RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT L. STRAUSS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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This begins an interview with Robert Strauss on September 28, 1994 at Jamesburg, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and Margret Thompson.

Kurt Piehler: I'd like to begin by talking a little bit about your parents.

Robert Strauss: Okay.

KP: And I read in an article about your family and family's firm, that your father came back from World War I and he could only find a job in a cigar factory.

RS: That's true, that's true, the General Cigar Company.

KP: And that was in New Brunswick?

RS: That was in New Brunswick. It's now an apartment building down from Robert Wood Johnson Hospital. ... They converted the building recently.

KP: Had your father volunteered for the First World War?

RS: He was drafted. He did not volunteer. And he had worked for the General Cigar Company before he was drafted, but he went back there after his discharge to get his job back and they told him, they didn't have a job for him. The only job they had for him was sweeping the floor.

KP: What had been his position before the war?

RS: I'm not sure what his position had been.

KP: But it wasn't.

RS: I think he was in the shipping department actually. If I can remember what he said.

KP: Had your father seen combat in the First World War?

RS: No, he did not. He didn't get out of the country. He was drafted and at the point that he was being trained the war ended. So back he came.

KP: Your family is an old time New Brunswick family.

RS: They are. They were here during the Civil War.

KP: And do you know why the family settled in New Brunswick? What drew them to the city?
RS: No, I don't. I know on my mother's side that my great- grandfather came to the United States from Wertheim, Bavaria and they settled in Englishtown. They were tanners and soap manufacturers and fertilizer manufacturers. What they did really was dispose of farm animals when they died. They used to go out with their horses and wagons and pick up farm animals and

bring them back. They'd skin them and save the hides for tanning and they'd render the fat for soap and take the bones and make fertilizers out of them like bonemeal. It was a very messy business, but this is what they did. ... Why they left Englishtown and came to New Brunswick I'm not sure, but I suspect the smell and the need for water. They needed water so they came to New Brunswick and their first factory in New Brunswick to the best of my knowledge was where the New Brunswick Public Library is now and at that place they made saddles and bridles for the Union Army as well as doing the other things they did in their business.

The smells that emanated from their plant in New Brunswick were so awful, as the city moved towards them they made them move out. The next place they moved to was what they called Mile Run Brook which is now known as Somerset Street. There's a brook that runs through there and where there's a depression in the road there's a limousine service there too and that building is where they moved a second time. Each time they moved they burned out. There was no such thing as fire insurance in that kind of business so each time they burned out they went broke. When that one burned out, they were at a location where the Robert Wood Johnson Hospital is now. The street no longer exists but there was a street that ran along the side of the hospital. The name fails me but that they were there. Finally they ended up in East Brunswick where the tremendous group of building that AT&T is in now and the Hilton Hotel... That whole piece of land they bought. And they burned out there too and ... they didn't try to rebuild anymore. My grandfather was in business with his father. As I remember my grandfather he just collected hides from the slaughterhouses and salted them and sold them to tanneries. And he used to buy fertilizers and resell it to farmers. That's ... how that family went. On my father's side they came from Vienna and went to Providence, Rhode Island, from there they came to New York. My father was born in the Bronx. My mother was born in New Brunswick. My father's brother got a job with the General Cigar Company. The General Cigar Company were family friends and his brother was the general manager of the General Cigar Company, but apparently he didn't favor his brother as far as getting him a good job was concerned. ... That's how my father got with the General Cigar Company. When he came back from the war, he went to New York and learned the stationary business from some friends of the family. After he learned the stationery business he came back and opened up in New Brunswick. At that time in New Brunswick there was one great big dealer named W.R. Reed. They no longer exist. They were very much the only dealer in town and when my father came in and they thought he had some nerve.

KP: Oh really, he was the young upstart?

RS: Young upstart. He had some nerve coming in. And that's how we started.

KP: Your father at one point, I had read, had worked for the Spad Store Company.

RS: My father was very aggressive and very much up to date in everything that developed. First he set up a printing business in the basement. Then along came radio and my father got an Atwater Kent Agency. So he started selling radios. Now this was brand new. This was battery operated radio. This is not plug it in electric. And he was successful in that and then along came refrigeration and he got a Frigidaire Agency. So he ended up selling radio and refrigerators and that business grew so fast that he decided with three other people in New Brunswick who were in

that same business to form a new company. A combination that was Strauss, Pazimant, and Dunn. That was ... how the Spad stores came about. And there was also another partner named Andrew Eisler. They had a store on French Street and a store on Church Street. While he did that my father had his brother-in-law and an employee form another company called Office Equipment Company, but he wasn't very smart about how he did it. Also in all of this his brother who was general manager of the General Cigar Company was his partner because he provided the money that made the things go. Spad Stores went broke during 1929 and my father went to go in with Office Equipment Company, but the way he had set it up he only had a one-third interest in it. They had two-thirds so they voted that he couldn't come back in. That started fights and my father started a business for himself on Church Street. This is 1932, I'm talking about, the heart of the Depression which you may not recognize as being a terrible, dreadful time, but after Spad stores closed he did things like he worked for Eastman Dillon Company, not as a stock broker, but as a guy who wrote the stock quotations on the blackboard and so forth. He had a job like that. Then he decided to go back to the office supply business, financed by a brother-in-law.

KP: So in other words, you've had a very tight family in terms of businesses and really depending on family to help one another.

RS: Correct. The family was always close. The older brother who died before he was fifty or at age fifty died from cancer. He was really the one who held the family together although my father's mother lived with us until around 1926 or so when she died. I remember her sitting in our sun parlor which is a den today, but a sun parlor then. She had legs that were very swollen. She couldn't walk. I guess today they could cure that, but in those days they didn't know what did it or how to cure it, but that's what she died from. I don't know how or why. Nobody explained it to me. I was only six years old.

KP: You mentioned that your father went out on his own in the 1930's.

RS: [19]32.

KP: How rough were those early years?

RS: Oh, it was very rough. My mother worked with him. ... It was just the two of them. He used to go out calling on people trying to get us business. My mother stayed in the store. We did things during the Depression like we'd leave one light on in the store and when a customer came in we'd put on lights and when they walked out we put the lights out. That's what it was like to be in business during the Depression. I was in junior high school and after school I would walk down and help put merchandise away, mark the prices on it and put it away. I used to come down from school and I was starved. I used to get a nickel out of the cash register and go across the street to a place called Van Dyke Company which no longer exists. And their cookies used to be in circular tins, they used to let me go in and take as big a handful as I could get out of it for a nickel. I could get a lot of cookies out. I started working when I was twelve years old and I've been working ever since.

KP: I talked to someone whose father was a butcher in the Spotswood area and he said competition was very tough in terms of his father's business. He was constantly having to reduce prices because of the competition.

RS: Which business?

KP: It was a butcher shop. How did your father deal with it?

RS: Price competition wasn't really a problem in those days. It's a problem these days with places like Staples and Office Max. But in those days it was not a problem. In fact, we would give a discount which Reed would never do and Office Equipment Company wouldn't do. So we discounted. We gave small discounts. But we did discount. And that's how in a way we got some of the business that we got. Eventually when I graduated from Rutgers and came back out of the army I went out on the road. I started calling on Johnson & Johnson and Squibb and all the other industries in the area and eventually I got them as customers. Hard work, price was always a factor, but price was something we could handle. And as we grew prices became easier because we got to be bigger and we could command better prices. ... Not only did I do business with J&J, but all its subsidiaries like Ethicon and Ortho, Personal Product, etc. and Squibb of course was a tremendous customer. So we grew with them.

KP: In a sense you were able to maintain your price levels.

RS: We would cut our prices, but we were certainly able to generate new business by cutting our prices as opposed to these guys getting list price or catalog price all the time. The discounts got deeper and deeper as competition got tougher and tougher and the customers got bigger and bigger. But we were able to handle it.

KP: You grew up in New Brunswick and went to New Brunswick Public Schools.

RS: Yes.

KP: What were they like?

RS: Very good. We had a good school system. In those days it was an excellent school system. The only problem I ever had was after I graduated from New Brunswick High School and started at Rutgers in my first semester freshman year I had a terrible time. I was really doing poorly. And I watched the students, who were classmates of mine and actually fraternity brothers of mine and I watched them getting A's and B's when I was getting C's and D's and on the verge of failing courses and of course that translates to 3's and 4's. Their study habits were much better than mine and during the Christmas vacation I went back to New Brunswick High School and talked to the guidance counselor whose name was Helen Rainey and I told her New Brunswick High School was great and they gave me a good education, but they didn't teach me how to study for college and I thought that was something they should incorporate in their college preparatory courses and she thanked me for that. Whether they did it or not I don't know.

KP: When you say they did not teach you how to prepare for college, what was missing?

RS: They didn't teach me how to study. Therefore I wasn't studying the right way to get decent marks. It wasn't that I didn't try. I didn't know how. I didn't underline. I didn't highlight. I didn't take my notes correctly particularly highlighting and underlining, I don't think we had highlighters in those days-we had underlining. You'd go back and study and you highlighted by what you underlined not reading the whole chapter over again and so forth. This type of thing I didn't know how to do, but I learned it by watching these guys and what they did. And I learned it because I came close to flunking out of Rutgers ... freshman year and after that I did fine. I did fine in school. I wasn't at the top of the class, but I wasn't at the bottom either. I was somewhere in the middle, and I used to work. I worked the whole time I went to college. I would go back down to the store on Church Street and work. I had classes until twelve o'clock. I'd go down to the store from twelve to four. At four o'clock I'd go up to the gym and I'd swim, I was on the swimming team the four years I was in college. How the hell I did that I don't know, but I did it.

KP: When would you study?

RS: I studied at night. I used to study at the library all the time. I studied at the library or at home if I had to, but the best place to study was at the library and in those days the library was the building where the art museum is now.

KP: In talking to Carl Bosenberg he had mentioned he went to the New Brunswick High School from North Brunswick. What was it like to have people from such wide circle of communities?

RS: Well Carl and I have become good friends over the years because, you know, he ran a business as I did. He and I didn't run into each other at Rutgers much except I knew who he was, but he was at the Ag School and I was in the Economics Department. I was trying to forge an accounting course out of what Rutgers offered and they did not offer accounting as a major. I had to go to classes at night. That was another thing that helped me. I had courses at night in accounting ... and business law and so forth. I had to take .... [them] in order to pursue what I wanted a major in accounting. And I made it that way too.

Margret Thompson: Where did you take those classes?

RS: At Rutgers. At night, in the night school. In the extension if you want to call it that. But they gave accounting courses at night so I took the accounting courses at night. Then eventually by the time I was a junior they started to give accounting courses during the day. I had a professor named Robert Lamberton. He was pretty good. He knew what I wanted to do. He knew I wanted to be an accountant. He used to help me a lot.

KP: Did you want to go to Rutgers or did you want to go farther afield?

RS: I wanted to go to college and the only ... chance I had to go to college was to go to Rutgers. My father was just making ends meet. This is 1938 now when I started school. He was really just barely making a living. And it's tough, tough Depression. There's no trying to explain what

people were like or what business was like and what making money was like in [the] 1930s. It was just almost impossible. My tuition was fifty dollars a semester and my father struggled to give me the fifty dollars each semester. There were only two semesters. Each semester he gave me 50 dollars and I guess maybe with the fees it probably came to 60 dollars. And so he had to come up with that money each semester and he did and paid my way through. But, of course, I worked there every day too, and, of course, as I grew older I was a bigger contributor. In those days we depended an awful lot on the business we did at Christmas. Christmas was the savior as far as we were concerned. At the time we sold Christmas cards. We sold writing paper. We sold gifts. We brought in gift items, wrapping paper, Christmas gift wrapping and that type of thing. We used to concentrate on that. We were open every night until eleven o'clock. We stayed open between Christmas and Thanksgiving.

KP: Was it unusual to stay open that late?

RS: No everyone did.

KP: Everyone did.

RS: We were not the only ones. Except Reed. Reed didn't.

KP: How long did Reed stay in business? There seems to be a story.

RS: They faded out. I was not very friendly with them obviously. The father, W.R. Reed, became the president of the National Bank of New Jersey which is the white bank building on the corner of Church Street and George Street. Everybody in New Brunswick felt beholden to him to buy their office supplies from him, especially all the old-timers in New Brunswick. The businesses here were from his ilk. So it was a struggle, but I got a lot of them to buy from me, because I offered them a better price and we were delivering. I don't think he would deliver. I think you had to send out and pick it up from him. And we would make deliveries. Those are two things that set us apart.

KP: You went out on the road?

RS: I was out on the road almost from the day I got back from the army, I had a brother, that was where the sons came in and my brother died in 1977. But he came back out of the army. My father had a heart attack. When he walked into the post exchange in Camp Kilmer because he was on his way home the woman said, "Oh Mr. Strauss, how's your father?" And he said, "What do you mean how's my father?" "Well how did he do after his heart attack?" My brother knew nothing about it, because we couldn't contact him, because he was on his way home. He was on a boat. So he went out and over the fence and came home. He started at Rutgers too and when my father had a second heart attack and died he was in his sophomore year at Rutgers. He quit school and he started going out on the road, because I was the older brother and I was going to stay in, but about six weeks [later] he came to me and he said, "I can't go do what you do. Let me stay in and you go out." I said, "Great. I don't like this system." And we worked like that until he died. That was 1946 until 1977. And we worked so closely together. We never had an argument.

Well we did argue, once in a while, but never fought. Never had a fight. Never went home mad at each other. And as we grew and we moved into bigger and bigger places we used to have an office where both our desks were in the same office. In fact, the office up on Jersey Avenue that's there now, when we moved there he and I had a desk in the same office together. He died from a heart attack at the age of 52 in 1977. The biggest shock of my life. It broke my heart. I was in the warehouse and a cop came into the warehouse and tapped me on the shoulder and he said, "Bob, come with me." And I said, "I didn't do anything." And he said, "I know you didn't do anything. I need you". I said, "What for?" He said, "Come with me." So I walked with him and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Come on. I'm going to take you in my car." I said, "What for? Let me call my lawyer." He said, "No nothing like that. Your brother. Your brother had a heart attack on the way going to the bank and we have him in the hospital." So I rode down to the hospital with him, but he was already gone. And Norman Reitman who was Chairman of the Board of Governors at that time at Rutgers and had been our doctor and had taken care of my brother from the time he started practice. He had a board meeting at that minute and they went in and told him that my brother was in the hospital and he stopped the meeting and ran over to the hospital, but he couldn't save him. And that was it. That was a sad day.

MT: Your wife went to New Brunswick High School?

RS: We lived a block and a half away from each other, but we didn't know each other until after the war.

MT: I was going to ask if you were high school sweethearts.

RS: No. I was a little bit older. .... Her sisters introduced me to her. Her twin sisters. Introduced me to her the summer after I got out of the army at the New Jersey shore. We were engaged in October and married in March. In fact, I asked her on our second or third date if she would like to go to the Rutgers-Princeton football game with me. By that time we were engaged. They were days. They were days.

MT: She went to Syracuse?

RS: How do you know?

MT: Your wedding announcement.

KP: Some of the stuff you sent to Rutgers or they clip stuff out of the newspaper.

RS: Oh yeah, she went to Syracuse. In matter of fact, there is an interesting story-I hate to-I don't know how much time you have on that tape. We haven't even gotten into World War II yet. The first time Rutgers played Syracuse in the stadium here she said, "... We got to sit on the Syracuse side." I said, "I can't sit on that side." She said, "We got to." So we went over [and] ... sat on the Syracuse side and Syracuse drilled Rutgers. They were just killing us. So she said, "Let's go sit on the Rutgers side. I can't stand what's happening to Rutgers." So we walked around to the Rutgers side at halftime. From then on we've had seats on the Rutgers side, ever

since. I still have them. I'm right on the fifty yard line. Still am. Right in the new stadium. Right on the fifty. ... But that's interesting. And then none of our children went to either place. My oldest daughter went to Smith. My son and my younger daughter went to Ohio University. We have all five of our bachelor certificates framed and hanging in our second bedroom.

KP: College was very important to your parents. They wanted you to go.

RS: Absolutely. Absolutely. No question about it. My mother-in-law did. My father-in-law thought that sending girls to college was a waste of time. They were born to breed children, stay home and cook and sew. That was his attitude. My wife is one of five sisters. Four of her sisters went to Douglass in fact her one sister just retired as Director of the Associate Alumnae at Douglass College. That's Adelaide Zagoren. She's one of two twin sisters my wife has. She's one of the four sisters. But finally ... when my wife wanted to go she said, "I don't want to go to Douglass. I want to go away to school." And she finally managed to get them to let her go to Syracuse.

MT: When the war started how did Rutgers change?

RS: When the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor I was in the library studying, as I should be on a Sunday afternoon. Howie Crosby- name ring a bell with you? He was the Assistant Dean of Men at the time. He became Dean of Men and retired maybe ten years ago or so.

KP: Yes, in fact, last year I was in Crosby Hall, the residence hall. They named the hall after him.

RS: Yeah, okay. He was assistant dean of men then. He walked into the library. This is austere. Libraries were quiet. I don't know what it's like at the new one. I've only been in it a couple of times and I don't think of it as being a quiet place like this one. You could hear a pin drop at any time. Nobody talked. They had this big reading room on the first floor. That's basically what it was. The stacks were downstairs. And he walked in and he leaned up against the desk in the front and he said, "Gentlemen may I have your attention?" And you looked and there was Howie Crosby. He said, "I thought you should all know that the Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor at this moment." So I ... turned around to the guy next to me and said, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" That's a true story. So we all ran out and got to radios. Did Rutgers change? Absolutely. I graduated May tenth as compared to June. There were no finals or midterms. We used to have two weeks of exams. Two weeks off in December for exams and two weeks vacation and then start second semester in January. Exams had to be given during the last week or so of classes. You got your exams and then the second semester started immediately after the first semester in December and then went right on through. Our graduation was put up from June whatever third, tenth whatever it was to May tenth. We graduated May tenth. July third I was in the army. I was drafted.

KP: How did you feel about the coming of the war in the 1930's and early 1940s?

RS: The whole attitude of the country was different. ... The thought of not being in service was abhorrent to me. Just the thought that I was not in service like everybody else would have been a terrible thing. I would have felt awful. Even my father said, "War's for the old. Let the old guys go and kill each other off and you young guys stay here. They're killing all the best blood in the country. They're going off and being killed and us old guys are just hanging around here doing nothing. Let the old guys go fight this thing out. That's what his attitude was. ... We looked down on anybody who wasn't in the service ... whether it was legitimate or not legitimate. Lots of them were illegitimate. A lot of reasons were trumped up excuses that they got away with. I just couldn't have stood the thought of not being in the service, that's all. I wanted to be in. I was in. Most everyone I knew wanted to be in. Yet there was at least one guy in my class, my fraternity group at Rutgers that did not go into the service. I know of one. Everyone else went in.

KP: But in the 1930's there was considerable debate both at Rutgers and throughout the country about whether the United States should enter the war. In fact, I remember reading in the Targum President Clothier addressed the class and basically urged America not to get involved in the war.

RS: There were a lot of things that went on, as a history major it has to be of interest to you. Thing in America like America First, Father Coughlin, Huey Long. There were thumpers and ... well first of all because I am Jewish, Father Coughlin and Huey Long and their ilk were anti-Semitic of the first order. In their speeches and their talks they damned the Jews. And it was hard, it was difficult. And my father was, of course, I was very much impressed by my father who I considered to be a brilliant man. And he was. He was a great businessman. He just was fit to be tied by all of this. But they wanted to pull, no Monroe Doctrine, no nothing, America First that was it, America First. No foreign involvements. No getting involved with any other country. And it was a tremendous debate, tremendous debate going on at the time. Franklin Roosevelt when he tried (his lend-lease program) to send destroyers to England to help them. .... He encountered a lot of opposition all over. Not only amongst the people, but in Congress as well, about sending these destroyers to help the English and to help the Allied forces. There was just a great amount of anti-war feeling in the country up until December 7th.

KP: How do you think most of your classmates felt say in 1939, 1940, 1941 about what was going on in Europe?

RS: In a sense we all felt that we were going to be in it. Perhaps because we felt that Roosevelt had set a course to get us into the war. They played into his hands with Pearl Harbor. He knew that England was going to be overtaken and overrun if he didn't get in there and help them but he couldn't figure out how to do it. Because...there were terrible forces against him. Taft, I guess if I looked at a book and saw some of these names, the names would come back to me, the guys who opposed him so vigorously. It was tough. He had a tough time. We were, my family were, Roosevelt Democrats. We weren't necessarily Democratic, but we were Roosevelt-well my father was therefore we were Roosevelt Democrats. We felt that ... his policies and the things he stood for and the liberalism that he displayed as well satisfied my father. This is what he thought should be going on, should happen.

KP: Had your father always been a Democrat?

RS: No, he was a Republican.

KP: In the 1920s?

RS: In the 1920s. Absolutely. He became a Democrat on March 4, 1933 when Roosevelt was inaugurated and closed the banks. And I remember my father at ten o'clock every morning he'd go up to Woolworth's had a .... fountain in their store and he used to get a cup of coffee for a nickel. Every morning at ten o'clock he'd go get a cup of coffee. He came back that day or maybe it was the next day, ... and he said, "There's anarchy in the air. There's people standing around outside The People's Bank up there at the corner and they're shaking their fists in the air. They want the bank to open. They want their money." And when the banks did open they had a run on the banks and as my father said, "It's a blessing in disguise." People kept coming in wanting to buy steel boxes with locks on them. So he and I got into his car and we drove into New York and we loaded up the back of our car with steel boxes and came back and put them in our window and we were selling steel boxes with locks on them.

KP: Did any of the banks fail in New Brunswick?

RS: Yes, certainly did, including the one he had stock in. It was really a nasty thing. He had The Citizens National Bank in New Brunswick and his brother again was an officer or on the board of directors in the bank and had bought stock in it, so my father had bought stock in it. And when the bank closed, that bank, plus there was a Liberty Bank that closed. You're pushing me.

KP: Have you ever.....

RS: Those were two of the banks, The Citizens Bank and the Liberty Bank that closed in New Brunswick. And my father had the stock and the stock in those days was double indemnity. Double indemnity meant he not only lost his money in the stock, but he had to pay an equal amount again to the receiver of the bank so he was responsible for I don't know how many dollars. I don't think I could ever recall if he ever mentioned how much. But he had to pay out over a period of years an amount equal to the amount of money that he had put into the bank back to the receiver. That was double indemnity. That doesn't exist today, but he had it then and it took him a long while to pay that off, because he didn't make that kind of money. But ...., he did pay it off. Because he said a lot of guys went into bankruptcy and he wasn't going to go into bankruptcy and he paid it off. World War II helped, because I mentioned writing papers, things like portfolios you write letters for and writing paper, fountain pens, pens. Of course, you didn't have ball point pens. Ball point pens only started after World War II. But they were the big thing and he couldn't get all the fountain pens he wanted and I was a quartermaster supply officer in Seattle and I could get them, I had the responsibility for the post exchange material that went on the ships and I could have had all the fountain pens I wanted. He wouldn't let me buy them. He would not let me buy them and bring them home to him. Nothing wrong with it. Would not let me do it.

KP: Really, he just insisted that...

RS: Just insistent he would never, that was not [right], those were for the men in service and he didn't want me-I could have bought ten dollar pens for about a dollar and a half. He wouldn't let me do it. That was the kind of guy he was.

KP: So you were always impressed that he was very ethical?

RS: ... To a fault, to a fault, he was ethical. When the war started on December the 7th he went down and volunteered for what they called the state guard and this was December. This was Christmas time and we were busy. The busiest time of the year for us when we made our money. He went and he used to walk on the Raritan River Bridge which is now the Goodkind Bridge. He walked that bridge every night in the freezing cold, and it was one of the coldest winters we have ever had and he caught pneumonia doing it.

KP: And when he guarded the bridge, was he issued a rifle?

RS: He was issued a rifle. Well he had had military experience.

KP: Military experience.

RS: Yes, he was issued a rifle. So he'd walked his post on the bridge expecting that the Japanese or somebody to try and blow it up.

KP: You had done like everyone else, your mandatory ROTC.

RS: No I did not.

KP: You did not?

RS: I did not do ROTC. I had bad eyes and they didn't require me to take ROTC, because my eyes and also I was a swimmer. But whatever how those two things tied in, I don't know, but I was not required to take ROTC.

KP: Really?

RS: And I didn't. I could use the time instead to work and to swim and I did. ... That question was asked to me when I went before the board to go to OCS. How come you didn't take ROTC at Rutgers? But it was ... time, it meant time that I could work and work was very important.

MT: You mentioned you were Jewish.

RS: Yes.

MT: Did you resent having to go to chapel?

RS: No, no, no, you had to go anyway.

MT: Right. Did you resent that, being forced to go?

RS: No. Rutgers at that time was a Dutch Reformed school. It wasn't the University. Did they call it Rutgers University? Maybe. But it was a Dutch Reformed college and the president was a Dutch Reformed minister, the Dean of Men Fraser Metzger was a Dutch Reformed minister, and if you wanted to go to Rutgers this is what you did. It didn't bother me at all and it was very non-sectarian as far as chapel was concerned. I certainly wasn't by far the only Jewish student at Rutgers. There were many of us. In fact, there were three Jewish fraternities. ... It was completely non-sectarian. And if they said something at the end, I don't know, so let them say it. It didn't bother me. I didn't care.

KP: What did you think of Dean Metzger? Did you have any dealings with him?

RS: No, I was a good boy. He was pretty tough on the guys that weren't. ... I knew him and he knew me. But then again everybody knew everybody. We knew everybody by name and he did. There were only 1700 students in the college and he said, "Hello" to everybody on campus when you passed him. After staying along with it who's that guy? ... Eventually, you know, "Hi Pete. Hi Joe. How are you?" And everybody knew each other. ... So he knew everybody too. I had no problems with him. I don't know if I was ever in his office or not. I think one semester, I think I cut chapel one time too many, maybe I had to go up there, but other than that I don't think I had any problems, but I may have done that once. You were allowed three cuts a year or something and I think one semester I cut four times or something in one year. Whatever.

MT: Living at home while most people lived on campus did you find you missed out socially?

RS: Yeah, I was a townie as they called me and I found I missed a lot at college sure but I did belong to the Phi Epsilon Phi Fraternity who had a house on Mine Street. And, ... I went to the library at night I'd study and when I finished my homework I used to [go] over to the house. The members of my class that were in the fraternity I used to go to their rooms and we used to sit and b.s. Then ... every freshman had a duty. At ten o'clock at night you had to go around room by room and take a list of what they wanted from the fountain up at ... Doc Kaufman. There's a pharmacy on Mine Street and Easton Avenue. We used to go there to his fountain. And some guys would send you across the street to the Tavern on the Corner ...

KP: I know which tavern it is.

RS: The tavern across the street. What the hell is its name? Jeez, I was in there enough.

MT: Old Queens?

RS: It's not the same thing any more. Maybe it was Queens. I don't know anyway there was a tavern directly across the street from Kaufman's. The drugstore I think is still there.

KP: Yes, the tavern and the drugstore are still there.

RS: They're both still there. Okay. We used to go over there for the hamburgers and they were delicious hamburgers. The guys that had enough money would send us for hamburgers and we'd go get them. Not many guys had that much money.

KP: I also know that a lot of the people went to the Corner Tavern and Rutgers students are still going.

RS: Oh sure, a lot of guys. There were times when after the library guys said, "Come on, we're going to CT, come on with us." And I would go with them, and we walked out of the library so I went there plenty too. They didn't particularly care what your age was. None of them did. I don't know that they ever gave anybody any trouble. Certainly all the students were in the taverns all over the campus area.

KP: As a townie you grew up in New Brunswick, but so few of them went to Rutgers. What did you think of the town-gown relations being on both ends? How do you think Rutgers and the community interrelated in the 1930s and 1940s?

RS: The community loved the school. I don't know that there were hard feelings. I think the townspeople, from my experience, were all very supportive of Rutgers. Of course, I was supportive. My family was supportive. My father was a football lover. He used to go to Neilson Field once in a while. I used to go to the kids section, they had off of George Street there was a gate and ten minutes before a football game they'd let the kids in and they had seats there in the corner where the kids went and they made more noise than the whole place put together. I used to go see Rutgers football games through that gate ... from the time I was about twelve years old I guess, eleven or twelve. I used to take my brother with me.

KP: So you've gone to Rutgers football games even before you were a Rutgers student?

RS: Oh yeah, I saw Tranivich and Arnie Truexs and Jack Grossman, all the great heros. Not the guy in the 1909. I never saw Robeson. I never saw that guy who was an all American ...

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

.....Demarest and all the presidents that followed him were leaders of the community and they all looked up to them when they spoke and people liked them. It was a good feeling at least through World War II there was a good feeling. As far as I know there's still a good feeling. I don't know there's a bad feeling now, is there?

KP: No, I think there is less interaction than there used to be. I think the communities are more separate.

RS: That could be.

KP: But it is just my sense. That is the impression I get.

RS: Yes. The school has gotten so big as compared to what it was when I went. There's how many here at Rutgers? 28,[000] here in New Brunswick? Between New Brunswick and Piscataway something like twenty-eight thousand? I'm talking about 1700. So it's pretty difficult to compare the two. And the whole thing was different. Life was different. People were different. Women when they went [to] downtown New Brunswick wouldn't think of going downtown without putting on white gloves and wearing a hat. My mother wouldn't. She certainly would never have gone downtown without a hat and white gloves on. People did that. That's the way people were.

KP: There was a lot of hitchhiking. Some of the people in the class have said that they got to school by hitchhiking.

RS: That could be. I was never involved in that. I always somehow managed to have a car. My grandfather before he died, he died in 1938 when I started school had a car and I got that car and when that car failed I somehow or other managed to get another one. So I had a car the whole time I went to Rutgers. They were junk. ... There used to be parking behind the physics building next to Ballantine and I used to always get there so that I could back my car up onto the hill. There was a little hill .... so that I would open the door, put my foot out, ... start the car, put the car in gear and get started that way. It's a true story. I did that. Because I didn't run the car far enough from where I lived to school to keep a battery charged. But it's true. It's a true story. I used to do that. That was one car I had. Another car I had the drivers side door didn't open and it was a convertible, but it was ... a '34 Ford and I used to take nine or ten guys from the Phi Ep Fraternity house to the stadium because '38 was when the Rutgers stadium was dedicated and I was there. I used to take nine or ten guys in my car in the convertible with a rumble seat to the football game. They used to just pile on the back and pile on the fenders and stand on the running board and we'd get nine or ten guys and I'd drive them up to the football game. ... You wouldn't believe the things we did. And this car used to use oil. A quart of oil a week or something.

MT: Was it hard to see the old stadium go?

RS: No. I've been such a Rutgers football fanatic that I was glad to see them take it down. I could never understand why they never built it bigger or filled it in years ago, why they didn't fill in the end zone originally. I was not sorry to see it go at all. ... [In] my own opinion they didn't build it big enough. They weren't thinking. Because with the Big East being the success that it's going to be, if Rutgers ever qualifies {and they will}, to be one of the leaders in the Big East, ... forty-two thousand will be nothing. Like this coming Saturday, they've got standing room and the seats all filled and they have people all over town calling me and saying can you get me seats. And I even said this to Vy at the ticket office. I said, "Why don't you fill in the end zone with bleachers. Put another four or five thousand people in." I don't know. They're not going to do it. ...

KP: You decided to go into the army or did the army make that decision for you?

RS: The army made that decision, no, I tried to get into the navy and I couldn't get in because of my bite. I went to Whitehall Street and tried to get into the V-7 program, they called it. I tried to get into the navy and the navy wouldn't take me.

KP: Why the navy?

RS: Because they had this V-7 program that you could go into, they send you to school someplace and you'd come out as an ensign. You'd come out with a commission.

KP: Was there anything else that appealed to you about the navy?

RS: No. That was the basic reason. I wanted a commission. ... I didn't know anything about it. Navy, army, it didn't make that much of a difference as far as I was concerned. But the army got me without a commission.

KP: So you joined the army or the army found you.

RS: They drafted me.

KP: What did you hope to do in the army or what did you hope the army would do for you?

RS: Never gave it a thought. I went into the army to fight the Germans.

MT: Did your background in economics or your experience in your father's business cause you to go into the quartermasters?

RS: Yes, they are very much involved if you want to skip forward to that. When I was drafted and ... when you go to Fort Dix they give you these exams. They call it an AGCT. I got one of the highest marks they had ever given in the AGCT. I think it was over 140, I think it was around 141, 142. ... I only found this out later because I looked at my 201 file. ...

KP: After the war?

RS: No, after I got my commission, I got my file and I saw they had marked me for quartermaster. We were at Fort Dix three days, four days and they came into our tent at Fort Dix after we had just had inoculations and had been given uniforms and so forth and [they said,] "Pack up all stuff and come with me." "Where are we going?" "You've just been assigned to an outfit that's going overseas." So help me God. In fact, I got in on July 3rd and on July 4th they gave me the day off and I went home. They said, "You can go home." So I came back to New Brunswick on the Fourth of July. I was inducted on July 3rd. I went back on the 5th and it was on the 6th or 7th of July they came and said, "Pack your things, you're going." So they took this group of guys who had apparently been marked for quartermaster and took us to the other side of Fort Dix and put us in the barracks and told us, I can't give you the history of it, but told us we were assigned to the 389th Port Battalion Quartermaster. This port battalion loads ships. That's

what they do. We had no basic training. We had just about had our shots. No disciplinary lectures, none of that stuff. All we did was just go into the army. So in a couple of days they tried to give us indoctrination into the army. They had old sergeants who were old warhorses. These are guys [who] were rejects from the rest of the army. They were drunks. They were everything. Nobody else in the army wanted them and they all got shoved in this 389th Port Battalion. They were just a bunch of renegades and rejects from everywhere else in the army. These were the guys that were trying to give us lectures on discipline and military courtesy, particularly. ... How to close order drill and rifle drill and so forth, manual of arms I should say and it was only a day or two.

Then, they loaded us on a train and we were actually headed for Churchill Manitoba, but because the army travels on land grant railroads we went this way, and then this way, and then this way, and then this way, and this way, until finally we got to Chicago, which was three or four days to get to Chicago, maybe five. And then from Chicago we had to [go] into Canada. We went this way and this way and finally on the Canadian National. We eventually after seven or eight or nine days on the train sleeping two to a lower bunk which means two private sleeping head to foot and non-commissioned officers or guys who had pull with ... the first sergeant would sleep alone in the upper deck and we rode that way for eight or nine days and eating slop we had to take mess kit and ... stand in line and get to the kitchen car and they'd throw slop in there and you'd go back and eat it sitting in your seat. You can imagine what went on in this place for nine days with this bunch of guys. Bunch of hillbillies, a bunch of undisciplined guys that they'd probably taken out of the stockade to put in this outfit to fill it up because they were just filling it up. They took us out of Fort Dix because they needed a quota. They needed to send a full complement up to Canada and they didn't have any so they took the guys marked quartermaster out of the induction center. So here we were. ...This is July, about the fourteenth, I think, something like that and here we are in Churchill, Manitoba and you get out of this car and you look. What's here? ... It's on the Hudson Bay. There's a long warehouse. There's a grain elevator. Up in the hills the Eskimos, or the Indians, the Hudson Bay Company had a store. Hudson Bay Company is the big thing in Canada. And here we are. They put us in the warehouse. They give us a cot with mosquito netting because boy you need it up there. Mosquito netting around the cots. We get out and they issue us O3 Springfield Rifles covered with Cosmoline and said, "Clean them off." And we had to do that with hot water. And you know we looked at our watches finally after we started cleaning, it was three o'clock and we said, "Jeez, it's not afternoon, but the sun's still out." We realized we're up here above the Arctic Circle the sun isn't going to set. So we went on like this. They tried teaching us close order drill and manual of arms and so forth. We had to wear mosquito netting over our heads and mosquito gloves and the mosquitos got into our leggings and our belts. And it was terrible.

They issued us four blankets and a straw matress, it was straw in like a mattress cover, the width of a cot. We were in canvas cots. That's what we were sleeping in. So we used to take these blankets and layer them, you know four on the body, one, two, three, four, one this way, one this way, one this way, one this way, make a cocoon out of it. On the second layer you'd put the straw mattress. And you slept in that with your socks and your clothes, and then on top of that you probably put your makinaw, and maybe everything else you could steal. If you could steal a couple extra blankets you put them on too. And that's the way we slept. It was terrible. And you

had this heat going in the tent. And it was winterized because they had about a five foot high partition all the way around three sides of it. The fourth side was a doorway and a wooden floot which theoretically should be pretty good, but boy that canvas wasn't doing a good job. And it had to be open at the top to let the smoke out. So it was not the nice way of living and everything was frozen.

KP: So you had the old fashioned legging.

RS: We had old fashioned everything, because the army wasn't ready for us, for this thing. What we were sent up there for, and I'm going to cut you short, we were sent there to build airports and to load ships. We were to load ships and there was an engineering outfit that was up there that was to build an airport in Churchill and they were also going to build an airport on Baffin Island and ... they were thinking of flying pursuit airplanes over the North Pole to Russia and this was all done for that purpose. Nobody has ever publicized it. As far as I know it's no secret. I've never been told that it's a secret although when we were there we were a secret operation. We had an APO number and we couldn't talk about it and I couldn't tell them where I was or what we were doing. To my knowledge I've never seen any publicity on it. That's what we did.

KP: So you built an airfield.

RS: They built an airfield there, but that's not what we did. What we did was we were loading ships to send merchandise up to Baffin Island to build an airport up there and that's what the port battalion was sent to do. And I was going to be a checker in the port battalion. We were out unloading gasoline, 55 gallon drums of gasoline, in the swamps way out at the end of the railroad. A jeep pulled up and said, "Who's Strauss?" I said, "I'm Strauss." He said, "The major wants to see you." This is the part that I wanted you to get. So he takes me back and says, "How long you been in the army?" I said, "Two weeks." He said, "You better get back. You're soaking wet. You better change your uniform in a hurry." So he took me back to the tent and he waited while I put on a dry uniform. He drove me up to battalion headquarters which was in the one building that was at this place and I walked in and I went up to the first sergeant. ... I don't know who the hell I went to, but ... now I know who I went to, I went to the first sergeant and I told him that Major Shipe had sent for me. He said, "You're Strauss?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do you know how to report?" I said, "No." He said, "Well when you get to Major Shipe's desk you salute and say Private Strauss reporting as ordered, sir." So I did this and as I did that he stood up and said, "Hi, I'm Shipe Rutgers '29." Honest to God. This is exactly what happened to me. And there was another guy with me named Sam Siegal and he did the same thing to him. He said, "What are you doing in this God-forsaken place?" I said, "They took me out of the reception center and sent me here." He said, "Well, what did you study at Rutgers?" I said, "Accounting." He said, "Okay, I must need an accountant in the post exchange. You be my accountant in the post exchange." But when I got there they had already put a guy named Sosen as the accountant so I was an assistant to him. How he got there first I don't know, but he was there. And, so I stayed in the time we were at Hudson Bay in the PX every morning, every day, that was my duty. And it turned from mosquito netting time to starting to get cold. The most gorgeous thing was the Aurora Borealis in the fall. That is the most gorgeous thing you have ever seen in your life. But here it was over our head, these shooting yellow and purple and green

lights flying across the sky like you can't believe anything could be so beautiful. It brought tears to your eyes it was so gorgeous. So I saw that over my head for a month or two. ... And there I was. I was bookkeeper and it got cold and colder and all of a sudden it was so cold, we .... couldn't do anything to keep warm. We only had mackinaws. That's all the army had. They didn't have parkas yet. They didn't have snowboots. All we had were arctics. So we put two or three pairs of socks on, our shoes on, and a pair of arctics. Wore two pairs of pants and had winter underwear. They issued us winter underwear so we wore two pair of underwear and two pair of pants, stick that in the arctics and my mother sent me-I asked my mother for a muffler and she sent me a muffler and she wove me a mask. Knit me a mask. I'm surprised that even got through the censor, because our mail was all censored. The request for the muffler, I guess the guy had pity on me, he let that go through. Because they certainly didn't let much go through. So I was an accountant in the post exchange until they closed it. November it got so cold. It was forty below zero. They couldn't do anything more. Hudson Bay froze over so they couldn't bring boats in anymore. The guys couldn't build the airport anymore. It was too cold to work. They were Sea-Bees, incidently. I said engineering, but they brought Sea-Bees in after the engineers to build the airports. Churchill was the railhead and so we got back on the train and criss-crossed across the United States for a while until we went to Camp Myles Standish which was the staging area for the Boston Port of Embarkation. It was muddy because we were the first troops in there. If you think that's something to come into a camp that ... has just been built where they're still building barracks and so forth. You never saw such an unholy mess in all your life. They started again with close order drill and then all of a sudden I was sick one day. I had a terrible temperature and I went to sick call and they didn't have any room in the hospital and they sent me back to my bed in the barracks. A guy came in and said, "Strauss." "Yeah?" I said. I think that at that time Shipe was now a Lieutenant Colonel. "Colonel Shipe wants to see you." So I got dressed and went up there and he said to me, "Where's your application for OCS?" I said, "I don't have one." He said, "Well get it here on my desk by this afternoon." So I went back and got an application for OCS. I went to my company commander to sign it and he said, "I'm not signing this. ... I'm going to take you overseas with me." I said, "... I'm not going overseas. ... Call Colonel Shipe and tell him you're not going to sign it." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because he asked for this from me." He said, "Okay" and he signed it. I had it back up on his desk that afternoon and the next day we went to Fort Dix to fire rifles for record and they had us sign the payroll at the same time when we got down there. I went up to sign and they said, "You're red lined. You're out of this outfit." I went to the OCS board the next day and I was already out of the outfit. And so they pulled me out and they sent me to what they call a casual company where I became a typing clerk in an area office, and stayed there until I went to OCS.

KP: Before leaving for OCS, you mentioned your unit was full of hillbillies, were they from Kentucky?

RS: Yeah, some of them had never had shoes in their life. For some of them this was the first pair of shoes they ever held. They used to sing all the hillbilly songs. They'd sit there and they'd sing these songs, good God drives you crazy.

KP: And how many knew how to read? Did everyone know how to read?

RS: I think so. I don't know if they did or didn't. I never really got involved... There probably were some of them that couldn't but I didn't know it. I wasn't involved with them.

MT: Were there any North/South conflicts?

RS: There's that constant going back and forth in the barracks. "You hillbilly." "You damn Yankees." Between hillbilly, Confederate, southerner and damn Yankees that was going back and forth in there all the time, but it was good natured. It might have ended up in a fight here and there when somebody had too much to drink, but I didn't do that so I wasn't part of it. This went on. But the part that I wanted you to know too was that when World War II was over and I came back to New Brunswick I tried to get in touch with Shipe. I wanted to say thank you to him. I'm alive. I'm here and you were responsible for getting me to OCS and they had no record of him. And I couldn't understand it other than the fact that he had graduated. There is no question that he existed, but there is no record of him. I was in New York one day walking on the street and I saw this guy from another company in the 389th Port Battalion and it was an Italian guy and I don't remember his name now, but at the time I said, "Hey Joe!". ... We ran over and I grabbed him and we walked into a bar and ... had a beer and I said, "What the hell happened to all the guys in my outfit? What happened to everybody like J.P. Brown who was an ex-con and carried a knife hidden in his shoe? He had a scar down his face like this. Some of these guys were dockwallopers. They were a bunch of tough guys. I had no trouble getting along with them. We became good friends but for a while, particularly because I was Jewish, I wasn't the most popular guy in the tent by a long shot. Eventually they realized that I could help them and I could do things for them that they couldn't do themselves so we became good friends. And so I said, "What happened to all of these guys?" He said, "Well J.P. Brown, he ended up in the stockade in Italy." I said, "But what happened to the rest of the outfit?" And he said that Company A and headquarters company, which means Shipe, were going into Anzio to land and they took a direct hit from a Stuka divebomber down the smokestack of the boat and it blew up the boat and ... none of them survived, everyone was killed. And that's what happened to Shipe. I never got to thank him. And this I think is important because he helped me and I'm alive because of what he did for me. He got me to go the OCS.

KP: You might well have been with that company.

RS: I would have been. They had me down as a sergeant and a headchecker and all that kind of stuff I was supposed to be. That was ... how they had me set for the table of organization when they got overseas. Before Anzio, they landed in North Africa. They issued all winter clothes incidently to everybody at Myles Standish. Everybody got winter clothes. They got out into the ocean and they took all the winter clothes away from them and gave them summer clothes. They landed in North Africa, when were the first landings in North Africa? I don't remember. But that's where they went. And then they worked the port there, up until they packed them on a boat and sent them to go to Anzio. And that's what they did. And that's what I would have been doing had he not sent me to OCS. ... I don't remember his first name, but he was Shipe and he was class of '29.

KP: We can look him up.

RS: Absolutely. That's very important.

KP: You went to OCS.

RS: I went to OCS at Grinnell College. ... They didn't have any room in Fort Lee to send me to quartermaster school where I was supposed to go. They wanted to clean out the guys that were hanging around Taunton in Camp Myles Standish waiting to go to OCS so they sent me to Army Administration School, to OCS in Grinnell College in Iowa. Now, that's a new experience. But it was interesting and of course, it was like going back to college again, because Army Administration going through all the army regulations. They teach you how to read army regulations, what army regulations are all about. They were really setting you up to be an adjutant. An adjutant in a post or something where you got involved with the rules and regulations and running the daily operations of the army. We studied this for three months, plus the fact that we did all the close order drill and marching and all the other military training as well. I had a black roommate. His name was Bob Taylor and we were in dormitory rooms. Everybody said, "Boy, how can you stand something like that?" I said, "He's a nice guy." I had no problem with that at all, but these guys in the next dormitory rooms down the way were all from the south and they wanted to have nothing to do with him. They couldn't understand ... why I didn't ask for a change. I said, "I'm not going to ask for a change." As a matter of fact I dragged him through OCS with me. He had a terrible time studying.

KP: Why?

RS: It was studying. It was studying army regulations. Memory. It was memory work. But I was just out of college and I didn't have any trouble with memory work, but he had and I dragged him through. I just dragged him through with me and he made it. But he was thrown out eventually.

KP: Why, what happened?

RS: ... He came back through Seattle. Is that how I knew? No, I didn't know from him. I knew from somebody who was up in Alaska who had come back and told me they had court martialed him because they kept putting him with black troops and ... I guess he had been a teacher in Washington D.C. And he just didn't like being treated like a black man, colored. What do you call him? He was a black man, that was how they treated him. He didn't like that treatment. He didn't want to be segregated. He was an officer and he wanted to be treated like the rest of the officers and they wouldn't treat him that way and he was belligerent about it. Eventually they trumped up charges against him and gave him [a] ... discharge and sent him home.

KP: Did you ever hear from him after the war?

RS: No, I have never heard from him since. Nor did I try to locate him, ... I'm sure if I really went to a lot of trouble I could have found him in Washington.

KP: But you lost touch after that?

RS: I lost touch after that. I saw him once. He came through Seattle on his way to Alaska with black troops. They were a duck company. Do you know what a duck company is? Ducks were amphibious vehicles that the army had and he was a lieutenant in a duck company and on his way to Alaska and he came through and he looked me up and he came up and saw me and we had dinner together and we had a great old time together for a day or two and then he left. That was the last I ever saw him. But I got along with him fine. I liked the guy.

KP: Was he the only black member of your training company?

RS: My training company? I can't say. He may have been. He was not the only one at school though. There were other black men at school. But I think he was the only one in our company.

KP: In other words your school was integrated?

RS: At OCS? Yes, absolutely. Integrated in a sense, yes, it was integrated absolutely. But the army wasn't integrated at that point. Absolutely not. No way.

KP: Why do you think the army put you together as roommates?

RS: I've never known. Maybe because I was Jewish. I just don't know. I don't know the answer to that, but it could have been that reason. You faced things like that in those days which I don't think you face today. In those days we faced things like that.

KP: What about army food? Did you ever have a problem with that?

RS: At OCS it was fine. We were eating college food. The college cafeteria we were eating in. But army food? What do I care? I ate. When we first got to Canada we ate beans for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for 30 some odd days, because that's what C-rations is. C-ration is beans and meat mixed together and the only food that they gave us was C-rations. And we ate beans for breakfast, lunch and dinner for over 30 days. You can imagine the noise when you were standing in line. It was awful. It was awful. Just awful. But we ate it. ... This is a funny story too. A train finally came with food on it and there was meat, we lined up at the mess shack early. They had built a shack for mess. We had gotten out of warehouses and went to tents. And we lined up waiting for the food and they loaded our plate and they put meat and potatoes and peas and gravy and some kind of, I think it was pineapple slice on the top for dessert. We went back to our tents to eat it and I ate the whole thing and I said, "Man is that good." The guy said, "It was the best porkchop I ever ate". I said, "What was that?" He said, "The best porkchop." I said, "Oh my God!" Then I went and threw the whole thing up. I had never eaten pork in my life. Threw it all up. That was embarrassing. And I never have eaten it.

KP: So you never ate pork your whole life?

RS: No, who cares. There is always something to eat. I never had trouble. I never ran into any problem. Never, never, never. ... But that experience I remember. But it was tough up there, living up there in Churchill Manitoba, because first of all when they moved us into the tents, we had the mosquito problem. As it started getting colder the mosquitos disappeared, but it got so damned cold we were freezing so they got a bunch of guys, apparently there were enough guys in this outfit who knew how to use tools, and they built floors and they built sides to our tent and they put the tent on top and they put a stove in the middle, a Sibley stove they called it. At night, each guy had to take turns taking care of the stove and that's the way we kept warm, it got to forty below zero. So you know, when it came time to pee at night you just opened the flap and let it ride. You weren't going to run out to the latrine. When it snowed you could see the marks in the snow outside the door.

KP: When you were up in Churchill, what did people do for fun, recreation?

RS: Well, the Hudson Bay had a kind of a store there and they built a big restaurant type-no bar-...maybe they sold wine. But they built a restaurant so you could go to the restaurant and get a steak if you wanted to spend your money on a steak. And there were Eskimo women around who would do many things. One of the things they would do would be laundry for one thing. And they'd take care of the boys too.

KP: So there was interaction between you unit and the larger community?

RS: Oh yeah! Oh and how. Yes, very much so.

KP: Had you done much travelling before the war?

RS: No, not at all.

KP: Had this seemed really out of the 1930's movie "Eskimos in the ...

RS: Yeah. I didn't think of it that way, but when you ask me now I guess it did. But we were above the timberline so it was all tundra. There was only flat land. There were no trees around us. We were above that. ... Of course, when it started to snow and the wind started blowing at 40 below zero there was nothing to stop that wind from blowing and it blew. Some nights it blew down some of the tent and those types of things happened. ...

KP: So you must have thought that being at Grinnell College was a much better experience?

RS: Oh yeah, but they were tough on us. This was OCS no matter how you looked at it. ... For instance, they used to give you a pillowcase, but you used to take the pillowcase off at night and sleep on the pillow, because they used to examine your pillowcase to see if it was dirty. Also when you sent your clothes to the laundry they used to look at your underwear to see if it was dirty. It was tough. They were tough. They watched your manners at the dining room table. There was a guy who stood next to me the last time we were in formation before graduation and a little dog walked along the line where we were standing at attention and there was an officer

standing behind. And I presume he was standing behind this guy for a reason, because it apparently was questionable whether they were going to give him a commission or not. And he said, "Hiya, mutt!" And the officer pulled him right out of the line and they sent him home. That was the last day before we got our commission so they must have been looking for something for this guy as I think about it now, but at that time I thought it was horrible. But now after having spent three more years in the army I understood how the army works and understood why they did that. Why that happened. But we ran a parade for the people of Grinnell, Iowa. Were we there Memorial Day? I guess we were there Memorial Day. So we made a parade for them. The whole school got out and marched for them with a band.

KP: Was there much to do in Grinnell?

RS: No, there is nothing. We used to take a bus on a weekend to Des Moines.

KP: So that was the big city?

RS: That was the big city.

KP: What did you think of Iowa and Des Moines?

RS: Not much. It was a real corn belt city. And you know this is 1943 so it wasn't very big but it was Des Moines, Iowa. We used to say they rolled up the sidewalk every night as soon as the sun goes down. And pretty much that's what they did. They rolled up the sidewalks. There was nothing to do there after dark. There were a few nightclubs that were illegal that people found we used to go to but nothing much. There ... was a U.S.O. canteen there.

KP: In Des Moines?

RS: In Des Moines.

KP: How much gambling went on? I imagine your first unit gambled a lot.

RS: Lots. Oh gambling was a big thing. There were big poker games and big crap games. Especially pay day. Lots of gambling and it was fearful. That's how this guy J.P. Brown got known for his knife because he'd be drinking and playing cards at the same time or shooting dice at the same [time] and he'd go after guys with his knife. It was tough.

KP: Is there anything else that is memorable about your Officer Training School experiences?

RS: Yeah, there was another Bob Strauss there in another class. We were introduced. We used to get each others mail. He came from Chicago. ... I was in OCS class number seven. He was OCS class number six. We got together and gave our mail back to each other and we used to talk about the fun.

KP: Did you have any family connection with the other Strauss?

RS: No, ... I don't know of any Strauss connections anywhere in anyplace in the world. There probably are, but I don't know of them. It was a blur. OCS was a 90 day blur. It was studying. We used to study at night every night. We used to drill during the day. Every afternoon was drill. And each guy took his turn of ... leading the drill, in other words being the platoon sergeant. I took a turn as being a corporal, a squad leader as well as a platoon leader. They graded you on how you did on conducting the drill and so forth. That was scary. You knew you were being watched in the cafeteria and in the dining room so that was scary.

KP: They even knew you were out?

RS: Everything you did. For instance, at night there was study time, seven to nine and they wanted you to study. They didn't want you sitting there playing the guitar or singing hillbilly songs. And they used to monitor it. The company commander, a guy from Indiana, "Yee done well men, but yee gotta do better." I don't remember his name but he was something. A captain.

KP: So he spoke in yee's?

RS: Yees, yeah, he was a captain from Indiana.

KP: Do you know what background he was? Was he Quaker?

RS: Yes, he was a Quaker and why he was there I don't know, but obviously they put him there figured that would get him out of the way. I know enough about the army to know that guys get jobs because there were reasons for every one of them. Let's send him over there and get him out of the way that way, because we haven't got anyplace else to put him. We'd do that. I did that. I did the same thing. Because I became Port Quartermaster. Excuse me. I became Quartermaster supply officer. Basically, I ran the whole quartermaster operation because the port quartermaster himself was a major and a lieutenant colonel, but he was a barber by trade and he was in the Montana National Guard when it went through Seattle on its way overseas and he was over age in grade and they pulled him out and ... assigned him to the Seattle Port of Embarkation. The commanding general said, "You're going to be the port quartermaster." So they made him the port quartermaster, in fact at that time he was a captain and they raised him to a major and he eventually got to be a lieutenant colonel. ... But he's a barber by trade in Little Falls, Montana. That's what he did. And he knew as much about the quartermasters as I knew about being a barber. After I was commissioned I got to Seattle where they called me for ... a board of officers. We were in a hotel. The Ben Franklin Hotel in Seattle. And we were on our way to Alaska as casual officers for assignment. We got called for a board of officers and sent down to the quartermasters office and we were sent there for the reason that the quartermaster had no record of where all the office furniture in the port was or what it was. He was supposed to have a memorandum receipt for every piece of furniture that's issued, every machine that's issued, every piece of usable equipment that's not expendable is supposed to be recorded on a memorandum receipt. And he had none. They never issued any so all this furniture throughout the whole port, and no record, and the port was spread out all over downtown Seattle. The Inspector General said, "Get an inventory of what that furniture is." They called this board of officers in and said,

"Well, you got to go count the furniture." The guy said, "What are we looking for? What do we do?" And they looked at each other and I raised my hand. I said, "Major, I can help you." He said, "How can you help me?" I said, I can give you a line drawing of the various types of furniture you've got and these guys can go around and just make a mark by each kind of furniture and bring it back with the signature from the guy who signed for it and we'll send our memorandum receipt back. And he can sign for it and then we know what he's got and we can make a record of it." He said, "Can you do that." I said, "Yes." He said, "Will you run it?" I said, "Certainly." He goes over to his office and picks up the phone and he said, "I want Strauss assigned to my office." And I never left. I ran that place for three years. I was 23 years old. He was so glad to have me you can't imagine. He was sitting there and he didn't know what the hell he was doing. And I came in and first of all his job was to issue all the office supplies to the port that everybody was using. This is what I cut my teeth on. And office furniture was part of it and part of it was issuing food to ships and issuing the gasoline to cars. We had the port laundry. We deloused prisoners of war when they came through. I was delousing officer. I was the subsistence officer. I was the gasoline officer. I was the quartermaster supply officer. And the quartermaster supply officer ran that place. And I did. And I didn't think anything of it. He got all the glory. He got to be lieutenant colonel and he couldn't get me above a first lieutenant.

There again, you asked me a question and I'll answer your question and I will only say it, but once. There again I ran into anti-Semitism. The commanding general was a West Point graduate and I know that the colonel or major put in a request religiously every six months for me to be promoted to captain. Because the quartermaster supply officer job, called for a major. And he used to get calls from all over the port from guys who were being reassigned, "How about getting rid of that so, so, guy there and giving me the job? I'm a major." And he wouldn't do it. But, he did put in a request and he gave me a copy of every request ... that he ever sent in requesting my promotion to captain, but it was never approved by this West Point protective association general. And he said to me at the end of the bar at the Forty and Eight Club when they gave me a party to say goodbye, he said, "There's only one reason you didn't get that and you know what it is." I said, "Yeah, because I'm Jewish." He said, "That's right. Because I tried to get it for you and I couldn't get it through."

KP: So your major he was very appreciative?

RS: Oh yeah. I did his work for him. He got commended for the way his office operated. The way everything was done on time and the way they were usually never out of any materials, and this was all my doing. We set up an inventory system. We had inventory control.

KP: How many men did you supervise?

RS: I think 150 civilians and 50 enlisted personnel and about four officers, two of whom outranked me, or three, maybe three of the four. But I was the boss and they did what I said, and they didn't even argue about it.

KP: Really, you never had any tension?

RS: The two captains were commissioned directly from civilian life, they were the friends of the colonel's, they were his friends from Great Falls, Montana. He got them commissions and he brought them into his office and made them captains to run his operation. They didn't know anything. One of them was in the grain and feed business and the other one sold insurance. Well the grain and feed guy could conceivably ... have had enough sense to be able to run a quartermaster operation, but he didn't. He had a girlfriend on the side and he was busy with her. And the other guy, he wasn't smart enough. One was Gallager and the other was-(-----?) I don't know his name..., well it's not important. But anyway, they outranked me, but I got the job. That's the way it was. I did that for three years. I saw lots of guys from New Brunswick come through, including Norman Reitman, who I mentioned before. He came through there. ... In the state of Washington you had to have a liquor license in order to get liquor, as guys would come through and leave they'd give me their liquor license so I had a stack of them. When guys came in, I could give one to them. A lot of guys came through from the New Brunswick area who knew I was there and they would look me up and I made sure we had dinner together and told them where to go and what to do.

KP: So you needed a license to get the bottle of alcohol?

RS: You needed a license to get a fifth of liquor a week. Plus you could get rum. You could get all the rum you wanted, you could get all the beer you wanted, but for bourbon, rye, scotch, gin you could only get a fifth a week. But if you had enough cards you could get all you wanted.

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

KP: You had mentioned earlier that you had been responsible for delousing prisoners.

RS: Yes.

KP: And that was later?

RS: Towards the end of the war when the United States ... [started] winning in the Pacific they sent a surprising number of Japanese prisoners back. When they sent them to Seattle, which was not very often, ... (because the ones that came through Seattle probably came from Alaska.) ... First of all, they had occupied several islands out in the end of Alaska's strip, Attu, and beyond. I'm trying to think of think of the name of the island, but the islands at the end of the chain....

MT: The Aleutians?

RS: The Aleutians, yeah. They occupied some of those islands so as they took them back they brought the prisoners down and they came through Seattle. Incidently, the Japanese prisoners were very impressive. They were well disciplined. They usually had a sergeant with them and the sergeant was absolute in command. They did whatever he told them. ... The guys who were there, the guys who were doing the delousing, the guys who were military personnel ... who worked for me tried to be as nasty to them as they could because the Japanese were nasty to Americans in the Pacific. They did inhuman things to American prisoners and to any prisoner,

not only Americans, whether they had been Chinese, or whatever, whoever they opposed and whoever they conquered out there in the Pacific. They were as mean and nasty as any human being could be and they did inhuman things to them and we knew it. And some of the guys, of course we got some of the stories back, so we knew. So these guys tried to do anything to them to make them [un]comfortable. The most discomforting thing was to put it in their rear end and squirt them with this material with this delousing material and tried to get it inside of them. That's what they tried to do. And they did it. And you'd hear these guys scream. And I walked away. I wasn't going to stop them. ...But compared to what they did to American prisoners that was nothing. Yes, we deloused, there were not a lot of them. .... Some of them were put in, Fort Lawton, the staging area camp for the Seattle Port of Embarkation, some of them they kept in stockades in Fort Lawton. They were as nice to them as you can imagine, I used to go there to go to PX and go to the officers club, you could see them. They were starting to wait on tables in the officers club and they were starting to tend bar in the officers club so they were giving them jobs.

KP: They were Japanese prisoners?

RS: These were Japanese prisoners of war, and they wore prisoners of war uniforms, but they were there doing work at Fort Lawton. So they treated them a lot nicer than they were treating American prisoners.

KP: Was that a shock to some people coming into a base that Japanese prisoners were waiting on tables, given the image of the Japanese?

RS: No, we knew they were wearing prisoner of war uniforms, we knew what they were there for. We knew they were trusted. They were being trusted, that's all. No it didn't shock me. I guess I didn't like it. I probably objected to them being treated so well, but then who asked me?

MT: When you were in Seattle, was there a Japanese-American presence there?

RS: Oh, Japanese-Americans were all rounded up and shipped to Utah.

MT: By the time you were there?

RS: Before I got there it had been done. They did that on the West Coast, as you know. They took all the Japanese out of every place and shipped them to Utah. As we know today it was a dreadful thing, but at that time they thought it was the right thing to do. I didn't think it was such a terrible thing to do. These guys, they bombed us at Pearl Harbor. We had no idea. They were ready, they were starting to try to come back into the United States. On the West Coast, they always thought that the Japs were going to invade the West Coast someplace. They were always on guard.

KP: I think in Washington towards the end of the war there was a balloon attack that killed a couple picnicking. Do you remember that?

RS: No, I do not recall that. I was not aware of that. But there were submarines that fired at West Coast places. I don't know whether that would be installations or just random hitting, I just don't remember anymore. But submarines would come up to the coast, along the Pacific, ... and fire on American installations or whether they just fired at people, I don't know what they did. But they did come up. And it wasn't publicized greatly, but we knew they did it and we were always on the lookout for submarine attacks.

KP: When you say it was not publicized, do you mean military people expected this when you were in the port? Was that a possibility that you prepared against?

RS: Yes, at Fort Lawton, they did absolutely. ... But I didn't live there. I lived in a hotel in Seattle. I had a terrible life. They didn't have room for me. They didn't have any room at Fort Lawton for me. I would have stayed there. So I was on separate rations and quarters for three years. And I had to make do with not a lot of money. But, I did manage to buy a car out there. I did not, paying homage to my father, I did not steal any gasoline from my own gasoline stock. There I paid for gasoline as I could get a ration stamp for it.

KP: So you also experienced rationing?

RS: Oh yeah, with my car. And towards the end of the war, and even after the war was over maybe, I can't remember what point, but at one point in my life I took up skiing out there. I went skiing at Snoqualmie Pass which is 50 or 60 miles away. So really I was probably illegal by going there. You're not supposed to go more than 50 miles away from your post. I was probably illegal being there because I know I hurt my knee. I know I did, because I hurt my knee and I came back and I went to the dispensary and the captain said to me, "How did you hurt it?" I said, "I fell down the stairs." And he looked at the knee and he wrote down fell down the stairs and he said, "What did you really do?" I said, "I was skiing in Snoqualmie." That knee bothered me for a long while too.

KP: So you had never skied before?

RS: I had never skied before.

MT: Were they the wooden skis?

RS: Yeah, wooden skis with real poles, even aluminum poles if I can remember, but maybe not. I don't remember anymore. I have pictures of it someplace. I have pictures of being with a civilian on Mt. Rainier in July, on the Fourth of July, and he's wearing brown and white shoes and standing in snow. I haven't looked at those pictures in years and years and years. Would you like to see pictures of Churchill Manitoba?

KP: Yes, if you have them.

RS: Here's a winterized tent. These things are falling all apart. This is Churchill Manitoba. That's Churchill, the docks at Churchill. These are the only buildings there. This is Major Shipe

right there. I don't know how I happen to have that picture, but there he is. That's Shipe. That's who he is. That's a winterized tent. This is a Mounty [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], obviously, and they were there. These are Eskimos. This is the Hudson Bay Company's store. I think these are the men coming off the train when we first got there. More Eskimos, that's what they look like. This is the grain elevator that was there. I guess that was a yard engine to move the stuff on the tracks.

KP: And these were two Eskimos?

RS: Yes, kids. This is the Bank of Montreal, I guess there was a bank building there. This is an inspection of our company I presume. This is our mess kitchen where we lined up to get the food, remember I said we lined up I had the pork chop. This is where their starting to build the winterized tents. This is from Myles Standish. This is where I was waiting to go to OCS. These were the guys who were in the barracks I was in. That's one of the barracks at Camp Myles Standish which doesn't exist anymore. This is the boat that came into Churchill in the port on the Hudson Bay. This is Shipe again.

KP: And you had Mounties?

RS: And there were Mounties.

MT: And dogs, look. Sled dogs.

RS: I think this is the Mounty headquarters. These are all the officers in our group up there. This is the guy who was PX officer. ... I guess that's Shipe there. This shows you some of the ice that eventually got up there. This is my family. He's dead. He's dead. That's my brother. This is my cousin who was a doctor. This is my cousin who is still alive. This is me before I got commissioned. This is my brother and I. This is my father and mother. This is all four of us. That's my family. My father, my mother, and myself. These are guys I was friendly with. This guy's a Rutgers graduate. He's no longer alive. That's Sam Siegal. This is J.P. Brown, the guy that I was telling you about with the razor in his boot. These are the tents before they were winterized. That's a guy named Mezzi. He came from Jersey City. He was a dockwalloper. This is just the basalt rock around. They're just standing on the rock. This is a guy name Vic Zeller, looking at the rifles and what the hell do you do with this? And those are the tents winterized. You can see the top of them. This is me standing there. This was the ice on Hudson Bay. Those quonset huts, I think they belong to the Mounties or to the Hudson Bay Company or something. This guy's name is Gallager. How can I remember? That's Zeller and Mezzi. We had fun. You can't say that being in service wasn't fun at times. It was serious, but the guys got along.

KP: There you are.

RS: I had their names written out here but the things all came off. I had their names on a list with a lot of guys on it. This is me in Seattle. This was a guy who was an attorney, a friend his name was Selkowitz. This is in my apartment that I had in a hotel. This is me in front of my

office at the Port Quartermaster's office. That is the girl who was my secretary. What the hell was her name? Myrtle. I don't have it on there. A nice girl though. She was a WAC.

KP: How many women did you have in your unit of port quartermaster?

RS: I don't know. God, look at this. It's been fifty years. This is the Sorrento Hotel where I lived in Seattle. They bring back such memories. That's approaching Churchill. That's what the grain elevator looked like at Churchill. That's the dock. That's probably the Aurora. That's probably a picture of the Aurora if you can see such a thing. Maybe it isn't. I just don't know. This is me studying at Grinnell College. Studying Army regulations. That's what we studied. This is the way the Home News used to write articles. That day is long gone. But that's in war-time. ... I don't know what else to tell you. That's me and the hotel. This is the view from my window in the hotel on the bay in Seattle which doesn't look like this anymore obviously. A picture of Mt. Rainier. This is one of our parties. That's not me. This is my OCS class at Grinnell 1943. I don't know how many of those guys are still alive. Where's Taylor? This is not him. Oh maybe it is him. That has to be him. That's Bob Taylor. Okay, he's the only one in the company. I don't know. What else can I tell you? This is a picture of me in Grinnell after I graduated and I first got my commission. These are the beds that we had to keep made so carefully in Grinnell College. This is the captain who was our company commander in Grinnell, Hodyer. This guy is named Doler. Yeah Dayton Doler. Here's the parade. Remember I told you we had a parade? In the city? This is us doing our drill. This is the cafeteria. These are the buildings in Grinnell College. Here's another picture of me studying. This is Alfred E. Whistler. He was my commanding officer. Port Quartermaster. That was the guy. Okay. And then I outfitted that ship. That was one of my big jobs.

KP: Here are your ration cards.

RS: Here's my gasoline ration card. .... I spent some time in San Francisco ... at a school. Here's the quartermaster depot. I guess I went out to dinner with a guy and we took a picture in Sir Francis Drake in San Francisco. I don't know. I don't remember. The drunkard is still playing. I thought this was the funniest thing I ever saw. This is my cousin, the guy you saw in that picture originally. This is him in my hotel room in the army. And this was when we met each other in San Francisco. He also came through Seattle and there he was. He was on his way to Alaska. He was a doctor. This is our group on a picnic. These pictures here. This was in front of the hotel. This is a guy named Bob Cohn from New Brunswick when he came through and this is the front of the hotel. ... This is Sam (Siegal). I tried to get him, I did get him. I brought him to Seattle. He worked for me, come to think it, I got him out there, because he flunked out of OCS in Fort Lee and I got him there. There is one family that was very nice to me there. Names (Shaffer). I heard from them in one point in my life. This is Norman Reitman.

KP: Is he still alive?

RS: Yes. He certainly is. He's 81 or 82 years old. Yes absolutely alive. He no longer practices. He was a doctor in New Brunswick. He was chairman of the Board of Governors at Rutgers for about six years.

KP: During the war was he in the medical corp?

RS: He was in the medical corps. That's a picture of him. He was in Alaska too. He came through Seattle and that was him in my room. He wouldn't give me permission. ... To get invited for a reception on the first of January, every year you had to leave your card, W.P. Nelson. This is the day of the end of the war.

KP: I thought this was the death of President Roosevelt?

RS: Oh was that what it was?

KP: I think so.

RS: Oh, okay. That's me skiing. You wanted to know what kind of skis we used? Here's the skis. Here's the guy in the white shoes in the snow. Here's another picture of it. That's when I first started playing golf. There's the prisoners of war. He got his all right. The quartermaster Christmas party, the 21st of December, 1945. Whistler .... Anyway that's it. What can I tell you? That's my military career. But of all of the stories I told you. Was I on all that whole time?

KP: Yes.

RS: Okay.

KP: I saw in one of the articles in the scrapbook you just showed us, that there was a dispute between Army and a private company over the use of a warehouse. Do you remember that? Any recollection?

RS: No, no. We used that warehouse. They ... wanted to keep possession of it and the ... military commandeered the land and said, "Screw you. ... We're going to use it." And we did and we took that building over for the quartermaster. I had forgotten about that. But, yes.

KP: You were in the military, but you also in some sense saw the home front. You mentioned, for example, when you were going through some pictures that there was a couple that was very friendly to you. And I have been told by other people I have interviewed that people would often invite you to dinner.

RS: That's correct. They invited me to their home on the Jewish holidays and my mother, after each holiday that they invited me, would pick up the phone and call them and thank them. They were very nice to me and they had a daughter that they wanted me to be interested in whose picture you saw there. But I wasn't. I was going back home to New Jersey and they were only interested if I was interested in her in staying there in Seattle and I wasn't interested in staying in Seattle.

KP: You wanted to come home to New Brunswick?

RS: I was torn. Seattle I knew was the place to be and as it turns out it was the place to be. And I had a relationship with some of the office supply dealers there. And they said to me if I was interested in joining their firm they would be glad to have me. Two of them, and one of them is still there, Seattle Office Supply. The other's name was Loehman and Hanford. Loehman and Hanford I don't think exist anymore, but Seattle Office Supply still exists. And, I just knew I had to get back home because I knew my father was not feeling well. I just knew I had to get back then and I did. And it was a good thing I did because he didn't last much longer. He lasted until six weeks after we were married. He died six weeks after we were married which is 1948.

KP: Had you given any thought to staying in the military as a career?

RS: Yeah, not staying as a career, no, but I did become a reserve officer and then when the Korean thing started I resigned my commission. I used the excuse that since my fathers passing I was the president of our company which had 40 or 50 employees and I was responsible for their jobs and so forth and I wanted to stay with the company I didn't see that I could leave them and, go back onto active duty so they accepted my resignation. I gave them a long explanation. I didn't want to go back.

KP: Had you soured on the military?

RS: No, no, not at all. I stayed inactive, staying in the reserves they assigned me to an outfit, a service outfit of some kind up in North Jersey and they never called a meeting. They never asked me to show up and so I said, "The heck with it." But I was assigned, was given an assignment in the reserves somehow, but it didn't mean anything and I didn't want it to mean anything. I didn't want to go back on active duty, because I was too much involved in the company. I knew I couldn't leave it.

KP: Do you think your experiences at Seattle helped your business career?

RS: And how! Our whole operation was at least 150 people and militarily it was extremely successful. We accomplished our mission of supplying the ships that we had to supply and supplying the things that we had to at the port. We accomplished our mission very well.

KP: How much equipment passed through? Do you have any sense of the dollar value?

RS: No sense of the dollar value at all. I only knew the sense of the dollar value of what was missing when we took inventory once a year.

KP: How much shrinkage would you have?

RS: There was shrinkage. Well, first of all, we had pots and pans. We had food. We had gasoline. We had sheets and pillowcases that went on boats. Blankets, which are certainly a most desirable type of blanket. They are heavy 100% wool blankets and we had a terrible time keeping them from disappearing. Honest, I really didn't care as long as I thought that the military

guys from my outfits got them when wives would come out. I hoped that's where they disappeared to, the enlisted men who worked there worked hard and they got no thanks for it. It was hard work and ... they were the best part of the operation. They kept that operation going.

KP: Where were most of them from, the enlisted personnel?

RS: All over, but I would guess that a good portion of them stayed in Seattle. Once they got there, they didn't leave.

KP: Of the enlisted men, when they were discharged?

RS: Yes, when they were discharged they stayed there. Especially, if they had their families there, already. It was the place to be and it was obvious that it was the place to be.

KP: Why?

RS: It was quiet. It was a nice life, all the fishing that was there, the salmon fishing was almost at your door. It was right at the shore. People would just throw a line in off the pier and you could catch salmon. We ate a lot of salmon. That was the staple dish to eat. ... The peninsula above Seattle was great recreation area. The recreation area, the water recreation and the hunting recreation and the recreation area on the peninsula above Seattle was just wonderful. Plus, you know, the whole coast line all the way up to Vancouver was a wonderful place to be. People used to camp and fish and hunt and have a great time out there. Taking a trip to Banff or Lake Louise was a great thing. Going to the Island of Victoria was a great thing. Going to Alaska was ... great, after the war was over it was a great trip. It was obvious that Alaska was going to grow. It was a place to grow and it has.

KP: So you really had that sense that Seattle was an up and coming community?

RS: I had the sense that Seattle was the place to be and it was going to grow. ... But my family was here and my roots were here and I came back. Guys who didn't feel that attachment to the roots they went out there and they did the right thing. This was the place to be. I'm sure some of those guys made fortunes out there. Look at the way Boeing grew. We watched the B-29's and the B-17's flying out of the Boeing plant. I remember the first B-29's we saw flying over. We couldn't believe the size of that damn thing. It was really unbelievable to see that plane fly. It was like seeing a house fly. It was quite a place. The whole city, of course then we found out that Hanford, Washington which was called, ... what did they call it? The something project?

KP: The Manhattan Project.

RS: The Manhattan Project was making the atomic bomb and that flabbergasted us, we used to complain because Hanford, Washington used to get all the help. We couldn't get decent help, because they were all funnelled into Hanford, Manhattan Project and we used to complain about the fact we only got what was left.

KP: You did not know about the Manhattan Project?

RS: ... Nobody ever had a hint, ... we thought it was a secret project for DuPont making silk stockings or was developing new kinds of silk stockings or nylon stockings. That's what we thought it was.

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

RS: I was in Seattle and you know what I saw actually ... how did I know about the atomic bomb? I guess reading the newspaper and seeing the headlines in the newspaper the next day. I don't think we listened to the radio very much. Maybe we did. I can't remember. But it was quite a surprise and again when I said, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" I said, "What's an atomic bomb?" Then I read the article and I began to understand and comprehend what it was all about. Nobody knew about it. We had no idea and we were so close to Hanford, Washington where the whole damn thing was developed or part of it was developed, fusion was made.

KP: Do you think the people passing through the port and the men you supplied appreciated what you were doing?

RS: I don't think they gave it a thought.

KP: Because often you hear soldiers griping about the quartermaster.

RS: The biggest complaints that we got was when the war was over, Christmas of 1945, the war was over. There were eight or ten ships out in the harbor trying to get in for Christmas and they were out there in the sound and they didn't have berthing facilities for them and they couldn't bring them in and people started jumping overboard and trying to swim to shore in order to get home for Christmas. ... I had duty that night. I was the duty officer at the port that night and man I got hold of the Chief of Staff and I said you better get down here because this is not something for me. All hell is breaking loose. There are guys ... jumping off the ships and they're calling me. There are no instructions here what to do about it. I said, "I think colonel you better get down here and he came right on down." He took over. I stayed there, but he ran it from then on. But I had enough sense to call him and say get down here, because it was terrible.

KP: Did anyone drown when they were jumping ship?

RS: I don't remember. They might have. They might have. But ... it was terrible. They didn't have... room for them. They just couldn't bring them in. The ship captains all tried to get into the port on time and when they got there there wasn't any room to dock them and they didn't have any room to put them in Fort Lawton or at Fort Lewis either. There was just no room because boats had come in before they were due. So it was impossible. It was an impossible situation that year. Christmas, 1945, that was some year at Seattle.

KP: You ended up coming back to New Brunswick. How did World War II change the community? Did you see any changes?

RS: Not immediately, no, it was the same town when I got back. It was only afterwards that it started to change.

KP: When did you see a change in the community?

RS: I think it was so gradual, I don't really think I noticed. And I was part of it. I was active in the community. I worked actively in the community. I worked on the Boy Scouts. I was on the Middlesex Council of Boy Scouts. I was active in the United Fund because Johnson and Johnson invited to be active in the United Fund and I was. I was active in the Jewish Community Center. I was active in our temple. I'm a trustee of our temple. I was on the board of directors of the community center. So I was active in the community so I guess I was just part of its coming of age.

KP: Your firm moved from the downtown to Jersey Avenue.

RS: That was in 1975.

KP: Your firm also made a major transition from really in a sense being a corner stationery store to a large office supply store.

RS: That's true.

KP: Why do you think you were so successful when other stationery stores, failed?

RS: The answer I gave you before had to do with Johnson and Johnson and Squibb and getting their accounts, ... getting most of their business. I didn't get it all, but I got a big portion of it. I made a lot of good friends who were helping me get that business. And it wasn't only Johnson and Johnson and Squibb. I had two very top-notch salesmen, we sold DuPont, we sold Westinghouse, we sold Revlon, we sold Mack Truck when Mack Truck was here. So there were almost no good sized firms in this area that we did not sell to and we added salesmen. We had at least sixteen salespeople out selling so that's what enabled us to grow. Actually, in 1965 we moved from Church Street to George Street. In 1975, we moved from George Street to Jersey Avenue. I'm wrong about the years. We moved to Jersey Avenue May 1st, 1975. 1965 we moved from Church Street to George Street. We were there ten years.

KP: Is there anything about change in business that you've seen, you've sort of seen your own business, but in business in general?

RS: Oh, certainly.

KP: Any changes that are most striking to you?

RS: Of course, of course. The fact that the small, whether it be in the drug business or whether it be in the food business, or whether it be in the office supply business, there are no such things

as small businesses anymore. There used to, like across the street from us used to be Davidson's supermarket. It used to be a private [business], it's now a Foodtown and it's up on Livingston Avenue but they went from a small grocery store to being big, it was either get big or you don't survive. The same is true for the drug stores. There's very few small drug stores left and most have left because the big CVS and Thrift Drug and the other big drug stores. The office supply businesses have all succumbed to Staples and Office Max and in Florida it's the Office Depot. And eventually these three guys are going to be the survivors in the office supply business. They're buying up right and left. They're buying up dealers like myself or type that are still operating. They're buying them up and they are getting into the business that I was doing of selling the large industrial account.

KP: So when you were in the stationery business originally in the thirties and forties there were really no chains. It was very much a small...

RS: The only competition other than the small stationery store was the department stores that had a stationery department and that wasn't really much competition. On occasion, jewelry stores ... sold good fountain pens and gold fountain pens and so forth, but that wasn't real competition. No, the competition, in the earlier days, came from the bigger dealers in New York City who used to try to come out and sell Johnson and Johnson and Squibb and did. I took them away from the New York dealers. But that was only where size entered into it. ... But most of the guys in New York that were big then are gone. Goldsmith Brothers, ... did you ever hear of Goldsmith?

KP: It sounds familiar.

RS: They used to advertise in The New York Times once a week. They were big, but they're gone. There are none left. They're all gone. I took Johnson and Johnson away from a company called Silver Stationery. They're gone. Been long gone. Remington Rand used to sell Johnson and Johnson direct. They're out of business. What was Remington Rand is the computer company, but it has no ... name like Remington Rand anymore. That's what left of it and they're not very good and not very big and they're probably not very long for this world. They were out here on Route 130 at one point in a building the Johnson and Johnson has now. I can't think of their name, but that's because I'm old. My memory don't work like it used to. I used to know all of these names.

KP: Your firm lasted...

RS: We just sold out. Our firm just sold to an outfit called Allied Office Supply in Hasbrouck Heights. The company is now called Allied-Strauss. So we've disappeared. Harry Strauss and Sons is no more. They bought the name and everything.

KP: But you lasted a long time?

RS: We lasted 75 years, exactly. We were started May 1st, 1919 and we closed or sold out July 1st, 1995. That's exactly 75 years.

KP: And so you saw the full transition in the business?

RS: Well, I had given the business to my son five years ago. I was no longer involved. I worked there, but I didn't own it, I didn't operate it and it deteriorated. The competition was such that we couldn't compete.

KP: It is much more competitive for the stationary business these days?

RS: It's a question of being able to cut your overhead down to where you can operate and still make a profit. And you have to be willing to do that and be willing to operate in a whole different type of business than the way we operated. We operated with a lot of people and you have to operate with very few people, mostly automated, and you have to make your deliveries the next day. You can't take two, three days to make a delivery. ... They call and want it today. If they order it today, they want it tomorrow. And you have to be able to do that. ... It means changing your whole method of operation. I mean, you have to start making your orders up at five o' clock at night and working all through the night loading your trucks up. The trucks leave at seven o'clock in the morning and make their deliveries with the orders that came in the day before. And you have to be able to do that. Without backorders. It's not easy. It calls for a lot of realigning yourself. People are doing it.

KP: Is there anything I forgot to ask about your war-time experiences?

RS: You got more than war-time. You got home experience. You got post-war period.

KP: Pre-war period.

RS: What's happened to my company. You got the whole thing. I don't think you left anything out. I'm surprised it took us so long. I didn't think ... it would take this long.

KP: That's what almost everyone has said.

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

RS: .... in the three years really of being in Seattle in the Quartermaster Office we kind of just roughed it. I showed you pictures of the people that I worked with. It was interesting and people came through and it was a lot of work, but the war went on and when Roosevelt died I thought that was the end of the world and Truman turned out to be a hell of a guy. I learned to love that guy. I thought that he was one of the greatest presidents we ever had.

KP: He was wildly unpopular.

RS: Nobody knew who he was. Nobody had ever heard of him.

KP: But even during the Korean War did you think he made the right choice?

RS: I think he made right choices all the way through from firing MacArthur on down. ... I don't think he made many mistakes, if he made any. Certainly his Doctrine stopping a Greek civil war. If you go to Greece today a statue of him is right middle of Athens. And, he just ... made right decisions all the way from the atomic bomb on down. I don't think he made many bad decisions.

KP: What did you think of Lyndon Johnson and the Kennedys?

RS: Lyndon Johnson I wasn't particularly fond of John Kennedy I thought was great. I guess I didn't understand Robert Kennedy. I wasn't sure where he stood or what he was about.

KP: The Vietnam War, did you think at the time it was a different war?

RS: I didn't realize that these guys were right who said we shouldn't be there. I didn't realize they were right.

KP: At the time you thought we should ...

RS: At the time I thought we should be there because that's the way we went and that's what we did and I supported whoever was president at the time, but in retrospect I see that the guys who were against it were right and the guys who supported it were wrong.

KP: When did you have a change of heart?

RS: Not until afterwards. Not until, I began, in retrospect.

KP: In retrospect.

RS: Yeah. But it was one of the happiest moments of my life was when Truman fired MacArthur, because being in Seattle and being involved in supplying the South Pacific and Pacific Rim and Alaska and you knew the types of things that ... MacArthur did and what he stood for and how he ran and how he lived and how he ran his headquarters and so forth like he was a king, like a fiefdom.

KP: How did you know how he ran his headquarters?

RS: We got all the stories. Well, how did I know? We furnished a ship called the Spindle Eye and I was very much involved in supplying it. ... The Spindle Eye was to be MacArthur's headquarters ship for the invasion of Japan. And we furnished that ship. And when it came to the last day and they were putting all this stuff on it because MacArthur wanted a new car, he had to have a new car, ... a Packard. Nothing could be used. All the things that went on there were special because they were for MacArthur. Sheets that were special for him, only him. Things that you couldn't get during the war. Silk sheets, that type of thing.

KP: He wanted silk sheets?

RS: Yes, all kinds of stuff that we did, you can't believe. But the last thing that came to be was they found out they didn't have a five star license plate for his Packard and he had to have it and his ship was getting ready to leave. How the hell do you get them? They only come from the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot. So I went to the Colonel and I said, "Colonel, we gotta get these plates for General MacArthur's car. What do we do?" "Well, get on the TAC line and call and tell them you gotta have it for him." I said, "How the hell can I say that? We're not supposed to say anything like that on the telephone." He said, "Use your own discretion." So I got the code words for the furnishing of the Spindle Eye and I got on the TAC wire and I got the Commanding General of the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot on the telephone on the TAC line which is supposed to be a secure line and I used the code name for the furnishing of the Spindle Eye and I told him that five star license plates were not on that ship and ... they had to be there and I had to have them tomorrow and please fly them out.

MT: Did they?

RS: Yeah. They put these five star license plates on an airplane and flew them out to me. That's Douglas MacArthur. That ship wouldn't have sailed without them.

KP: Really? He had to have it furnished?

RS: Absolutely. That's the kind of guy he was. He was an S.O.B. of the first order. As commanding general I'm sure he did a great job but personally and the way he lived and his attitude about the military and about people and himself and the way he had to be catered to, God, it was awful. And after everybody was suffering because nobody had anything. When I was invited to a civilian's home I went out and bought a pound of butter and a pound of coffee and brought it with me when I went to their home. This is what you did.

KP: So if you got an invitation you then reciprocated?

RS: You bought a pound of sugar and a pound of butter and whatever and that's what you brought with you and for people to have you for dinner they were taking away from their own rationing.

KP: So the G.I.'s were very appreciative.

RS: Of course. Of course. And we used to get invitations. I got invitations from people, particularly at Christmas time, from people who worked for me, so I had to scrounge around and get that kind of stuff for them.

MT: Your brother was in the army too?

RS: My brother was in the army. He was in the Battle of the Bulge.

KP: Oh, really?

RS: It was probably one of the things that killed my father. My father, ... he knew his son was in the Battle of the Bulge.

KP: He knew?

RS: He just knew. He just plain knew. He just knew that he was there. ... He was so against losing his sons, I told you his feeling was that the old people should be killed and shot at, not the kids and he just was afraid he'd lose his son. It really hurt him. He wasn't scratched.

KP: But the fear.

RS: The fear of it, was terrible for him.

KP: Did your brother ever talk about his experiences?

RS: Oh yeah, we talked about it all the time.

KP: Did he have any vivid stories he told you about the Battle of the Bulge?

RS: No, no. I can't remember anything about it. He told me it was cold. He said he never saw a winter like that in all of his life. He didn't know it could be so cold. But he was a sergeant in a motorpool of the hundredth division. ... Or was he in artillery? I'm not sure which is when. He eventually ended up as a sergeant in a motorpool but he may have been just a man working with field artillery at the time in the hundredth division. I am not sure. ... He would tell me about how cold it was and how they suffered and how they didn't have any food. Those were his recollections about it. That's about all he ever said.

KP: You joined veterans organizations.

RS: Yeah, I joined the American Legion, but I didn't like it and I got out of it.

KP: And the Jewish War Veterans.

RS: I joined that too, but I got out of it. I just didn't find it was something for me.

KP: When did you talk about the war? Did you talk about it with potential customers?

RS: I've talked about it more today in these three hours than I've talked about it the whole time after I got out of the army. I've never talked about it much.

KP: Not even when you were a salesman did you ever build up a rapport with someone because of the military?

RS: Not really. Really never discussed it. Just a part of your life you wanted to forget and did forget.

MT: Was it a negative experience overall?

RS: Not really. Just something to put behind you and get on with your life. It wasn't negative. Not necessarily negative. I had an easy experience compared to what other guys went through. So, no, it wasn't negative.

KP: Well, thank you very much.

RS: You're welcome.

KP: This concludes an interview with Robert Strauss on September 28, 1994 at Jamesburg, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and Margret Thompson.

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

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