RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL SCHRAMM

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Russell Schramm on November 26, 2002, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Mark Miller: Mark Miller.

SI: And now Mr. Schramm, thank you very much for being with us today.

Russell Schramm: Okay.

MM: I'd like to begin by asking you a bit about your parents. Where they came from and what were their backgrounds?

RS: Well, I was one of seven children from Springfield, New Jersey. [laughter] I was living with my parents at that time and that was back in [the 1920s]. … Well, I was born in 1924 and I'm now seventy-eight years old, … but, anyway, my parents are both deceased now and my mother passed away when she was thirty-six years old as a result of pneumonia in the hospital after delivering … the last child. My Dad died when he was eighty-four years old in 1974, but, anyway, that's my background. I went to the local schools in Springfield, James Caldwell School and the Jonathan Dayton Regional High School and I got my higher education after I left the service under the GI Bill, anyway, that's pretty much … my background. I played some basketball and football in high school.

SI: In the 1930s, before the war, how much did you know about what was happening in Europe with Hitler and in Asia?

RS: I really didn't know too much about it. I graduated from high school in 1941 and that was the beginning of the real German activity in Europe, at that time, and I enlisted in 1942. So, I didn't know too much about … what was going on over there except that Hitler invaded under the blitzkrieg, the various countries over there and then ultimately France, I wasn't too concerned about that at that time and I was working full time as a banker in Summit, New Jersey. When I graduated in '41 … from high school, … my brothers and I went and enlisted at the same time. One is living and one is deceased now, but, anyway, I didn't know much about the war except when I raised my right hand and I was inducted, after enlisting. They put me in service school in Great Lakes, Illinois and then they sent me from there to Northwestern University for service training and after that I went to the East Coast, on my request. That pretty much covers me up to the time I went in the service and after I enlisted in the service.

MM: How did Pearl Harbor affect you and where were you on that day?

RS: Sorry, I didn't get you.

MM: How did Pearl Harbor affect you and your opinion towards the war?

RS: I was devastated and thought it was impossible, and to the war? Well, I went from New York to Great Lakes and I was in boot camp there and did my basic training and everything was new to me. I was eighteen years old and I really didn't know what I was in for, or what I was

going to be exposed to, but, anyway, at my request. I wanted to go into communications and they sent me to Northwestern University for that training. …

SI: Was it your first time being away from home and on your own?

RS: Yes, it was, actually the first time. I was a little homesick. [laughter]

MM: What was your parent's reaction to you entering service?

RS: They wished me well and good luck. Well, you know I couldn't communicate with them all the time because I was limited to what I could say, but, anyway, both my brothers and I were in the service at the same time and my dad displayed the three stars in the window. Dad was working seven days a week in Westinghouse … so he was very busy and they were limited, to; restrictions for gas rations and ration for food like that. So, they had a hard time at home and missing us, too, I guess, I had four sisters at home at that time so it kept them company.

SI: Was your father still doing war work for Westinghouse?

RS: Yes, as a matter-of-fact, he acquired a couple of Navy "E's" [Navy's award for excellence] for developing a submarine tube and that kind of thing for Westinghouse. He was a scientific glass worker there. … He was also an inventor of sorts, you know, and he discovered the sonar tube for submarines.

SI: Oh, really?

RS: Oh, yes, and a couple of other things and I don't remember what they were, but, anyway, [laughter] yes, they didn't know when we were coming home, or where we were half the time because I had written them a letter and then I stopped writing them a letter when I was in the Mediterranean when we were bombed by the German aircraft in convoy there. So, I missed sixty-five days in telling them where I was and what I was doing because they sunk four hundred forty-four ships out of a convoy of eight hundred in Mediterranean at that time with their glider bombs. But, anyway, we were in a convoy there, that was my first encounter in the war with any, enemy action, there were airplanes, Messerschmitts, and dive bombing us and we were on the outside columns with the tankers because we were carrying ammunition, high explosives, and they attacked troop ships in the center of the convoy, which were located there and then came the tankers and then came the ammo ships on the outside, but we were attacked by submarines and also aircraft at that time I wrote a letter to my parents explaining the reason for my delaying in writing them because we went from there to Suez, and from there to the Persian Gulf, and from the Persian Gulf to Bandar (Shapoor?), which was a port city in the Persian Gulf, and then, it was Persian. Now, it's Iran and Iraq.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RS: Basic training was boot camp. That lasted two-and-a-half months. Either you went on to service, or you were Section Eight, OGU [outgoing unit], which meant that you were discharged because of one thing or another. A few of us got out of boot camp and went on from there to the

service school in Northwestern University. … I knew how to type from high school and that helped me in my training for radioman, which you can see my ranking was radioman second class, but, anyway, the training was rough because we had a fellow, Joe Nagy, who was our chief instructor. He had us polishing his shoes and doing that kind [of stuff]. We did the Great Lake's shuffle, which was using steel wool on the floors at four o'clock in the morning. It was winter time then. We jogged around the Great Lakes area in our skivvies when it was snowing. It was pretty rigorous, training there. Some of the guys didn't make it, but I made it and I went from there to service school in communications, primarily. I had an equivalent of a year and a half of college there. That was the basic training, excepting I was trained again when I was transferred from the European Theater to the Pacific Theater. I got to Camp Eliot in San Diego, the Marine base, and got another set of training things, you know, with combat stuff and then I was shipped to the South Pacific from there. That was rigorous training, too. The training in this school that I went to was tough, I mean, they were, you went to school and then you just back to the barracks, and you swept [the] hall. I was assigned to and you studied and then to sleep and went to school again. [laughter] That was the training. I graduated, I guess with God's help, third in my class, tied for second with five hundred. … Then I was given a choice of which coast I wanted from there, but that was the basic training that I had and, of course, we were trained in weaponry, the five-inch .50s and the .60mm because I became an armed guard then, the armed guard center of Brooklyn, New York, and we were trained to antiaircraft weaponry and also a 'sparks' in the radio shack. We were doing twenty-four hour duty at times going through the Mediterranean when everybody was on alert. The Merchant Marine though, had a much better job because they were making a hundred dollars a day bonus in the Mediterranean and we, in the Navy, weren't making that kind of money. …

MM: How did you get along with the Merchant Mariners?

RS: Fine. I served with a fellow from East Orange, a fellow named, Banks. I don't remember the skippers' names of these ships, but, anyway, we were the armed guard gun crew and I was in communications and gun crew on those two ships. And, by the way, on the way over to Europe the first time, we had a collision with the *Ignais Padarusky*. Yes, we cut a twenty-five foot hole in our hold after we made an emergency turn. What had happened was we had a sabotage. Somebody fouled up our steering mechanism and we made a ninety degree angle alteration in our course and we got rammed by the *Ignais Padarusky*. That slowed us down too.

SI: They found that it was actual sabotage?

RS: Yes, and they arrested two men in England from the Merchant Marine crew.

SI: Do you know if they were German agents?

RS: I guess they were because our FBI was in England at the time and they came aboard the first day in port and arrested these two guys. We never saw them again. So, you know, we were kind of glad they caught them, but they sabotaged us by fouling up our steering mechanism.

SI: When you joined the armed guard it was at a time when the U-boats were very active.

RS: Oh, yes. They were sinking ships. As a matter-of-fact, we had destroyer escorts going on convoy and DE's, destroyer escorts, would chase off the subs. Sometimes you'd see birds and shoot at them, you know, a flock. You didn't know what they were, periscope or not, but we saw periscopes near the coast of England and the coast of the United States at that time. We saw a lot of U-boat activity. [As] a matter-of-fact, they sank, I think it was three a day, at the beginning of the war, off the United States coast, off our coast here. My other brother that served on a sub chaser out of New London, Connecticut, so, we knew they were active and … not mines, you know, shooting from the sub chasers, it slips my mind what they were.

SI: Depth charges?

RS: Yes, … these were great big fifty-five gallon drums of dynamite going down in the water, anti-sub activities.

SI: Did you realize how dangerous it was when you joined the Armed Guard?

SI: How dangerous the situation was?

RS: No. I had no idea. What the heck, I was fresh out of high school and I didn't know what we were in for. It just said it was a 'World War,' so, I took one day at a time when I went out. [As] a matter-of-fact, black powder; in our ships, when it gets wet it explodes, so, when the *Ignais Padarusky* rammed us, we had water in the second hold where the black powder was, so, we threw all the black powder overboard so it wouldn't explode when it gets wet. But, anyway, I knew we were in dangerous waters and under dangerous conditions, I knew that, but like I say, [I] became lackadaisical after a while and you don't think about it.

MM: Did you see any ships sink that were in your convoy?

RS: Yes, I did. [As] a matter-of-fact, in the Mediterranean, I saw some ammo ships get hit with these bombs that were guided radio-wise down in the stacks of the ships and blew them apart. In thirty-two seconds the ship was gone from the surface, so, that's fast and they just blew apart, you know. [As] a matter-of-fact, they hit a couple of Swedish transport ships and fifteen hundred were lost on them, one of those that they got. But, they sunk four hundred of our ships in that raid. Those raids happened for days. Anyway, we left Oran and we were headed for Sicily, in the southern part of Italy, when they raided us, a lot of Messerschmitts, and then, they had another light bomber that they used and I can't remember the name, I'm thinking, "Betty," but I'm not sure what it was.

SI: The Henckel .88?

RS: Yes. So, that was the first action, activity that I was involved in, except when we were in Suez they put suction bombs on the hulls of our ships, the Japanese did, and we had to have divers go down and disconnect those. So, as soon as you pulled into a dock, you would explode one of those bombs. That was another interesting experience.

SI: The raid with all the Messerschmitts?

RS: That was my first encounter excepting seeing, sighting subs in the Atlantic coming over. No, that was the first air raid situation that we had, but we saw subs there, too, and they drew off all of our protection and then we were raided by aircraft.

SI: What were your duties during the air raid[s]?

RS: I was in communications, radio, and our instructions were to star and scatter fan-wise, that was our [duty] and I left the radio shack and went to the gun tubs and we were breach loading these five-inch .50 guns, which made a loud, loud, loud noise, anti aircraft, then when they get up in there they exploded, you know. … I had injured my nerves, … my hearing nerves and it's gotten progressively worse over the years, so that now I'm sixty percent handicapped with that. But, anyway, then when we landed in Italy unloading ammo as the Italians, and Germans were fighting against us. We were up around Rome then, and when we were unloading in Bari, Italy, we had another attack of aircraft with incendiary bombs trying to get us on fire, or explode. We survived that ordeal. We went down from there to the Suez Canal, going through the Straits of Gibraltar, no, [not the] Straits of Gibraltar, that was going through, but down the Nile River. We came into Great (Bitter?) Lake, where half the lake was sunken ships, …but, anyway, that was a scary situation. I wouldn't want to go through it again. It's like a chapter in my book, that it's a nightmare, that part, and then, of course, going over the Pacific was another scary situation. I was on patrol duty carrying a TBY on my back in the Pacific on the islands in the invasions in the Carolines, Truk Island, and Moen Island and what not, and I'll get to that in a little while.

SI: How many trips to Europe did you make total?

RS: I'd say four. We made one to England, one to France, one to Suez, and then, the Persian Gulf one. So, we made four back and forth. We had to come back loaded with half rope and things like that from India, also rugs, and reloaded in New York, and Florida, and Norfolk, Virginia, is where we reloaded ammo again. We went into dry dock after the first trip, getting rammed, and that was in Norfolk, Virginia, and had repairs done because it buckled our … beams. The beams on the ship buckled and the deck buckled under that ramming, but they fixed us up and then out we went again, but we were loaded with torpedoes, black powder, detonators, and block busters, that's the one thousand pound bomb, and so on, and we had five holds in the ships. We were a troop carrier with the *Samuel Livermore*. We carried troops in addition to ammunition. That was dangerous. The more I think about it.

SI: Was it US Army troops that you were carrying?

RS: Yes. It was the Buffalo Division that we took to Italy.

SI: Oh, really?

RS: Yes. Not the division, I mean, we took a part of the division, because the division was quite numerous. I think we had a capacity of carrying five hundred troops.

SI: Were they segregated?

RS: When you say segregated?

SI: On the ship, I know they were a segregated unit.

RS: They had their own bunks, yes. We had our bunks under the helmsman's quarters. They had theirs, destroyer bunks, down in the hold of the ship, two holds, but they were packed like sardines. … Anyway, the Buffalo Division, in this situation, were all colored people and we landed them in Italy, around Naples. … Anyway, we brought prisoners of war back, too, and landed them here in Kilmer, I think. We had prisoners of war on. … We picked them up in England.

SI: Were they Italians or Germans?

RS: Well, they were German primarily, yes, and there were some Italians, but, you know, I couldn't tell the difference, really.

MM: When the ship entered port were you able to leave and go on land?

RS: Yes. We had liberty, they called it, and when I was in Italy, that was an interesting leave because I went to Pisa and saw the Leaning Tower that was all shot up with bullet holes and we went to Bologna, which was the front then, and we had a jeep at our disposal and we heard the gunfire, but we didn't go to the front. Yes, that was an interesting stop. Then we went to France. We dropped ammo here and there in France, and that was Florence, I guess, Florence, France I think it was in the southern coast of France. We dropped ammo there because we were fighting against the Germans in France at that time. I can't think what his name was, the General that came out of Africa, back to France, de Gaulle, anyway, he was leading our troops there in France against the Germans and they were somewhere near Paris then, I think. Anyway, … we came around the coast and we landed in Port Debouc, France, and we got sideswiped there by another ship and we were broken down for two weeks there, so, I had a leave there. But, anyway, the leaves were, you had to be back, or you missed your ship, at a certain time, but, we had leaves. [As] a matter-of-fact, I came back from that tour of duty to the armed guard center. After a thirty day leave grant, I was back in ten days, back in the armed guard center, being shipped out to the coast after getting yellow fever and cholera shots, so, we knew we were headed for the Pacific then, and then, the trains, air conditioning broke down going through the deserts, and what not. It was a harrowing trip, anyway.

SI: How did you feel about switching theaters and going to the Pacific?

RS: That was interesting. They took all of our naval outfits away from us and reissued us greens, you know, fatigues, and what not, and they trained us in hand-to-hand combat more, and also, we were carrying five pound rifles. I forgot what they were, but, anyway, heavy rifles, and bayonet training and we were doing exercises everyday. That was in San Diego, in California.

SI: Were you trained by Marines?

RS: Yes. Then I … became 21st [Regiment?], Third Division Marines. They transferred me from the Navy to that and I was considered equal to a staff sergeant then, because of my background and experience in the Atlantic. There were twenty-six of us Navy guys that went through that process and then we became volunteers. "We need volunteers," there was a Lieutenant General Blank in the Pacific, who said, "We need volunteers," and he said, "You, you, you and you." I became ship's company then, I forget the name of the ship, but we landed on islands on those ship[s]. We went down rope ladders and then they dropped, there's a picture of a motorized unit in here, we went up on land then and we met some resistance.

SI: Did you have amphibious training? Were you given amphibious training?

RS: Oh, yes, yes. [As] a matter-of-fact, I was on patrol with this TBY; it's a portable transmitter/receiver. I was carrying it on my back. We were going through the jungles, it was like … 127 degrees in the shade, and we were carrying all this weight, you know, the radio and the gun, and everything else. I passed out and when I came to it was like medics slapping my face. He said, "When did you have your last salt pill?" and I said, "What's a salt pill? I don't know, I never heard of it," but, anyway, we lost six of our patrol then in that eight-man patrol thing and, I guess, they were all hit when I went down. I went down, they thought I was dead, I guess.

MM: What island were you on at that time?

RS: Truk and it was in the Carolines. We were sleeping in pup tents at night and this is funny, we threw pup tents on the ground and then the tides changed, and came in, and wiped us out in the pup tent, right. We got wet and we had to move back inland farther, but we didn't have much room to move back inland because we were getting shot at, you know.

MM: When you would land on an island like Truk, what were your duties in the patrol?

RS: Okay. We had … one of these, it's in here somewhere, [Editor's Note: Mr. Schramm is looking at a scrapbook] there's a big truck with a generator on it, okay? … This is a Marine thing over there. Maybe it's here. There is the truck. This is … what we came on land with, one of those, and that was equipped with radio communications. What we were doing on patrol was radio, you know, picking what looked to be a hot spot and telling the ships at sea, the Navy, to shoot the target, where it was located, and they would fire at it from the ships.

SI: So, you were like a forward observer?

RS: That's right. That's good, good point. [laughter]

SI: How many of these patrols did you make on Truk?

RS: Well, I'd say about five, five patrols and then they took me off that. I think after the one time that I passed out from the heat, they decided to transfer me then. Well, here's pictures showing where I am, and inside a station communications. That's where they transferred me to from the patrol duty. These are pictures of the Marines that I served with.

SI: The Marines that you served with, had they been in combat before Truk?

RS: Oh, yes. Yes, they came from Guadalcanal. That was where they began. That was the 21st [Regiment,] Third Division Marines. These are three guys that I served with.

SI: We're looking a picture of three Marines and a dog.

MM: How long were you on Truk?

RS: About six, seven weeks, and then we were transferred back to Guam. From Guam, we went to Moen Island, another six weeks, until that resistance was no longer. …

SI: How long was the combat phase on Truk?

RS: About four-and-a-half weeks, but they were still on the ground, in tunnels and in caves. We had to dig them out one-by-one and then we went to an outdoor movie and they were sniping at us.

SI: Oh, really?

RS: Oh, geez. [laughter] They were sitting up on the trees, or the palms, and taking shots at us in the movie, outdoor movie, and then they got in our chow lines. You know, Japanese also served in our services … so, we didn't know whether they were friends or enemies at times over there.

SI: Were there Japanese-Americans?

RS: Yes, there were.

SI: Stationed near you?

RS: Yes.

SI: Okay.

RS: They spoke Japanese, and English, so, that was a help.

MM: Did you get to know any of them?

RS: Sure, I did, but I don't remember who they were. Probably all, you know, a lot of these guys are probably deceased now, I mean, they were twenty years, twenty to twenty-five, and that's fifty, that's seventy-five, eighty years ago, you know, and a lot of these people are deceased. As a matter-of-fact, I had a good friend from Pennsylvania named Mike Zerine, he's deceased. I read in the paper. We met after the service.

SI: How often did you come under enemy fire?

RS: In there … on the islands? I'd say each patrol we got fired on maybe four or five times until we got to them.

SI: Did you ever have to fire your personal weapon?

RS: Yes, yes.

SI: Okay.

RS: That was a bad experience, you know, if you were doing patrol with some guys you knew, or have known and they just disappeared. But, anyway, these are the rigs we were driving around the islands with. … That's a transmitter station. My TBY transmitted information to them; they transmitted it to the battleships and the cruisers out in the water.

SI: It seems like if you compare your experience in the Atlantic and your experience in the Pacific, it's very different.

RS: Different environment, but the same risks.

SI: You came under fire in both theaters, but in the Atlantic, it was more distant.

RS: Yes, this was hand to hand you encountered trouble in the Pacific.

SI: Was the Japanese Air Force or Navy ever a threat?

RS: Oh, yes. The Zeros were strafing us when they could find us, but through the jungles, were very thick, you know, and they couldn't see us all; maybe ten or twelve patrols went out at one time in different areas. Yes, the Zeros were active and they were *kamikaze*, too. They were committing suicide. If they spotted some of our ships at sea, they dived on them.

SI: Did you ever witness a *kamikaze* attack?

RS: Only once and that was for a short duration because they missed our ship most of the times. They'd come in … and go by us and then flop in the water, you know, but, anyway, no, I saw one day of *kamikaze*, coming from Guam to the island, that's when I saw them, to Truk Island. [As] a matter-of-fact there's a picture in here where they were looking for that plane that was, one of the planes that got shot down. I have a picture of that here somewhere, here. They were looking for the downed plane. They were out there in the water. These are shots of our tents and what not on the islands after we were established for a while.

MM: When you were on Guam was combat still taking place?

SI: Were there enemy troops on Guam when you were there?

RS: No. Not on Guam. It was only when we left there on the troopship, … anyway, then we went down the rope ladders to the LCIs landing craft. Guam had already been taken, as far as I know, by our troops, or our Marines.

SI: Which wave did you go on Truk?

RS: On Truk, probably the second wave. The first one was all on the beach, you know, and we fired behind the line there, and you know, from our ships, and got the resistance down so that we could move in with our trucks. We took jeeps and troop carriers and those mobile rigs.

SI: Was it entirely a Navy/Marine operation or were there Army troops?

RS: There was no Army there.

SI: How did the Marines and the Navy work together?

RS: All right, you might think, "There was a little rivalry there," but, no, we had complete cooperation from these guys, you know. … Here, we were with a Jap prisoner. That's how tall they were then, but, anyway, no, the cooperation was great. I can say nothing bad about the Marine Corps.

SI: How many prisoners, Japanese prisoners, did you see?

RS: We had quite a bit. We took two … shiploads out of Truk Island. The Japanese resistance was pretty heavy there, because they were in tunnels in the ground, and once we shooed them out of there, they came out with their hands up. They were hungry and everything else. I guess their lead forces were out of the islands before, even before they left.

SI: I've read that the Japanese soldiers were very fierce, but if they became POWs they become very cooperative.

RS: That's right. They did. It's not like our Death March out of, I forget where the … it was in the Philippines, or some place, the Death March, where the Japs were pretty rough on the POWs there. We didn't want to be captured, I'll tell you.

SI: Was there a time when you thought you might be captured or …

RS: Well, the only time I don't remember anything is when I passed out. I don't know how close they were, or anything else, but they overran our position then, so, they passed me.

SI: You were living out in the field with the Marines, right?

RS: Yes, right at these tents. That's it, right in those. We established that, let's say, after two-and-a-half weeks.

SI: Okay.

RS: Okay. The other was, it was pup tents, okay, but we established those tents after two-and-a-half weeks on the island.

SI: Were you eating Marine rations and that sort of thing?

RS: Oh, yes. Well, C rations. We ate ground up turkey and all that out of that, but it was good. I liked it.

SI: Do you feel you were well supplied with food, ammunition, and all that?

RS: Yes, we were. We were well supplied with ammo and everything else. On this situation, we were. I don't know how they did in the other areas of war over there. [As] a matter-of-fact, the radio that we had, communications were all service. We didn't hear any music, or anything, from anywhere …

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SI: I want to ask one other question about the Atlantic Theater, the Mediterranean. You came under attack a number of times.

RS: Yes.

SI: Did your ship ever suffer any casualties?

RS: No, … oddly enough you should ask that. The only damage we had on our ship from enemy was the falling flak from our own guns on the deck. [As] a matter-of-fact I may have a piece of it at home, shrapnel, that fell on my feet, but, anyway, that's the only damage we sustained on those ships. We saw a lot, but we didn't have any problem. They didn't select us for some reason, I don't know, but, no, in the Mediterranean that was a rough deal. We heard that there were 444 ships sunk. That's a lot of men and a lot of ships lost in that and that fifteen hundred, Swedish ship, troop carrier that was sunk, and I don't know how many survivors they had from that, but they had other troop ships hit, too, but not that badly.

SI: Did you ever pick up any survivors from any ships?

RS: No, we didn't. … Our destroyers and what not were picking up survivors, I know that, because they came into Sicily, too, with the survivors. We didn't have occasion to pick anybody up, no.

SI: You were in the Navy, but the things you did were kind of untraditional, with the armed guard and working with the Marines. How was your, what kind of command structure were you under with your officers, and so forth? Or were you pretty much left to your own devices?

RS: Yes, we had our own commander, our own lieutenant, let's say, that instructed us in Pacific. In the Merchant Marine here, the captains were captain of the ship and the operation of it, but

when they're under enemy attack and everything, the armed guard took over the ship. So, you know, our authority on the Merchant Marine ship, on the Maritime, the captain, it was his ship until we were under fire, then it became our ship, and we instructed the Merchant Marine were trained a little bit on antiaircraft and what not. They were the firemen if we got hit, they would put out the fire. When we had the collision, the Merchant Marine watered down the black powder as it's going over the side, you know, so we didn't do that. Let's see, I'm trying to remember the complement of Navy that we had. We had two five-inch .50s, one in the forward and one after tubs and then we had six .60-mm machine guns on each side of the superstructure. I guess, you know, I never thought about it, how many people did we have on the ship complement? I'd say about thirty. We had thirty. The Merchant Marine, of course, they ran the ship, they had probably about forty or fifty.

SI: Were the Merchant Mariners from all over the world or were they mostly Americans? The Merchant Marine crews, were they mostly Americans or were they from all over?

RS: Well, there was a Canadian on our ship. I know he worked with me on the radio. I was the only radioman from the Navy on that ship or those ships, but the Canadian worked when I wasn't, in other words, he went in there when I was manning the gun, or whatever, and he also did, I was doing twelve-hour shifts in the radio room, and he worked the other twelve. He was from Alberta, Canada. I can't remember his name. Anyway, we got along fine together. [laughter]

SI: The Merchant Marines they had contracts, they could get off the ship when it pulled in the port if they wanted to. Did that ever happen?

RS: Yes, that's right. Did anybody leave the ship? No, … except the two that got arrested in England. They got off the ship. I don't know what they did on the ship that they were masquerading as … Merchant Marines. [As] a matter-of-fact, we had to stand guard in our radio shack with a .45 in our hand watching anybody that went in the helmsman's quarters because of what had happened is they turned the wheel, the helmsman's wheel, and locked it. And that's why we went this way. … They weren't aware of it. They just had no control at that time. They didn't know what happened. It could have been disastrous if we had gotten hit in the engine room part of the ship, but they hit right and forward of that on the second hold instead of the third or fourth. That could have been real sabotage. Like the terrorists today [9/11], you don't know where they're going to hit next.

SI: I think you're the only person I've ever interviewed who saw both *kamikaze* attacks and those glider attacks the Germans used, which I always thought were very similar. You're the only person I've ever interviewed that witnessed both a *kamikaze* attack and a glider attack via the radio control. I always thought they were very similar tactics.

RS: No, the glider bomb, you saw it launched, but then it was radioed right to the target, right down the stack it would go on the ship. So, I guess they used all of their compliment to sink 444 ships in that convoy, but that was a major convoy destruction that I saw. [As] a matter-of-fact, I recall that there were no ships that I saw, in convoy, in the Atlantic lost. We saw subs and we had alarms for subs, but the sub chasers went right after them and either bombed them out of the

water or, what's the name of that, you know, it's a Y gun and it shoots two things in the air and they come down on the water and they're anti-subs?

SI: Depth charge?

RS: Depth charge, that's what it is, depth charges. I didn't see any ship sunk in our convoy across the Atlantic and back, but we had plenty of warnings and then you saw these little flocks of birds that would skim right on the top of the water that you would shoot at once in a while. You just don't know whether it's a periscope, or what it is. … We had destroyer escorts, we had cruisers as our escort, half cruisers they called them, and then we had British escorts, too. They'd pick us up mid-Atlantic and take us into England.

SI: From what I've been told, life in the service is a lot of routine and boredom, and then every once in a while there is intense fear and panic right during an attack. Was that your experience?

RS: I didn't notice it. As we often said to one another, "Life wasn't worth a plug nickel," in the service, at that time, but, you know, you just took it one day at a time. "What's today going to bring?" You don't know. … The *kamikaze* attack that we had, there was a hole, the sky was black with Zeros and they each picked a place to go, except our ship, which was a troop carrier going to the islands. They hit the heavy cruisers, and the battleships, and what not, that were in that group, the fleet, going to the islands. They tried to get them and the oil tankers. … Some of them hit, but most of them missed.

MM: What island were you heading to when the *kamikazes* attacked?

RS: That was Truk Island, that's the biggest island in the Carolines. I guess they were based. They were based in the islands north of us because they had to be in order to get fuel they didn't have that much fuel on them. They had the light bomber, though, and I think it was called the Betty, I'm not sure.

SI: Yes.

RS: And that bomber bombed the ships, okay? One came close to us and missed [laughter], I'm thankful to say, otherwise, I might not be here.

SI: How did you view both the Germans and the Japanese as the enemy? What was your opinion of them as the enemy?

RS: I would say they're both ruthless and I'd say the Japanese were a little more; they outnumbered us in many cases. The Germans, I had no way of telling the numbers except the aircraft in the air but on the islands, I saw Japanese, all right, like the one that we have the picture of here. We took him out of a cave, but I'd say the Japanese were a little more ruthless than the Germans. You know what? I think half of them were doped up. You know, they were under, they had that drink before they took off in the airplanes, whatever it was called, and I think half of them were doped. I can't prove it, but I'd say that, I would guess that. The

Germans, I don't know how strict they were with the liquor. There is a name for the stuff that the Japanese used to drink.

SI: Sake?

RS: Yes, that's it.

SI: In either the Atlantic or the Pacific did you ever encounter anybody who just sort of cracked under the pressure, any mental casualties?

RS: Oh, yes. They went to the outgoing units, Section 8s. Yes, I saw that, especially those that were actually, encountered violence. … I knew a couple of them that went that way and I was just told they were in OGU, outgoing unit, Section 8, but, I don't know really why, except in action, but, you know, it depends. Now, I had a little confrontation with a Japanese in a pup tent, may have said that in the write up. You live with that and it's tough. If I had too many more of those encounters I think I would have gone to the OGU, too, because it's a case of survival. At the … [expense] of sounding corny, either kill or be killed. There was no ifs ands or buts about that. You just did what you had to do.

SI: It must have been difficult to lose people.

RS: Oh, sure, sure, absolutely. Why, you know, you grow, after you're in a service, I think military training is good, and after you're in there and you've served I think you become sort of complacent. You know, nothing is that serious anymore. You kind of take everything with a grain of salt and you kind of live a sedated life, I think, after experiences like that, because it's like a nightmare. It was a chapter on my life and it's over.

SI: Did you have trouble putting it behind you?

RS: Yes, the first two or three years, yes. Well, I had a brother that served on the Battleship *Texas* and he was in the invasion of Normandy and they got hit with shore fire in their helmsmen's quarters and he said, "Boy, I'll tell you, I jumped out of my skin. I was pretty close to where it happened," but he's still alive. He lives in Springfield yet, but, anyway, he's eighty. He's got me by a year-and-a-half. He went down to Texas to see the *Texas* recently, too, but, anyway, that was a memorable situation. He said, "They only hit us once and that was it." He remembers that vividly.

SI: How often were you able to write to your brothers, your sisters, your mom?

RS: Probably not often enough. I still have some of their letters at home. My oldest sister, who kind of took over when my mother passed away, got letters that I wrote her, like a one page thing, real fast. I had left a map at home saying, you know, that was numbered, "this is where I am, number eight or number seven." So, they kind of had an idea where I was, at the time. The only time I couldn't get mail off the ship was that sixty-five days from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, … but I tried to write. I love to receive letters. [As] a matter-of-fact, they sent me a carton of Herbert Tarryton cigarettes that were made then. I got them, they were all dried out.

When you twisted the thing, they all fell out, but, anyway, I got that package, that care package, they called it. I was in Great Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal at that time. We were anchored there, a layover, but, anyway, we tried to communicate as often as we could, I guess. They were getting the stories from their radio, too, like what was happening, where, and so on.

SI: How was morale in your unit the 21st Regiment? How was the morale?

RS: How was my morale?

SI: Both your own and the unit.

RS: Good. You know, it didn't matter what I spent eight hours doing. It really didn't, whether I was there or here if the truth were known, I didn't realize the significance of the dangers. I didn't. You know, you're young and you're wild and you kind of stick your neck out and so on, but I think youth is great in the service because they know no fear. I didn't realize my fears until I was out of the service, if you want to know the truth. What I was going through, and what I went through, I didn't put any significance on them when I was in. You know, they say the best fighter pilots are youth because they know no fear and here I am, talking to two youths, but it's true. You know no fear. You only get afraid when you get older, I think.

SI: After Truk, you went to Moen Island?

RS: Yes, Moen Island.

SI: What were your duties there? What happened there? You weren't doing the same duty, were you?

RS: Yes, in the Moen Island, yes,

SI: How long was that campaign? How long did that campaign last?

RS: About the same, about six weeks, a month and a half.

MM: Were there Japanese soldiers on the island?

RS: Oh, yes, but they were a lot less resistant there than on Truk because, I don't know, just weren't that many there. You know, how spread out can you be? and, I guess, their numbers were dwindling then because was it another year after that, or a year and a half that the war was over. I had forty-six points. I was on Guam and they said, "You're going to Lido Beach, New York, you're being discharged." Forty-six points, all gathered through experiences, and what not.

SI: How soon after V-J Day was that?

RS: How soon after?

SI: After V-J Day, were you discharged?

RS: I was discharged in January 1946. V-J Day was in 1945 sometime, wasn't it?

MM: Were you relieved to be discharged at that time? Were you happy to leave the service?

RS: Happy? Oh, yes. Yes, they wanted me to ship over and wanted to give me a warrant officer commission, but I said, "No, no way, I'm out. I'm going," and that's what I did. Lido Beach, that was good because, actually I came into Treasure Island, California and they flew me by NATS, Naval Air Transport to Lido Beach in New York and I was discharged.

SI: Do you remember where you were when you heard that the war was over?

RS: When the war was over? I think I might have been in California because I thought I had pictures of that, you know, "The war has ended," or something like that. I think I may even have the papers home that I brought home.

SI: Did you bring home any souvenirs, anything like that?

RS: Yes, yes, I did. I brought home a Japanese rifle, an Italian pistol, a German Luger, and I brought some things from India, like ivory, and stuff like that. I brought an Egyptian Fez home because I was in Egypt. Let's see, what else did I bring? I guess, that was pretty much it, but, anyway, I've since gotten rid of those things. I don't have the Japanese rifle. [As] a matter-of-fact, coming into California a lot of the Japanese rifles were thrown over the side. … I have a certificate home from Intelligence, which said I was permitted to have these things. We went into caves and took them.

SI: Did you have to actually clear out caves, yourself? When you were in combat did you actually go and clear out caves or did somebody else do that?

RS: Oh, I went in the caves, yes. I didn't go in and scour them. I just went in there and looked around, you know, that kind of thing, but that's when I was on patrol. They used flamethrowers to get them out of there. Then I went into the cave and looked around to see what it was. They had radio equipment in there, and stuff like that. I have my bug at home that I used with the radio. Do you know what a bug is? It's a transmitter thing that you go like this and the thing goes down here and it sends out dots and dashes. I still have it.

SI: It's like a key?

RS: Yes, it's a key. The only thing is that instead a manual case, sending Morse code, you send it by bug. It goes quickly, like twice as fast as a hand key. I have a hand key home, too, I think, somewhere. Those days are gone forever.

SI: You said there were natives on the islands. Were there natives in Truk and all?

RS: Yes, there were, these were the natives, they had. They used to carry things on their head all the time.

MM: Did you interact with them? Were you able to speak with the natives of the island?

RS: No. This was a group picture that the guy that took all these pictures of me, and everything else, this is me, he took that. I don't know, I don't even know who he was. One of these guys, I think, Marines. You know, I meant to bring my discharge papers and to show that I was dispatched to (PacSet?) or something, Pacific Fleet, you know. I meant to bring that in to show you where I'd been, but, anyway, it shows the ships on the discharge and everything else, Camp Elliot, Marine base out on the California coast, San Diego.

SI: When you were in the Pacific were things like disease and trench foot a problem?

RS: No. No, I'll tell you why. I got yellow fever and cholera shots, when I came back off a leave, ten days, in Armed Guard Center in New York. I got the yellow fever and cholera shots. When they put us on the train going out to California, guess what? Our medical records didn't catch up yet, so I got the yellow fever and cholera shots, again, on both arms. They hurt, but, anyway, I got out to California and guess what, our medical records hadn't come yet, behind us, so, I got the yellow fever and cholera shots again. So, I think we were immune to getting those diseases so I didn't see any disease. I didn't see any disease over there either with these people. You know, their clothing was kind of given to them, I guess, but I didn't see any disease. We saw plenty of things that they caught on the islands. In other words, when I went around the island the first thing they did was get a sample of this bug, that bug, and all bugs, you know, and they put them on a bulletin board. So, we saw green pythons. We saw rats the size of possums here, oh, geez. I slept in a Quonset hut on Guam Island and, when I was there, and the rats used to come across and you would have your arm out of your bunk and they'd come across you. That was interesting. That's funny, it came back to me now. I hadn't remembered that, but, anyway, they got a sample of everything. They had disease pretty much controlled, I think, because they found either contaminated bugs, or whatever, lizards, chameleons, all that kind of stuff.

MM: Did you ever have to go for medical treatment while you were in the service? Did you ever have to receive medical treatment when you were in the service?

RS: No. The only thing is a medic or when I passed out, he was waking me up, you know, and he gave me my first cigarette. [laughter] I haven't smoked for twelve years now, but, anyway, that cigarette tasted awful good then and he said, "The salt pill," you know. I said, "I hadn't had one, what's that?" So, he gave me two salt pills, which kind of made the recovery then. That was the only medical treatment that I had. Oh, I got from, I had cat fever, you know, from shots. I developed a fever from that. That's the only thing that I ever got. Oh, I had on the outside of my joints, I had a fungus from the jungle on the outside of my knees, and everything and they treated me with a blue ointment of some kind and got rid of it, but that's the only thing that I ever got when I was in.

SI: Do you remember hearing about the atomic bombs?

RS: Yes. Yes, I do. When they said, "We won the war," and that was because of the atomic bombs in Nagasaki and what was the other place? The two cities that they bombed? Truman made the decision and that was good because that ended the war in Japan. It saved a lot of lives, I think, even though it took a lot of lives where the bombs fell. In Germany, we just beat them, outright. That was just a lost war. They just lost the war. We went on Normandy and went into Paris and then across the Maginot Line into Germany with the Russians. That was the end of that. You know, we had thirteen million, and that was a lot of people. I don't know how many we lost, I think a million-and-a-half. How many of the other countries lost, I don't know, but it has to have been astronomical. So, that's my story. I think I don't have anything.

SI: We just want to ask you about the GI Bill. How did you use the GI Bill?

RS: When I got out of the service, I applied for the GI Bill and I went to New York University under it and got a degree. [As] a matter-of-fact, I went to the Wise Building down in Newark, where they were holding evening and day classes, and that's where I went. Most of the courses I took there, the Wise Building in Newark, but, I used it then and I also used the GI Bill to get my first mortgage. I had a GI mortgage. I think I spent fifteen thousand dollars for the house. I got a GI mortgage for twelve, but, anyway, that was it. I used the Veterans Administration now for healthcare. I had open-heart surgery in 1990. They replaced some valves and I'm on (Cumadin), which is a blood thinner, so, I have to go there every week and a half for blood tests. But, anyway, I liked the idea that they were charging two dollars for medicine, unlike today, which if you go into a pharmacy, you get broke, you come out with nothing except the medicine. Well, anyway, that's what I use, the VA.

MM: Do you go to any of the veteran's reunions to meet fellow service members?

SI: Do you ever have any reunions with people that you served with during the war?

RS: Only in the Legion, the American Legion. I'm a life member of that and I joined it in 1946, so that's in the Post 228 in Springfield, New Jersey. I'm a member of that. So, that's the only place I meet fellow servicemen that are left. Not many living any more, you know.

SI: Do you think you would have gone to college if not for the GI Bill?

RS: I'm sorry.

SI: If you hadn't gone in the service and gotten the GI Bill do you think you would have gone to college anyway?

RS: Well, I was one of seven kids in our family, kind of tough on my father to pay for that. So, taking advantage of the GI Bill was easy as, you know, one-two-three, and that's why I took advantage of it. I would do it again. GI Bill is very important to me. [As] a matter-of-fact, I became an executive vice president, secretary of the board of directors; I was a director in a bank when I finally retired and that was through my degrees and what not that I got. My son went to Rutgers here. He graduated with a BA, business administration, and now he works for a big

furniture company in the Midwest. I can't remember what year he graduated here, but he's now in his forties. I have a daughter forty-five, another daughter that works here is forty-two.

MM: Did any of your kids join the military?

RS: No. They haven't been asked to join or they haven't joined involuntarily. You know, this war in Iraq that may develop, I don't know, but I think they would become exempt anyway from the service because they're too old, maybe, I don't know. That war in Iraq could be a small thing, I think, but, anyway, the draft, I'm 4-F in the draft, I guess, I don't know, or exempt, so, I have a card that shows that, but, anyway, I'd like to get rid of this guy, [Osama] Bin Laden. I'd sure like to see them get him and this Saddam Hussein, he's another character, but, no, in answer to your question, none, I think, he maybe … could be drafted. I think he might be. He has two kids and he's forty-three years old. No, I don't think he would be. He's in good health and he developed muscles like his dad, you know. [laughter]

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

RS: I don't think so. This kind of explains it pretty much in capsule form. I don't know if there's anything else you want of me. I don't think I can elaborate on what I said.

SI: Okay, well, thank you very much.

RS: Okay.

SI: This will conclude the interview.

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

Reviewed by Adam Pollak 10/12/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/13/04
Reviewed by Russell Schramm 10/15/04