more about that, but, when you were assigned to Italy, where was your base located?

MR: We were located in Verona, which is one of the most beautiful spots in Italy and tourists are missing a [good] bet when they don't go there. It's a wonderful place. They have a perfectly-preserved Roman amphitheater, where the gladiators fought, and so on. I was there for three-and-a-half years. I was the radio officer on the staff of the missile unit. It was a wonderful assignment. While I was there, the University of Maryland had, in Rome--I think even Temple University had [it]--they had people there giving courses, part of the university, and the University of Maryland had the professors, and so on, here. So, I took advantage of that immediately, took some courses. I took courses in law, I took some courses in advanced Italian So, I says, "Well, here's my chance to get back into action." So, I did that immediately. That's how that story [went].

SI: Did you sense any difference in the way Italians viewed Americans between when you had been there during World War II and now being there in the late 1950s and early 1960s? Was there any noticeable difference?

MR: At that time, no. Of course, we lived in the Italian economy. In other words, we lived right in the middle of the Italians. All the Americans did. In Verona, there were no barracks or officers' quarters or enlisted quarters or anything like that. They were in rental places all over the city. We lived in a nice apartment house that they had just built, and so, we lived amongst the Italians. Most of the Americans commuted back and forth between the homes and the enclave where the headquarters was and they had the commissary and the officers' club, the enlisted club, that sort of thing. That was their life, back and forth, and there was very little contact with the Italians, because of the language barrier, but, in my case, I had no problems at all. A lot of my friends and a lot of radio amateurs over there are Italians. We lived right there amongst the Italians. When I went into a theater or into a restaurant, they never knew that I was an American. They thought that my accent was a little bit like the French accent, they said, [laughter] but, no, there was none. Now, they had the Communist Party over there. The Americans, they were sort of paranoid about that. When they had, what was it, May Day? I think it was, over in Russia--the Italian Communists were not like the Communists in Russia at all. It was just a political party is all it was. We were told not to go out, not to go into the restaurants and stuff, because of possible attacks against the Americans, which, of course, never happened. So, I'd mingle

amongst them and had no problem at all. I used to go up skiing, and so on, with them and go to restaurants with them and made a lot of Italian friends.

SI: When you came back to go to Command and General Staff College, was that in Kansas?

MR: Fort Leavenworth.

SI: You kept going back to school, but not necessarily in a formal setting. What was it like, all of a sudden, being thrown into Command and General Staff College?

MR: It was tough. Well, I had taken courses with the University of Maryland. I started out, then, I went to the Staff College. The officers were selected. A very small percentage were selected to go to Staff College and, if you went to Staff College, that meant that you were considered an officer that was worthy of watching and advancing in the Army. So, I went there. I was there and, after I graduated from there, I received orders. I was supposed to go out to Colorado Springs. They said, "No, you can't go out there yet." I said, "Well, why not?" He says, "Well, we're sending you to do your nuclear weapons employment school." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, you go there and you'll learn the tactics, and so on, of employing nuclear weapons in the division. You are supposed to be the adviser to the General." I says, "Yes, but I'm in the Signal Corps now." He says, "Well, you wouldn't act in a direct capacity, but you have to have an understanding." So, I had to go back and learn all about nuclear weapons and how to employ them in there. You talk about a tight environment--we weren't allowed to take any notes home. Each of us had a safe in the school, a special section of the school there. We'd keep all our notes in there, and so on, and so, we learned all about chemical, biological and radiological warfare. Then, from there, I was sent out to Colorado Springs.

SI: When did you arrive at NORAD?

MR: In 1961. While I was there, they had an aero club there that had some retired Air Force aircraft. In NORAD, the North American Air Defense Command, the Air Force had a fighter command there and they had officers who had been in combat as fighter pilots, and so on. I joined this aero club and they had a lot of advanced aircraft, high-performance aircraft, in there. Well, I had taken a few lessons out at Teterboro Airport, years ago, right after World War II. I says, "I'd like to get a license." That's fine. So, a number of the members of the aero club were flight instructors. They had been teaching fighter pilots and teaching B-29 pilots and C-47s, and so on. So, I had the best of instructors in the world. I mean, these guys were instructors, former instructors, who now had the assignment up at NORAD there and they taught me how to fly. I had the Air Force facilities and all of their simulation machines there, and so on. Then, when I got my license, then, I used to fly all over the United States, checking--well, we would have what they called operational readiness. The SAC [Strategic Air Command] Command would have operational readiness inspections at the SAC bases and things of that nature. So, I used to go around checking them out.

SI: In addition to checking the bases, what other duties did you perform at NORAD?

MR: I had the communications in the headquarters and all of the crypto machines, and so on. In addition, I was supposed to go out to the different missile commands. Around the cities and around the SAC bases, they had these missiles, Nike missiles. We had communications people out there and I was supposed to go out there and check to see that everything was set up and that they had their destruction capabilities all in place. I was supposed to go out there on a surprise basis. The way SAC was, General [Curtis] LeMay, he would go out there and they'd have surprise alerts and things of that nature. Well, I always made sure that they knew I was coming. [laughter] So, I'd fly out to these different bases on my own and do that. I was only there for two years when I was suddenly pulled out of there. The Colonel called me in, he says, "You're going to Berlin." I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, you've been selected to go as the Signal officer of the Allied Staff, Berlin." I said, "What's that?" Then, he explained it to me. Berlin was divided into four sections. Are you interested in this?

SI: Yes. Please, go ahead.

MR: The American, the Russian, the French and the British. Now, each month, according to the agreement just after the war was over, one of these commanders would take over control of the City of Berlin. Of course, they would rotate around, but the only stable part of this whole operation was that there would be one Allied staff that would be the staff for that commander at that time, for that particular month. On this Allied staff, they had German, British, French, English and some German police. I was to be the Signal officer of that [joint command], be the communications [officer], and I would be in control of all communications between Berlin and West Germany. Now, Berlin was in the middle of the Eastern Zone [East Germany]. There was Russians all around us and the only agreement between them was that our people would be there, the Americans and the French and all the rest of them, and they were allowed to be the staff. The only thing was that the Russians decided not to do that and they kept out of it. So, each month, the American, the French or the British generals would act as commanders of the [city] and we would be the staff for them, okay. The other agreement was that the only access into Berlin was via road, one road, or one flight lane, okay. Now, in order for us to go to West Germany for leave, which I did, to go to Italy, you had to get a set of what they called flag orders, signed by the Americans, the British and the French, to permit you to do that. Technically, you were supposed to go to the Russians, too, but they were on the other side of the Wall. They had the Berlin Wall up at that time. [Editor's Note: On August 13, 1961, East Germany sealed the border with West Berlin and began erecting the Berlin Wall.] So, that was my job. They sent me over there for that, which meant that they had me lined up for special assignments. I guess they thought I was pretty good. I didn't think I was, [laughter] but, evidently, they thought that I had the capability to do some special things. Now, a lot of my assignments, when I went to Italy, I was in coordination with the Italians over there. They had an Italian missile outfit. When I was sent to the Navy, I was with the Navy and the Marine people and, of course, when I went to Italy, I was with the Italians and, now, in Berlin, I was with the Germans and the British and the French. So, they sent me on those types of assignments, because I was able to [get along with people]. This all goes back to my [youth]. Remember when I said I was moving from one area to another? That was all the supporting factor in me getting along with all these people. That all built up over the years. I didn't realize it at the time, but, evidently, they did. Well, I hadn't. I hadn't realized that, until I thought about it. I says, "Yes, they've sent me on all these special assignments," and so, that was it. Then, when I was in Berlin for a year, the Colonel called me

and he says, "You're going to Italy." I says, "What for?" He says, "Well, the General down there in Heidelberg said you're going to Italy. They're setting up a new command down there, building it up." I said, "Well, when am I supposed to be there?" He said, "You're supposed to be there in five days." In five days, I was out of there. I mean, they had a quick party for me, and then, they sent me down to Italy. What they did was, they established what they called the Signal Group Mediterranean and we had this big communication station in Northern Italy, near Pisa. There were three hundred people down in Ethiopia, in Asmara [now in Eritrea], there were about three hundred in Tehran, [Iran], and they had about three hundred in Turkey. So, here I was, I had this command with troops on three different continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. Basically, what these stations were, they were stations that were in communications with the States, mostly. The ones in Turkey and in Iran, they had these units out on the border and they were watching them [the Soviets]. They were monitoring the frequencies of the Russians and, if the Russians scratched the wire, they would know about it. They would channel these communications into these big stations--it'd be encoded, of course--and sent back to the States. So, I had the command of a thousand people on three different continents. It took me two weeks to make the tour around for inspection. That was my last assignment before I retired. So, I didn't want to get out of the Army. I was set up to be a full colonel within the next year. I had sent my son, Peter, off to Rutgers, he was there, and I had a son that I had problems with, Michael. One day, when he came home from school, I threw about fifteen, twenty pamphlets on the bed. I says, "Pick one." He says, "What's this, Dad?" I said, "Well, these are military schools in the United States. Pick one." He says, "Why?" I says, "Well, you're going to go to one." So, he picked the Staunton Military Academy, which was the most expensive one of all. With Peter going to Rutgers, and so on, and Michael going there, I had to get out. I had to get out and make some money. So, I got out of the Army and I was making fifteen, twenty thousand a year or more, in addition to my pension. I was able to keep it. The tuition rates at Staunton were more than Princeton at that time. It was very expensive. That's why I got out of the service. Then, I was assigned to Fort Monmouth as a civilian. I went to Monmouth College at that time and I took maybe ten or eleven courses. Then, I went to Edison State College and they got all of the different background experiences, and so on, and they decided that I needed to take eleven courses, "And you can have your degree." So, I got my [doctoral] degree from Temple University--oh, while I was there [in the Army], then, they sent me down to Arizona and I took courses at the University of Arizona. So, I went to the University of Maryland, the University of Arizona, then, I went to Monmouth College and, of course, with Edison, I took the courses there and I got my degree. Then, I got my master's degree at Pepperdine [University] and I took the doctorate course there for four years at Temple. I was working at the time. I attended classes and I had to drive from here down to Temple, and then, out to Ambler Campus. Working on the dissertation took me four years.

SI: What was your field and dissertation topic?

MR: Well, actually, it was a special [field]. It was in education, but my dissertation was a comparative analysis on the differences between military project managers and civilian project managers. What I did was, I got the data from 150 different companies all over the United States. It took me a while to do that, using a couple of different questionnaires. I wrote the dissertation in that and found out--I thought that the military project managers that were handling big projects, like getting Air Force missile systems and aircraft and the Navy, by getting

battleships and things of that nature, these big projects, you would think that these military project managers would be much more disciplined and more rigid than the civilians when I found out that the opposite was the case. The guys that were on top of the heap in the civilian side were more class-conscious than they were in the military. [laughter] So, I got my dissertation on that. The defense lasted for about two hours. Man, I never thought I'd get through that, Jesus. [laughter] It's a good school, by the way. Temple's a good school.

SI: I want to go back to your time at NORAD. Could you tell me a little bit more about the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

MR: Okay. NORAD was the North American Air Defense Command. They had lines to all the different SAC bases, to alert them, and there was the Distant Early Warning Line, and so on. Then, the Army portion of it was the North American Air Defense Command, which was headed by a three-star general, okay. One day, I was called up to the General's office and there were about four or five of us in there. In the meantime, evidently, the Russian ships were going down to Cuba. I said, "Boy, this is bad." The situation was getting pretty bad. So, he called me up there. There were only about four of us in there, his operations guys, an intelligence guy and another one and myself. I was head of the communications. He says, "What we're going to talk about here is not to go anywhere." I had a full colonel as a boss. I was a major then. I says, "Can I communicate with my boss?" He says, "No. The only one you talk to is me, okay?" What it was was that the Missile Crisis was on at the time and we were supposed to get special messages in case "the balloon went up" [war began]. The messages that we got, supposedly, if anything happened, would give the generals the authority to go ahead and release missiles or whatever, okay. So, I wasn't allowed to tell anyone outside of my own group. In my communications facility, I had all cryptographic machines and there was one spot, a little room there, which was separate. The only one allowed in that particular room was a warrant officer and myself and the other people, who were cleared for cryptographic top-secret clearances, weren't allowed in there. Whenever the messages came in there, if the warrant officer was on duty, he would usually get there at night and I would be there during the day. When I got messages, I would hand carry them to the General. Fortunately, the Russians backed off. I said to the Colonel up there at the operations office, [laughter] I says, "Colonel," I says, "if a war starts, what about us?" Well, we weren't in the Cheyenne Mountain facility at that time. We were in the center of town. He says, "Well, Colorado Springs is the number one target, because of all of the capabilities that we have." In later years, they dug a hole in the mountain, they moved everything there. So, it was very, very interesting at the time of the Cuban Crisis. My wife was saying, "Why are you staying out so late? What's wrong?" I said, "Ah, they're going through an exercise." I couldn't tell her. I couldn't tell her. I wanted my wife to get away from Colorado Springs, move her out of there, because, if anything happened, we were gone, but I couldn't tell her. All of us thought the same way up in the staff. Fortunately, nothing happened and we got out of that. That's when I was pulled out of there, finally, and sent to Berlin, when the Wall was there. We would get reports. We had German police on the staff--not on the staff, but they would be in the same area there--and they would get reports. We would get reports of shots being fired on the other side of the Wall, people trying to escape. There was one kid that got as far as the wire. They shot him, but he wasn't dead. The German police on the [West] Berlin side, where we were, wanted to get this kid out of there, but they couldn't get close enough to him. So, he died right there. He bled to death and died. Every Sunday, we would go

for a walk. One place, where they had the Wall and the buildings were part of the Wall complex, we saw this man on the street here every Sunday. He would wave his handkerchief and his mother was up on the top floor of one of the buildings [on the East Berlin side of the wall]. You could see her handkerchief waving back and forth and he couldn't get over there because of the Wall. Well, it got so that there were so many people trying to escape that they evacuated all of the people from the buildings [near the Wall] and that was it. On the Allied staff, we would get reports from the German police about different things going on. Some people got across. One of the people even tried a glider, I think.

SI: Were there any crises started by the Soviets? Did they try to cut anything off?

MR: No, not overtly, no. Of course, they were interested in what we had and we were interested in what they had. Now, one of the agreements was, Shaun, that we were allowed to go into East Berlin as long as we had a staff car and we were in uniform, okay. Conversely, they, the Russians, would come over in their vehicle and they'd go all over our area, where our troops were and everything else, with an American MP [military police] car following them all around the place, okay. The same thing happened when we went over into the East Germans' [side]. The Russian police or a soldier would be following our staff car around. Well, we had a fellow--I can't think of his name--he was a pilot, too. His parents were Russian, so, he spoke Russian like a native. I mean, he learned to speak English when he was about ten years old, but he spoke Russian like a native. He says, "Come on, Mike, let's go over and visit East Berlin." I said, "What are we going to do over there?" He says, "We'll do a little shopping or something." [laughter] So, we got in the car and we had our uniforms on, of course. They let us through. They weren't too happy about it, but they let us through. One of the things that I got was a clock for the kitchen. I saw it, paid five bucks for it in East Berlin. We went to the Russian officers' club. Now, the Russians weren't too happy with the Americans at the time. So, we went into the Russian officers' club and we sat down at the table. They came over and offered us some vodka. We had vodka. They drank a lot of that stuff. There was a family over there with a couple of kids. So, I can't think of the fellow's name who was with me. Anyway, he went over to the table He greeted them, said, "How are you doing?" and so on. These Russians, they went back like this. I mean, here was an American officer who spoke perfect Russian. So, they got along. We sat over there for about a half an hour and I'm sitting at the table. I went back to West Berlin with the clock. They [the Russians] would never show up at what they called the Kommandatura meetings. Every month, we would have a meeting of the staff. The French [general] was on one side of the table, the American general would be on the other side of the table and we had the English general over here and I'd be sitting near the American general. Now, behind the American general, there was an American officer who spoke perfect French. When the French officer said something, the American officer would translate it and tell the American general. [laughter] Conversely, when the American general said something, the French officer who spoke good English would translate. Now, these meetings were held every month and, every month, there was supposed to be all four, the Russians, the Americans, the French and the British, but the Russians never showed up at these meetings. Now, unfortunately, we had a lot of top secret stuff that we would have in these meetings and there was always the possibility that the Russians could pop in at any time with all of the stuff we had on the table, [laughter] but they never showed. They never came. I had leave with my family to go to Italy, to go down to near Venice and go to the beach there with the family. So, I had to get these flag orders. When I got the flag

orders, I said, "Okay, I'm going." So, I went to the checkpoint there where the Russians were. The Russian checkpoint, you had to go in there, and so, "It's good to see you, Major Ruggiero." Now, how the heck did they know I was coming there? I mean, they probably had spies everywhere. He took my ID and everything else and photographed it, of course, but he knew all about me. I guess he knew I was on the staff or something. So, there was a radio playing in the background. There was a soldier back there near his desk and he had a radio. So, he was tuning around. So, there was an American station in Berlin. He was tuning around and the music started coming out. The Russian officer went back there and raised holy hell. What had happened was that the soldier turned on the American station, the music [that] came out was the [song] *Stars and Stripes Forever*; true story. [laughter]

SI: Were you in Berlin when President Kennedy was killed? [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.]

MR: No, no. I was there afterwards.

SI: Okay. You were at NORAD still.

MR: I was at NORAD, yes.

SI: Was there any kind of alert, because, at first, they thought it might be a foreign threat?

MR: Where's that? Do you mean the Cuban Missile Crisis?

SI: No, when President Kennedy was killed.

MR: Well, they had tank to tank at Checkpoint Charlie, which was the checkpoint [with] Americans on one side, Russians on the other [of the Berlin Wall]. You had a Russian tank and an American tank like that, okay, pointing at each other. Now, if the war had broken out, we would have been overrun in a matter of a couple of days, maybe less. They had Russian armies all around us. It was very, very tight at that particular time, but the Russians backed down and Kennedy, I mean, he was swearing like a trooper, when he was out there [giving his speech in West Berlin on June 26, 1963]. He endeared himself to the Berliners when he said, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*," which means, "I am a Berliner." The Germans went nuts. They idolized him. I was there when he was assassinated.

SI: Okay.

MR: All of the Germans throughout Berlin had candles in their windows, because they really loved him. Of course, it was a terrible thing, losing our President, at that particular time.

SI: After you retired from the Army, you worked for Allison Engineering Company. That was at Fort Monmouth.

MR: No, no. He was a civilian outfit.

SI: Okay.

MR: He had two hundred engineers and installers in Vietnam.

SI: Okay.

MR: Now, in Vietnam, they were establishing a strategic communications system, these big, fixed radio stations, all throughout Vietnam. My guys were the ones who were doing all the installing. So, I flew down there in civilian clothes--I wasn't in the Army then--and I got down to--not Hanoi. What was the name of …

SI: Saigon.

MR: Saigon. We landed there and the American colonel met me. He says, "We want you up in," where the hell was it, the big city up in northern Vietnam, where the Marines were?

SI: Da Nang?

MR: Da Nang. It was up in Da Nang. I guess it was Da Nang, yes. So, I says, "How am I going to get up there?" He said, "Well, normally," he says, "you'd go up there in a truck, but, since you are retired military," I was a retired [lieutenant] colonel at the time, "we have a C-130 going up there tomorrow morning." He says, "Do you mind that?" I says, "Hell, no." I says, "No problem at all." So, I went up there, I guess it was Da Nang, and they had some trailers out there. Allison Engineering had trailers out there and I was supposed to stay there at one of the trailers. Well, what I didn't know was that, the night before, they had a rocket attack, a sporadic rocket [attack], and destroyed one of the trailers. So, when I did get there, I had to stay in town. There, it's another case where but for maybe twenty-four hours, I would have been obliterated. Anyway, we put that system in and, after about a year, I guess it was about a year, came back to the States. I had an offer for a job with the [US Army] Communications Systems Agency. I didn't know what that was. One of the fellows that was there, one of the managing civilians up there, was a friend of mine. We had been instructors together at Fort Monmouth. He says, "Mike, we have an executive GS-13 position for you," which was like equivalent to a lieutenant colonel or something like that. So, I quit Allison Engineering and I went to work for the government. There, we were putting command-and-control systems all over the world, communications systems, and I had a couple of different projects. One was putting in a radio system from Heidelberg all the way down to Southern Italy, where they had this security command. Another one was where we were upgrading airfields and I was doing that. Another one was putting in the communications systems down in Panama, Panama Canal. The Panama Canal Company had their system on one side of the river, we had it on the other. We'd put them in there. We put sensors in and [they were] able to tell them where the ships were as they were going through. The last job, a big job, I had was putting a communications system in for the Shah [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi] of Iran. So, I used to go out to Tehran about every three months. That was before he was forced out of his kingdom, so-to-speak. [Editor's Note: Dr. Ruggiero is referring to the 1978-79 Islamic Revolution in Iran.] It was very, very interesting. I finally retired in 1982, I guess it was. I set up a small consulting company, myself and a couple other guys, and I called it MBR Associates. My middle initial is "B." What I did was, as a

civilian, I would act as point of contact between contractors who were looking for contracts with Fort Monmouth and they were multi-million-dollar contracts. This was during the Vietnam War [Cold War?] and things were really hot. So, these companies were looking for people who knew the ropes there and can advise them as to what to do about getting set up for contracts. That's what I did. So, I was a consultant for ITT, Boeing and a bunch of others. I think I had, all together, over a period of time, about fifteen different companies. That's what I did. We got contracts for them and, sometimes, we didn't get contracts. Basically, that's what I did. Then, I finally retired and went to Pennsylvania. We lived there for ten years. Before that, they called me--Fort Monmouth had set up [a program] when they had some advanced degree students that were taking courses there--and they wanted me to teach a special course on project management techniques on big projects, dealing with different companies and interactions between these different companies, how to do that. So, I taught there for two years, and then, I decided to move to Pennsylvania and I left. They wanted me to stay and teach other courses. So, I came a long way from the Italian neighborhood, but I never gave up wanting to [go to school]. If people tell me that they're too old to go to school or that it's no sense going to school, they're crazy. There's always a way. So, I got my doctorate degree when I was sixty-nine years old. You think about that.

SI: Yes.

MR: During the oral exams, when they were checking me out, man, the process you have to go through to get in the program, one of them was, you had to write a letter, and then, you had to go for an oral interview. He said, "You're in your sixties. Why get a degree now?" He said, "You should be retiring at your age." I said, "Well, my grandfather lived to be 105, so, I think I have a little time left." [laughter] I says, "No," I says, "all my life, I've been sidetracked and I want to finish my degree. I want to get the doctorate. This is personal satisfaction." So, they accepted me, and then, they gave me the Mensa [IQ] test or whatever they give you, in addition to a bunch of other [tests]. The rest is history.

SI: Are there any other impressions from your time in Vietnam? Do you have any thoughts on what you saw, based on what America was doing there?

MR: Well, I wasn't there long enough. I was only there for maybe, on and off, for a year. It was terrible. I mean, it was pretty bad there. It was a war that we never should've been involved with to begin with. Why we went down there, I'll never understand. You had two hundred thousand American troops there--for what reason?--and another fifty thousand kids killed. My own view is that we never should've gone there, but, if you're in the military, you do what you're told to do. So, I wasn't in the military at that particular time. I only went there as a civilian. In all my inspection of the different sites there, some were pretty close to VC, Vietcong, territory or activity, but they never fired a shot, not one shot, at the communications facilities being built, because I think, in my own mind, they knew that, eventually, they were going to take over the country and they can take over these [systems]. They'd have a built-in system already built in for them. That's what we did. We left there, left the equipment, walked out of there--walked out, we escaped out of there. There were no problems or occurrences between the Americans and the Vietnamese that I knew of when I was there. As a matter of fact, they liked the Americans. They did. The Germans loved the Americans when we were there in Berlin. I think Kennedy

had a lot to do with that, too. Every year in Berlin, the Americans would put on, not a rodeo, but they'd have a barbecue sort of [thing]. All the Americans and Berliners were invited to that and they'd have their hot dogs. Of course, I was in Italy and I was in Germany, I was in Tehran, in Iran. The Iranian people, they're a nice bunch of people. I mean, they're basically a [nice] bunch of people and I'm sure that the younger group over there--they're a lot of religious fanatics over there. That's why they have the ayatollahs that have tremendous influence over the president over there, whatever his name is, [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad]. The younger people don't like the set-up there right now. I can tell you that right now. There was a little unrest when I was there about the Shah. The religious groups, they eventually overthrew him. I don't know how that occurred, but they did. That was after I left there. The people themselves, they liked us very much. As a matter of fact, they had American movies. They had Iranian subtitles, Farsi subtitles. That was their language, Farsi. When I went there, a number of times, I'd go to the movies and there'd be a big line waiting to go to see the American movies. They loved the American movies, especially the cowboy movies. They even had quite a few Jewish people with businesses over there in Tehran and they were getting along very well with them, the same thing in Turkey, when I was in Turkey. Well, that goes back to the Ottoman Empire, where they had what they called the millet system, where the Jewish people were "people of the book," so-to-speak. They're mentioned in the book [the Qur'an]. Moses, of course, was revered by Allah according to the Qur'an. So, they were allowed to rule themselves back then. When I went to Turkey and Iran, there were a lot of Jewish merchants there and they were living together as if they were brother and sister, no problems at all. Right now, you have a group of people that are running Iran and I'm sure that, if they could, the people would overthrow that group, but I don't think they can.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record?

MR: No, except that it's been very interesting. I think I've been talking too much.

SI: I can probably ask a few more questions. I do not want to take any more of your time today.

MR: No, you can stay as long as you want.

SI: Did you have any lasting effects from your combat tours?

MR: No, because, in World War II, well, when you get into a combat situation, we were busy doing what we had to do. We were scared as hell, of course, but that was secondary. I mean, it was always there. I mean, if anybody says they weren't scared, you have to check them out and send them back to see a psychiatrist. When I went to Korea, it was the strangest thing. Since I had been in World War II and escaped, I guess I thought, in my own mind, that nothing can touch me, which was ridiculous, because it could've. No, I had no negative effects from the military. What can I say? I keep thinking of the people that I knew that are left behind.

SI: Thank you very much. I appreciate all your time.

MR: Was this satisfactory?

SI: Yes, absolutely.

MR: Can you get anything out of this?

SI: The whole interview was good. Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 3/5/14
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/7/16
Reviewed by Cara Blaszka 11/4/2016