

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK
AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD STANLEY
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. Richard Stanley on October 5, 2001, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. We would like to thank you for taking the time to sit for this interview. Could you tell us where and when you were born?

RS: I was born in Philadelphia in 1914, ... May the 15th.

SH: Has your family always lived in the Philadelphia area?

RS: Yes, more or less. We originally lived in ... West Philadelphia and we moved to Lansdowne, (Delercantly?) suburb.

SH: What was your father's occupation?

RS: He ... had a baking business, wholesale cake.

SH: Did you work in his bakery?

RS: Yeah. I worked there for about ten years, after I got out of school in '32, and then, ... I got drafted in '41, in July, and so, I had to quit my job. [laughter] ... We were inducted in Philadelphia and we went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I took basic training down there, all summer, and, October 17th, I believe it was, we shipped out. We boarded a train at Belvoir, and wound up on the West Coast, and got on the troop ship, the *St.-Mihiel*, I believe I got a picture of it, [laughter] and, about a week later, we were in Hawaii, and we moved up to Schofield Barracks, where our barracks had already been built by the Third Engineers. [laughter] Then, they didn't have any civilian labor.

SH: What were your duties?

RS: I was a cook and, later on, a mess sergeant. So, we moved into those barracks. It was pretty rough then. It was (by the harbor?), red dust, and we got pretty well settled in.

SH: Was Hawaii the paradise you believed it would be?

RS: Oh, yeah. It was swell. We finally got passes and went down to Honolulu and Waikiki; [you] saw those pictures there, on the beach. [laughter] We had a lot of fun, up until the "Day of Infamy." [laughter] That Saturday night, usually, we all went out to the local pub, or PX, and drank beer. I got home pretty late and went to sleep. ... The next thing I knew, in the morning, the barracks started shaking. The bombs were going off. [laughter] They were bombing Wheeler Field, which is right next to Schofield. That was their main objective, up there. They did fly through us and strafed us. Guys were out in the chow line and, luckily, nobody got hurt. They hit the water tank, put a couple of holes in that. [laughter] I guess they thought it was gas, but, when that barracks started shaking, I woke up. I thought, "Well, it's just a maneuver. I'm going back to sleep again." It was Sunday morning and it started shaking again. I got up, went

upstairs, went out on the landing there, they had a little landing, ... temporary barracks, (maybe you've seen them?). I stood out there, here comes a plane, right down through. I thought, "Gee, they put red circles on our planes, [laughter] [to] make it more realistic," and I waved at the guy. He was right over the barracks. He was headed for Wheeler Field. So, we thought it was a maneuver at first, but, then, it came over the radio, they said, "This is an actual attack. Get ready." [laughter] So, we fell out. The supply sergeant was in Honolulu and the supply room was locked; no guns, no ammunition, nothing. [laughter] ... We finally broke the door down. We got our rifles and ammunition, got all ready, and sat around that day. Of course, the radio was on all the time. It said they were bombing Pearl Harbor, and the *Arizona* was sunk, and the *Utah* turned over, and ... four or five battleships were hit.

SH: Were you listening to the reports as the attack was underway?

RS: We were hearing it on the radio. Pearl Harbor was down the coast, right next to Honolulu. We were twenty miles up, Schofield [was] on a (sort of a?) plateau. ... Then, we heard about Wheeler Field and Hickam Field getting hit hard. Incidentally, a friend of mine had his leg blown off at Hickam Field. He was from Lansdowne. So, all that day, we didn't know what was going on, whether they were going to invade or what, and we dug trenches and foxholes. At night, all hell broke loose. They shot everything, cows, they hit ... one of our own planes, and he came down right near us, raising bloody hell, [laughter] cussing. He was okay, though. So, they told us to, "Put on your khakis." Usually, we wore fatigues, you know, the green fatigues. They said, "The Japs are rumored to have landed and they're wearing a green uniform with a red circle on the breast." So, of course, that was a false alert. I think they did sink a small submarine off the coast. So, as I said, things were all up in the air. It took awhile to get settled down, and then, we finally got settled down, and then, the Midway battle happened ... a couple of months later, I believe.

SH: What was the mission of your unit in Hawaii before Pearl Harbor?

RS: The 34th Engineer Regiment, we were supposed to build gun emplacements, things like that, airfields. ...

SH: When did you arrive in Hawaii?

RS: ... Middle of October '41.

SH: Had the engineers completed any of their tasks before December 7th?

RS: Well, we were working, yeah. We were working every day. Of course, I was in the mess hall. I was cooking, see.

SH: Do you remember discussing the war in Europe or the Japanese military build-up?

RS: No, no. ... Of course, the Japanese, they were in China, but, they hit Hawaii mainly to damage the ships, put them out of commission. The whole Pacific fleet was in the harbor. On a

Sunday morning, everybody was asleep. [laughter] It was a complete surprise. I think they did shoot down a few planes, but, not many.

SH: What did you do for the next two days?

RS: We were, more or less, on guard. We didn't know what to expect. As I said, they thought [there were] rumors of the landings, but, they had no troops, just carriers.

SH: Did you continue to cook as usual?

RS: Oh, yes. We went right along. Of course, there's blackouts and all kinds of stuff like that at night, but, everything went along pretty much the same.

SH: How long were you stationed at Schofield Barracks?

RS: Well, we stayed there ... for about six months, I believe, and then, we shipped out of there to Christmas Island. It's a small island, two degrees above the Equator. [You have] probably heard of it, and we stayed there about six months, and then, I was in another outfit, the 110th Engineers, no, the 267th, I think it was, and we built airfields down there. They stripped the coral out of the ocean and laid it on the ground, ... made it like concrete, and then, from there, we went to (Canton?) Island, a small island below the Equator, not too far. We stayed there six months, same thing, airstrips. ... After that, we came back to Hawaii, back to Schofield, and stayed there, and I got a furlough home, a thirty-day leave. They said I'd been overseas two-and-a-half years and I got a leave. I came back to Philadelphia, stayed thirty days, and went back to Fort (Long?), Washington, and shipped out of there, went back to Schofield. From there, we got alerted to go to the Philippines. ... The Philippines had already been invaded, in October, I believe, in '44. So, we got on a ship out of Honolulu and proceeded to the Philippines, but, we laid off, two or three times, on different islands out there, waiting for convoys, and it took me eighty days to get from Honolulu to the Philippines, eighty days, almost three months, in an old, rotten troop ship, an old merchant ship, had civilians, bed bugs. Everybody slept up on deck. [laughter]

SH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

RS: No, I don't remember the name of it, now, but, it was rough. We had stew and all canned stuff.

SH: Did you cook on board the ship?

RS: No, I didn't; the civilian cooks [did that]. It was strictly a civilian ship, Merchant Marine. We finally got to the Philippines and everything was pretty peaceful there. ... That was in Leyte, yeah. ... So, we stayed on Leyte and worked around there and, ... in the Spring of '45, we got notice to pack up and go to Okinawa. We got on a ship. We arrived on Okinawa on April the 1st, Easter Sunday, 1945, and invaded the island, and it was hell there, I'll tell you. The Japanese had these suicide planes. They were diving on the ships, kamikazes; you've heard of [them].

You may have heard this before, [laughter] but, I was aboard ship, and I could see this Jap plane come in and hit this other ship beside us. It just hit her on the side, didn't do much damage. They said, "You stay on the ship and supervise the unloading." I says, "I want to get off of this ship." [laughter] Next thing, I got off and rejoined my outfit. They were already there, the first day. They got on the first day. So, we didn't hit any opposition on the beach. The Japs had all gone north and dug in caves and stuff. So, we set up camp and proceeded and the artillery was going on all the time, back and forth, our artillery, theirs. ... That was continuous for weeks. They dropped a delayed action bomb in our area and it went off right around breakfast time. ... A big piece of rock and stuff came right through the tent. I wasn't over there. I was stuck in my other tent. The cooks were in there, preparing the hot cakes, [and] this big rock came right down through the tent, and fragments of coral sprinkled in the pancakes. [laughter] So, just one guy was hurt. He later died. He was hit in the back with a rock and that was the only casualty there, in our whole outfit, except, one time, we'd moved; we'd keep moving all the time. We were in a spot up near the frontline and a friend of mine, big guy, about six-foot tall, he says, "Come on up here. ... Take a look at what's going on." I said, "Okay." We went up. I said, "I've seen enough." So, I went back to the tent, and, later on, I hear he got shot right through the eye, killed in an instant, and I was standing right next to him. Another time, ... I was sitting outside this tent [that] had this big hole right in front of it, like a manhole, and one of my friends had adopted this monkey. He was sitting right with me. He knew the mess sarge. I was the mess sergeant then and he knew that I might give him something to eat. [laughter] So, all of a sudden, "Zoom," something went right by, and I jumped in the hole, he jumped in after me, on top. I figured that was a pretty close call then. It must have been a piece of shrapnel or something. I don't know where it came from. I had pretty close shaves, but, I came out, didn't get a scratch. So, let's see, August, we heard that they had dropped the bomb at Nagasaki, Hiroshima, two of them. I said, "Oh, boy, the war is gonna be over in a couple of weeks." Damn if it was. Then, we got ready, came back to the States.

SH: You did not have to go to Japan as part of the occupation forces.

RS: No. The war was over in Europe.

SH: Where were you when you heard that the war in Europe was over?

RS: ... Was that '45? Yeah, I must have been on Okinawa. See, I got to Okinawa [in] April '45. I think the war was over ... May 8th, '45, and I was in Okinawa, then.

SH: Were there any celebrations on V-E Day?

RS: Oh, yeah. Everybody was glad to hear that, but, the guys in Europe were being shipped over to the Pacific, and they were on their way, but, then, the war was over in Japan. So, they didn't have to serve.

SH: How often did you get mail from home?

RS: We got mail ... fairly often. It was the V-mail, you know, those little sheets. That's what we sent out. We got mail fairly regularly. Of course, ... after the landings, it took awhile. So, that was it, came home and got discharged.

SH: What happened to your brothers? You showed us a letter that the Secretary of War sent to your mother concerning the fact that she had four sons serving in the Army.

RS: ... Yeah, well, my brother, Eddie, he was next to me, he was in the Navy, and he was lucky. He was stationed at the Pentagon, well, not the Pentagon then, but, in DC, ... the Bureau of Personnel, but, my other two brothers, Bobby and George, George was sent to the Philippines. He was in Manila, under General MacArthur there. I don't think he saw much fighting then. I think the war in the Philippines was over by then, but, Bobby, he was sent to Okinawa, and he was in an artillery unit there, not far from me, and he came over one day with a (Paris?) bag full of beer. [laughter] I ran into him. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Did your engineering unit ever interact with any Navy, Army Air Force, or Marine Corps personnel?

RS: Well, when we were down in the islands, Canton and Christmas, the Seabees were there, too, and we did have a little contact with that ... Navy construction outfit. They were good.

SI: You trained at Fort Belvoir. Did you go through formal basic training or were you immediately placed into the mess service?

RS: ... Engineer training. Yeah, Fort Belvoir was an engineer camp, School of Engineers, everything was engineers there. Of course, we did have infantry training, ... some. Of course, we were on the range and all that stuff, bayonet and all. They gave us the infantry training, but, mostly engineers, construction.

SH: Did you ever believe that you might be sent to Europe?

RS: I don't know. I didn't have any idea whether I would or not. Of course, there was no war then; war didn't start 'til '41. Then, he declared war on Japan and Germany. ... After I got discharged, I fooled around, had sort of a job, and I decided to go back in the Army. I enlisted in the Reserve, but, I got discharged at Indian Town Gap. ... They said, "You won't be called up or anything in case of a national emergency, but, if you ever want to go back in the service, you could go back in grade, in the rank you have now." I was a staff sergeant then. It was a pretty good rank. So, a couple of years later, I said, "Well, the hell with it." I went back and reenlisted, ... stayed twenty-two years. [laughter] I came out as a master sergeant.

SH: Did you serve in Korea?

RS: No. I was lucky. I was in Fort Lee, as an instructor in baking. I'd taken a ... master baker's course, so, they kept me there, made me an instructor, instruct officers, and that's where I made master sergeant, and they came along, they said, "Well, half you guys are going to Korea and half are going to Germany. The ones who were in the Pacific in the Second World War go to Europe; European fellows, Korea." [laughter] I went to Germany, which was swell. It was occupation. Cigarettes were a dollar a carton. You could sell them to the Germans. They'd work for you, do your housework, be a maid, everything, and they gave us a house, maid, fireman. [laughter]

WH: Where were you stationed?

RS: Right outside of Stuttgart, it's called Kaiserslautern. You ever heard of it?

SI: I have.

RS: We had a great time in Germany. My wife came over with my son, the big guy you just saw.

SH: Where did you meet your wife?

RS: Cape May, New Jersey, the day after I got out of the service in '45. We were married at Fort Lee ... in '48, [by] the chaplain.

SH: Was she a New Jersey girl?

RS: No, she lived in Germantown, right around here. [laughter]

SH: To return to your tour in Hawaii, did you ever go down to Pearl Harbor to see what it looked like?

RS: Yeah, we went down.

SH: How soon after the attack did you see it?

RS: Oh, about, maybe, a month later. It was still in bad shape. The *Arizona* got a bomb right in the magazine, where all the powder and shells are, and it blew up, went right down, and most everybody in it was drowned, still there. They never attempted to raise it or anything. Some of the ships were turned over on the side. They were later righted. Most of the ships were fixed up, sent back to the coast and fixed up. The *Arizona* is still there, you know, the memorial there. ... Things got pretty quiet. The tap room we were in was right off the base, it was called, what the hell was his name? Some Japanese owned it, and they suspected him of directing the planes in over the island [with] the short-wave radio in his basement, and, later on, I think that was disproved, but, they locked him up anyway.

SH: What did you do for entertainment before and after Pearl Harbor? Did that change?

RS: Oh, yeah. Of course, we couldn't go anywhere for awhile. We were restricted. Before the war, we'd go out ... to Honolulu, Waikiki. There's a little town right next to it called (Waimalu?). We'd go in there.

SH: Did you interact much with native Hawaiians?

RS: Not much, no.

SH: Was that true also of your stints on Christmas and Canton Islands?

RS: There was nobody on there. They shipped them all out. That was a coconut plantation, Christmas Island; I think Lever Brothers had [a facility] for soap. Canton Island ... had hardly anything on it, wonderful fishing. We used to fish, get big red snapper. I got ahold of a Moray eel. [laughter] It took me an hour to get it up, but, I cut the line in a hurry. [laughter] It was a terrible looking thing. Good fishing, drink beer, when we had it, bought the Red Cross man's whiskey. He got a bottle every month and we'd buy it from him. He'd sell it to us. ... [laughter]

SH: What did the Red Cross do in your area?

RS: Well, ... anything they needed. What they'd usually do, I guess, I never gave a job (to them?), but, they were there in case you wanted to leave, or something with your family, you know, emergencies. You always went there first to get a furlough and they would approve it. Yeah, there was not much to do there. ...

SH: How many men were stationed on the island at any one time?

RS: Not too many, no, two or three thousand, maybe. It was a small island, ... quite a ways from Honolulu. I ran into, on Canton, Mrs. Roosevelt. I met her at Canton Island. That used to be a stop on the way to Australia. She was on her way to Australia at the time, and she stopped over to refuel, and she went around and saw everybody, shook hands, ... very nice woman. That's the only famous person I saw. [laughter]

SH: How would you describe your relationship with your officers?

RS: The usual. We respected them and ... we got along pretty well. They were okay. I never particularly cared for them, but ... [laughter]

SH: Where were the men of your unit from? Were they from one particular area or were they from all over the nation?

RS: ... Well, the 34th Engineers mostly [were from] around this area, 'cause we were made up here, went to Indian Town Gap, first, and we were formed in a group, mostly around the Philadelphia area. Later on, the 110th, the guys were from [the] Middle-West, different sort of group. ...

SH: How did you travel to the West Coast?

RS: Well, we went by train from Fort Belvoir, after we'd finished basic. We loaded up a thousand of us, I think, on this train, went to New Orleans, up through Texas, LA, San Francisco, and that's where we left.

SH: What was that cross-country trip like?

RS: It was a lot of fun. They'd let us out, once in awhile. We chased rabbits around the prairie. [laughter] It was sort boring, but, we did see a lot of the country.

SH: What did you do to entertain yourself?

RS: On the train? played cards.

SH: Were you a good card player?

RS: Well, you played pinochle, [laughter] fair. I got along all right. The ship ... was sort of boring, [laughter] get up on deck and look over the rail. Fortunately, I never got seasick. ... Usually, a lot of guys get seasick. [I] could eat.

SI: Did you ever see a USO show?

RS: Oh, yeah, ... [at] Okinawa. I think Bob Hope was out there, big crowd. Of course, that was when things settled down; a few shows, once in awhile. ... I think they mostly went to Europe. It was a hell of a trip out there. [laughter] ...

SI: How well supplied was your outfit? Did you always have enough food?

RS: Yeah. ... Of course, the food in the islands was salted hams, canned, nothing fresh. Some of the officers went out and caught a bunch of fish. We ate that. We did have frozen meat, steaks, roasts, and stuff like that, but, they shipped some potatoes down and they all went rotten. It's hot, you know, on the Equator, and you had to be careful of the sun, wore those hats, and I kept covered most of the time. Beaches were pretty rocky. We didn't do much swimming and they had these eels and all kinds of stuff. [laughter] ... We didn't do so bad. That's about it, I guess.

SI: Did you ever trade with the Navy or the Army Air Force?

RS: Sometimes for beer and whiskey, different outfits. One outfit, I think it was all black men, you know, they unloaded the ships, and they dropped a couple cases of whisky off the ship and sold it, [laughter] and we used to go up there and buy booze, fifty dollars a bottle, [laughter] when we could get it. I had a couple of the cooks that liked their booze a lot, you know. Of course, I was no amateur, [laughter] but, we'd buy beer for a dollar a bottle, whisky for forty-five, fifty dollars a bottle. In the Philippines, they had this rice whiskey, terrible stuff. We'd buy

that, too; anything that had alcohol. I had a first sergeant, he drank Listerine. He had a whole footlocker full of Listerine. One day, ... we were down on the beach and he came down from Schofield to see us. ... On the way back, he drove into a parked dump truck. He was killed instantly. We had some characters. [laughter] One of my cooks, he stayed drunk most of the time, when he could get it. They busted him, and then, later on, in Okinawa, he made mess sergeant, made it all back. He was a good cook when he was sober, but, drunk, he'd lay around in his cot. He wouldn't even get out of his cot. [laughter]

SH: Did you ever see anyone who suffered from battle fatigue?

RS: No, not in my outfit. The only thing we had was the shelling and that continuous, overhead (go on and Canada?). You get used to that, too.

SH: During your tour in the Philippines, did you ever see any of the natives?

RS: Oh, yeah. We saw a lot of them. They used to line up in the chow line, and, if we had anything left over, we'd give [it to] them, and, of course, our troops dumped a lot stuff in the garbage, you know. They'd go in the garbage cans and clean them out, right after the meal. It was good food; it was just leftovers. [laughter] They liked us very much, the Filipinos. We were the liberators. Leyte was the first invasion, then, they went up to Manila later, but, ... while we were on Leyte, they had that big sea battle, you know, and we didn't know whether they were going to come in or not, but, the Navy beat them off. That was a big one. ... Of course, Okinawa, that was eighty days, I believe, and the Japanese kept retreating. They'd get in the caves. Finally, they went to the end of the island. They were jumping off the cliff. They wouldn't surrender. You had to go in the caves with the flame-throwers, burn them up. One day, I saw a bunch of them laying around. They were all black. They were dead, of course. This one GI had a pair of pliers. He's pulling the gold out of their teeth, pull their teeth out. "(Stink?)," I said, "how the hell can you do that?" "It's gold," he said, "It's worth money." Of course, during the war, gold was forbidden, wasn't it, 'til after the war?

SH: Did you ever see any prisoners of war?

RS: Prisoners? Yeah, a few of them. Those Japanese didn't surrender, you know, very few of them. That was against their code. They committed hara-kiri, fell on their sword, fanatics. Yeah, they were pretty tough, but, they killed ... a bunch of them. Of course, then, they dropped the bomb.

SH: Were any of your brothers wounded?

RS: ... They blew up his [Bobby's] outfit. He's in the artillery. He got out in his underwear. He was lucky, too. You never knew when a shell would come in.

SI: How much of a turnover rate was there in your unit?

RS: ... Not in our outfit. See, we didn't lose but a few. We lost four or five. One night, they were underneath a tree and a shell hit the tree and blew them up. This was a different company. Our company, I only remember losing one or two men, two, I think; we're damn lucky.

SH: Please take us through the process of establishing your mess facility and the camp as a whole in a new locations, which you did quite often during the war.

RS: Yeah, well, we came ashore in the assault boats, mostly; in Okinawa, we did; in the Philippines, I just walked, no assault then. The war was practically over at Leyte. We'd set up tents and we had these portable stoves, ... have you ever seen them? gasoline units. It looked like a tall, tin box, they were aluminum, and the unit would slide underneath, and they had trays with griddles. You'd pump them up and light them, and that's what we cooked on, those gasoline stoves, and we found an oven in a ditch, somebody threw [it] in a ditch on Okinawa, and we set that up, and we were baking bread in that. Of course, there was no bread, you know; there was crackers and stuff like that. ... We took the Spam, a lot of Spam, take a Spam tin, make a pan out of it, cut it out, put the dough in there, shove it in the oven, made nice bread. I'd scout around for flour, trade for flour, always had flour. A lot of the units didn't use much, you see, maybe for pancakes.

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RS: A lot of them had had all their teeth taken out, [laughter] and they said, "Well, Stan, that steak was pretty good. We gummed it." Steak and occasional fish, fries, beer; you'd get an allotment of beer every so often, ... two or three bottles. We'd trade around. Some of the guys didn't drink at all, you know, and we'd buy their beer off them. [laughter] ... We made our own fun, you know.

SI: Since you were stationed in mostly tropical locales, did disease and fungus pose a problem?

RS: No. ... We took these pills for malaria and stuff like that. Our face all turned yellow, you know, [laughter] some salt tablets and stuff like that. The heat was very much of a problem. Daytime was very hot. Night wasn't so bad. Of course, you were on an island, you get the breeze off there.

SH: Did you always cook all three meals or did you serve cold meals at times?

RS: We usually had hot meals, yeah, 'cause we had the stoves, you know. The combat troops, we were combat engineers, supposedly, but, we were never on the frontline. The infantry did all the fighting, and they ate rations, you know, that they carried with them, usually cold, but, we always had full meals, practically.

SH: Did any of the infantrymen come off the line and eat in your mess?

RS: No, we never saw them. We didn't want to see them. [laughter] We didn't want to get tangled up with them.

SH: What did you do for special holidays, like Thanksgiving and Christmas?

RS: ... They shipped us turkeys, frozen turkeys, and thawed them out in the garbage can, heated them up with ... hot water and cook them. We had Thanksgiving, Christmas turkeys and that's about it. ... They were pretty good. Of course, down in the islands, shipping, they couldn't ship much stuff, no fresh stuff.

SH: Do you think that the men appreciated their cooks?

RS: Oh, yeah. [laughter] Yeah, they liked to eat, you know. They worked hard, engineers.

SH: Were you in charge of men on KP duty?

RS: Oh, yeah. I was the mess sergeant.

SH: How does that work?

RS: Well, they would assign certain guys to the kitchen, to clean up and do KP, and we would tell them what to do. After awhile, they knew what to do, wasn't much to it. We had these big gasoline drums outside, half drums, full of water, and we'd light a fire underneath them, and they would wash the mess kits in that, ... one soapy water, one rinse water, another rinse; they'd go along washing mess kits that way. We burned all our garbage or buried it.

SH: Did the insect problem ever make your job as a cook more difficult?

RS: Well, flies were pretty bad on Canton Island, I remember, yeah, if you left anything around, but, we usually buried everything or burned it, and this kept them down pretty well. We had sprays and stuff. ... Nobody got sick or anything.

SH: What were your duties when moving to a new location?

RS: Well, we broke everything down, folded up the tents and all the equipment, the cooking equipment. Those stoves, you could put everything right inside the stove, and it wasn't too hard, just tents and the cooking stuff, and they'd load that on.

SH: Was it in the Philippines that you first witnessed the natives eating your leftovers?

RS: Yeah, the first place, yeah. Canton and Christmas, there weren't any natives. They had been on the plantations. I don't know what they had on Canton. [laughter] There wasn't much there, but, ... it was a coral atoll, island. There was a rumor, I don't know how true it was, that a Jap submarine shelled that island. I think it was before we got there.

SH: Do you remember the day that President Roosevelt died?

RS: Yeah.

SH: How did people react?

RS: It was sort of a shock, yeah. He was so well-liked that it was a shock, but, you got over it. He was a leader. He was elected four times, wasn't he?

SH: How did you meet up with your brother on Okinawa?

RS: Well, he came over to our camp. Somehow, I guess he got a letter from my mother, I think, saying I was there, so, he looked me up. It was easy to find out ... where we were. So, he drove up in a jeep with the beer. I met him in Hawaii, too. He was in Hawaii when I was there.

SH: Before or after the war?

RS: After ... things had settled down. I met him in Honolulu, Waikiki. We had steaks. Yeah, twice I saw him, Bobby, yeah. "Okie-nawa," he used to call it. I never saw George. He's in Manila; that's quite a ways from Leyte and Luzon.

SH: What did the engineers do on Okinawa? Did they build airfields?

RS: Airfields, yeah. I never really did find out what they were doing. The big airfield was at (Kadena?). That's where we landed. ... They did a lot of work. They built mess halls, too. I saw them build a whole mess hall, concrete floor and everything. They were good. This engineer outfit I was with in Canton and Christmas was a construction outfit, ... volunteers from Hawaii. After the war, they formed a special outfit, construction, and a lot of guys volunteered who were working as civilians [in] Pearl Harbor and different parts of Hawaii, and they were expert carpenters, and bricklayers, cement men, like that, and they made them all master sergeants, a lot of them. So, they joined up, patriotic I guess. That's when we went to Canton, Christmas, first, then, Canton. You know, they could do anything. Those guys, yeah, they were good. As I say, they built this whole mess hall from the bottom up, screened in, benches, tables, concrete floors.

SH: Were they native Hawaiians?

RS: No, they were Americans working over there. The only Hawaiian I ever saw was, ... no, this guy was from that little island down in the Pacific, Samoa, great, big guy, wore a fourteen-inch shoe. ... They did have one of the outfits that was all-Hawaiian and, later on, they went to Germany and made quite a name for themselves. I think that senator, what's his name? [Inouye], lost an arm over there. ... See, after the war, they interned all the Japanese in California, but, not in Hawaii. ... They said they were loyal Americans, but, there wasn't any sabotage or anything.

SH: You mentioned that your baseball team went to the championships. What other forms of recreation did you guys come up with?

RS: Softball, that was about all. They had a softball team. ... I never played. I was too busy in the kitchen. That was an every day job in there, keeping the cooks sober, cooking yourself, if you had to, [laughter] breakfast, dinner and supper.

SH: Did you maintain contact with any of them?

RS: I wrote to one guy, the guy that stayed drunk all the time. He was from Oregon, (Klamath Falls?). I never got a reply from him. I don't know what happened. I lost contact with all of them. One guy, from Lansdowne, he was in the engineers with us. I saw him after the war. That's about it. ... I was glad to get out of it, finally.

SH: When you traveled by ship, did you ever encounter any bad weather?

RS: Well, on the way over to Hawaii, it was pretty calm, but, that trip from Leyte to Okinawa, we ran into a typhoon, and everybody was sick. I was sick, well, not too sick. I didn't really get sick, but, a lot of guys couldn't get out of the bunk, and we were ... going to invade an island. [laughter] They got better as soon as we got there, scared out of their wits, I guess.

SH: Were you assigned to a battle station? What were your duties on board the ship?

RS: Nothing, didn't do anything. The Navy had the transport ... to Okinawa from Leyte and that was run okay. The food was good, clean, bunks were clean, but, that was the Navy. It was an APA, attack transport.

SH: Do you remember the ship's name?

RS: No, I don't remember. ... It must have had a name, but, I don't remember. It was strictly an attack ship for the invasion. When you got off the ship, the ship was ... just off the shore. You had to climb down these nets, you've seen these nets, climb down that, and get in a small boat, a landing boat, and go ashore. That puts you just about on the shore. Sometimes, you got a little wet.

SH: How long did you have to wait for your equipment to catch up with you?

RS: Not long. It came right in with us. Everything came right along with us. So, we got set-up quick. It wasn't hard to set it up. You had your gasoline and everything.

SH: When you looked out across the water, were there a lot of ships with you?

RS: Yeah. It was loaded, the whole harbor, all kinds of ships, and they shelled the island before we went in quite a bit, but, it didn't do much good. They were all holed up in those caves, you know. Okinawa was a different [battle], valleys, up and down, up and down. They'd get in the valley, you couldn't hit them. The only way would be a direct hit. The big city, Naha, you probably read about it, they had all this trouble, you know, Marines, rapes and stuff; Naha was destroyed, but, it was rebuilt fast after the war, Okinawans.

SH: Did you pick up any souvenirs?

RS: I went into one of these caves and they had a lot of dinnerware in there, plates and stuff. I got a few of them. [laughter] That's about all.

SH: How much exploring did you do? Did you mostly stay in camp?

RS: We stayed pretty close to camp, yeah, 'cause you didn't know what was out there, you know. We were outside one time, and this Japanese was up in a tree, he's throwing rocks at us. One of the guys pulled out his rifle and shot him, shot him right in the head, ... right then. He was just a kid, though. It's sort of a shame, you know. ... He was by himself. He'd been eating sugarcane. His hands were all brown, you know, practically starving, but, he was throwing rocks at us.

SH: Did you send home any other souvenirs, besides the dinnerware?

RS: I don't know whether I shipped some of that home or not. I don't remember what I did with it. ... Most of the souvenirs, I guess, were picked up by the infantry, 'cause they were right there when they dropped them, [laughter] bayonets and swords and things.

SH: Did you travel in convoy?

RS: Yeah. We had convoys all the way up to Okinawa and convoys from Eniwetok, Ulithi, to the Philippines. That's why we stayed so long in ... the islands, to get a convoy together, 'cause they wouldn't leave without a convoy. ... Some of the times, it took quite a while to form one, get one together.

SH: You stayed on board for the entire time.

RS: Oh, yeah. We stayed on board. We went on the island a couple of times, get some beer, but, that was eighty days on one ship, and it was infested. When I got to the Philippines, I had bites all over my back. My back was a wreck. ...

SH: Did you talk with any of the Merchant Marines?

RS: I didn't have anything to do with that; probably didn't like us. It was a dirty ship; food was lousy. We didn't have any contact. I stayed away from officers. We stayed away from them. [laughter]

SH: Did you ever have any interaction with the chaplain?

RS: Yeah, once in a while, we'd see the chaplain. He's the guy we bought the whiskey from.

SH: You bought the whiskey from him.

RS: Yeah. He'd get a bottle every month. I think he paid three dollars for them, but, he was pretty generous. He'd give [them to] us [for] what he paid for them. We didn't have to give him fifty bucks. [laughter]

SH: Did you have the same chaplain throughout the war?

RS: He was a Red Cross chaplain. Yeah, he wasn't an Army chaplain, Red Cross. That's the guy we bought the booze off. ... I always liked the Red Cross.

SH: Did you ever go to any church services?

RS: No, never had any. ...

SH: What kind of celebrations broke out when you found out that the Japanese had agreed to surrender?

RS: Well, everybody was glad, of course, and they had the point system, and I had a lot of points, so, I was one of the first ones to get out. The others had to stay awhile. ... I told them, I said, "The war's gonna be over, atomic bomb."

SH: Was there a celebration?

RS: Well, everybody, yeah, they were glad. They got drunk. Everybody had a good time. It was a big relief, you know, after all that time, almost four years.

SH: From Okinawa, you returned to ...

RS: ... The coast.

SH: San Francisco? Washington State?

RS: Washington, yeah, Fort (Lauten?), I believe it is. We left from Fort (Lauten?) after the furlough. ... No, we came back to Frisco from Okinawa, flew back, ... B-24. Yeah, they flew us home, a lot of furlough, too.

SH: Where did the plane stop on the way back from Okinawa?

RS: San Francisco. It was only 2000 miles. It's a non-stop flight. There's nowhere to stop between San Francisco and Honolulu.

SH: Where were you stationed when the war ended?

RS: Okinawa.

SH: You flew from Okinawa ...

RS: ... To San Francisco

SH: Non-stop?

RS: Oh, yeah. It's not far, 2000 miles.

SH: What kind of reception awaited you in San Francisco?

RS: Not too much. I was just by myself, see. ...

SH: What did you do at that point?

RS: Well, I went right home from San Francisco.

SH: By train?

RS: No, I flew.

SH: Again?

RS: Yeah. I landed down here at the airport and took a taxi home. [laughter] That was it.

SH: How soon afterwards did your brothers return home?

RS: ... They came home a little later. I was the first one home. Yeah, my mother was sure glad to see me. [laughter]

SH: I bet.

RS: Yeah, she was lucky everybody came home. Nobody got hurt. ...

SH: Did you ever visit your brother who lived in Washington?

RS: No, I never went down there. He got discharged shortly afterwards, and everybody came home, and we had the pictures made, and had a good time, yeah.

SH: After your thirty-day furlough, where did you report to? Where were you discharged?

RS: Indian Town Gap. See, I had to go up there. ... I didn't get out for about a month. I had my teeth fixed by the dentist, and then, I got officially discharged. As I say, I joined the Reserve, inactive Reserve.

SH: Did you consider using the GI Bill?

RS: No. I could have gone back to college, but, I don't know, I was sort of fed up with school, and the war and everything else, so, I didn't bother with the GI Bill, but, my brothers used it. They were in college when the war started. Of course, Eddie, he was out. He was working in an insurance company then, but, those two brothers used their GI Bill at Williams, which was a big help.

SH: Would you like to share any other memories before we conclude the interview?

RS: No, I think I've covered just about everything that I can think of. [laughter]

SH: What did you think of the patriotism in the country at that time?

RS: ... At that time, it was high. It wasn't like Vietnam. Vietnam was terrible. They hated the soldiers, but, we were kings then, we were tops. Everywhere you went, you got glad-handed. While I was on leave, when I wore a uniform, well, I had to wear a uniform, everybody would wave at us. ... Those poor guys from Vietnam had a tough time.

SH: Did any of your sons serve in Vietnam?

RS: No. I just got one son, him, the guy you met, and he was in college at the time. So, he was exempt. He was lucky, too. Anybody [who] had to go down there, I felt sorry for them. Now, I was in a combat outfit before I got discharged in '64, I retired, but, my outfit went to Vietnam in the '60s, later on, I think '65, '66, and I think they had a rough time there. ... I met one guy when I got discharged the first time. I was at Fort Lee. The sergeant that I was working with, they sent him to Korea, and ... he told them, "I'm a food service supervisor." They said, "You're a sergeant. You're in the infantry now, buddy. Here's your rifle, let's go." He got hit pretty badly, in the head, and he was in bad shape. He says, "Hell, ... they put me right in the frontline. I'm no mess sergeant or supervisor. You're combat infantry." I told one guy, one time, "I sure was lucky I didn't get to Korea." He got mad; he got real mad. I says, "Well, that's the roll of the dice." If I'd gone to Korea, I might have ... gotten it over there. They had a terrible time, winter, cold, Chinese come the hell out.

SH: What was your favorite duty station?

RS: Fort Lee, I guess; well, Fort Lewis; well, I was at the Presidio in San Francisco. I guess that was the favorite, yeah. Right outside the gate was San Francisco. You walk right out the gate and that's some town. You ever been out there? You know it. [laughter] I had a lot of fun out there.

SH: We have met your son, Richard. Do you have any other children?

RS: No.

SH: Okay. Thank you very much.

RS: You're welcome, sure.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/9/02

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 1/13/02

Reviewed by Richard Stanley 2/02