

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS J. RUSSOMANO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Louis J. Russomano on April 7, 2004, in Bloomfield, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Thomas Russomano: Thomas Russomano.

SI: Mr. Russomano, thank you very much for having us here today.

TR: Mr. Russomano, when and where were you born?

Louis Russomano: Newark, New Jersey.

TR: What was your date of birth?

LR: 1/2/25.

TR: Can you tell us about your mother and father?

LR: Like what?

TR: Can you tell us what your father did?

LR: He was a plumber.

TR: Which generation of your family came over from Italy?

LR: My father's generation.

TR: Did he come over on a ship?

LR: He was born in this country.

TR: Where was he born?

LR: Brooklyn, New York.

TR: Do you know anything about his childhood?

LR: Not too much.

TR: Was he a plumber for all his life?

LR: All his life--a plumbing superintendent.

TR: You mentioned that your father served in World War I. Do you know anything about his service?

LR: Not too much. He was a cook in the war.

TR: Do you know where he served?

LR: He was over in France.

TR: What was it like growing up in Newark during the 1930s?

LR: Beautiful. Better than it is now.

TR: Did the Depression affect your family at all?

LR: Very little.

TR: Did you have to work at all during the 1930s?

LR: No, I was in school.

SI: Which section of Newark did you grow up in?

LR: I forget what they call it now, around Bloomfield Avenue in Fifth Street by Branch Brook Park. I forget what they used to call it.

SI: What was the neighborhood like? Was it an Italian-American neighborhood?

LR: Mostly Italian-American.

TR: Which high schools did you attend?

LR: St. Benedict's Prep.

TR: It was a Catholic school?

LR: Yes.

TR: What was that like?

LR: It was good--an all boys school. You had to be good or you get thrown out, that's all.

TR: Do you have any recollection of when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

LR: Just what I read in the papers and all that.

TR: Do you remember how you felt hearing about it?

LR: I was only a young kid then, I didn't feel too much.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, did you know anything about what was happening in Europe with Hitler and Mussolini?

LR: No.

TR: You stated in the pre-interview survey that you enlisted at age seventeen.

LR: Right after ... I graduated St. Benedict's.

TR: Why did you decide to enlist?

LR: I didn't really enlist. I was drafted.

TR: How did your family feel about the fact that you were drafted?

LR: I got a six-month deferment for a while, and when that was up I went down and they called me down to the draft board and signed me up, that's all.

TR: What was the deferment for?

LR: I don't remember what it was for.

SI: Do you remember any blackouts or defense drills in Newark?

LR: Yes, we used to have them blackouts and all.

TR: Do you remember seeing any defensive measures around the Jersey Shore?

LR: I never got down there before. We didn't have no car or nothing to get down there.

SI: How did the war change Newark? Were there more servicemen in town?

LR: Not really. Penn Station was just a turning point--people traveling here and there, but there wasn't that much in town. Mostly all the young guys were in the service.

SI: Did most of your friends go into the service?

LR: Yes, in fact all of them went in.

TR: They were drafted the same as you?

LR: All drafted, right. A couple of them went in before me.

TR: You were drafted right into the Navy? You did not pick the Navy?

LR: When I was in line, they would sign you up to different parts of the service. They asked me what part of the service I wanted to go. I said, "The Navy." The guy said, "Okay."

TR: Why did you pick the Navy?

LR: I just picked it, that's all. The guy after me said, "Navy." He said, "You're in the Army." They were just picking every so many.

SI: Had you ever had any experience with anything with the water, shipping or boats?

LR: I used to own a boat with a partner down the shore, but that was well after the war.

TR: Where did you attend basic training?

LR: Newport, Rhode Island.

SI: Was it a shock for you to go from civilian life to military life?

LR: Not too much. Once you got accustomed to it, it wasn't too bad.

TR: During high school did you realize that there was a good chance you were going to be drafted afterwards?

LR: Yes.

SI: Did a lot of people leave high school early to go into the service?

LR: Not too many. Everybody waited till they were drafted and called.

SI: What was it like to leave home for basic training? How did you do it and what were you thinking at time?

LR: It was scary at first. The first time you're leaving home, and once you got up there and started making friends things started to even off a little bit.

SI: Did anyone from your area or neighborhood go with you?

LR: No, I went alone.

TR: Can you tell us anything about your training in Newport? What were they teaching you?

LR: Just basic training, that's all, building your body up, being on the call with a bayonet and high-heeled shoes to run around the track. That we went on for five weeks, that's all.

SI: It was just general training? Was there anything specific?

LR: No, that was general training. After that was up, five weeks, I went to Newport News and that was specific. They trained you for a ship then. They were training me for going on a destroyer.

SI: Did you at any point have a choice of which kind of ship you were going to serve on?

LR: Oh, definitely. I went through a rigorous physical exam, all kinds of examinations they could think of on the human body. Then they put two "X" marks on your shoulder. Then along comes this officer, and said, "You're eligible to go in the submarine duty." [laughter] Right then and there I said, "Not me brother," but a guy that I worked with he went into it, Terry (Raymond?), he went into it and he survived it. No way you're getting me down under that water. Then I went for training for a destroyer and they shipped me to Boston, Massachusetts. It was the homeport of the USS *Corry*, the homeport. ... We went on the cruise, the shakedown cruise to Bermuda. Between Boston and Bermuda, I got sick, I mean sick--seasick. When we got into Bermuda, I was all right, but they wanted to court martial me.

TR: Why?

LR: Because I didn't report to duty. I was supposed to be on watch someplace. I was new on the ship, I didn't know nothing about it. Luckily the captain had a little friendship towards me and didn't do anything. ... I don't remember his name.

TR: Do you remember what date you were assigned to the *Corry*?

LR: No.

SI: I am curious, it sounds like you were a replacement on the *Corry*.

LR: Yes.

SI: What had happened? Did somebody get sick?

LR: They were shorthanded on the crew, that's all. I was just was assigned to it.

TR: Do you happen to remember what your unit number was or regiment number?

LR: No. All I know is that we, after the shakedown cruise, we teamed up with the aircraft carrier, the *Block Island* with a bunch of other ships and we're out there hunting submarines. At the same time the pilots on the *Block Island* were getting training. ... I saw one plane blow up in the air and come straight down and crashed into the water and all we saw were bits of flesh, that's all. They couldn't find no part of the pilot. We did get a submarine when we were out there.

TR: That was German U-boat U801?

LR: Probably so.

TR: You were aboard when they sunk that?

LR: Yes.

SI: What was that whole experience like?

LR: To tell you the truth, I never made it to my spot in the gun turret over there. It happened so fast. When I saw that submarine come to the surface, it looked like the shell they put into him went right through the first guy that come out of the hatch. ... That's the way it went down. We picked up a few survivors.

TR: Did you have any contact with the German survivors?

LR: They were on the same ship we were when we picked them up, but I was on duty at my post over there. I never got close to them, just the security people on the ship, the armed guards or whatever they called them. They took charge of it.

SI: How often would you get a contact like that?

LR: We'd drop depth charges sometimes. That's the only one that come up.

SI: What goes through your head during this kind of submarine chase? Or is it just duty as usual or something else?

LR: Nothing really serious.

SI: It sounds like that one experience was pretty fast.

LR: It was pretty fast. It didn't last too long. Then I was up in the North Atlantic, I remember being on that destroyer, and ... talk about rough water. We'd be up top up here, and you'd look down over there, and you'd be down at the bottom of the valley and you look up, there's water all around you. That was scary.

TR: You mentioned that you were a gunner's mate. What kind of job did that entail?

LR: ... Taking care of all the guns on the ship, take care of the big ones, take care of the .351s. After they fired them we had to clean them out, maintain them, the 20 mm, the 40 mm, we had to maintain all of them. In the meantime, when we went to battle stations, I was the loader to drop the case of four shells down into the breach to fire, just keep pouring them in, that's all.

SI: Did you get a lot of training and drilling for that?

LR: Oh, yes.

SI: Did they put an emphasis on speed?

LR: Yes, they wait till you're sleeping at night then they call general quarters to get you out there to see how fast you can get out there.

SI: You were pretty young at the time.

LR: I was eighteen years old.

SI: Were most of your crewmates, the enlisted men at least, the same age?

LR: Most of them. We had one guy we called him "Pop," I can't remember his name. He was in his 40s, but the rest of the crew was all my age. Here's a picture of them all. That's going on the LST.

SI: How large was the *Corry's* crew?

LR: A hundred and some odd, I think it was. I don't remember how big it was.

TR: I read that it was two hundred men and sixteen officers.

LR: That's probably right.

SI: What was your average day like when things were not happening?

LR: Just hanging around. Take care of any duties. ... I was taking care of the guns. We'd be swabbing out the barrels or lubricating the 20 mms. If you didn't have nothing to do, you just hung around.

SI: Who was in charge of you, was it an officer or a chief?

LR: A chief, then you had the ensign.

SI: How did you get along with your chief?

LR: Good, got along good with him.

SI: Most of the men you served with, were they draftees?

LR: Mostly all draftees.

SI: Were there any regular Navy men on the ship?

LR: I don't recall.

TR: After attacking the U-Boat on St. Patrick's Day, you were on the ship when it went back to Boston for an overhaul.

LR: Yes.

TR: Then the ship left for Great Britain after that?

LR: Yes.

SI: Before you went over to Great Britain, what were you being told about what your future plans were?

LR: They didn't tell you too much, everything was hush-hush. They said, "We're going across the ocean to England." Went across, and we landed in Plymouth, England, and that's where we stayed until the invasion.

TR: In the days before D-Day, were you aware that you were going to be involved with the operation?

LR: Yes.

TR: Did you realize what a large-scale invasion it was going to be?

LR: No.

SI: About how long were you in Plymouth?

LR: A couple of days, I don't recall how long.

TR: Were they training you specifically for D-Day? Were they giving you specific instructions on what was going to happen?

LR: It was training, just telling us things were going to happen, and what part we're going to be in the invasion.

SI: What were you being told? What was your mission?

LR: Patrol the outside of the ships that were going across there. I mean you could hardly do anything, that water was so rough, but we made it across there all right.

TR: Across the English Channel?

LR: Across the English Channel.

SI: Were you able to get off your ship at all while you were in England?

LR: Oh, yes. We lived in Quonset huts covered with dirt and everything else--that's camouflage. That's where we stayed, off the ship over there.

TR: While you were in England, did you experience any air raids?

LR: No, I don't remember. I know we got liberty over there in England.

SI: What was that like?

LR: Walked around, that's all. There's nothing to do. Eat fish and chips wrapped in newspaper. I always remember that.

SI: Did you get to talk to any English civilians or soldiers?

LR: Not too many. Usually you hang with your own crew, that's all.

SI: Was this in Plymouth or did you go somewhere else?

LR: Plymouth. You couldn't go any place else. We only had a couple of hours out there anyway.

SI: Before we go on into D-Day, I just want to ask some general questions.

LR: Go ahead.

SI: It sounds like boredom was a big part of your average day. How did you deal with that? What did you do to fight the boredom?

LR: Not too much.

TR: Was there any kind of recreation or anything to do aboard the ship?

LR: Not on the destroyer, not that much room. We did wake up one morning, we had what they called the practice gun on the ship--it's a dummy gun--practice. Woke up one morning, there's a big shark ... wedged in between there, real rough water.

SI: Did you come over to England in a convoy?

LR: I don't remember.

TR: Did the *Corry* have any support boats or any smaller boats that gave it support?

LR: No.

SI: As you were training for D-Day, did you realize that this would be the big event that it was?

LR: After a while you started realizing what it's going to be. You knew it was going to be something big, but you didn't know how big.

SI: Were you working in conjunction with any other vessels or military units?

LR: They were all together over there, so you'd maneuver in and out. You're on the move because they were afraid of German U-boats, so you were like on the outskirts of it. The SONAR, whatever they got, they spot them.

SI: Were you involved in any training exercises like mock landings?

LR: No, I was fortunate I was on a destroyer. A couple of friends of mine were on them LCIs [Landing Ship Infantry], which take the infantry in. They got out alive, too. Because a lot of them, they were going in, and heading in, and then beached, they'd go in sideways and they were stuck, they couldn't get off the beach anymore.

SI: During the training and preparation for D-Day, did your job specifically change much?

LR: No.

TR: As a gunner's mate, were you aware of what the targets were going to be on the beach?

LR: No, we were just general quarters, we were just standing in general quarters, and waiting to see what's going to happen. Are we up to the invasion yet?

SI: Sure if you want to talk about it.

LR: That's when they sent us in as decoys to draw the fire. ... The invasion started at six o'clock, twenty minutes later we were in the water. We were sunk. [On June 6, 1944, the destroyer USS *Corry* was sunk by the Germans during the initial stages of the Normandy invasion.]

TR: Can you describe where you were located on the ship when you started out?

LR: I was amidship on one of them twin 40 mms and I was the loader, dropping the shells into the breach.

TR: Were you in a position to see a lot of what was going on around the ship?

LR: Just saw all the ships. The next thing you know we were up in the air and down hitting bottom.

SI: You were firing on the beach before that?

LR: We didn't man the guns. We didn't do no firing, nothing. We didn't get a chance. We were there just so the bigger ships could pinpoint where the guns were on the beach.

TR: Can you tell us about the German gun batteries that were firing at your ship?

LR: Didn't see them.

TR: What can you tell us about the ship getting hit? What do you remember?

LR: Got hit right in the forward engine room, split it in half. We were on deck by the guns we were manning. We got hit, the ship went up in the air and it went down and hit bottom. When we come up, I had a turtleneck sweater on and the uniform had sand all around in there around my neck from hitting the bottom.

TR: It was shallow water?

LR: Yes. When we finally settled in, the mast was sticking out of the water. We weren't more than a mile off the beach, less than that, too.

SI: After you were hit, did you go under the water?

LR: As soon as we got hit, we got the order to abandon ship, went into the water. My lifebelt wouldn't inflate, I climbed back on the ship again. [laughter] ... There was an officer there, he helped me inflate it, and we were hanging on to a life raft for about three hours or more waiting to get picked up. That's when the son of bitches started to shell us.

TR: Can you describe what happened to the ship? I read that it split in the middle.

LR: Just like that.

SI: When something like that happens, do you just go into shock or do you know how to react?

LR: You got no time to react. All you want to know is if you're going to stay on the ship or you're going to get off it, because you don't know how bad it was. All the guys down in the engine room were killed, about six or eight of them I guess. The rest of them were killed ... in the water.

SI: Was there any way you could take cover in the water?

LR: Just hanging on to the life raft, that's all. If you swam to the beach you would have got shot, so you just stayed there. After about three hours another destroyer picked us up. There was a destroyer there and I think there was a minesweeper there too, picked us all up. We're sitting on the back of the ship, they gave us blankets and stuff, and we had to stay there another couple, three or four hours yet, then we headed back to England. We were heading back with a cruiser, and I remember they were racing across the channel, that cruiser beat our ass boy, for a big ship it was fast, and back to England into them Quonset huts over there. They gave us dry clothes, and then we stayed there. I don't know how long we stayed there, then they shipped us to Scotland. We stayed in Scotland about a week. Then after that they shipped me home on a thirty-day leave, and I was back home.

TR: What was it like when you were in the water? The German batteries were still shelling the ship?

LR: Yes, it was scary, especially when you see a guy get part of his head blown off.

TR: How long were you in the water?

LR: Three-and-a-half, four hours.

SI: Had you thought about being hit before it happened?

LR: You didn't get a chance.

SI: Were they unable to come rescue you for that period because of the shelling?

LR: Because of the shelling. They were busy going up and down the beach over there, drawing the fire from the beach. The skipper of the destroyer that picked us up, he was damn smart, but he saved the ship from being sunk. He's going along the cruiser along the beach over there, he threw it in reverse, he backed up from where we were--two shells landed right there. We would have been in the water the second time.

TR: Was that USS *Finch*?

LR: Yes, it sounds like it.

TR: Were any of your friends wounded or killed?

LR: Yes, a couple of them were.

SI: After you were sent back to England, was there any attempt to keep you together as a crew or were you broken up at that point?

LR: Just broken up. Just the way you were, that's all, they shipped you back. I come home on the *Queen Elizabeth*, no guard, no support ships, or guard ships or anything else. She was too fast for them to keep up, zig-zagged right across the ocean. They gave me the job as a mess cook serving the table, two tables of the crew, and the people on there. It was best job I ever had in the Navy. [laughter] Got more to eat than anybody else.

SI: In general, how was food on board both the *Corry* and your LSTs?

LR: Food was good, very good. First thing when we pull into port, when we were out for a couple of weeks or something, the head cook, I forgot what they call them, would get to the beach and get fresh milk and fresh vegetables for the crew. They feed you good. Had three meals a day, a warm bunk to sleep in. Compared to the Army where they're laying out on the ground and don't know when they're going to eat. So then I was home for thirty days. I went back, they trained us to go on an LST. They took us up to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania--Carnegie

Tech. We were waiting for them to build, they were building this LST up there. We had a couple of weeks for them to finish it off and we took that, and we traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi River, right into the Gulf of Mexico to Mobile, Alabama. We loaded up with all kinds of bombs and tanks and ammunition, and we headed towards the Philippines, just two LSTs, that's all. The only trouble we had was one of our own ships fired a shot across our bow, because the skipper didn't answer the call and identify themselves. ...

SI: I wanted to ask a couple of questions about the LST training. You were there from the time they laid the keel on the 1054?

LR: No, the keel was laid well before we got there.

SI: Were the new crew mostly green sailors?

LR: Six of us were from the North Atlantic, the rest were all green sailors. They thought they were sailors anyway until we hit the Gulf of Mexico, and the ship started ... bouncing around like a cork, and they started falling down like flies, got sick.

TR: Was there anyone else from the *Corry* aboard?

LR: Not that I know of. We had one guy who was in there--I remember his name, Russell. He was in the armed guard on the supply ships. He got sunk three times in one day, get picked up by the one ... cargo ship, ... got sunk, got picked up by the third one, that one got sunk. Finally, he got picked up, he got into the armed guard, come on the LST, took the training with us.

TR: At the fiftieth anniversary of Normandy, President Clinton told a story about the *Corry* in which one man raised the American Flag as the ship sunk. Do you have any recollection of this?

LR: No. How could he raise the flag when the ship was sunk when the flag is already up?

SI: Since you were one of the few people on this LST that had any combat experience, did you think people looked up to you?

LR: No.

SI: Did you have any added responsibility as a more experienced sailor?

LR: Not really. They all had their own jobs to do. The LST is like a floating tank.

SI: How would you compare your officers on the *Corry* with the officers on this LST? Were they the same caliber?

LR: They were about the same caliber. They were all about the same.

TR: What were you being sent to the Philippines for?

LR: Guess they were getting ready for the invasion of Japan.

SI: What did you do once you landed in the Philippines?

LR: We were there not even a day when the word come around that the war was over. Two marines come riding by in a jeep yelling that the war was over. They took our ship, took all the ammunition off, put it on a cargo ship, and took it out in the ocean and deep sixed it, dumped it overboard, and we loaded our ship up with tanks and Army guys, took them to Japan. Went through a cyclone when we were going over there, boy did we bounce around. Landed on Kiire, Japan. That's the first stop we stayed in Japan. Then we set up shop around in the docks over there, and I was there for six months.

SI: Did you get to interact with the Japanese at all?

LR: ... A little bit. ... When they first saw you they were all bowing. We didn't trust them.

SI: How did you view both the Germans and the Japanese? What did you think of them?

LR: I think the Japanese were more cruel. The Germans, I never had any dealings with them. I never got close to one except the ones we picked up in the Channel, when we sunk the sub. The Japanese would walk around bowing to you and all that bullshit. ...

TR: Did you have any reaction to the atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

LR: No.

TR: Did you know about it when it happened?

LR: We were told after it happened.

SI: Did you have any idea what that entailed? Later on you would see Hiroshima. Did you have any idea what it meant that a city could be wiped out?

LR: No. What I can't understand is how they let us in over there when they say you're not supposed to go in that radiation for an extended length of time. When we took liberty, you could go up to the town by railroad or on one of those LCIs. We went to Hiroshima to look at it. We went to the other place, Nagasaki, got a glimpse of that too. Everything was leveled but the hospital. My opinion is if they didn't drop that bomb there would have been a million casualties on the American side. They were entrenched on the side of the mountains over there, in caves and what not.

TR: Your ship would have been part of the Japanese invasion if they had not dropped the bombs?

LR: We would have taken soldiers in, tanks, and whatever equipment ... to get on the beach.

SI: Were you any more or less anxious to go to the Pacific than to the European theater?

LR: Not really. Just went where they sent me, that's all.

SI: Had you been following news about the kamikazes and how dangerous it was in the Pacific?

LR: I had been reading up on that. They're sick people if you want to die like that.

SI: You did not spend too much time in the Philippines?

LR: No. Of course a week there was a lot.

SI: When you were in Japan, what was your average day like?

LR: You pull guard duty or you're allowed to go on the beach. We had a club set up at the end of the dock over there, like a bar, and you can go in there and get a drink, and get a bottle of beer and all that. They'd give you liberty or you'd be on guard duty, that's all.

TR: What were the ships duties or responsibilities?

LR: Like any other ship, you got to upkeep, you got to keep doing this and doing that, taking care of this, painting here, painting there.

TR: Did you have to patrol the coast or anything?

LR: I was on SP duty when we went up to the northern part of Japan, I forget the name of the town, but there was a lot of snow up there, and houses almost covered with snow. It was like a rock.

SI: At any point in your time in the service, did you have any kind of interaction with other branches of the service?

LR: No.

SI: Even on liberty?

LR: All I know is when we took them soldiers across into Japan, we had to feed them. They were commenting on how the Navy had better food than the Army, which is true. We always had three hot meals a day.

TR: Could you tell us the story behind how you obtained the Japanese sword, rifle, and the dog tags that you have?

LR: The rifle, we raided an armory over there. I got a sword and the bayonet and the rifle. The sword we had pulled up beside another LST, a Japanese LST, and nobody wants to believe me, my family did--we started ... searching for everything. I felt on top of these lockers over there

and I felt the sword up there. I took the sword down. It was one of them fancy ones with all the fancy ribbons on it, and everything else. That's it. I brought it home, I got the papers approved that the sword was mine, that the rifle is mine, and the bayonet is mine. Thanks to my brothers, they ruined the thing, I mean, trying to chop down a house. Ask your father sometime, he'll tell you.

SI: Did you give any thought to staying in the Navy?

LR: No, sometimes I'm sorry I didn't stay in.

TR: Do you remember what you were getting paid in the Navy?

LR: I think it was twenty-one dollars a month, if I'm not mistaken.

TR: When did you end up leaving Japan?

LR: I don't remember.

SI: When you returned to the US, did you have any duty before being discharged?

LR: I landed at Pier 92 and I got discharged from Pier 92. They gave me the price of a ticket home, took the train to Penn Station. ... I left carrying my sea bag with my rifle and my sword tied on the outside. [laughter] If you did that today, the rifle and the sword would have been gone in no time.

TR: On your trip back to the United States, did you know that you were going back to be discharged?

LR: Yes.

SI: How were you received when you came home by your family and also by people in your neighborhood?

LR: The family was all glad to see me. It was nothing fantastic about the neighborhood.

TR: Did your family know that your ship had been sunk after it happened?

LR: They did.

TR: How did they react to that news?

LR: They were shocked when they saw me come home.

SI: Were you able to correspond with your family while you were overseas?

LR: Yes. They had letters you can send, Western Union letters.

TR: Were the letters censored at all?

LR: I don't remember. There was nothing written on that, no censoring on that, so. I guess they watch what you put in it, that's all.

SI: Did your officers read your letters?

LR: Yes.

SI: Was it important getting letters and sending letters?

LR: Oh, yes.

TR: What did you do after leaving the Navy?

LR: ... I thought I was going to hang around and collect 52/20. I didn't even collect three weeks when a ... friend of my father's got me into the plumbers union.

TR: What was 52/20?

LR: That's what the government gave you, fifty-two weeks, twenty-dollars a week and I collected four of them I think. Then I got a job as a plumber's apprentice.

TR: Did you use the GI Bill?

LR: Yes.

TR: How?

LR: I went to Plumbing School under the GI Bill and they paid me so much a month. I think it was 165 dollars a month. I got that for a certain amount of time. By that time I was working, plumber's apprentice, 1947. I forget how much we got. The plumbers were getting twenty-one dollars a day. I forget how much I was making. I think I was making twenty dollars a week. I was coming home giving my mother twenty, and keeping ten for myself.

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

TR: You have a large family. Did any of your brothers serve in the military?

LR: My brother Tommy served in Vietnam. My brother Albert served in Germany during peacetime. My brother Ralph served in the Army during peacetime. "Pat Pat" didn't make it.

TR: Uncle Al was serving in Germany during occupation?

LR: Yes.

TR: Do you know anything about that?

LR: No.

TR: Can you remember how you felt about Vietnam when your brother Tom went? Did you approve of the war?

LR: No. They weren't fighting it the right way. I didn't approve of it. I think they're just wasting their time, getting men killed.

TR: How did you feel when Tom got sent over?

LR: I was a little worried about him, but he was there for thirteen months. I used to send him a package every other month loaded with canned food and a couple of times I sent him a bottle of VO. One time I had to ... make a loaf of bread where I can clean out the center and put a bottle inside so it wouldn't break. The other time I shipped it in popcorn. This way they ate the popcorn too.

TR: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

LR: No.

TR: Have you kept in touch with anyone from your service years?

LR: No.

SI: When you became a plumber and joined the union, how many of your fellow plumbers were veterans?

LR: The apprentice class was about ten of them, I think they were all veterans, some of them before me, they were older than me, but they were all veterans but the plumbers themselves they were all old timers. They were too old to go into the service.

TR: Do you have any knowledge of your family on the home front, like what they were doing while you were at war?

LR: Life was as usual I guess. They weren't doing too much.

SI: Do you remember when you heard the news of Franklin Roosevelt dying?

LR: No. I think Harry Truman was the best president we ever had. As soon as they signed that thing on the battleship over there, that treaty, he said get them men home. In a couple of months, I was home.

SI: What did you think about FDR?

LR: I was too young to have any thoughts about him.

TR: Just to backtrack a little, was there any celebration with the troops after the Japanese surrendered?

LR: A little bit in the Philippines, not that much. Everybody was ready to go home right then and there. I'll tell you though, it was three years of my life that was a good experience. Now, with this war going on in Iraq over there, I'd say it's a good deal for young kids to go to the Army for a couple of years, get one hell of a training, plus they can learn a trade, but with Iraq going on, it's rough.

TR: In general after leaving the Navy, you felt that it was a positive experience?

LR: Yes.

SI: Did you have any problems readjusting to civilian life?

LR: Not really. I didn't do a lot of drinking and stuff like that. All my friends were all coming home, so we all started getting together, hanging out together, concentrating on getting a driver's license. I had a '33 Chevy with a stick shift. Fifteen guys got their driving licenses on the car before I finally dumped it, then I got to be a big shot, I got a brand new car. I was making good money them days.

TR: Was anyone you were friends with before the war wounded or killed?

LR: One guy, yes, Cosmo. I forget his last name, but he got killed. I can't remember anybody else.

SI: Would you say most of your friends were changed by the war?

LR: A little bit, not too much, not really.

SI: Was most of your business in the Newark area?

LR: Yes, downtown Newark.

SI: Was there any kind of a boom in the late 1940s and 1950s, or was it pretty much the same?

LR: It was in the '60s when the boom started. They started putting them high rises up. Everybody was working. Things were good for a good many years. Things are rough now though.

SI: Were you there when the riots happened?

LR: Yes. Our union hall was ... almost in the center of it.

TR: Can you tell us what the riots were like?

LR: I didn't go into it. I stayed away from it. I was living on Bellevue Avenue at the time. They were in their own, like in their own area, burning their own houses, burning their own stores. They couldn't buy food or anything. I was living down in Doodletown over there. That's what they called the part of Newark I was growing up in, Doodletown. They were just on one side of Park Avenue, they never crossed over and come over into the other part.

SI: When did you move out of Newark?

LR: I moved out when I got married. I moved to Belleville. My mother and father were there until my mother died in 1986, I think it was. That's when we sold her house, moved out. ... I was six years old when my father bought the house over there. We were living there over seventy years.

SI: How long have you lived in Bloomfield?

LR: Over here, I'm living here twenty years now, before that I lived in Belleville for about fifteen years.

SI: Have you ever been back to any place where you served?

LR: No.

TR: Did you ever have any desire to go back?

LR: Nobody there I want to see. We were up in Connecticut. They got a bunch of ships over there like the *Intrepid* in New York dry-docked. We were on there, that's the first time I saw where the *Corry* was sunk. They had different ships that were sunk and they had the *Corry* there. It was a good ship.

TR: The *Corry* was the only major naval loss on D-Day?

LR: No. ... A lot of men were lost. Before they hit the beach they were getting shot in them LCIs, the coxswain, the guy that drove the ship was up high, he was a plain target for anybody who wanted to take a pop shot at him, but he had to be high to look around. He had the part of the front that goes down to get out. It was high over there.

SI: What could you see of the operation from where you were on the ship and then in the water? Were there landings going on in your area?

LR: Couldn't see nothing. There were big ships all around us, destroyers, and ... the minesweepers. They were fishing for mines and everything else. ... People say we were hit by a German 88 and the others say we hit a mine. I always thought we were hit by an 88, got it right in the forward engine room.

SI: Was everyone together in the water or were you all spread out?

LR: No. We're pretty well together.

SI: Were the officers trying to maintain order at the time?

LR: There was order. There was no panic at all whatsoever, and they took us to the base at Plymouth in England and that's when they shipped us to Scotland.

SI: Was there anybody who had any mental problems as a result of this?

LR: Not that I know of.

SI: Which beach was this near?

LR: Omaha.

SI: Is there anything we missed?

LR: That's about all that I can think of.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say for the tape?

LR: Not really.

SI: Well, thank you very much for talking with us today.

LR: My pleasure.

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Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 6/12/2012

Reviewed by Giovannina Russomano 10/3/2012