RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT SALVIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
APRIL 15, 1997

TRANSCRIPT BY

JANET LELI

Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Robert Salvin on April 15, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and …

Janet Leli: Janet Leli …

KP: And an observer …

Michael Brittan: Mike Brittan.

KP: We would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents, beginning with your father, who emigrated from Russia.

Robert Salvin: Yes.

KP: Can you tell us a little bit about why he left Russia?

RS: My father left Russia because his mother was a smart woman and my father was born without a father. His father died when he was about four months into my grandmother's womb and he died from, I guess, it was pneumonia or something like that, but my grandmother had sent her other … two boys over here as they reached the age of sixteen. She shipped them off to the United States with fifty dollars, or fifty rubles, whatever it was, and they came here independently and settled. I knew both of my uncles and that was about it. My father also had a sister who died in 1917 of the flu in Russia.

KP: Do you know why he ended up settling in this area?

RS: He settled in this area because his older brother settled in this area and his middle brother settled in this area, and so, he just followed the line.

KP: It was a family connection.

RS: Somewhat, … although they were somewhat distanced from each other. There was not any brotherly help going on. It was just, "Hello, brother," and that's it.

KP: Your father really had to make it on his own.

RS: Exactly.

KP: You wrote on your pre-interview survey that your father was a businessman. What type of businessman?

RS: He had a small grocery store. When he came to this country, though, he worked in the textile industry, … I guess the garment industry, and he didn't speak any English, so, he used to work, I think it was twelve hours a day, and then, go to night school until he learned English and he lived in a little room by himself, or with one or two other friends of his, and that was about it.

… At the end, my father lived to be ninety-five, by the way, and he used to read four newspapers a day. He spoke English fluently and he had a vocabulary that really amazed me. [laughter]

KP: Which four newspapers did he read?

RS: Well, he used to read the *Star-Ledger*, the *Courier-News*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*.

KP: Did he ever read the *Forward*?

RS: No, no. …

KP: Did he ever speak Yiddish?

RS: Only when he didn't want me to know. [laughter] My father spoke five languages.

KP: Which five languages?

RS: I think he spoke Polish, Russian, German, a little, Yiddish and Hebrew.

KP: It sounds as though your father was a very smart man who, under different circumstances, might have had a very different life.

RS: My father was. Well, my father had a good education in Russia. … At that time, Russian Jews were not allowed to go to high school, … unless you were in the upper ten percent of your class, and my father was and he continued on. He went through what was known as the *gymnasium*, I guess, before he came over here and he was a whiz with math, not algebra and trig and all that, but he could do numbers in his head, multiply, divide, subtract, you know, without any calculators or slide rules.

KP: How did your parents meet?

RS: My father was working in a store in New York and my aunt was married to a man in New York and my mother was living in Scranton with her mother, at the time, her father had died, and my aunt said to my father, I guess, "Have I got a woman for you," or something like that, you know. … My mother would come up, he visited, and then, he used to travel by train down to Scranton and, I guess, they got married. That was it. In those days, it wasn't a long courtship or anything like that, especially when people lived far away.

KP: For that era, that was a long distance courtship.

RS: Yes, it was, yes.

KP: Did your father ever own his own store?

RS: Yes, yes. In 1928, when he moved to Dunellen, he had his own store.

KP: I have a feeling that you probably did some work in that store.

RS: Very much so. [laughter] I used to pack out all of the things for him as I grew up, you know. … It was a seven-day a week store … and, when I was in college and later on, I used to relieve him on weekends, on Sunday, especially, so [that] he could go out and enjoy himself with my mother, and then, he'd come back and take over.

KP: How long did he keep the store?

RS: I guess my father kept the store until he was seventy-two, which meant … 1977, so that would have been '28 to '77, fifty years.

KP: The store stayed in Dunellen.

RS: Oh, yes, unfortunately for him, yes.

KP: Did your mother work in the store?

RS: She relieved my father from time to time.

KP: Did you live over the store?

RS: Yes, we did.

KP: You really never got away from the store.

RS: Never got away from the store, until I went in the Navy. I had never been away from home before I went in the Navy.

KP: You never went to summer camp.

RS: Never to summer camp; my summer camp was working. I used to work in greenhouses and stuff like that.

KP: In the summer?

RS: In the summer, yes.

Janet Leli: Mr. Salvin, you were born in New York, correct?

RS: I was born in Bronx Maternity Hospital in New York and, when I was old enough to walk, which was the age of two, I moved to Dunellen. I always throw that in. [laughter]

JL: You went to high school in Dunellen.

RS: Yes, I did.

JL: You were the valedictorian of your high school class.

RS: Yes, I was; so was my sister, who proceeded me by a couple of years. …

JL: There were only two children in your family; you had a sister.

RS: I had one sister, correct.

JL: Had you intended to go on to college when you were in high school? Were you planning ahead for that?

RS: My mother had plans for me to become a doctor or a lawyer and I had taken three years of Latin and two years of French and, about three weeks before I started my senior year in high school, I said, "I don't want to be a doctor and I don't want to be a lawyer." So, the only other thing I could think of, which I knew very little about, was to be an engineer, because I was good in my math, and so, I went back to my … guidance counselor and we rearranged my whole schedule for the coming year. I had no study periods. I took physics, I took aeronautics, I took solid trig and all the scientific courses that were necessary. The only one I wasn't able to fit in was chemistry. So, when I came to college, I didn't have a chemistry background, but, with that, I still succeeded.

KP: Your parents worked in the store seven days a week …

RS: I think a lot of people worked a lot of time, you know. Things were tough. It was during the Depression and that type of thing.

KP: How tough was the Great Depression for your family?

RS: … I guess, when I was going to grade school, I always had clean clothes, because my mother would wash my clothes every night, and so, I had my same pair of pants and my single shirt and my single pair of shoes, you know, and I was always neat and clean, but I didn't have any clothes and nobody else did, either.

KP: What about the store? Did your father have many accounts that he could not collect on in the 1930s?

RS: I did some of the collecting. Yes, I used to get on my bicycle and go out and collect and … bring home a nickel or a quarter or whatever people would be willing to pay at that time.

KP: One person I interviewed, whose parents owned a store in the 1930s, he remembers, at one point, they would turn off all of the lights, except for the front lights, and then, when a customer came in, they would turn on the lights.

RS: No, no, our lights were on when they were needed and they stayed on all the time. …

KP: Were your parents observant?

RS: No. We had no religious facilities available to us. It was a small town.

KP: Did you ever feel isolated by the fact that there was no synagogue?

RS: No, I never felt any isolation at all. I melded in with all my friends and everything else. It was a very mixed neighborhood.

KP: When you say mixed, do you mean in terms of ethnic backgrounds?

RS: Different ethnic backgrounds and different colors, even. … One of my best friends was a black boy. He protected me through my childhood.

KP: Really?

RS: Well, he was a year or two older than I was, but his uncle was a prizefighter, and so, he learned how to fight well. [laughter] … When someone older than myself would try to pick on me or something, he'd step in.

KP: To have him protect you like that, you must have been pretty close friends.

RS: We were. … He went in the Navy before I did and he used to write to me and I used to figure out, you know, how wonderful it was. Then, after I went in, he didn't write anymore.

KP: You lost touch with him.

RS: We did, yes, and then, after the war, he came back and he moved away. I went to his funeral, but, I mean, there was no one there. I got there a little late, so, all I saw was his body lying out there.

KP: When did he pass away, recently?

RS: No, I'd say it was … almost ten years ago.

KP: Dunellen strikes me as an industrial town.

RS: There's no industry in Dunellen. We have no industries, bedroom community.

KP: It is a bedroom community, but there are …

RS: Blue-collar workers, a lot of blue-collar workers, yes.

KP: I have only been to Dunellen once or twice.

RS: It's like any other small town; it's changing. The business section is diminishing in its viability. The number of people … living in a one-family house has now increased to several families. I know, because I was soliciting in my quest to develop this monument.

KP: You remember Dunellen in the 1930s and 1940s when it had a very vibrant quality.

RS: I knew everybody in Dunellen at that time and I knew … where they lived and everything else, because that was the way the town was.

KP: It sounds as though collecting for the store also helped you become acquainted with people.

RS: Well, I had other opportunities. A friend of mine used to deliver newspapers. I used to ride around with him, and then, when he'd go on vacation, I'd take over his route and do that for him.

KP: You mentioned that you worked all through the summer.

RS: I was earning my own money, [laughter] I guess from the time I was about ten or eleven. I'd sell marbles that I'd win, you know, and one of the things I remember vividly was, at about the age of eight or nine, we used to walk the streets and … pick up cigarette packs and strip the tinfoil off, and then, make a roll, and a roll would be about, maybe, ten, twelve inches in diameter before it weighed a pound and you'd wait for the junkman to come along and he used to pay you a penny a pound and it took, maybe, three, four months to accumulate this pound, but, then, he would cut it open with a knife, to make sure there were no rocks inside, and he'd give you the penny, and then, you'd go buy three fishhooks for a penny. So, you had your summer entertainment developed. Then, I was picking berries, blackberries, … that type of thing, selling them, and then, as I graduated to older age, I started working in greenhouses for ten cents an hour.

KP: There is a great neighborhood theater in Dunellen that I have been to once or twice.

RS: There's only one movie house in Dunellen, … on Madison and North Avenue.

KP: How long has that been there?

RS: … I think it started in 1926 or '28, something like that.

KP: Did you spend some time there?

RS: Every Saturday, I'd go there. My father would give me a dime and I'd go to the movies, until I earned my own.

KP: Your own dime.

RS: Yes.

JL: When you graduated from high school, you were awarded a State Scholarship.

RS: I participated in the State Scholarship test and I guess I must have done all right, because they gave me a State Scholarship and my first year in college was on the State Scholarship. They paid tuition. I had to pay [for] books and transportation or whatever else.

KP: Were you still in high school when the war broke out?

RS: Yes.

KP: Do you remember where you were during the Pearl Harbor attack?

RS: … It was on a Sunday. I was down in the store with my father and I heard it come over the radio. President Roosevelt came on and he spoke. That's my first recollection of it and nobody knew where Pearl Harbor was.

KP: A number of people have said that. What were your thoughts at the time?

RS: Nothing. … You know, it was just, "Well, we're at war and that's it."

KP: Did you think that you might be going off to the service?

RS: No, I didn't. … I guess I was too naïve, at that time, to realize the implications of what was going on.

KP: You were also fairly young. You were, I guess, fourteen.

RS: I don't know, '41, fourteen, I guess, fifteen.

KP: What did you know about what was going on in the world in the 1930s? You mentioned that your father read a lot.

RS: He read; I read the papers, too. … I can remember, back in grade school, I used to keep a scrapbook as one of our class projects and I remember cutting out all of the things about the Chinese-Japanese Wars. I became pretty much knowledgeable about what was going on, but, starting out, I started, like, from ground zero. I knew there were problems in Europe. I knew that there was a war going on in there and I followed some of that, but the Japanese involvement was not something that was [pressing]. Oh, I knew we were having negotiations, but nobody really

knew what was going to happen at that time. We always figured Japan was just a little country. They made cheap toys and that type of thing.

KP: Did your family stay in touch with any relatives in Russia?

RS: My grandmother had moved to this country, I guess, in the middle '30s and she stayed with us for a while, and so, we had no relatives in Europe that we knew of. However, later on, it surfaced that my aunt, I guess my father's sister, had had two children and one of them married a girl from Brooklyn after the war. The other one died someplace in Russia; we don't know where. … He came over with his two children to visit, not at the same time, but, from time-to-time, he came over and visited with his two children and there was a tremendous striking resemblance between my father and his nephew, so much so that when his son saw him, he thought they were like brothers. [laughter] It was that close.

KP: You mentioned that you had this older friend who went into the Navy. What did he tell you about the Navy?

RS: He didn't tell me anything. … He wrote letters telling me what he was doing at Pearl Harbor. He was, like, a coxswain, I guess, in the Navy. He was just driving these little boats from ship-to-ship in Pearl Harbor.

KP: He seems to have enjoyed it.

RS: I don't know. I don't remember receiving any of that type of thing. It was just, you know, … like a one-page letter, what he was doing and that type of thing. There was no emotion involved.

KP: It sounds like it piqued your interest in the Navy.

RS: No, no. My cousin was in the Navy. He was an aviation machinist mate. So, he always said, "If you're going to join up, join the Navy," and you couldn't join the Army at seventeen, but you could join the Navy at seventeen. So, that was … one of the things that helped. Plus, … when I was in college, the Navy was recruiting at that time, trying to get, I guess, scientifically minded people, I was going to say bright people, scientifically minded people, to sign up for a program on electronics.

KP: The EDDY program?

RS: The EDDY test, yes, I passed that and, the next thing I knew, they were hounding me and I saw the opportunity to get out of taking my final exams, [laughter] so, I enlisted. I went in in June, just before the final exams.

KP: Which I believe you got credit for.

RS: Yes, I did. [laughter] I wasn't that dumb. I knew I was going to be going in … eventually, you know. Why sweat through all the exams? My marks were good enough at that time, you know. I didn't have to worry.

KP: Spoken like a true student. [laughter] How did the war affect Dunellen?

RS: Well, … I didn't say this before, but Dunellen had a population of about five thousand people and, in the surrounding area, we gathered close to a thousand people to go in the service, men and women. There was about close to fifty women that went in the service as nurses, WACS, WAVES, Marines, Coast Guard. So, Dunellen had some industry at that time, in the adjoining areas, and people were employed and a lot of overtime. We had (Buffalo Tank?), across into Piscataway and we had R. Hoe [Printing Press], which was in Dunellen, … mostly in Middlesex, though, and Art Color was doing magazines, but a different type of printing, but that was the only industry, but everybody was working, you know, and everybody was working a lot of overtime and women had just started working.

KP: While people were employed in Dunellen, during the Depression, I would imagine that there were many who were unemployed or not employed very regularly.

RS: Not during the war.

KP: No, I meant the 1930s.

RS: Oh, in the '30s, yes, well, they had the WPA and they built the municipal building and they repaired the roads and stuff like that, put in sewer systems. So, the people were employed, but they weren't making a lot of money.

KP: It sounds like the WPA left a distinct impression on you.

RS: I remember it because they were doing roadwork out in front of my house and that's where I watched how they put down the roads and took up all the old cobblestones and the trolley tracks and that type of thing.

KP: I imagine that your father's business did better after Pearl Harbor.

RS: Business picked up as soon as the war, rationing, started, because my father had stock and you were able to replenish the stock based upon what you had and there were a lot of small stores. There weren't the supermarkets that there are today and he did run a book and people would buy on the book, and then, after they ran out of money and they couldn't pay you, they would go someplace else, and then, they'd pay you off, and then, they'd overcharge in that place, and then, they'd come back, you know. So, it was a vicious circle. They were your customers, but you didn't see them for weeks when they owed you money.

KP: Another thing that I have been told and that I have read about is that people, when they did run up the book, would then go to the chain stores and buy things on sale.

RS: Well, that came somewhat after the war.

KP: You did not face any chain store competition in Dunellen.

RS: No, not in Dunellen. There was one supposedly large store, which, when I look at it today, is a small store, you know, in Dunellen. It was in the center of town, it was a long walk and they had a butcher shop and groceries and that type of thing, but … it didn't compare anything to the supermarkets of today.

KP: Dunellen sent over a thousand people to war. Did you notice that your older classmates were going off to war?

RS: Yes, yes. There were a lot of people that didn't graduate from high school that almost did what I did in college, you know. They went away, like, in June or May, enlisted.

KP: Without having to take their finals.

RS: Yes.

KP: You mentioned that you had not traveled much before the war. What was the furthest east, west, *et cetera*, that you had gone?

RS: Well, I guess I used to travel to New York, occasionally, to visit relatives, my aunt, and I had a couple of aunts there, and uncle, and, every once in a while, we'd go to Scranton, because there'd be some sort of family gathering there. We didn't have a car, so, a friend of ours used to drive us there, but those were my parameters. I had never been south, you know. I had never been, really, north and I had never slept away from home and I didn't really relish eating away from home. I never ate much out, outside of the house. So, it was a new experience.

KP: Going to college and into the Navy must have been …

RS: Well, going to college, I commuted every day. I drove and used to pick up riders along the way; some contributed, some didn't. If they were hitchhiking, I'd pick them up and that was the way it was.

KP: Had you thought of going to any other colleges besides Rutgers?

RS: No, no. I had to go to Rutgers for several reasons; one is the commute. … The family couldn't afford to board me off someplace. Secondly, … I guess I wasn't sophisticated enough to know there were other colleges that would teach me what I wanted to know, maybe better, maybe not as well, but there was no competition in my mind. You know, it was Rutgers. My sister had gone to NJC, on a scholarship, also, and that was it, you know, [laughter] the closest college and I was really just looking for the education. I wasn't looking for a lot of social life.

JL: What made you decide to major in mechanical engineering?

RS: What made me decide to be a mechanical engineer? Because I figured that was the broadest one. Again, I'll go past that for you right now, if I can. I studied to be a mechanical engineer, because … I used to like to work on cars, I used to like to do things with my hands and the mechanics were interesting to me. Electrical engineering, at that time, was just motors and generators. There was nothing on computers, nothing … scientific. Even electronics was sort of rare, but, when I went in the Navy, I learned all about electronics. … I had the equivalent of two years of electrical engineering in the Navy, pretty much so, and, yet, when I came back, I went back to mechanical engineering, because I thought the broadness of having both of them would give me an edge.

JL: Did you have a favorite professor here?

RS: Yes. I don't remember who it was. [laughter] I think Professor [William H.] Lamont was always a very nice professor.

KP: Why did he stand out?

RS: I don't know. He was an ex-Navy man, but, aside from that, he had an easygoing way about him. He was very nice to the students, you know, … and he was almost like a character on campus. … Professor Lamont was a nice professor. He wasn't in my specialty; his was English.

KP: Okay.

RS: Yes, he was an English professor.

KP: He must have been very good. Many engineers …

RS: Did they mention him?

KP: No, you are the first to mention him, but I often find it is a tribute when you mention a professor outside of your major.

RS: Oh, well, the other ones were too tough, [laughter] couldn't develop a love for them. They mark as they saw it.

KP: You came to Rutgers in the middle of the war, in 1943.

RS: Yes.

KP: What were your initial impressions of Rutgers? How was the war affecting Rutgers?

RS: The war was affecting Rutgers because we had ASTP here. The war was affecting Rutgers because I was also into ROTC at that time and we had a regular Army lieutenant that was

teaching ROTC and, on the day we had ROTC, I used to come to school in my uniform. … Sometimes, I'd commute home on the bus and there'd be regular soldiers. You know, they see me with this uniform and I don't know whether they knew what I was or what, you know, [laughter] but there was a strangeness, you know.

KP: It must have felt strange, because there was a war going on and these guys were soldiers in uniform.

RS: And we had a lot of soldiers in New Brunswick at that time.

KP: Can you comment on that? Camp Kilmer was right across the river.

RS: Yes.

KP: How did that affect the town?

RS: Dunellen?

KP: Yes.

RS: Dunellen used to have a lot of soldiers passing through it, because we had a train station there, we had buses, but we also had bars there, you know, and there were places for them to meet people and it was a small town and some soldiers just migrated to small towns. Others would go into New York or stay in New Brunswick or places like that, but we had our fair share of soldiers going into the Dunellen area.

KP: How did the community receive the soldiers?

RS: Very well. There was no animosity towards any of them. I don't think they did as well as some places like Milwaukee or Chicago or California, but they were treated fairly and nicely.

KP: You did not have any problems with drunken soldiers.

RS: Not really.

KP: People did not start to complain.

RS: I didn't see any; no, they weren't that type.

KP: Were there any USO activities in Dunellen?

RS: No, the USO activity was right here in Camp Kilmer. Dunellen didn't have anything.

KP: Did anyone from Dunellen come over to the USO here?

RS: … The girls did, I think some girls did. I didn't know them, but some of them did.

KP: Everyone seems to have a distinct memory of Dean Metzger.

RS: … Oh, yes, I knew Dean Metzger, yes. … He was a slow moving man, that's my recollection. He didn't move fast, you know, but he was a nice guy. His son took over after that, yes.

KP: Did you go to chapel?

RS: Yes, we had to go to the chapel every week.

KP: What did you think of chapel?

RS: It was interesting. … We sat sort of in alphabetical order and I met some people there that weren't in the engineering curriculum, you know.

KP: You had an assigned place. You did not just come in and sit wherever you found a seat.

RS: … No, I don't think so. My recollection is, I sat next to the same guy all the time.

KP: Really? I knew that people sat by class.

RS: I don't know, … that's my recollection.

KP: I have never asked anyone, but you are the first to mention assigned seating.

RS: I thought so; I don't know.

KP: When you first came here, how long did you hope or want to stay in college?

RS: Four years. Well, I didn't know about the war, you know, what the war impact would be, but my intent was to complete a four-year college education, hopefully on scholarship. [laughter]

KP: How was your first semester? Did you run into any problems?

RS: I think I made the dean's list, but I'm not sure. I don't think they had much of a list. [laughter] I don't think there was a lot of competition. You know, we didn't have large classes.

KP: When did you realize that you probably would not be able to finish four years straight through, that the war was coming along?

RS: … Well, I sort of figured that half way through my college [career], that I'd probably be going into war, … my last half of the year. I think there was an interest in going into the service, at that time, you know. I didn't want to be a slacker. I didn't want to be someone that didn't

participate. I had a sort of patriotic feeling about it, you know. It was the thing to do and there was a lot of excitement going on with it and it would have been a new adventure for me, I guess.

KP: It sounds like you did not mind the idea of going away from home.

RS: No, I didn't.

KP: You mentioned earlier that you decided to enlist in the Navy.

RS: Yes.

KP: You took the EDDY test.

RS: Well, first, I wanted to become a Navy pilot and, at that time, I had a stigmatism. I still have it, I guess, but it doesn't bother me as much and I was unable to pass the physical for the eyes.

KP: However, you otherwise passed the physical.

RS: Oh, yes. There was no other reason why not; it had to be eyes. … I don't know, I just couldn't focus. I had to drive into Newark and I got up early in the morning. I sat on the bus, I was looking out the bus window, you know, and things are going by and my eyes are getting tired and I was wearing glasses in college and I didn't wear them, because I didn't want to have any trouble, you know. [laughter] I was sort of psyching myself up to pass it and, as it ended up, I'm glad I didn't, because a lot of fellows my age that tried to get into the Navy Air Corps, they didn't flunk them out, they just had too many pilots and they transferred them off to something else anyhow. So, they did not succeed in becoming pilots.

KP: Why a pilot?

RS: Oh, it's excitement, you know. I always wanted to be a pilot, I think. Later on, I changed my mind, but I'll tell you about that story, if you're interested. It happened in my business career. …

KP: Growing up, you really found aviation appealing.

RS: I sent away for books, because the Navy had advertisements, "Be a Navy pilot, two hundred dollars a month," and I said, "Boy, if I can make fifty dollars a week, in the '30s, man, I've got it made," you know. [laughter]

KP: Did you have any sense of how dangerous aviation was at the time?

RS: No.

KP: You really liked the glamour and excitement.

RS: Yes. You used to see in the movies, you know, they'd takeoff and they'd shoot down the Japs and the Germans and that was it. [laughter] We never lost.

JL: Early on, you preferred the Navy to other military branches.

RS: Yes, yes.

JL: That was what made up your mind.

RS: I think so, I really think so. … I think the Navy offered more to an individual, as far as living habits went and the ability to participate, you know. … Onboard ship, everybody has a responsibility and a job to do. In the Army, if you're in the infantry, you do this and that's it. You don't get a chance; you can't express yourself or anything else.

KP: You had been in ROTC for the year that you were here.

RS: Yes, right.

KP: What did you think of the training you received?

RS: I don't know. I knew I knew how to march, I knew how to do the manual of arms and stuff like that, but they didn't teach you how to fight, you know, and that type of thing. They taught you map reading and, … I guess, officer stuff, but … not to go out there with a bayonet or anything else. …

KP: Some men I have interviewed said that the ROTC convinced them to do anything they could to avoid the infantry. Did you have that feeling?

RS: No, I didn't have that, no, I didn't have that. … I just had the preference, I guess, for the Navy, maybe because my cousin was in. He had a large influence on me, you know. He says, "If you're going in, go in the Navy," you know, that type of thing. You hear that twice and already it's in you and, as I say, they took me at seventeen and I had to get my parents' permission. My mother never signed; my father signed.

KP: Your mother did not want you to go.

RS: No, no. "It's time enough when they ask for you."

KP: You could have easily waited.

RS: I could have gotten deferments. There was a fellow I had working for me, later on, that was in my class in '43 and he got two deferments.

KP: Even if you had just waited until you turned eighteen …

RS: Yes, well, I would have been starting, … probably, my next year and they probably would have let me finish that, you know, but it wasn't in the cards for me, I guess. It was what I thought was the right thing to do at the time and you know what? It turned out to be the right thing. Maybe, from my interview, you've noticed that I was a little boy at seventeen or sixteen and it gave me a much [more] worldly, wide ability to understand what goes on and how to conduct myself. I had responsibilities onboard ship. I was the only one onboard the ship that was responsible for all the electronics. That would be the radar, the Sonar, the IFF, the transmitters, the receivers, the whole thing. I was eighteen years old, you know, and, at eighteen years old, if something went wrong, it was mine. The whole ship depended on me.

KP: You mentioned your disappointment at not getting into pilot training, but you did pass the EDDY test, which was a very difficult test.

RS: Yes, it was.

KP: Where did you report to first when you entered the Navy?

RS: Well, strange thing, you know, I got my papers and I was supposed to go into New York to be sworn in and to leave. They told you to bring along your toothbrush, your toothpaste, a razor and stuff like that [to] carry you through the first day, and so, I told all my friends, "I'm going, good-bye." My father said, "My son's going into the Navy," to all his customers and I took off and I went into New York. I got there, they swore me in, then, they handed me carfare and said, "Go home and come back tomorrow." So, I went back home and [everyone] said, "I thought you went into the Navy." [laughter] So, I went back the next day and I said good-bye again and three days I did this, back and forth, back and forth, and everybody said to my father, "Why are you trying to lie to us? You know, your son's not in the Navy. You know, he's home all the time," and so, finally, I said to my father, "Well, I'll see you later," and I ended up going on. … We marched down Fifth Avenue to, I guess it was Penn Station, at that time, from Madison to Penn, and we got on the troop train and we went to Great Lakes.

KP: This initial experience with the Navy must have taught you that the military and the Navy sometimes moves in mysterious ways.

RS: I had no comprehension of that. You know, it was just one of those things. I knew I was in, I knew that, eventually, it was just a matter of them deciding when they wanted me and, as it turned out, they had groups. They grouped people together. They had to develop a full train. They went up and they developed the companies and everything else. The logic was that when they're ready for you, they're ready for you and not before.

KP: This train trip across to Chicago was …

RS: It was overnight.

KP: You said that you had never been away from home overnight.

RS: No. [When] I got to Great Lakes, my T-shirt was so black from soot, because it was coal burning, and I wanted to see everything. I had the window open, my head out. I had coal cinders in my hair. I remember all that. [laughter]

KP: This was really an exciting adventure.

RS: Oh, it was, yes, and then, the next day, they hand you out all your clothes and they gave you the shots and everything else and you went to your bunk and they taught you how to make it and that type of thing. It was like going away to the camp I had never been to. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned how excited you were to see different parts of the country. What did you think of Chicago when you eventually got to see it?

RS: I didn't get to see much of Chicago at first, because we didn't get any time off from boot camp. We spent ten weeks in boot camp, and then, you got your leave to go home, and so, … I got on the train, went back to Chicago, went from Northwest Station to Union Station, picked up the train there and went into New Brunswick, and then, took the bus home. So, I didn't really even get to see anything, except the sights along the way, but I remember going up through the Mohawk Valley and we went up into Canada, I think, to come back down into Great Lakes.

KP: What did you think of your basic training?

RS: It was good. … In high school, we had had some basic training, but, in college, we had a tough [instructor]. He used to be the wrestling coach and he was a tough sucker and we'd go for PT and, in February, you know, the coldest days of the year, we'd go out with just a pair of shorts and a T-shirt on and he'd make us run four times around College Avenue, the whole gymnasium, on the outside, and we'd run and run and you couldn't stop. He wouldn't let you stop. [laughter]

KP: Your physical training in college helped.

RS: It helped. Oh, it helped me in boot camp, sure. I was in good shape. I used to be able to do a lot of sit-ups and a lot of push-ups, because we did all that, you know, and the obstacle course, I did in high school. … Of course, I was young and, you know, I didn't get tired that easily, good muscle tone.

KP: What about your instructors?

RS: In college?

KP: At Great Lakes.

RS: We had a chief. … We called him, "Chief," but he was a first class petty officer. … He was a nice man. He was tough on us, but he was fair and he supported us, you know. We were winning all the medals in the boot camp, like the Rooster or the whatever, I forget what the

names were, but we always had a crack company, because we were all pretty well educated people in my company.

KP: You were with other EDDY people.

RS: Yes, yes, we were grouped together.

KP: I have been told that the people in an EDDY company could be very diverse. You had people like yourself, who were just out of college.

RS: We had some engineers that … couldn't make officer material, I guess, and we had some people that didn't have an education, too. They were high school educated, that type of thing. We had people from all over the country. I remember, there was a guy that was bunked under me. … He was from [the] Merchant Marine up in Michigan, I guess. He was a foul-mouthed kind of a guy, you know, sort of the scum of the earth, but, somehow or other, he passed the test. I don't think he finally made it, but, you know, he got into the program, but there were really some nice guys, too. There was one fellow, he was about twenty-five, twenty-six, he had studied electrical engineering in Stanford under [Frederick E.] Terman. I don't know if you know the name Terman, but Terman was the professor of electrical engineering. He wrote the book on electronics and I met him after boot camp. We went our different ways, to different places for training, but I met him one time in a NSPE, National Society of Professional Engineers, meeting. I was an officer in that and I met him one time and his nickname was Stud, and so, he's walking down the hall and I said, "Hey, Stud, how are you?" "Who are you?" you know. [laughter] So, then, I reminded him who I was and … he was so glad to see me. He ended up being a professor at UCLA.

KP: The name, Stud …

RS: Stud (Rosenstein?) was his name.

KP: Did he used to brag about his exploits?

RS: No, well, I don't know. That's what we called him, Stud Rosenstein. He was an older man. [laughter]

KP: Was he married?

RS: … I guess he was, later on. I don't think he was married then.

KP: Almost everyone I have interviewed about Great Lakes has very distinct memories of the firefighter training.

RS: Oh, yes. Well, we only had a day of firefighting training, but I'll tell you an interesting story about when we went out to the rifle range. I was a very particular eater, as you probably realize. I'd never eaten away from home and I didn't like any fat on my meat. My mother used to cut it all

off for me and we went out to the rifle range, which is about a three to five mile walk. We marched out there and we're shooting all day and it came time for lunch and they brought out this big tray of hard roll sandwiches with roast beef in them. So, I opened mine up and here's all that fat, you know. It was about fifty percent fat and fifty percent meat. I started pulling the fat off and I realized that I didn't have any sandwich, [laughter] so, I put it all back in. I ate the thing and went and had another one. I was hungry, you know. … That sort of broke me of any problems I had with eating.

KP: What was it like to eat Navy food at first?

RS: … Well, I had some experience in boot camp, you know, where I was sort of selectively taking things and I remember sitting next to this fellow from Iowa, his name was Sears, and he was a rugged kid, about eighteen, nineteen, and he's sitting next me. He says, "You know, you want to grow up to be big and strong, you've got to eat your beets." [laughter] So, then, I started eating everything and, when we had work week in boot camp, … we'd get to eat the leftovers, too, you know, and I can remember having something like ten dishes of ice cream [in] one day and about twenty slices of cantaloupe another day and I finished three big pies, fruit salad pies, all by myself, you know. I was an eater and that's the way it was, but I didn't put on any weight.

JL: It seems like you adjusted pretty well.

RS: I think I did, I think I did. …

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

KP: There were men crying the first night because they were away from home.

RS: Yes, yes, and there were guys that were crying when they got the shots, you know, they passed out and stuff like that. I remember feeling a little weak the first time they drew blood, because I had never had it done, but I didn't pass out, you know, but I felt weak.

KP: Great Lakes was a massive facility during World War II.

RS: Yes, it was, yes. I think it was probably the best run of all the boot camps, though.

KP: Really? You did not have any problems.

RS: No. We had a lot work to do every day. You know, we had to steel wool the floors. That was part of the "Great Lakes Shuffle," they called it. You put steel wool under your shoe and go back and forth, so [that] there'd be no shoe marks or anything on the floor, and you get inspected every week … or sooner, if the Chief walked in, and, [if] he didn't like something, you heard about it. You lived out … of a bag, that's the way you lived, and your uniform had to be rolled up all the time, you know. We didn't do anything in dungarees, except for work week, but everything was in whites. So, if you got them dirty, you were scrubbing every night and they didn't allow you to have bleach to get them white. It was just scrub with a scrub brush. …

JL: During boot camp, nothing made you think that you had made a wrong decision. You knew that you did the right thing.

RS: No, I was satisfied. I mean, I knew if I had to go someplace, … I had found a home, you know, and I was comfortable with it. I had nice fellows around me and the activities kept me tired, you know, so [that] I'd sleep at night, all the things, hungry.

KP: What was a typical day like in boot camp? Do you have any distinct memories?

RS: No, because each day was somewhat different, you know. Some days, we just marched, some days, we'd do the manual of arms, other days, we'd go see visual things for aircraft spotting or ship spotting. We had night vision; we learned night vision. You look over the horizon and the different rods in your eyes pick up the silhouettes. It was always something going on or, otherwise, we'd be running around, you know, or preparing different steps for parades, stuff like that, but, primarily, it was not educational, it was more physical.

KP: After Great Lakes, where did you go?

RS: … They sent you to a school called pre-radio. It was Wright Junior College in Chicago, off Addison, I remember the street, and you stayed there a month. We learned slide rule, we learned a lot of math, but things that I had already known, you know. So, that was just to separate out the people that weren't going to make the rest of the course.

KP: How many did not make it?

RS: They said, "Take a look. You're going to have about fifty percent [that] won't make it."

KP: Did that prove to be accurate?

RS: No, because they flunked out later on, but about fifty percent finally passed the course and we didn't get any leave after that. Then, I got on a troop train. Then, when we went out to California, I went to a school in Monterey. It's now the US Navy Postgraduate School, in Monterey, and I've been out there several times to visit it, trying to refresh my memory of things. They've changed it a lot. … It was interesting. The one thing I forgot to tell you about boot camp was that we used to stand watch at night and I can remember standing out in the back and you'd look up at the sky and there were nights when I'd count thirty falling, shooting stars. They just, "Whoosh, whoosh." There must have been a shower of stars going off, you know, and you weren't allowed to go to sleep and you had to … be able to answer any questions that anybody asked you when you were on guard duty and, like, that was from day one [laughter] and they hadn't told you the answers yet.

KP: What would they ask you?

RS: I don't know, different questions about Navy regulations and stuff and some guys would just do that, you know. … That was the ship's company type people, you know, if they wanted to. If you were on guard duty at the laundry or something like that, they'd ask you questions, just to assert their superiority, that they knew.

KP: Where did you live in Chicago, at the junior college?

RS: Yes, yes. … It wasn't too much bigger than this Van Dyck Building, I guess.

KP: Did you get to see any of Chicago when you were there?

RS: No, … we didn't have any leave. We used to be able to walk around the block at night, you know, circle around the block. There'd be some girls who would come around and talk to us, that was about it, but you never got any liberty.

KP: It must have been a little frustrating, since you were very excited about being in a different part of the country, but you could not get away.

RS: No, but I got to see some of Chicago, anyhow. Maybe I did get off one or two weekends, I don't know, and we did get to see Chicago. We must have, because I remember going up to Milwaukee.

KP: What about going to Monterey, California?

RS: Oh, that was … like going into paradise, … because it was getting cold already. … We went up through Sun Valley, Idaho, all around that way, and then, worked our way back down, so, I saw a lot of the different states, Iowa, Nebraska and all those, going through the corn fields, and then, you start seeing the palm trees, in the Sacramento area and places like that, and then, we ended up in Monterey. … It had been a resort hotel, the … Hotel Del Monte, and the Navy had taken it over. … We had three guys in a room and we did our studying in that room and, across the highway, we used to march over there and they had the labs, where you'd learn the different techniques on troubleshooting the equipment, and then, also, on our side of the road, where the barracks were, or the hotel was, they had other places, classrooms set up. We'd sit there for four hours and learn about the different equipment or the different things about electronics and the thing I remember vividly was this redheaded first class petty officer saying, "Now, we're going to learn something about something so secret, I can't write it on the board." He said, "It's a little black box and I'll spell it backwards, because you're not allowed to spell it frontward." He put, "R-A-D-A-R." [laughter] That was it, and then, we started talking about that.

KP: Radar was a top secret at the time.

RS: Oh, yes, that was secret, but the most secret thing that we learned was IFF, Identification, Friend or Foe, and that was so secret that the equipment, … all the components, were painted black, so [that] if it was captured, nobody could duplicate it. The resistors were all black, the

capacitors were all black and … there was an explosive device in it that you were supposed to pull the pin if you had to leave the ship for any reason. Before the enemy would get on it, you'd pull the pin and, … like a hand grenade, it would blow up. They wouldn't be able to duplicate it, but I'm sure they had them anyhow.

KP: I imagine that the security at Monterey was fairly tight in some areas, because of the equipment.

RS: Well, no, … we really were learning [the] principles of it.

KP: You did not have the actual equipment.

RS: We didn't get the equipment until we went to Treasure Island. Then, we had the equipment and that's where we learned to troubleshoot the equipment.

KP: How long were you at Monterey?

RS: Three months.

MB: Was it a little strange working with equipment that had the equivalent of a hand grenade built into it?

RS: No, no, because it was always defused. The charge wasn't in it and, basically, we didn't get to work much on the IFF, because the IFF, … as I said, you couldn't troubleshoot it, because you couldn't see anything in it. It was just all [black]. They told us about it, you know, and they showed us how the circuitry was, but there were no manuals given to us that we could take out and study. They were all within the class, but they used to have sneak circuits in there to confuse you. They would have a wire going to no place, you know, and they'd tie it into another wire, just so that if somebody did try to do it, they couldn't do it, but all that equipment, eventually, … I found out later on, was all serviced on shore bases. If you had a problem with it, … they'd give you a replacement. …

KP: They just gave you a new unit.

RS: Yes, right.

KP: Being billeted in a resort hotel, three to a room, by Navy standards, seems pretty comfortable.

RS: It was. … The food was excellent. … They had waitresses actually serving it to us and you could have all you wanted and it was a great variety. You know, you sit down for breakfast and I'm surprised I didn't blow up like a balloon, but I didn't. [laughter] … You'd have French toast, you'd have sausages, you'd have eggs, you'd have cereal, you'd have milk, you'd have, you know, fresh fruit and stuff like that, all for breakfast, you know. It was a tremendous diet they had there.

KP: What time of the year were you at Monterey?

RS: I guess it must have been October. No, I left there around February, I guess, so, let's see, boot camp was June, July, August, I got there some time in September, near the end of September, October, November, because I remember it … being cold there at night, when you'd stand watch. It was raw and damp.

KP: However, it was not like winter here.

RS: No, but you had to wear a pea coat at night, because it was that cool, but, in the daytime, it was warm and … we had an outdoor swimming pool [that] we took PT in and you'd dive in the water to stay warm, it was a heated pool, because the air was cool outside. The air must have been in the thirties and forties.

KP: Having a heated pool is also pretty plush.

RS: Well, if you want to look at it as plush, it was just a rectangle. It was not something that we were in there to play around in. We were doing things in it.

KP: What was the most difficult part of your training at Monterey?

RS: Sometimes, staying awake.

KP: Really?

RS: Yes, you'd sit in this room, you know, and you might have had a watch all night long and you're going in there and you'd sit and he'd be boring in this description, you know, or he'd be monotone and the first thing you know, you'd stand up in the back of the room. You'd do it on your own. You had to, because, if you fell asleep, they'd give you trouble.

KP: Were you allowed to do that?

RS: Oh, yes, we'd have ten, fifteen guys standing in the back of the room. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever think that it was a little crazy to go on these watches?

RS: No, no.

KP: You seem very accepting.

RS: Oh, yes. To me, it was an adventure, you know. … It was developing me, actually. It was making me self-sufficient. It was giving me a feeling that I could handle responsibilities and that type of thing.

KP: I get the sense that Monterey was where people really started to drop out.

RS: Yes, yes. You had to pass tests and one of the most devastating things to me was, I took my test; every week, every Saturday, you took a test in the morning before you went out on liberty and this one time, I woke up and I had a terrible headache and I had a fever, but I took my test, and then, I checked into sick bay and, as I walked into sick bay, the corpsman said, "Uh-oh, here comes another scarlet fever," and he started to walk me back to the scarlet fever ward and he ran across the doctor … and he said, "I've got another one for the ward," and the doctor said, "Let me look at him." He says, "He's got German measles." So, in those days, you used to wear dark glasses, you know, people said, "Protect your eyes." They put me into this sunlit room, you know, facing south. [laughter] The sun used to come in this window. There were about five of us that had German measles at that time. So, we sat there for a week, playing cards, and then, I got transferred to another class, because I had lost my class, and so, I had to make all new friends again and fit in.

KP: How was that?

RS: No problem. You know, everybody accepted you. You were sharing the same experiences and everything else. It's just that you had to learn new names.

KP: Did you have to repeat part of the course?

RS: No, I passed everything. Sometimes it wasn't that easy, but I passed them. …

KP: One of the things that we noticed from the *Targum* in 1943 was that they accelerated the semesters and a lot of the science people were not happy with that.

RS: Yes, well, there was like a four-semester year.

KP: Yes. Students do not like the two-semester year right now [laughter] and this was a very technical discipline.

RS: Technical, it was difficult.

JL: Did you have liberty every weekend?

RS: … Every weekend when I was in Del Monte, I had week[end] liberty, yes. We used to go … down to San Jose or to Salinas and, sometimes, go into Monterey.

JL: What type of things would you do?

RS: I'm not going to tell you. [laughter] No, I used to go to the Moose Hall in San Jose and they'd have dances there and stuff like that. That's where I started to learn how to dance. Some of the nice girls would show me how to dance. Sometimes, we'd stay around Monterey and go to the movies or something like that or try to pick up some girls, you know.

KP: Had you dated much before going into the Navy?

RS: No, no. I didn't have any money to date, I didn't have a car to date and I didn't have any opportunities. You know, I used to like girls and I had a girlfriend, but it was on my bicycle, you know, ride over to her house, sit on the porch and stuff like that.

KP: Whereas now, you were in uniform, you had money in your pocket and you were staying in a hotel.

RS: Well, it wasn't a hotel. You had restrictions. You had to be back at a certain time. You had to conform to all the rules and regulations there. You were in the service; it was just that the accommodations were probably better than the barracks, but not really, you know. You're three in a room and you had to share the bath with the next group. You still had to make your bed, you still had to shave and, you know, shower and stuff like that, clean your clothes.

KP: Did they inspect your room?

RS: Yes, oh, yes, people think that's important. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever think of staying in California after the war?

RS: … Yes, I did, but I didn't, and I didn't because I had ties back here and I didn't have any source of income or support. … Now that I think about it, I would have loved to have gone to Stanford. I had visited Stanford's campus in my business opportunities, you know, and it's really a beautiful campus and their educational system is superior to most schools. I won't say Rutgers, because, you know, Rutgers has some good colleges and I truly think, you know, and I've run up against engineers from MIT and stuff like that, it's not so much what school you went to, it's what you do with it after you have it, you know. You forget a lot of things, you remember a lot of things, but it's how you apply what you've learned that counts. I thought you were going to ask me, "Did I ever consider staying in the Navy?"

KP: I was going to get to that. I usually ask about re-enlistment.

RS: Okay, go ahead, later on.

KP: It seems like you gave the idea some thought.

RS: The war was over and I was onboard a ship and we were out by Bikini Atoll, on the atom bomb tests. We were working on Operation: CROSSROADS and my ship was one of the lead ships in there, setting up all the things, and the Captain called me in one day and he says, "Salvin," he said, "you're a young man," he said, "you're a second class petty officer," he said "you've got a good career here in the Navy," he said, "have you ever thought about signing over?" and I said, "Yes, sir, I have." He said, "Good, what can we do about it?" I said, "Well, I thought about it and I didn't like the idea." [laughter] He didn't like that, but I did think about it and I was

being truthful. I didn't want to stay in the Navy. You know, to me, it was no life. You live onboard a ship. I was out there ten months, you know. You didn't do anything except sail the ship and do work on the ship. …

KP: You did not want to spend …

RS: There was no future; no, there was no future there.

JL: When you were in training, did you correspond with your family?

RS: Every day I used to write a letter. Yes, they used to write to me, every day, but I never said anything. I just said, "Went on liberty, went here, went there." My letters were very terse. It was just to let them know that I was okay.

KP: You then went to Treasure Island and, there, you actually worked with the equipment.

RS: Yes. Treasure Island was a true Navy base, you know. …We had all the chicken[s--t] that belonged with a Navy base, you know, that was it. You had to salute going out, you know, and you had to have passes to go in and out. It was tight. There was only one way to get on and it was all secured. They didn't let people into certain areas. … A lot of our labs were secret and they were classified or secret and we … couldn't take the books out of the secret labs.

KP: Which makes it even harder to learn.

RS: Yes and no, you know. If you have a good basis, all the equipment operated pretty much on the same thing. … In those days, we had tubes, so, all you had was a little different use of the circuitry of the tubes and how it applied [to] some of the more difficult things we were developing, RDF, you know, and, in your own mind, the radio direction finding, how the different things go. Troubleshooting was more based upon, "If this circuit didn't work, what would cause it to work, not to work?" and then, they would put in dummy faults and we'd have to find them.

JL: You were getting a good engineering education in the Navy.

RS: Yes.

JL: That complemented your major in college.

RS: Yes, a very good education. As a matter-of-fact, when I came back, I used to get very good marks in electrical engineering.

KP: People have to pay a lot of money to get the kind of training you were getting.

RS: Yes, they did. Actually, I met a guy in Princeton, oh, about two years ago, at one of these fairs and he was in the Navy and we got to talking and he was an officer and … I don't remember

what he was. … I told him I was an ETM. He said, "You know, you might not realize it, but you had the best education that the Navy offered to anyone at that time," and I really think so. I have a high respect for the Navy training schools, based upon what I had learned.

KP: In a very compressed amount of time.

RS: Yes, oh, yes.

KP: Were the instructors at all three bases civilians and Navy personnel?

RS: No, they were Navy, they were all Navy, people that had either been electronically developed outside, and then, came into the Navy, or they learned their courses through the Navy, but they were all qualified and they were good instructors and they all sort of kept your attention. There were no dummies there.

KP: It sounds like, although you occasionally had a professor who spoke in monotone, while you were tired, most of your instructors were fairly engaging.

RS: Oh, yes, I think a lot of what contributed to the tiredness was the activities that you went through, you know. You were always stressed, you know. You were doing a lot of physical work or you were up all night doing watches and stuff like that or you had just eaten and you had a full load in your stomach and no stimulants.

JL: How often did you have to stand night watches?

RS: I guess, you mean in Monterey, Treasure Island or what?

JL: Any place.

RS: Well, aboard ship, I used to do it almost every night. [laughter] When we were underway, I always had a night watch.

KP: These night watches in training really toughened you up for actually being on a ship.

RS: Well, most of my night watches were onboard ship.

KP: In Monterey, how often would you stand night watch?

RS: Maybe once a month, maybe.

KP: It was not every week.

RS: No, at boot camp, I did it more, but, no, in school, we didn't do that much and, … at Treasure Island, we didn't have to do any. I shouldn't say [that]; yes, we had weekend watches, sometimes. I remember standing watch on YB [Yerba Buena] Island, which is where the

Oakland Bay Bridge [is], you know, where it lands on that island there. We'd stand on there and it was, like, in February and it was cold. The wind was blowing and you're standing out there, "What are you watching?" "I don't know," but you're standing there on watch.

KP: How long did your training at Treasure Island last?

RS: Six months.

KP: You were in training a lot.

RS: Yes, I was.

KP: You were in training for about a year.

RS: Yes, yes.

KP: What was the easiest thing about your more advanced training at Treasure Island? What was the hardest? Did you pick some things up very easily?

RS: I don't think there was a hardest and easier; it was all pretty much equal, you know. It was something new every day and you had to accumulate that into your skills. There was nothing that was harder than something else. I mean, if you don't know something, to learn it is just as hard as if you, you know, go from one step to the next.

KP: It sounds like you preferred the hands-on experience to the classroom theory.

RS: … I have always been the person that believes, if you've done it yourself, you can then teach someone else or you can understand it … much better.

KP: After Treasure Island, where were you sent?

RS: I was sent home for leave, and then, I went over to Guam. In Guam, I lived in a tent in the middle of a coconut grove. There were eight of us in the tent. It was a wood floor, no sides on the tent, just a canvas top, and there was a row of coconut trees. Surrounding that coconut tree farm, I guess it was, was papayas, a whole bunch of papayas, and, when I got there, somebody said the papayas were poison and they were these orange [things]. They're fully ripe papayas. You all know what a papaya is, but I didn't know what a papaya was. … We used to throw them at each other. The seeds would go all over and they'd stick to you, you know, and we never ate them, but … I learned how to husk a coconut. I had a spike in the ground I used to husk them off and I would drink or eat the milk, you know, drink the milk, and maybe eat three coconuts a day, supplement my food.

KP: They were fresh coconuts.

RS: Fresh coconuts, yes.

KP: Someone was describing pineapples, that if you have had a fresh pineapple, you can never go back.

RS: Oh, a vine ripened pineapple, right, yes.

KP: How did you get to Guam?

RS: By ship. We sailed out of San Francisco. … I was on the *APA-17*, the *American Legion*, and we landed on Guam and it was the tail end of … a typhoon and they weren't expecting us yet, or they didn't have a place for us. So, on that day, there was no food prepared for us. The ship had run out of food. … So, they handed us all a can of cold Campbell's beans and a plastic fork and that was our meal. That night, the wind came up strongly and we were down below, around ten o'clock, in our bunks and, all of a sudden, we hear, "Bong, bong, bong, bong, bong. Prepare the ship for collision. All hands on deck," and so, we ran up in our skivvies and you look out and here comes the *Bon Homme Richard*, which is a CVA aircraft carrier, which Harvey Harmon was officer of the day [on] that day [laughter] and this thing is blowing down on us. … You look up and you see the flight deck, you know, and it just missed us by a little bit before the tugs got it and pulled it away again, and so, we went back down, secured the ship, you know. We were just passengers and went back down to our bed and, about an hour later, the same darn thing happened again, only this time the thing hit us, just, "Boom," you know, banged into us a little, and then, the tugs got it under control again and they went out to sea. They took it out to sea. The wind had really blown it around, and then, the next morning, we went off and we landed and they … drove us in trucks to our tents.

KP: How did you know that Harvey Harmon had been the officer of the day?

RS: I found that out later on.

KP: Really? He remembered this incident.

RS: I don't know if he remembers it, because I haven't talked to him about it, but I know he was officer of the day that day, okay. I learned it from somebody.

KP: Very interesting; what a small world.

RS: Yes, he didn't know me at that time and I didn't know him. I don't think he became the coach until after the war.

KP: Yes, his name has come up quite a bit. What did you think of being onboard ship? Did you get seasick at all?

RS: I got woozy when we went out through the gate, the Golden Gate, and then, after that, I was fine. We played cards, … cards or blackjack, you know, or something like that, all the way across.

KP: For cash?

RS: For cash. [laughter]

KP: Oh, you did.

RS: Oh, yes.

KP: How did you do?

RS: My recollection is, I never drew pay when I was overseas. [laughter]

KP: You did not win too often.

RS: I didn't lose.

KP: Oh, you did not lose.

RS: I said, "I didn't draw pay."

KP: You lived on your winnings.

RS: Yes. [laughter] …

KP: There is a real difference in rank when you are aboard ship. In other words, officers lived better than sailors. It was very obvious aboard ship, whereas it may have been less obvious in other places. Could you talk about that?

RS: On the last ship I was on, which was the USS *Conserver*, ARS-39, that's the one that we were [on] at Bikini, but we had left Pearl Harbor and we were underway and we did some salvage work along the way. All of a sudden, this young ensign came onboard. His name was Meharg and he lived in Sleepy Hollow in Plainfield, and so, he and I got to talk to each other and I can remember, one night, we were up on the bridge, searching for a B-17 that had gone down, and the Captain came up and he started chastising him, because he wasn't conducting the search properly. The kid had never been onboard ship before, you know. He was just a ROTC graduate and he was maybe a year older than I was, but he had his fresh commission and he had never been on a ship before and he's out there and he's not doing it the way the Captain [wants]. He restricted him to his cabin for a week. [laughter] He wouldn't let him come up and eat with the officers. He was restricted to his cabin. So, you say that and, yet, I felt I enjoyed myself much better on the ship than he did.

KP: That is a pretty severe punishment.

RS: Yes.

KP: What had he done wrong?

RS: Well, he didn't please the Captain. [laughter]

KP: Do you know what he did?

RS: I don't know exactly what, no; all I know is, I got a copy of the ship's log and it said, "Ensign Meharg was released from his … stateroom," yes, [laughter] and he used to come in the fantail and talk to me, and then, later on, he was told he can't talk to the enlisted men.

KP: Because he was fraternizing?

RS: Fraternizing, yes. I was the only one he could talk to, you know. Most of the guys weren't too well educated and he was educated and we had some commonality in coming from the same area.

KP: The Navy really enforced the officer-enlisted men separation.

RS: I don't know. … I had, like, free run of that ship, because I was the only one that could do what I was doing and the Captain liked me, I thought, even in spite of the fact that I told him I'd thought about it and didn't like it, but, when we were doing salvage work, I'd be, like, the lead petty officer onboard and he'd come over and he'd put his arm around me and talk to me, and then, he'd go back to the ship and I'd be sleeping on the other ship, but, anyhow, I used to be able to sit on the bridge with just a pair of dungaree pants, no skivvy and no hat, you know, and you were supposed to have a hat and a skivvy when you came to the bridge, but I used to like to sun myself and I'd sit up there. … He never said much to me, you know, "Hello, how are you?" you know, that type of thing, pass the time of day, and then, it got to be May, I guess it was, of 1946 and I wanted to get back to college and, according to all the points I had, I was supposed to be released in early February 1946, and so, I wrote him a note, … a two-page letter with ten reasons why I should be sent home and I gave it to my chief and the chief said, "What do you want me to do with this?" and I said, "Give it to the Captain." He says, "Are you crazy? … He'll kill you," you know. So, two days later, the communications officer comes up to me, who was a nice fellow. He was a mustang and … I don't know where he lived, but, anyhow, I thought I knew where he lived, but I found out later, I didn't, so, I'm not going to say where he lived, and he says, "You don't really want me to give this to the Captain. You know it's going to upset him." I said, "Well, I'm entitled to one written request a day, sir." I said, "I'd just like to pass this on, because it's important to me." Next thing I know, I'm sitting there on the bridge, the next day, the Captain comes up with this thing in his hand and he rips it up in front of me and says, "You want to go home? You do this one more time and I'll send you home as seamen, second class," which is the lowest rating in the Navy. [laughter] "You're court-martialed," he was saying, for insubordination or something, and I said, "Well, sir," and I was cocky in those days and I said, … "I really meant this letter or I wouldn't have written it." I said, "It's important for my future that I get home. Otherwise, I won't get back into college. I'll lose time." He says, "Well, you're under my control and you'll go home when I send you home," and, with that, he walked away. He

turned back and he said, "And I don't want to see you on the bridge anymore without a hat and skivvy." [laughter] So, then, I had to wear a hat. … A week-and-a-half later, an ALLNAV came out that said, "All reserves must be sent home." So, he had no choice, and so, I went home and I checked back into Rutgers and the place was filled up, you know, and they said, "Well, you're going to have to wait until next year." I said, "Well, I was going here." "Oh, you were previously enrolled?" So, they said, "Okay, we'll let you take these courses," you know. So, they gave me all these crap English courses, [laughter] but I got back in and they gave me some of my engineering courses, too, but I didn't get to select what I wanted to do.

KP: Your concern about getting back was well placed.

RS: I was right, yes. If I had missed it by another two weeks or three weeks, I wouldn't have gotten enrolled.

KP: How long were you on Guam?

RS: I guess about six weeks.

KP: What did you do?

RS: Well, I stood generator watch and we went on work details and we sat around. … I became very resourceful, in that I had a guy that was in my cabin that was from Leoma, Tennessee, Lacey L. Williams, I'll never forget him, he's dead now, I tried reaching him one time, and he was a sharecropper. He taught me how to chew tobacco. He also taught us how to put the spike in the ground and husk the coconuts and he also developed a collection system off the roof of our tent to collect water, so [that] we could clean our teeth and do everything else without having to walk all the way, about a half-a-mile, to where running water was. He was a good guy.

KP: What specialty was he?

RS: He was … a coxswain.

KP: In other words, you were the only one with electronic training.

RS: No, there were eight in our tent; seven of us were electronic technician mates and one coxswain. [laughter] He was the least educated, but he was probably the smartest. [laughter]

KP: Did he know how to read and write?

RS: Yes, oh, yes. He wouldn't have made coxswain if he couldn't. … He had a lot of native intelligence, no great formal education, probably a one-room schoolhouse or something like that, but he knew how to work it, how to do things.

KP: It seems like he really made life much more comfortable where you were.

RS: Yes, right. You were going to ask a question?

JL: Your accommodations in Guam were the worst out of anywhere.

RS: Yes, I guess so, but … they were comfortable. The only thing is, when it rained, the rain came in on you a little and I remember going to visit my cousin one time. He came to see me. He was on Guam, came after I came, and … we were playing cards one day in the tent and he came in looking for me and I had a beard and a mustache, or at least I had a mustache at that time, and he wanted to know where I was and I recognized him, but he didn't recognize me and he would come visit me. … Our tent was right near Tumon Bay. I don't know if you're familiar with Tumon Bay, but, during the war, Tumon Bay was just a bay with a reef out in front of it, about three-quarters of a mile out, and all jungle around it, but the water was only about chest high and it was clear and it had coral in it and you could see it, but it was sandy bottomed and, after the war, the Japanese built hotels there and they made a honeymoon resort out of it. So, I've never been back there, but, anyhow, he'd come up and we'd go swimming in there and … I used to collect these, the (cowrie?) shells, … these little shells that used to grow on the coral. You'd take them, put them into your sock, until you got enough of them. Then, you'd take them out by the tent, bury them in the soil, so [that] the ants would eat out the meat, and then, you'd … take surgical stainless steel and toilet paper, tissue, chew on it, and then, pack it in there and make jewelry out of it. Well, anyhow, we were swimming one day in Tumon Bay and further up was the officers' side and they had these little life rafts and stuff. So, my cousin and I worked our way over there and, finally, one of the officers coming in says, "Would you like to use the raft?" and my cousin says, "Sure," you know. My cousin was older than I was, he looked more like an officer, and so, he says, "Hop on," to me. I hopped on. He pushed it all the way back to our beach. The next thing you know, it was under my tent. [laughter] … One time, I went to visit him at his place and I didn't have shoes. I didn't have good shoes, because we weren't issued shoes, so, I got a pair of shoes, the inside-out shoes, with the high thing on them, and I got sunglasses, and everything else and the guy said, "What's your name?" you know, and I gave him a fictitious name and a fictitious number and I walked away with all that stuff and, heading back home, the sky opened up and I'm hitchhiking, you know. … Finally, this Navy truck stopped and it was a pickup truck and I was in the back. … A monsoon came down on me for twenty miles, you know, while I was driving back and I walked back towards my place and the puddles were this deep, you know. You'd step and they'd go over your shoes and stuff like that. I took off all my clothes and that was it. … I hung them up to dry inside the tent, but it was an adventure, excitement, you know.

KP: What did you expect to find on an island like Guam? Did you even know about Guam before the war?

RS: I didn't know Guam. I didn't know what Guam was. I remember reading, one time, about Hagatna, the capital of Guam, and that was it.

KP: The Japanese had occupied Guam.

RS: … Yes, it was captured by the Japanese and occupied; originally, it was an [American] protectorate.

KP: What traces of the war did you see?

RS: Buildings that were blown up, but, … where I was, there were no buildings anyhow. It was sort of jungle and, as you go down towards my cousin, it was further south, I would see some of the churches, you know, and stuff like that on the side of the road. Other than that, there wasn't much intermixing with the people.

KP: Did you have any contact with the native inhabitants of Guam?

RS: None at all, no. First of all, they were off limits, but, aside from that, … I was too remote. We were far away from them.

KP: When you say they were off limits, what were they off limits for?

RS: For fraternizing and stuff like that.

KP: There were restrictions on that.

RS: Yes, yes.

KP: What did your cousin say? Did that order really hold?

RS: Oh, I don't know, he didn't mess around like that out there. He didn't have an opportunity, either. Actually, they weren't too attractive.

KP: You mentioned that you were responsible for the generator. Was this a make-work detail?

RS: No, … actually, you know, to keep electricity on, they had a generator. It was a big [thing], about from here to that wall long, and it was a tall generator. It was a slow speed generator, diesel operated, and your responsibility was to stand there, make sure it had fuel and it was running and you'd know when it wasn't running if the lights went down, [laughter] but it was a good place to take your laundry, because I'd wash my clothes there while I was on watch, and then, hang them up in front of the radiator and, in ten minutes, they'd be dry.

KP: How long did your duty on Guam last?

RS: About six weeks, I said, and then, I went to Saipan.

KP: Did you have similar duties there?

RS: No, Saipan, I was waiting for a ship. I supposedly thought I was waiting for a ship on Guam. It was a receiving station. On Saipan, we lived in a Quonset hut, okay, and we had a

cistern alongside that captured the water coming down and, if you wanted to take a shower in the morning, you wanted to brush your teeth or wash your face, you took a pail and put it into a helmet and you washed yourself in that, but, if you wanted a shower, you took two pails and took it up and put it in the drum and you'd open it up, just get yourself wet, soap yourself all up and use the rest of the water to wash it all off.

KP: How was the food on both Guam and Saipan?

RS: I don't remember on Guam too much. We had our own galley and I remember eating and that's about it.

KP: It sounds like the coconuts really added to your diet.

RS: Yes, I think so. …

KP: What about Saipan?

RS: Saipan was a little bit more rural. I mean, … it wasn't as green, you know, it was more rocky and there were still Japs … on both of those places, but, on Saipan, I remember going out into the jungle with a knife and looking for coconuts or anything and I found a banana tree, a wild banana tree, and they had, like, fingers about the size of my fingers on them. So, I reached up, I was looking for snakes, too, but I also found leg bones, you know, that were laying around and I cut down the banana thing and I took it back to my barracks. …

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Robert Salvin on April 15, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and …

JL: Janet Leli.

KP: You were talking about the banana tree.

RS: I brought down a whole big bunch of bananas and I put them in my sea [chest]. I had a sea chest that someone had left there on Saipan. I locked them up until they started getting ripe, and then, I would take a whole hand and that would be my banana ration for the day, when they got ripe, but I didn't tell you how I got from Guam to Saipan. They woke us up one morning at four o'clock and said, … they didn't tell us ahead of time, "Prepare all your gear, we're shipping out … and report at the mess hall, but don't eat breakfast." So, we waited, breakfast started at six, we waited and waited, finally, eight o'clock, the mess hall closes and we're still standing there. There were about six of us and we were on our way to Saipan on a PC, which is a narrow beam, little steel hulled thing with a few guns on it, patrol craft it was, and so, we never got to eat breakfast. We got onto the PC and they had about five or six soldiers that were also being transported to Saipan. We no sooner got out of Guam Harbor, then, we hit a storm and the ship started heaving and rolling and everything else and everybody got seasick and, since we didn't

have anything to eat, we all had [the] dry heaves, except for the Army. The Army had come on board and they had K rations with them and they were eating them before we took off and I can remember this one guy laying on the deck, saying, "Let me die, let me die," you know, and he was full of vomit, all over the place, you know, and most of them threw up. … The waves were washing over. We're sitting on the deck and the waves are washing over, so, our gear is getting wet and it came lunchtime and they didn't make any lunch for anybody, because the crew was seasick, and we didn't have any dinner, because the crew was seasick. Okay, that was the kind of storm it was. So, anyhow, ten hours later, we got up to Saipan and there was nothing to eat, you know. We went the whole day with an empty stomach, after heaving and everything else. It was pretty tough. So, I scrounged around, after they put us in our barracks, and I found the galley and they didn't have anything prepared. It was pretty well locked up and I found a loaf of bread and that's what I ate. I ate the whole loaf of bread, all by myself. So, I said to myself, "I'm never going to catch myself without food again." So, somewhere along the line, I remember, "accumulating" is the word I'll use, a large can of chicken a la king and I carried that in my sea bag, in case I ever got hungry again.

KP: In case there was a situation where they did not feed you.

RS: Yes, I would open it up and eat what I wanted, and then, pass the rest around, you know, but at least I'd have something. … I'll tell you about that later, but, anyhow, that's how I got to Saipan. Then, from Saipan, I was there several weeks when a ship came in that I was assigned to. I was assigned to the USS *Patapsco*, *AOG-1*, and that was a fleet oiler that used to carry aviation gas, oil or whatever and our assignment was to carry water up to Iwo Jima and one of the fellows that I was in the tent with on Guam also went to Saipan with me on a different ship and he was my buddy. He's since become a major judge in New York State. He just retired recently, but he was up in [the] Binghamton area. He was a circuit judge or something like that and he was on an LST and they were taking beer up to Iwo Jima, but he called me one day, … before I got my ship, and he said, "I've got a problem onboard my ship." He said, "The Victrola is playing backwards." So, I went onboard his ship and I didn't know much about Victrolas, but, to me, I watched it and the needle, instead of going in, is going out, and I said, "There's got to be something wrong with this," [laughter] you know. "Is it going the right way?" "Yes, it's going the right way, so, it's got to be the needle." So, we got a spare needle, we changed it and the thing worked and he told all his shipmates what a wonderful technician I was. I fixed their whole record player for them and he let me stay for lunch and they had a great lunch, [laughter] you know. They had, like, a turkey meal, which we weren't used to getting, you know, on the island. So, then, I met him again … up in Iwo Jima. Their ship got up there with this … whole well deck full of beer, only there were a lot of cases missing by the time they got there. We pulled up to Iwo Jima and we hooked up to the place to unload the water and I had the anchor watch that night, from twelve to four, and it was in February and there was a stiff wind blowing and the anchor was taut, so, I had to make sure that it didn't move and I can remember standing out there in my pea coat and freezing, you know. After being down in the tropics of the other places I was at, it was really cold to me and, yet, the temperature was probably in the forties, but it was cold.

KP: You were used to the nineties.

RS: Oh, yes.

KP: Where were you when the atomic bomb was dropped?

RS: I was home, fortunately.

KP: When did you get home?

RS: I got home in June and the bomb was dropped July. …

KP: You were home on leave.

RS: I was home being discharged. I was home, discharged. I got discharged June 26th; the bomb went off … July 1st. Which bomb are you talking about?

KP: The atomic bomb.

RS: Oh, okay, I thought you were talking about the bomb at Bikini.

KP: No, but I was going to ask you about that.

RS: Where was I? I was in Treasure Island at the time. V-J Day was declared when I was passing through Fort Wayne, Indiana. All the whistles in all the industry there were blowing off and that's what it was; it was [that] the war had been ended.

KP: You were on your way home.

RS: I was on my last leave before going overseas.

KP: Did you have the sense that you might not have to go?

RS: I thought that, maybe, I'd get orders not to report back, but it didn't happen, no. … First of all, they needed replacements, I guess, … and I don't think that they realized it was going to happen. They hadn't organized for it.

KP: It must have been a very joyous homecoming.

RS: It was for my parents, yes.

KP: Even if you were going back, the chances of you getting killed were much lower.

RS: Yes, although somebody got killed on the troopship going overseas.

KP: What happened?

RS: Well, they were showing movies on the aft deck and this guy climbed up on something. He fell off and broke his neck, so, we buried him at sea, you know, interesting. There's all kinds of dangers yet, especially when you're at sea. I can remember, when I was on the *Conserver*, we were going to salvage the *Nickajack Trail*, which had run aground off Eniwetok, and it was, like, about eighty yards off the beach and we came around on the lee side, because the sea was too high and we couldn't land from the sea side, so, we went around on the lee side and, as we were transferring from the LCVP out to the thing, up a cargo net, this one fellow fell between the LCVP and the ship and we all held the ship off, but he was covered with oil, because it was a tanker that went aground and it spilled all the oil and he came up black. So, he didn't go on the *Nickajack Trail*. They took him back onto the ship, our mother ship.

KP: Did he …

RS: Oh, he was all right. It was just a matter of cleaning up, but he could've got killed.

KP: He could have been crushed.

RS: His head would have been crushed. …

MB: What did you think when you heard about the atomic bomb?

RS: I was happy. I was glad the war was over, … ended a lot of killing people, stuff like that, you know. It's not a nice thing to have to shoot people. … Whether you wound them or kill them, it's not nice. I don't know if you've ever gone hunting or not, but, when you shoot a deer or an animal, you know you're taking something's life. You have thoughts about it.

KP: You served on two different ships. What were the differences between the two ships, in terms of the crews and the captains?

RS: I thought that the crew on my last ship was much nicer, friendlier, okay. It was more of a working ship and the other ship was more just a transport, you know. You go from here to there and the people didn't intermix as well.

KP: On the first ship, you were the electronics specialist.

RS: Yes. I was the only one onboard. I also ran the movie onboard that ship and it was a tough situation. You know, you'd run the movie and, all of a sudden, the reel would change and everybody's, "Hurry up, hurry up," you know, because you only had one projector and you would know when it's happening. You'd flip it off and something would happen and you'd put it on, or if the … splice broke or something like that.

KP: You had to fix it in a hurry.

RS: Yes.

KP: What movies did you show?

RS: I don't remember.

KP: Really?

RS: They were movies from the '40s, that's all I remember. … We didn't see the same movie twice or anything like that.

KP: What was your first captain like?

RS: I hardly knew the first captain. He … sort of kept to himself. He was a drinker. I remember going on a liberty party. Since I was a second class petty officer, the lead petty officer, I took this group … over to Saipan for liberty, after we came back from Iwo Jima, and one guy was short coming back. We didn't have him. So, I brought them back, you know, "Everybody back, it was time to leave." I got onboard the ship and, that night, I happened to have officer of the deck and I had my .45 and everything else, standing gangway watch, and another officer's standing by and, all of a sudden, I see this splashing in the water. Here's this guy, we were a good half-mile out, you know, from where he was coming from. He swam all the way out and he came onboard and the officer of the deck called the Captain and the Captain said, "Where were you?" He says, "I was on shore." He [the Captain] says, "You were drunk, weren't you?" He says, "Yes," and then, he [the Captain] says, "That's all you're going to say?" He says, "Yes." So, then, the Captain started berating him and he started calling the guy's mother names, you know, son of a bitch and all that stuff, and, finally, the guy took a swing at the Captain, because that's what the Captain wanted. So, the Captain said, "Put him in chains." So, that was my job, we put him in chains and, a couple days later, the Captain's mother got sick or something and he got an emergency leave to go back. That's why I didn't know the Captain that well and the executive officer, the first thing he did was release the guy from chains, you know, dropped all the charges, because he was there. He knew it was provoked, you know. It was nothing the guy would have done on his own. He just would have been AOL, absent over leave, you know, or something like that.

KP: This really made a difference for the guy in the brig.

RS: He would have court-martialed him for striking an officer, would have been a summary court-martial and he might have ended up with eight years in jail.

KP: Whereas now, the charges were dropped.

RS: Yes, and then, the ship headed back to the States to be decommissioned. They dropped me off at Pearl Harbor and that's where I picked up my second ship.

KP: What about the crew? You mentioned it was not as friendly as the second crew.

RS: I had four or five friends on there, you know, and it just seemed to be that the ones that I was friendly with were the ones that got transferred over with me. … One of them ended up being an electrical engineer for GE, up in …

KP: Schenectady?

RS: Yes. He was an electrician's mate. I guess the GI Bill was really good for this country. You know, it really gave people that could not afford an education an opportunity to get a good education. It paid for my last three years, you know, books and all, books and subsistence and stuff like that.

KP: Do you think that you would have gone back to college without the GI Bill?

RS: Yes, yes, but it made it a lot easier for me. … I was working every summer anyhow.

KP: Do you think that you would have been able to go to college without the State Scholarship?

RS: I think I would have. … I worked, when I was fifteen, in Art Color, jogging books. I was making forty cents an hour, sixteen dollars a week, plus, I worked overtime on Saturdays. Then, when I graduated high school, … before I entered college, I went to work in Kingston-Conley, in North Plainfield, repairing electric motors, because I had a mechanical-scientific background in high school. So, they put me in there. My job was to repair all these electric motors that were either manufactured improperly or had come back from the field as being burnt out or damaged or something like that and that paid fifty-eight cents an hour and they gave me a raise to sixty-five cents an hour, which was great, and I worked half a day Saturday, every Saturday. I had to earn my own money. I knew my responsibilities.

KP: You have talked a lot about your second ship.

RS: I stayed on it longer.

KP: You had an interesting relationship with the captain.

RS: I did. He liked me. I always thought he liked me, you know, … until I challenged him, I guess that's the word to use.

KP: What about the other members of the crew?

RS: They hated him.

KP: Really?

RS: Oh, yes. I got a letter from this one guy, he was a radar man and, after I left, the Captain sort of broke his arm. He got tangled up. We were doing some heavy work and he broke his arm

and he wrote, in the letter, he said, "The Captain broke his arm. I wish it had been his neck." [laughter]

KP: There is still some animosity after all these years.

RS: … No, no, this is what he wrote when I left the ship, okay, right after I left, and it was a dangerous mission for the guys that were left on the ship, because … the first bomb was an air bomb and my ship was about fifteen miles from the epicenter and they went back in about a half-hour after the bomb had gone off, as things settled down, to take readings and stuff like that. I had set up all the electronics onboard the ship for the commodore who was going to come onboard and monitor things, before I left.

KP: You left the ship just before the actual Bikini Test.

RS: About a month or so before, yes.

KP: Did you know that this was going to be an atomic bomb test?

RS: Oh, yes.

KP: You knew?

RS: Oh, yes, we knew about it; we knew … what the responsibilities were. We towed … a lot of the ships. We set up all the anchorages, because it was just a bay, and … I'd been on Bikini Atoll Island itself, looking for coconuts, but they had scrawny, little coconuts, you know. [laughter] They weren't worth anything. I guess the natives there lived on fish. [laughter]

KP: This was a pretty important mission.

RS: It was. … It was a big mission

KP: There was a lot of Navy brass interest.

RS: Yes, there was, oh, yes, the whole world was interested. … As I said, my ship went in and they took readings, and then, they went back out again, but, then, they went back in the next day and started doing salvage work, because the responsibility was to measure the radiation, but, also, to keep the ships afloat, so [that] they could have the next test. So, they went in there. We had divers onboard and we had all the damage control people. … That was the kind of ship it was. You've seen the TWA 800? [Mr. Salvin is referring to the salvage operations off of Long Island for TWA Flight 800, which crashed on July 17, 1996, en route to Paris from New York.] They were ARSs, okay, only they were a little larger class than ours. Ours was an ARS, auxiliary rescue, salvage, and we did all the diving and stuff like that.

KP: You had permanent divers as part of the crew.

RS: Oh, yes, we had a hyperbaric chamber onboard. … One of my best friends onboard was the chief diver. He was a chief gunner's mate, but he was the chief diver and his name was Joe Karneke, Chief Karneke, and enlisted men didn't have Cokes, okay, we didn't get any, but the chief had a refrigerator of Cokes. He always used to [say], "Come on," gave me a Coke, you know, always gave me a Coke [laughter] and he'd ask me to do him favors and stuff like that and I'd do it for him. After the war, I came back and I read an article in *Reader's Digest*, … one of these first-person … [pieces], by Joe Karneke, who, when the *Squalus* had gone down, I don't know if you're familiar with the *Squalus*, one of the submarines that sunk before the war, back in the '30s, he was a diver at that time and he got trapped under the hull. … He had a water hose and he washed his way through the mud to come back out again and he was the same guy, but he was a nice guy. I think he's dead now, because I tried reaching him and I couldn't get him, but he was one of my best friends.

KP: You really enjoyed your second ship a lot.

RS: Oh, yes. I learned a lot on that ship. [As] I said, we did salvage work and it was a tanker, I guess it was ten thousand barrels or something like that, … that had come out of Eniwetok and had been blown onto the reef. I told you, where the guy got hurt and I stayed on there about three weeks. … We set up air compressors, to try to blow the air out of the tanks, only you could hear the air going, "Whoosh," as the sea would come back in again, you know, and then, we put out beach gear. I don't know if you know what beach gear is, but … they take these anchors and they drop them off, and then, they shoot us the small line, and then, we get to a bigger line, a bigger line and a bigger line, until, finally, we've got a two-and-a-half-inch steel cable that we're pulling on. We had eight sets of those out and I was responsible for working on that. … We pulled and pulled and our ship was pulling at the same time and, finally, I snapped one of those two-and-a-half-inch cables and it was like a big gun going off, a five-inch gun going off, "Boom," and this cable went flying over the thing, you know, went flying the other way. We finally had to leave the ship there, because it … had been holed too badly, but it was a good experience. … After we were told to abandon that project, I had to wade ashore to Japtan Island. It was just off of Japtan Island, which is part of Eniwetok Atoll, and I didn't have any clothes, because all of my clothes had rotted off. … I didn't have a change of underwear or anything and all I had was a pair of pants that some Merchant Mariner had had and a Merchant Marine pack, you know, and I'm wading ashore with all my other Navy friends and here comes the Navy shore patrol from the island there, in the jeep, and he says, "Who are you guys? Where are you going?" you know, and I said, "We're the Navy. We just came off [that wreck]." "No, that's a merchant ship," and I said, "No, we're Navy," you know. So, I showed him our dog tags and stuff like that. We walked to the other side of the island. There was our LCVP, ready to pick us up and take us back to the ship. I came back onto the ship and there were no clothes. All my clothes that I had sent to the ship's laundry, they usually just put them on your bunk and you got, like, a day to take them off or they'd go into the lucky bag and all my clothes were gone.

KP: They were all in the lucky bag.

RS: All in the lucky bag, and I see guys walking around with "Salvin" on the back, you know, and stuff like that. They were wearing my clothes.

KP: When did you get new clothes?

RS: I had to buy new [clothes] from the ship's stores.

KP: It sounds like you dealt with more than just the electronic equipment with the salvage crew.

RS: … Oh, yes. … While I was on the *Nickajack Trail*, my ship lost its depth finder, which was important in those waters, because we were close to shore, and so, after I came back, we didn't have a depth finder, so, I said, "Well, take me back to the other ship and maybe I can get a transformer." The transformer had blown out. So, I went back and I found a transformer. It was larger than what we needed, but I jury-rigged it up to run my equipment, and then, we radioed, well, we mailed into Pearl Harbor to send us a new one. So, about two weeks later, we got a new one, but, in the meantime, we ran on the one that I had jury-rigged and I think that's what the Captain liked about me, I could do that.

KP: You could solve these problems.

RS: Yes.

KP: Do you think that you were put on these different missions, the salvage missions, because the Captain liked you?

RS: Well, he didn't know whether I could do anything, you know, but I was a petty officer and he needed petty officers in charge and I just happened [to be there]. He probably figured, "Well, he's got nothing to do on the ship. We'll send him over there and put him to work." [laughter] That was probably his mentality at the time. He needed hands on the other ship. I think that's why he sent me over.

KP: Did you have any stewards onboard ship?

RS: Yes.

KP: How many were there?

RS: One.

KP: Just one. You only had one black sailor onboard.

RS: Yes.

KP: How large was the ship's company?

RS: About a hundred people on this last one and about ninety people on the one previously.

KP: What was the steward's …

RS: It was no problem. He used to sit out on the fantail and talk with us, but the one on the first ship I was on used to drink Aqua Velva or something like that. That's what we always thought he drank, because he was always out of alcohol. …

KP: You obviously wanted to get out of the Navy, but were you at all curious or interested in staying for the Bikini Test?

RS: If it had been six months earlier, yes, but I'm glad I didn't, because, on the second test, it was an underwater test and there was radioactivity on board all the ships. One of the things the Captain had us doing, and I always used to … figure he was just trying to wear us down, was, every Sunday, in the morning, he would say, "Anybody want to go to church services at Bikini?" and, if you did, you had to be in whites and nobody wanted to get into whites, because none of the other ships sent anybody in whites. They all had dungarees to go to [the] church service, but … that was his way of discouraging it, you had to have whites and you had to have a haircut and everything else, … because, on Sunday, he would take us out and we'd take all the fire hoses and charge them up and shoot water all up and down the harbor and we'd ride up shooting water, all over the place, and then, we'd have to roll the hoses up and dry them out and everything, and then, we could go to lunch, and then, we'd have the afternoon pretty much to ourselves, while we were there, and I figured he was just doing that to keep us busy, but, about two years ago, a friend of mine died and I was watching him die, I guess, and I was over his house and they had the Discovery Channel [production] of *Bikini, the Forgotten Paradise* and they showed these ships, and I saw parts of my ship, washing the radioactivity off the ships that had been in the blast and that's what he was doing. He was giving us practice for that, but he never told us that, you know.

KP: However, it makes sense now.

RS: It makes sense now. He wanted us to be proficient in washing down with hoses [laughter] and making sure all the equipment worked. That's what he was doing.

KP: Normally, that was not standard.

RS: No, it wasn't, but, in our type of ship, it could be anything, because we'd be a firefighting ship, if necessary.

KP: Did you ever experience any full-blown typhoons? You mentioned storms.

RS: No, I mentioned we were at the tail end of a typhoon on Guam.

KP: However, you were never …

RS: No, but I saw the results of the *Pittsburgh*'s hull, somewhere, I forget where I saw it, but it was beached someplace.

KP: It sounds like you have stayed in touch with many men from your second crew.

RS: Well, I had a reunion back, I think it was 1992, in Mesa, Arizona, and I went there and I saw guys that I hadn't seen since the time I left. My old chief was there, only instead of being a little, scrawny guy, he was puffy, you know. He'd blown up and I thought he was just an ordinary guy, but he ended up becoming a chemical engineer [laughter] and he worked for a pesticide company, you know, and he had had the little skin cancers, but he survived. He always used to chew on a cigar, never lit it, but he used to chew on a cigar. I remember those things about him, and then, that radar man that used write to me, he was there and he was, like, a hundred-and-twenty-five pounds when I left the ship and he weighed about two-hundred-and-thirty pounds and he had a scar, we were in bathing suits, … where he had a kidney removed and he had his gallbladder removed, so, he had two major scars. … I remember stepping into the hotel and I saw his name was there. I didn't anticipate him being there, and so, I found out what his room number was and I knocked on the door, there was no one there. So, the following morning for breakfast, I see somebody coming out of the room. Well, it was a good-looking young lady and I went over to her and I said, "Are you with Gene Bagwell?" She says, "Yes." I said, "Are you his daughter, his wife or what, his girlfriend?" She says, "No, I'm his wife." It was his second wife. She's a young girl, [laughter] and then, there was the mailman that was onboard the ship, you know, and I made friends with the guy that was the snipe. That was the guy below deck; … I never knew him before, you know, but, actually, when the ship was decommissioned, I had a videotape of it from someone that sent it to me, and so, I drove down to Delaware, where he lives, and I showed it to him and he had been to the VA hospitals for skin cancers, but most of the people … who had been on that ship are dead and they died of cancer.

KP: You obviously got off the ship before the test, but I imagine that it came up at the reunion. How did they feel about being in harm's way for this test?

RS: We had copies of the log for all the time when they were in, when the ships were hot, and that was the word that was used, "Hot," and there was no comment, you know, except that, "If you die of cancer, you know, just use this for your widow," or, "If you develop any types of cancers, you know, go to the VA hospital and show [that] you were exposed," but that's pretty much all I heard.

KP: No one was rather vocal.

RS: Well, all the other guys were dead, you know, so, whatever; I'm just fortunate I wasn't on it, because I know, [in] my type of thing, I would have been wiping my hands all with radioactivity, you know, hands-on.

KP: Yes.

RS: Yes, I would have rolled in it. [laughter] "Hey, it feels okay."

KP: When did you realize how lucky you were?

RS: After I got in contact with the fellows, you know. I didn't realize they didn't have any decontamination suits or anything like that, just regular routine.

KP: The only decontamination was washing off the decks.

RS: Yes, but, you know, if you went down below and did some work, the radiation had gone down there. The metal itself probably picked up the radiation.

MB: Did people not know at that point in history that they needed suits?

RS: I don't think anybody cared at that time. They should have known, because you had the damage that was done at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, that there was a lot of radiation burns, you know. People that were miles away got radiation burns. I'm sure our scientists all knew about radiation, Madam Curie, you know, all the things that happened with other people. It's just that, you know, "Here's a test, you're going to run it." You've got to remember, the Army has put people about five miles away from the blasts in Nevada and [said], "Put your … arm over your [head]," so, all they did was, they blocked the radiation with their elbow, with their arm, I guess, before it went into their brain. I don't think anybody much cared about people.

KP: It sounds like no one in the crew realized the danger.

RS: We didn't know what it was all about. We knew they were going test it. … I figured that, you know, it'd be a safe thing; you'd be ten miles, twenty-five miles away or something like that … and you'd wait, you know. I thought our mission was just to … go there and set it up, you know, and then, the scientists would go in, but that's not the way it worked.

MB: Was part of the mission designed to find out what it would do to the men?

RS: No, I don't think [so]. I hope that wasn't the mission. The mission was to see how the placement of the bomb would influence the damage, … for blowing up ships and it seemed as though more damage was done by underwater [detonation], because the pressure built up and collapsed the hulls and put holes in them and over washed them and the radiation lasted for a longer period of time, but you can see, today, they still don't let people back on Bikini.

KP: How did you get back home?

RS: I landed in San Francisco and they put us on a troop train and we took the southern route back and they took us to Ledo Beach and, from Ledo Beach, it took about three days to finally get me out. I remember leaving around eleven o'clock. They gave me passes and tickets for my transportation home. I think we took a bus to the subway, the subway to the train, the train to the ferry, and then, another train to Dunellen, and then, I walked from the railroad station home, carrying my sea bag, and I got home about eleven o'clock at night.

KP: Your parents were probably delighted to see you.

RS: My father was waiting for me outside, yes.

KP: You have stayed in touch with a lot of people. How many of your crewmates did you stay in touch with over a long period of time?

RS: I send Christmas cards now, since I got their addresses, to the chief, who had a stroke and is not doing well, to Bagwell and those are the two guys from that ship I communicate with on a yearly basis. The guy from Delaware, he really isn't the kind of guy, you know, that I would call a friend, you know. I didn't know him then. … He really doesn't fit into my society. So, I don't have much to do with him and those are the only two from that ship.

KP: You lost contact with them after you came back.

RS: Yes, well, sure.

KP: Was the reunion when you really reconnected?

RS: The reunion was the second reunion that ship had. The first one, I hadn't gone to. I wasn't aware of the first reunion and we had talked to them about having another reunion, two years later, except that it never developed and I called up the guy in Arizona, who left the ship before I got on, but he was the yeoman and he mentioned the fact that it's too much work for him, he'll try to get somebody else, but the guy they tried to get had had a heart attack and, you know, it wasn't going to happen. So, there's an association of fleet tug sailors, the National Association of Fleet Tug Sailors, which encompasses all the ARSs, the ATOs and the other ships that were tugs and they're having a reunion in Richmond this September and I intend to go to that one.

KP: When did you decide that you wanted to go to a reunion? It sounds like you actively look for them.

RS: Oh, yes, yes. You know, if you're my friend, you're my friend and I always figured these are my friends. I've met guys … I was in boot camp with numerous different times. I met one guy in Newark Airport, one time. … He ended up being a professor of physics at Cornell. I met another guy who ended up being a lawyer in Boston. He's now dead, I know, because I called up one time when I was in the area. He'd had a stroke. I spoke to his wife. … Another guy knew someone that I knew, met him in Virginia, one time, oh, and I met some guy that was in boot camp with me in Newport News.

KP: When did you decide to join the American Legion?

RS: Seven years ago, I decided to join the American Legion, because they sent me something through the mail. I thought, "Gee, seventeen dollars, I might as well belong." [laughter]

KP: What about the Jewish War Veterans?

RS: The Jewish War Veterans, I joined that, maybe, three years before that.

KP: You did not join when you first came back.

RS: No. A couple of my friends joined the Inactive Naval Reserve, which was offered to me when I left the Navy. You know you joined the inactive naval reserve; you get to keep your rate in case they ever called you back, but they'd never call you back unless they had an Act of Congress and you get twenty-five dollars a month for going to meetings and stuff like that and I thought about it. I said, you know, "I enlisted this time; I'll enlist the next time." I figured that if there was another war and it happened, I'd be an officer or something like that. So, I didn't bite for that. About six months before Korea, a friend I used to commute to college with called me up and he said, "I'm joining the Inactive Naval Reserve, you know. They sent me a letter and I'll get this much money," and all this other stuff. Another one of my engineering friends joined it, too; … my friend was an electronic technician's mate, third class, I was one step higher than he was, and the other was a water tender. He had gone … to Annapolis, but he got thrown out for fighting, during the war. So, he ended up as a water tender and the both of them went back in. They spent two years and they got called back in. I didn't bite and I didn't go back in. They got called in at their rates and they didn't really participate in Korea. They just got stuck on a ship someplace and lost two years. So, it was not to their advantage.

KP: You are glad that you did not.

RS: Yes, I am.

KP: This is not the first time I have heard about people staying in the Reserves for the pension and so forth.

RS: I don't think I would have gotten a pension, though.

KP: Yes. People in the Army stayed in for their pensions, and then, they got called back.

RS: Yes, it disrupts your whole life, without you having a choice on it; be different if there was something like World War II again. I don't think there ever will be.

KP: Did you ever have any contact with any Japanese people in any of your travels in the Pacific?

RS: Yes. On Saipan, we had Japanese prisoners of war and I used to go past the compound. Every once in a while, the baseball would go over, you know, the fence, and so, they [said], "Ha-ba, ha-ba," [laughter] and so, you throw the ball, "Number one, number one," you know. I'd throw the ball back at them. On Guam, I picked up some souvenirs from Japanese prisoners, but I didn't personally see it. I picked them up from other places.

KP: What was it like to come back to Rutgers after the war?

RS: It was hectic. I was taking courses that I really wasn't interested in. There were a lot of people in each class. We moved around from here to there, you know. It's a lot of running from one class to another. You didn't have a lot of study periods and, some courses, I found easier, other courses, I found that I'd forgot everything, you know. There was some adjustment, some of it, I'd say, severe.

KP: When you left, Rutgers was a small school.

RS: Yes, it was.

KP: Now, it is much larger.

RS: Yes, it's huge now. It's in the, what? forty-five thousand.

KP: However, even in 1947-1948, Rutgers was larger than the school you left.

RS: … Yes. Well, the physical size hadn't changed, by the time I left until I came back, but the number of people in the class had changed and I think the type of professors improved. I remember, I don't mean to denigrate the man at all, but Professor Charanis was a history professor and he was teaching me calculus, you know. [laughter]

KP: He is legendary. I never met him, personally.

RS: He was a bright man, but, yes, he couldn't teach calculus, or at least I couldn't learn calculus from him. I had trouble with his dialect a little. "When theta [thay-ta] would go from zero to nothing [nya-thing]," you know. [laughter]

KP: People who were here in the History Department in the 1960s and 1970s remember him very distinctly. I cannot wait to tell them that he taught calculus at one point in World War II.

RS: Yes. I guess he knew more than I did, anyhow, about it.

KP: I am sure that his gift was in history, not calculus.

RS: And then, coming back, we had Professor Slade, I don't know, you've probably heard about him. He was a whiz-bang. He was teaching differential equations.

KP: He would just write and write and write.

RS: … We'd walk in, he'd close the door and he'd start writing and talking to the wall and he'd just go around the thing and, you know, you're still copying here and going [around] and, finally, he gets around to the back and he says, "Any questions?" and he says, "Okay, see you tomorrow," you know. [laughter] It was tough.

KP: I have also been told that there was a professor in engineering who was a terrible lecturer and used to sell his notes.

RS: Sell his notes?

KP: Yes.

RS: Wasn't in my class. There was another tough professor; it was Professor (Dockerty?). He was a chemical engineer, but he was teaching heat power, or thermodynamics I guess you'd call it today. We had twenty-one in our class. They had several different sections, but, in our section, we had twenty-one and it was taught by, maybe, three different professors. Our section flunked fourteen out of the twenty-one. It was the first time that they had run the summer sections for it. Fortunately, I passed it, but, you know, my mark would have been a lot higher if I had had a different professor, not that he didn't teach. It's just that his tests were so darn hard, compared to what the other professors [gave]. We'd have a daily quiz every day, you know, on what you learned yesterday, or thought you learned yesterday. You know you didn't learn when he asked you the quiz. …

MB: Did you take part in any other school activities when you were here?

RS: I don't know. I played intramural basketball, but I wasn't the star on the team. I played with stars. I played with Vince Campopiano, I don't know if you heard [of] him, he made the big team, Joe Rogoff, but I was like the fill-in. They had to have five guys to play. [laughter] So, I got a little fob for it and I must have lost it about five years after I got it. It was my one big claim to fame here at Rutgers.

KP: Did you go to any school dances?

RS: No, no. As a commuter, it became very difficult to be social. You know, you were here and you were home … and, especially in engineering, you had so much homework to do and weekends were spent on project work and this and that. … It was not what I would consider the type of college that "Joe College" goes to. You know, you have all these [other students saying], "Hey, I got three classes today. I've got a full load," you know. [laughter]

KP: You have not been the first engineer to say that, particularly after 1945.

JL: Were there many other veterans in the classes with you?

RS: Pretty much all of them were. I think there were, maybe, eighty-five percent veterans and a lot of them had been going to colleges and stuff like that, ASTP or Army colleges. Most of them were Army or Air Force, you know. They had been educated. They hadn't just … disappeared for four years or five years.

KP: You also had a lot of training in the Navy. It sounds like you got a lot more out of your engineering experience after you came back to Rutgers.

RS: My work career made good use of what I had learned in the Navy.

KP: In what ways?

RS: Well, I was chief facilities engineer for a Johnson & Johnson company. … Well, before that, I had generating experience that I picked up at US Gypsum and I got the job, my first job, as an engineering trainee because engineers were in abundance.

KP: In 1949?

RS: In '49, yes. There were more engineers than there were jobs. So, I got this job and, when I interviewed for the job, the guy asked me [about] my experience, "Do you know anything about electricity?" and I said, "Well, I had electronic engineering in the Navy and I think I know all about electricity and motors and generators and selsyns," and stuff that they didn't even have. … I told them I was a mechanical engineer and he was a mechanical engineer. …

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

RS: So, I got the job. After I started the job, I realized I was replacing a guy, … an electrical engineer, that was killed the first day on the job. …

KP: Not a great way to start your new job. [laughter]

RS: Anyhow, you know, I had learned a lot more about safety, perhaps, than he had and he had gone across 440 bare wires. I learned to respect electricity.

KP: Probably because you ran a generator.

RS: Well, I did more than that. … You know, we had high voltages in the radar equipment. We had thirteen thousand volts and stuff like that.

KP: If you are not careful, you can get hurt.

RS: You get a shock, it'll knock you across the room.

KP: Did you learn that from personal experience?

RS: No. I did across a 550 once, so, it knocked me across the room. [laughter] You learned not to put both hands on anything. You just use your finger, you know. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you have enjoyed being an engineer.

RS: Oh, yes, I enjoyed my whole career. I pay a lot of tribute to Rutgers for giving me the opportunity.

KP: You said that US Gypsum gave you very valuable training.

RS: Yes.

KP: Why did you leave?

RS: Why did I leave? Well, they started me out as electrician, okay, which was a snap for me. I learned to run conduits and stuff like that, but I knew all the circuitry and I used to troubleshoot the shifts and stuff like [that]. It was a twenty-four-hour, seven-day operation. Then, after doing that for a while, they put me in the powerhouse and … one of my weak subjects was heat, thermodynamics, you know. Even though I passed it, I never really felt comfortable with it. I don't know if it was because he made it so tough or what, but, anyhow, it was a generating station. We had high-pressure boilers, super heat, the whole works. It would have been an ideal problem for him and I had to do the heat balances on that, but, beside that, I learned to fire the boilers. I got my operating engineer's license, a red seal, which is next to the top, and I could have gotten the top one, but I didn't apply for it, over a period of time, and I got to be assistant chief and everything else like that. We had turbines in there and water treatment, and then, in the rest of my training, … I worked with the millwrights, setting up equipment, doing this, and then, I finally became an engineer, where they let me design things and draw things.

KP: Which you had trained for.

RS: Yes, and so, I had a lot of hands-on experience, which I've always remembered. It's always stayed with me and it made my job at J&J so much easier, but they went on strike. They'd had no union and I don't know if you ever heard the name Sewell Avery. It's a classic. He used to be in charge of Montgomery Ward and they carried him out … for refusing to talk to the unions. Well, he owned US Gypsum. So, the first strike came on and I was in the training program, so, I was halfway between management and … the workers. So, I had to jump over the fence, you know, and come in the place … in the back and I'd come in and they gave me all the manual labor, "Clean out the chest and do this," or, "Hose everything down and prepare for shutdown," and the union found out about it and the management found out about it. So, management spoke to us, "We'll go back over the fence at night, when they can't see you." [laughter] So, then, they settled the strike, and then, I moved up into the office and I became part of management. Then, they had another strike, which was going to go on and on, and, after I cleaned up the place again, they said, "We'd like you to take your two weeks vacation now, because, when you get back, if we're not settled, we're going to ship you either to Oklahoma or Indiana or Illinois, one of our other plants, until we open, if we reopen." So, I said, "Okay." Here it was, March, and I had never taken a spring vacation or winter vacation. So, I said, "Before I go away, I'm going to go find another job." So, I went up … that Monday and I found a job at Air Reduction, which is, I guess, now, Allied Signal or something like that. They offered me a job and, the next day, I went to … Johnson & Johnson and they offered me a job and I weighed the two and I tried to negotiate more money. You know, I finally settled for Johnson & Johnson and I told them, "I have to give two weeks notice … when I come back," and they said, "Okay." So, I went to Florida and I came back and I gave a week's notice at US Gypsum and came back to work.

KP: The labor strike was really the breaking point.

RS: Yes, yes. Oh, I enjoyed my opportunity there. I was working, many times, thirty-six hours straight through, [laughter] you know, because we'd have shut downs and you were there and you were committed and twenty-four hours, once a month, was nothing, you know. There were other reasons why … and there were other times when I had … shutdowns. …

KP: You mentioned, partially because of the engineer surplus, you had to do a lot of blue-collar work.

RS: Yes, I did.

KP: You mentioned that that helped you a lot.

RS: It did, it certainly did, yes.

KP: You moved up the ladder.

RS: Yes, because when I went to work for … Johnson & Johnson, they needed somebody that understood the utilities there and I said, "Well, I just came from a generating plant. I have my license, … I know all about boilers, bigger boilers than what you have here, … these little teapots you have," you know, and that type of thing and maintenance; I knew machinery maintenance and everything else. So, my first job was in plant engineering and I revised all the metering systems for the utilities and I got involved with changing over the utilities from 440 to 4160 and that type of thing, and then, they put me in charge of the maintenance of the gauze mill, which was the building where Johnson Hall is now, before it got ripped down. I had that whole five-story building. …

KP: It was still a gauze mill then.

RS: … Gauze mill, yes. It was the gauze and the cotton mill there and I had the gauze mill and I stayed in that job for a year and it was a backbreaking job, five-stories, you know, up and down, no air-conditioning, nothing, and a lot of old equipment, and, after a year in there, they made me plant project engineer and I became a full engineer, you know, for them. Then, I got involved in the utilities. The guy that they had, they fired him and they gave the utilities to me, and then, all of a sudden, they started wanting to build ESDP. So, I got to design the utilities for ESTP, and then, they put me out there as the field engineer and I held the responsibility for this and I was out there eighty percent of the time and I got a lot of good experience and [it] ended up that I worked there for a few years, and then, I added on to their buildings there, in charge. I was superintendent of the whole building. I went to New York, designed the whole thing with three different firms, and then, I was responsible for putting it all together, and then, I went to [the] Personal Products Division, took over their operation and I ended up with over … two million square feet built in five different states for them.

KP: Which is a lot.

RS: Yes, that's a lot, … but I enjoyed it. I traveled a lot, but, then, it gave me the opportunity. I was involved in the National Society of Professional Engineers and … I got to be chairman of the Professional Engineers in Industry for the … whole country, and then, from that, I became a member of the executive committee and the Northeast Vice-President of the National Society of Professional Engineers and I probably would have run, whether I would have gotten elected or not, I don't know, for president of the society, but my father took sick and that curtailed all my activities.

KP: I have interviewed many people from Johnson & Johnson. My wife would desperately like to get a job at J&J. She thinks it is a great company to work for.

RS: It used to be. I don't know whether they still are. I think a lot of paternalism has disappeared. I used to work for General Johnson himself. I was his houseboy, you might say. I took care of his home and he invited me down to Florida and took care of his things. … When he had any personal things he wanted done, he would call me up and I'd go visit him in his office.

KP: It was very paternalistic.

RS: It was, but no more. It's gone, but they have good benefits and, if your wife can get a job there and she can keep her nose clean and survive, she can walk away healthy, wealthy and wise.

KP: Yes, that is the impression.

RS: Who were you talking to, Frank Simon?

KP: I think so.

RS: [laughter] He loved everything; oh, Bob Campbell?

KP: Robert King. He was in sales. I have interviewed a number of people from J&J and most really liked working for Johnson & Johnson.

RS: Well, I said, I enjoyed my career. I guess it was up until the last two years when things changed, that you had a lot more younger people coming in and … they didn't appreciate or accept experience, you know. They were going to redevelop the envelope, I guess.

KP: In your first job, the blue-collar work, did that help you build a rapport with people?

RS: Oh, I think so. You know, I learned to understand what is important to some of these people, you know.

KP: What did you learn? What was important?

RS: They wanted to be respected. They wanted to have a voice in things. They wanted to understand what was going on. It wasn't just, "Do this, do that," you know, give them some explanation for it, but you also had to understand that, when you were in charge, you had to be in charge. Okay, when you lead, you lead; you don't involve everybody else, necessarily. You still carry the responsibility.

KP: It sounds like that took a while to figure out.

RS: I think I learned that in the Navy.

KP: Really? [laughter] You grew up in Dunellen and you still live in Dunellen. Have you lived in Dunellen all your life?

RS: All except for a short time when I was married.

KP: What is it like to live in the same town for such a long time?

RS: It's changed a lot, I think. … I called some people on the phone, because, I told you, I'm … chairman of the committee for the monument and a lot of people remember me as Sonny, you know. I tell them my name. "Oh, are you Sonny?" "Yes." So, then, they can talk to me. [laughter] Otherwise, I'm just Mr. Salvin.

KP: When you say Dunellen is changed, what has been the biggest change?

RS: The biggest change is, the taxes have gone up [laughter] and I think the educational system is overblown, for what they can accomplish. We graduated eighty in my class with a small school. Now, they have forty-five and they've got a three-times bigger school. The classes I went to were, like, thirty-five to forty in the class. Now, the director or the superintendent complains if there's more than twenty; twenty-five is the maximum he'll go for. They've now increased their standards, supposedly, for four years of math and science, you know, and everything else like that and no study periods, which I suffered through, or I lived through. I guess I shouldn't say I suffered, because they didn't bother me. … My senior year in high school was like that, but I don't think the quality of the people going through the school is going to be rewarded by all that extra attention. I really think it's going to be frustrating and a lot will have to drop out. You know, they'll be unable to succeed and, therefore, they'll hate school, rather than find something that they can appreciate.

KP: You mentioned that many of the single-family homes have been converted into multiple-family homes. Has there been any continuity? Obviously, there are people who still remember you as Sonny.

RS: … Yes, the mayor and I are friends. The chief of police and I are friends, you know, things like that, but you have to keep making new acquaintances, new friends. I don't have to, but I'm doing it because of this committee.

KP: When did you become involved with the World War II monument?

RS: Last November.

KP: Were you asked to participate?

RS: No, I read a letter to the editor by some fellow I knew the name of and I called him up on the phone and I said, "I agree with you." He says, "Come on over, let me show you what I've got." He's eighty years old, he was wounded on Guam, he was a Marine and he says, "I would like to see this thing go up before I die." He said, "I'm not in good shape. My two brothers are dead," and he's the oldest of the family. … I said, "Well, I'll take a look and see what it means," … but I said, "I can't do it alone." I said, "I'll have to have a committee and I want to make sure the town will let us put it up." So, the first thing I did was, I called the mayor and I got a resolution passed in the council to give us space in the park, and then, … I met with the American Legion, who said, "We tried this once before and we failed. I don't think we want to do it," and I said, "Well, this is what I've gotten together so far and I got this list of seven hundred names and … here's the program I've established, what we're going to go through," and they said, "Well, we'll give it a try." Then, I tried to get the VFW and I spoke to the commander. He says, "Oh, we're interested, but I can't make all the meetings," you know. So, he never showed up, he never sent anybody, never said anything. Then, I involved the mayor to come to the meetings and I involved the chief of police to come to the meetings, and then, finally, a couple of fellows from the VFW found out about it and they came on their own and they said, "Well, our commander doesn't do anything anyhow."

KP: When had the American Legion tried to do this before?

RS: I don't know. They said, "We had to give all the money back." I've got a feeling they probably did it through their own membership. I've waged a campaign where … I wrote a letter for the mayor and he signed it. We sent it to all the businesses and professions in town and he said, "Oh, you should get twenty thousand dollars easy, … without a sweat." So, I figured, "Hey, here it is, go ahead and do it," and we didn't get that much money, you know. So, then, I decided that I have to put out something to all the people in the town. So, I got … the chief of police and we went over and we got somebody to donate the printing of three thousand leaflets to be dropped off and I got the Boy Scouts to drop them off, only they didn't drop them off when I wanted [them to], they dropped them off when they wanted to, you know, so that the money started coming in. … It was coming in, but sporadically and I recognized that this wasn't going to do it, either. So, I started to write letters. I found all the class reunions, the addresses and everything. I started writing them letters and saying, "Whether … a family member or whatever [was involved], we're doing this and that," and started getting money back from that. There's one class I still haven't gotten the addresses for, but we'll get that, and then, we're climbing up the ladder to our goal, but we're far from it.

KP: How far do you have to go?

RS: Another ten thousand … dollars. So, then, I started calling people that were on the list or members of the family. … I went through the phonebook, I had somebody else go through it, put down the number of the page, and then, I started calling them up and I'm down to the Ls now and I've still got the rest of them to go, but I've been getting some positive response from it and I also spoke to a philanthropist in town who'd given a hundred thousand dollars to the Rotary Club and I spoke at the Rotary and I spoke at the Lions, trying to get the money, and they're all working on it and Public Service asked and I sent them a request and … I filled out this form and the form didn't fit … my needs. So, I wrote them a letter back, saying that, "This is a one-shot deal. Your form doesn't fit my needs," and everything else. Then, I called the guy up and I pressured him and he kept saying, "Well, how much have the other industries given in town?" I said, "Dunellen's a small town and it takes time for us to get all the facts back," I said, "but, if you have to know, we've gotten two thousand dollars from National Starch," which we hadn't, but I figured I'd give him a target, you know. So, he says, "Well, I don't think we're going to do it." … So, a couple of days later, he calls back and says, "I have to know. … The board wants to know about your other companies." I said, "Why? Are you planning on doubling the amount they give?" you know, and I put him on the spot and I said, "Are you planning on giving ten thousand dollars?" "No." I said, "Well, five thousand dollars?" "No." I said, "Well, then, you know, in reality, our list is confidential and I don't care to share with you, unless you're going to come up with a substantial amount of money, but I certainly would expect that Public Service would not be bound by what someone else gives as to their generosity," you know, and so, I worked him over on that and I'm still waiting to get their money. … The next task is, oh, I spoke to this philanthropist. … He gave a hundred thousand to the Rotary and I finally got him Sunday and he says, "Well, I think it's a good cause, but I think you're spending too much money." I said, "Well, we're only spending twenty thousand dollars. We've got a thousand names. That's only twenty dollars a name, cast in bronze and mounted on granite." I said, "I think that's reasonable," and I lied a little, I said, "We went out and got competitive pricing and everybody else is five to ten thousand dollars more than that." He said, "Well, I don't like to be pressured." I said, "I'm not pressuring you or anything." I said, "I just want to make you aware of it, but, if you'd like to come up with ten thousand dollars, I'll make sure that we get your name somewhere on that." He said, "Well, I don't want my name on it." I said, "Fine, but it's just an opportunity for you, if you want some recognition," and he said, "I have to think about this for a while." He says, "I'm running out of money." You know, he gave a hundred thousand dollars. He said, "I've got to think about my retirement." He's about seventy-eight years old now or more. …

KP: Is he retired or is he still working?

RS: I don't think he's working. He has a home down the Shore and he has a home in Dunellen, you know.

KP: Why did he give the money to the Rotary?

RS: He's a member of the Rotary. I have no idea what he gave it for. The Rotary is having trouble figuring out how much money to give me, you know, and I spoke to them and they're meeting on it this week, again, but it's, like, been a month since they first met on it and I'd like to

get at least a thousand dollars from them. I'll be lucky if I get three hundred, but that's what got me started on it.

KP: Is that the letter in the paper?

RS: Yes. … The *Courier News* put out a letter and the *Home News* put out a letter and, supposedly, the *Town News* is going to be printing something on their front page when they come out again. Do you have anything else?

KP: Just to follow up on the monument, when you came home in 1947, had there been a discussion about any type of monument?

RS: Oh, no. Nobody was interested then. The war was over; forget about it. Now, you're getting these older people that … want to leave some sort of legacy to the grandchildren or something else. "Hey, my grandfather was in the war;" … you know, it's a shame. Even the federal government is recognizing it now, with their hundred-and-ten million dollar monument in Washington, from public funds, they say, which means that they're going to hit industry up, you know, the lobbyists and all.

MB: Can you talk about this desire to leave a legacy?

RS: Oh, it's not mine, because I don't have anybody to leave it to. [laughter] I guess it's all part of history. … My family, I have a psychiatrist cousin, third cousin or something like that, from Massachusetts, he did a family tree and we had a family reunion two years ago in Scranton where we had over three hundred people show up. … We've got a family tree, this is just on my mother's side, of over a thousand people and he found it by going to different cemeteries and different places, you know, and word of mouth and he really researched it and we found out we have relatives in Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, you know, all over this country, some in Hawaii, you know. All over the world, we have relatives. I have relatives in Poland. Some of them fought in the Polish Army. One that's still alive, he was a captain. He's pretty well disabled. He had a whole bunch of medals. His brother was killed at Monte Cassino. His sister showed up about five years ago, in my cousin search, as living in New York, in Flushing, and she got integrated into our family and, now, she's a cherished member of the family, you know. She didn't know she had any family and we didn't know we had her as a relative. She would have been my mother's first cousin, but my mother's family left before she was even born. So, they had no idea. I guess that's part of a legacy for people that want to trace roots and stuff like that and there are people that do.

KP: If you do not mind me asking, have you ever wished that you had children?

RS: I have a lot of grandchildren from my girlfriend. [laughter] I have something like ten or eleven grandchildren. … Yes, my stepson had five kids. … I've got kids, but they're not really my biological kids. They call me "Pop-pop" and stuff like that. That was my reason for getting married, to have children, but my wife and I didn't see eye-to-eye on so many things that it just didn't work out.

KP: When did you get married?

RS: When I was old enough to realize that I should be married, which was too old; thirty-five, I was. I was a young thirty-five, though.

KP: In your generation, countless people got married right after college.

RS: Some of them got married at seventeen and eighteen.

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask about?

RS: How much money I made or something like that. [laughter]

KP: Thank you very much for coming.

RS: I appreciate the opportunity to speak and meet with you both, all three of you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/15/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/20/04
Reviewed by Robert Salvin 8/12/04