

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL R. VAN DUREN SR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

THE RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

Linda Lasko: This begins an interview with Paul Van Duren, at Rutgers University on February 8, 1995 with Linda Lasko and

Tara J. Liston: Tara J. Liston

LL: I guess we'd like to begin by talking about your parents. I understand on your mother's side, you were primarily of Irish descent.

Paul Van Duren: On my mother's side is all Irish. Her mother was born in New York, but my grandmother's mother was born in Ireland. As far as I know, my grandfather was born in Paterson, New Jersey. His parents were born in Ireland. Exactly what year and frankly which county they came from I don't know. That seems to be lost. They didn't know much. The last person who would know, my aunt, died some years ago, not too long ago, ... and she wasn't quite sure.

LL: Would you say that on your mother's side you identified strongly with the Irish?

PV: That really did what?

LL: That you had an Irish identity on your mother's side.

PV: Well yes, but not strongly, no. Roman Catholic, ... but Americanized, definitely. There was very little, my grandmother spoke some Gaelic, she used to give me some words, you know, I don't recall them, when I was young. But they weren't flag wavers on St. Patrick's Day, so to speak. You know, ... they probably wouldn't support the Irish Republican Army right now, for example.

Tara J. Liston: So you were not eating corned beef and cabbage every night?

PV: Excuse me.

TL: You were not eating corned beef and cabbage every night.

PV: Oh no, no, no. ... No, that was somewhat removed. You see my mother's parents were born in the U.S.. So she was second generation actually. ... Is that first generation, or second generation?

LL: And on your father's side, your father was primarily of Dutch descent.

PV: All, both parents. Both grandparents on my father's side were born in Holland.

LL: Where about in Holland?

PV: I don't know that. I know a lot more about my father's genealogy, than I do my mother's. But, I don't know exactly where. The name Van Duren presumes it comes ultimately from the city of Duren, which is in Germany near Holland. But that doesn't mean, you know, my

grandparents came from there. They came from Holland. ... My grandfather was a butcher and a grocer, and my father was, too, in his early years.

LL: Did that run in your family?

PV: Well in that part of the family, yes. It ended in the early part of the Depression, in the early '30s, when they decided to sell it, because they just couldn't make it go. They couldn't live on script and chits, you know, or IOUs, or whatever.

TL: With the butcher shop during the Depression, did your father experience a lot of pressure to give out extra rations?

PV: Yes, yes. Although I wasn't personally familiar, but I heard it from him and from others. Yes, that's one of the reasons that they decided they just couldn't maintain it. They couldn't pay the bills to the suppliers, and they weren't being paid for what they were giving. This was the little corner grocery store, in the small town of Prospect Park, which is north of Paterson, up Haledon Avenue on the hill. I don't know whether you're familiar with it, but ... it's been a Dutch town ever since it's been started, I guess. I recall when I was a kid, the fish salesman would come through in a horse drawn cart hollering, "Herring, Herring", so it was mostly herring, pickled herring. [laughter]

LL: Just like in Holland.

PV: Yeah, just like in Holland, I guess.

LL: Is this, did your father choose this particular area for his butcher shop, because he was of Dutch descent?

PV: Well my grandparents did, I guess. I think they were married when they came over. They came over young, and they were married, and then came to the U.S.. And they choose it because it had already been established as a Dutch town. They happened to be, incidentally, Baptist in a town that was mostly Dutch Reform. There was a difference, a big difference. You'd be surprised. ...

TL: Did that cause them to be sort of an outcast in the society?

PV: To a certain extent, yes, [but] it didn't stop people from doing business with them. You know going to the store and all, but socially, yes. I mean Dutch Reform might be in church all day Sunday, but the Baptist were only there three times on Sunday, you know. Something like that. [laughter]

TL: What kind of town festivities did they have that your family participated back in Prospect?

PV: Why I don't recall anything in particular. ... There were community organizations, sure. My father was a member of the fire department, volunteer. There was a bowling alley in the fire department. I understand he spent a lot of time there, the bowling alley. But there was no bar,

not in Prospect Park. It was like Ocean Grove, you remember. Do you know Ocean Grove? Have you heard about it?

TL: I have heard of the town.

PV: Ocean Grove is Methodist, and Prospect Park is Dutch Reformed, mostly. Whether it still is, I don't know.

LL: How would you characterize the community [where] you grew up, as far as it being first generation Americans? Were there a lot of first generation Americans or primarily second and third generations?

PV: I would say primarily immigrant and first, yes, like my father and his brothers and sisters. They were primarily first- generation. There were some immigrants who came after, you know, even after I was born. And there ... were some others, there were people of different ethnic backgrounds, but not many.

LL: Mostly Dutch?

PV: Yeah, mostly Dutch. ... Actually there was even a Roman Catholic Church right on the border on Haledon Avenue near Haledon itself, where my mother sent myself and my sisters to church.

TL: How did your parents meet, being that they were from different religious and ethnic backgrounds?

PV: I don't know exactly, probably at some dance or something in town, in Paterson. I don't know exactly where they met or how, they didn't meet at the same church, that's for sure. But, they, I think, were part of a pattern that was probably starting then of, what would you call it, a melting pot of cross ethnic marriages. I never heard him or her discuss it. And I forgot to check with them, ... exactly where they met, I don't know.

TL: How many children did they have?

PV: They had three. I was the oldest and I have a sister who is two years younger and another sister who is seven years younger.

LL: How important was education to your family? Was it expected that you would all go on to college?

PV: It was very important, but it wasn't expected that I would necessarily, because I was not an A student. And you know, either an A student [and] get a scholarship, or you didn't. You know or you had somebody sponsoring you, or you had some kind of, something to fall back onto to pay for it. What paid for mine was the G.I. Bill. It paid for practically everything, because my parents ... at that time, couldn't help very much. I went home on weekends, you know, I didn't have to pay for meals or room and board, or whatever. But otherwise, I don't think I could have

stayed at Rutgers, or for that matter any other school. There was nothing else to go to in my area, in Paterson area. There were state teacher's colleges, my wife was a graduate of that {Paterson State then.}

LL: But the G.I. Bill paid for your post-World War II education?

PV: It paid for the four, well, three-and-a-half years here. One summer and three years here. Yes. It paid the tuition, the books, and the subsistence, which wasn't nearly enough, you know I'll tell you. You had to scratch.

TL: It's still like that today.

PV: Oh, I guess it is. I guess it is.

TL: Were they fully supportive and proud of you going to Rutgers?

PV: Oh certainly.

LL: Why did you choose Rutgers?

PV: Well I don't know, I think ... it was the best possibility, you know, nearby. Also, Rutgers at that time, you may know, ... sort of opened itself up to this big influx of new students. Recent discharges from military service who could pass the basic [examination]. ... You had to come and take an examination, which I assume amounted to the SAT at that time. Similar to it. You know, you had to have a high school diploma, then you took the examination. But I think they took a lot of people who may not ... have taken it previously, possibly because they felt, ... I mean the officials of Rutgers ... and the political atmosphere at the time--they felt they owed it to returning veterans to help as much as possible, right?

TL: Definitely.

PV: I think the university does that. But a lot of different types of people they owe it to them, to the society to try to help them.

LL: So you attended Rutgers even before the war though, right?

PV: Oh, no.

LL: No.

PV: No, I was a high school, a Paterson High School graduate. Paterson Central. I worked for a while in the Curtis-Wright plant in Caldwell.

TL: What did you do over there?

PV: Well, I was on the split-gear line. We made propellers. I was a machinist grinder for a while, until they found out that I didn't know what I was doing. [laughter] And then I did a simple job in a sand-blasting machine. It was all rubber, you put your arms in there and you hold the inside of the split gear, and then you step on the pedal and blast sand on the inside of it.

TL: What year was that?

PV: 1942, from February through the end of October. When ... [in] November I enlisted in the Army Air Force.

TL: So you worked in a defense factory in the early part of the war.

PV: Yes, yeah, I was helping produce propellers for Curtis-Wright, same kind of propellers that went on the B-17 plane that I flew eventually, I believe.

TL: Did you notice there was a lot of morale, a lot of American nationality, and pride in the factories?

PV: Yes, I think so, there was a lot of that. There was a lot of propaganda, a lot of promotion, you know, a lot of push, push, push. This was still with the feeling of Pearl Harbor. ... The attack on Pearl Harbor was a shock. It was a real shock to people. People who had never been to Hawaii, or anywhere ever near it, you know. The attack was tremendous, especially when we realized there was something like two or three thousand, was it, killed? Mostly on the battleships. But it was quite a shock. And there was so enthusiastic feeling, of you know, let's do it. But, of course, it provided a lot of employment for people who didn't have any employment.

LL: Especially coming after the Great Depression.

PV: Yes, the unemployment rate went down very fast starting in 1942, you know. And the jobs were paying relatively good money, and wages were high. As you know, you, probably in your history study, that the war had a tendency to give a big boost to the economy, obvious[ly]. ...

LL: Absolutely.

PV: Same for employment.

TL: With Pearl Harbor, did you notice that there was a lot more racism towards people of German descent, Italian or Japanese descent in your area?

PV: Well, I didn't know any Japanese people. I did know people of German descent and Italian descent, yes, friends and neighbors. A friend of mine in grade school, was of Italian descent, lived in Prospect Park, others, some German descent lived in Prospect Park, also. Another friend I knew fairly well in high school, and we went through college here together, German descent. But he was in service, he was not in combat, but he was in service, too. There wasn't any, no really, not nothing at all, most of the people of German descent were not antagonistic toward the

American effort at all. On the contrary. There might be, you know, some problems among some of them, ... but I never heard them. ... There weren't any [among] ... Italian descent, either. ... People might keep their culture history up going, but when they became "Americans" that's their country. ...

TL: I have read in Paterson that there is a pro-fascist paper, (Il Nuovo Americano?)?

PV: I've heard of it.

TL: You have heard of it? Did it have a great following?

PV: I don't know, I would doubt it. I would doubt it. Frankly, I didn't pay too much attention to newspapers before the war. ... Well, during the war--toward the end of it, I did, and I really got interested before I was discharged. But before, no. I don't ... I know this one friend I was speaking of, his family did not, they were ... Italian background, stuck in among a lot of Dutch. But, they nevertheless, ... considered themselves American. They were a little bit not socially part of the community. I don't know what happened to him, frankly, whether he went into the service or not. But, ... I personally didn't think much of, or didn't really understand much of what was going on in the Pacific Coast. Putting a lot of Japanese people into camps, as it turns out I think unnecessarily, ... and unwarrantably, I suppose. But I didn't know of any, I had no, my family, my Dutch grandmother in particular, {my Dutch grandfather had died fairly young early}, never said anything to me about any feelings toward the Germans, you know. She was Dutch. Dutch and German are not the same thing. There are similarities in language, they are bordering each other. There are other similarities, and whatever, but they're not the same at all. ... They don't talk to each other necessarily, the Dutch in particular. ... They don't like to be dominated, you know, by the Germans. There are so many more of them, and whatever. And they showed that during the war. They were occupied, you know, they were not annexed. They were not part of Germany. They were occupied, as France was and the others.

TL: When you were fighting, were you kind of fighting for revenge, of your "motherland?" Did you want to help free your grandparents' country?

PV: No, I think I just wanted to be a hero and get it over with it, and have fun when I could. Drank too much, played too much, you know.

LL: Had you travelled a lot in the United States before you entered into the military?

PV: I never went any further than the Jersey Shore.

LL: Not further than the Jersey Shore.

PV: ... Not very much down there, either. No, my folks didn't have any money to take vacations for one thing, and I didn't have any either, of course, I wasn't working during school. And in fact, we didn't even have a car at that time. We had to use buses. My father, when he gave up the butcher store, he took the bus to work. And I took buses from Prospect Park to downtown Paterson, to Paterson Central High School, back and forth. My aunt had a car, and

she occasionally would take us on excursions up into the northern part of the state, ... Greenwood Lake and places like that. But no, I had never been, in fact, when I went to Newark to be enlisted, ... {I wasn't drafted, I enlisted.} But when I went to Newark, to be inducted, ... {I was in Newark with my father,} ... we went down there by bus. Because, there was no other way to go. And when they put me on a train to Miami Beach, that was the first time I was on a train. Let's see, that was November of '42. I was 19, yes 19.

LL: When you got this opportunity to see other parts of the nation, what was your impression?

PV: Well, it's fascinating, when you first go to Miami Beach, you know. In November, you're up here in New Jersey and you go down to Florida, the weather is fascinating, of course. So mild, so unusual. And after a week or so down there, they reassigned me to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. When you're going from 70 to 80 degree weather, down to minus twenty, not minus twenty, but twenty degrees and below in Sioux Falls where it really gets cold. And they put you in the barracks with a coal stove, and you get up early go to breakfast, and go to school all day, most of the day.

TL: Did you feel a lot of apprehension leaving your family?

PV: Well, yes and no. ... I felt it was adventuresome, you know. ... I was going into an adventure. I didn't realize exactly what in hell I was getting into. [laughter] But it was like it, you know, an adventure, I was looking forward to it. But that's the way, ... that's the attitude I had all the way, until, you know, until some months before I was finally discharged. And I really wanted to get out, because I was not the type to remain military service, you know. I didn't want to stay in.

TL: So the adventure was over.

PV: Yeah. Well the adventure was over, but they sent me out to Colorado Springs to fly with brass around the country {after European tour}, brass meaning colonels, and brigadier generals and whatever, who wanted a plane and a crew. And I went along as the radio operator. But, that got me to see a number of places in around the country too, that I didn't see.

TL: In the service, did you notice a lot of distinction between officers and the enlisted men?

PV: Well yes, officers and enlisted men didn't socialize. Of course, ... they were closer together in flight crews, than they were--probably in submarines too--I'm guessing, because of the physical proximity and the need to be with each other and work together closely. ... Than in the infantry or other army or large-ship situations. You're billeted separately, you don't sleep in the same quarters and you eat separately, except on days of missions when flying missions out of England over Germany and occupied Europe you all ate together in the same mess hall. You may not necessarily sit together, but you eat together. I don't think either officers or men wanted necessarily to socialize with each other, although occasionally while on leave we did. We'd go mostly to London on two-day leave every two weeks, and we'd socialize for one dinner or so.

TL: Is that when drunken bouts came about?

PV: When what?

TL: When your drunken bouts with a few colonels came out?

PV: No ... that happened on my last mission. And the commander of the group. ... The tradition was when you finished your missions. (At the time I could do 29 and I could come back to the states. I didn't have to go any further, I could leave or ask for more, or go for another tour if I wished. But I decided that I was lucky enough, so I didn't.) But the tradition was, after every mission, each crew member was given one shot of whiskey. Whatever they wanted, rye, Scotch, Bourbon, whatever. So the tradition was whenever one of your crew was finishing up, he could have it all if he wanted. So I got about half way through, I think. I'm not that much of a drinker. I never was, a little beer, a little beer and that's about all. I got about half way through, and I really started in the debriefing, big debriefing section, I went all all round introducing myself to people. And I knew who he was when I introduced myself. I don't know what I said to him. He said later, he said, "No you didn't say anything." {Meaning disrespectful} But, in fact, he had a drink with me. He said, "Here have one on me." His name was Bowman. He became a brigadier general and he was a colonel then. If he had been, you know, been slated for higher office, he certainly would have become a lieutenant general at minimum, but he didn't get that far.

And then another went out in ... Peterson Field, Colorado Springs, with one of our colonels we were flying around with. Two engineers, myself, we went to Washington, then he flew down to Florida to visit friends and family, a girlfriend, or whatever. He flew back to Boston, and back to Washington for two weeks and I went home for that time. And, finally, he said, "We're going to go out together." So we went out together, it was three of us, four of us, and sort of tied one on so to speak. And talked about flight commanders who fly over Frankfurt three times in order to make sure they are dropping bombs in the right place. In the meantime, you know the sky is black with anti-aircraft fire.

TL: I want to get back to that. I have got a list of questions that I want to ask about your experiences in the service, and that is one of my top questions. I remember reading that. Can we just go back to when you got inducted into the service?

PV: Yeah.

TL: Did you feel that Newark and the actual induction camp was efficient and organized, that everything ran smoothly?

PV: Well, you know, ... it's just a group of a hundred or so, being inducted quickly in a room, ... in an armory or someplace. Then they put us on G.I. buses and took us to Penn Station. It all happened pretty quickly. Because you are previously all signed up. I signed up, in the local Paterson recruiting station. So, we went through the formality of taking the oath, and then being put on the buses and on the trucks to Penn Station and the train to Fort Dix for three days, then train again. {To Fort Dix for three days, then train again.} On regular cattle-car trains with sit-

up seats, you know. Cattle-car trains, you can't sleep on them or whatever, but you did whatever you could. It took two days, two-and-a-half days to go to Miami.

TL: On the train, were there any people that were drafted and did not want to be a part of this?

PV: You know I don't remember talking with anyone in particular about that. There were a mixture of draftees, and enlisted. I don't remember. It's kind of, you know, a lot of military life, ... you're in a situation like that you just sit around and wait. It's, you know that expression, "Hurry up and wait." You know, you hurry up and get there and then you wait. You get on the bus, hurry up and get on the truck and then you wait. And then the truck goes, and then you hurry up and get off, get on the train and then you wait for two days. Well, of course, ... you go to the bathroom, you go to the mess car, whatever, ... but otherwise, you're still waiting. That's the kind of life the military is very frequently.

LL: Now you had mentioned that you volunteered to sign up in your local Paterson office.

PV: Yeah.

LL: What led you to do this?

PV: I was getting tired of doing what I was doing at the propellor plant. It was really silly. I wasn't going anywhere, doing that work ... for Curtis-Wright. And partly in the back of my head, the idea, within the year I would have been drafted, within the year, I would say. By the time I was twenty, ... maybe before that. I don't know. But mostly I think for adventure. I wanted to get out and go, ... not out away from my family so much, but out of the environment. It wasn't bad, there was nothing wrong with it, I just wanted to be out by myself, even when I was a teenager. But I couldn't afford to do it. Of course, ... like most every boy when he gets to be maybe ten, eleven, twelve years old, he says, he's gonna leave home. He's gonna pack up his sack and leave home, you know.

LL: Do you think your work for Curtis-Wright led you to choose the U.S. Army Air Force?

PV: No, I wanted to be a pilot, but as you can see with these bi-focals, I couldn't see well enough, you know. I'm far-sighted, astigmatic. And that's partly why I'm wearing these half-tints here, just for the glare. They wouldn't accept you as a pilot unless you could do 20/20 eyesight, and not astigmatic, and you know whatever. But, they would allow [you to] ... train for flight crews. Eventually, I didn't have to go through gunnery school {most of radio operators did up to that time}, because they needed radio operators to fill up crews and training. You didn't need gunnery knowledge really as a radio operator. When you were flying in a formation you weren't doing really much radio operating either, just listening and monitoring. If you were on a lead plane, you might be doing more. But then, of course, you have to monitor whatever you're pilot says or your commander, plane commander, says "Monitor, I want to know what they're sending back to division headquarters." Wants to know whether the missions called off, you know, before they tell him. Over the voice radio.

TL: Did that happen frequently?

PV: Well no, not too much, but you might, the weather people might say, "Well its clouded over." We didn't have accurate bombing radar at that time. They developed some, but after we got started over there. But if it clouded over too much, they might call it back, or they might send us to a ... secondary target. Every mission had two minimum, at least two targets. Primary and secondary. If the weather got bad, the meteorologist figured that, or if they had sent some plane out ahead of time, to fly up high to see what the weather was like over there around the target area. ... And sometimes the commander of the formation, either of a group formation of eighteen planes, or what was called a wing of three groups of 54 planes, would ... have his operator send the message back to division headquarters by Morse Code, before he would tell the rest of the pilots in his formation ... what he was going to do. He might send a message back and ask for suggestions or instructions. So my pilot wanted me to monitor it, and get my codebook out see what, every day the bomber code changed. And they put it on this ... little thin onion paper, as they say. And you know what your supposed to do with the onion paper, eat it.

TL: Really.

PV: Well, if you were knocked down. [laughter] But ... if your plane was suddenly hit and out of commission, you've only got one thing on your mind, just get out! You know, get your parachute on and get out. Most wore a harness for a chest chute to buckle on. Some cases you can't. I've seen some that you couldn't. They couldn't get out, possibly get out. All of a sudden the plane, ... the wing just crumbled and went up in flame. You know, gone.

TL: What did that do to morale when you saw it?

PV: You drank more I guess. ... You go off on leave and you play more. There were some naughty girls in London. In other places too. But after a while it builds up, and you're looking forward to the two days off every two weeks.

LL: And what would you do on leave?

PV: Drink, eat and play.

TL: Do you care to elaborate on play? We get some good stories every so often.

PV: Well, hopefully you'd find some people that, ... I'd usually pal around with the tail gunner, an Irishman, farmer, from Wisconsin, his name was Garrity. And we got lost once in the Piccadilly area, and we went to the Windmill Theater, and we met a couple of dancers. And we took them to the Lions Corner House for supper, late supper, very late, and they took us to their apartment, and we stayed with them until the morning. We weren't talking all the time. I wasn't married, but I guess that's no excuse, is it? Anybody who tells you they didn't do that, in that circumstance, don't believe them. Don't believe them. Because, you believe your going to, next time up, your gonna get it, you're know, you've had it. So you think you'll live it up until the last minute. That attitude. You don't start out with that, but after a while it ... Of course, some few men didn't do this.

TL: How long do you think it took before you got to that point? I mean wanted to live up every second?

PV: Oh, I don't know, by the tenth mission, ... I guess, something like that. Or after seeing, after real bad ones. After ones with a number of planes lost. Yet those who started flying in '42, in August, September, of '42, they started flying B-17s over Germany, without any air cover, without any help from fighter planes. And they started to do some long ones, a year later, Schweinfurt for example, which was the ball-bearing capital of Germany, I believe, it was considered that, and I don't know how many planes, they sent up about 400 planes and they lost 60 or something like that. Or 300 and they lost 60, which is a very high ratio. They had no protection by means of fighter cover, I mean from our friendly planes. And the German pilots were very good. ... They'd come in straight. First, they'd appear high, and then they would come straight in and aim for engines. ... On their main planes they had twenty-millimeter cannon. On the ME-09, Messerschmitt-109, and the Focke-Wulf 190. One of those hit, that was hit. So they were, they got hit a lot. Worse than we did, I didn't get over there until December of '43, well November, late November. By that time, there was quite, they were building up quite fast, and were sending a lot of P-47s and P-38 American fighter planes in, and eventually P-51s over there. And that became easier, with ... less opposition. By the time of D-Day they, ... the Allies had no opposition in the air over Europe. Maybe over the Eastern section. They could still dominate the Russians, but in the air, but otherwise, no.

TL: Did you feel more secure towards the end of the war flying, or did you still fear being shot from the ground?

PV: Shot from the ground?

TL: When you were flying after the Americans had control of the air, did you have less fear on your bombing raids?

PV: Well no, ... you still had problems. Especially anti-aircraft fire, called flak. And, .. after the invasion, they had a lot of longer missions. They were running a lot longer, since they had less opposition, because they were going further and further into, deeper into Germany, for targets like the synthetic oil refineries, that place called Merseburg, near Czechoslovakia, and other ... targets like that. And that could be difficult, and it still can occasionally have opposition. You know the ... P-51 could have wing tanks, wing gasoline tanks, but their range was still limited with those tanks. And every time they got into a dogfight, they would have to drop those tanks, and then they would have so many minutes and then they would have to stop and head back to England. Otherwise, you know, ditching in the Channel is ... no fun. Not only no fun, there's no guarantee you're going to make it that way. ... So, did we got lost somewhere along the line?

TL: No, I was really interested in the Schweinfurt mission.

PV: Schweinfurt.

TL: Schweinfurt, I am so bad, I butcher every language. Did you actually fly in that one? You said you came in December, right?

PV: No, ... those raids, I spoke of, were in August and September, '43. Schweinfurt, Frankfurt, certain key targets they were after. Like ball bearings at Schweinfurt. Those were the first long-range raids without any support, and that's the big reason they got hit so badly. You know, the Luftwaffe would send up squadrons here and there, you know, and our planes would run out of short-range [fighter cover]. ... The one thing about World War II fighter planes, they didn't have very much fuel capacity. The English Spitfire was the worst of all. It didn't even have much. Although it was the ... most maneuverable and probably the best one. ... So those formations of B-17s got hit four or five times, to the target and probably on the way back. Mostly to the target, obviously you want to get them before they drop the bombs. "Achtung! [laughter] The Americans show up there."

LL: Going into the war, what were your feelings about the Germans? What were your impression of them as combatants?

PV: Well, ... as I said before, I knew some German people. I didn't think ... anything, I knew enough from my studies and reading what Nazism was all about, you know. I realized ... from adults and others, ... that many people detested it, and realized what it was like. We didn't realize the extent of the genocide either. That was not published at that time. Whether it was known or not, it was not known by the press. Quote press unquote, generic or something. But, I think ... I realized and others did, I called it propaganda, propaganda made the point of saying that we got to do something, we got to help the English. Otherwise, you know, if Germany took over Europe it would be a very difficult situation. Technically, diplomatically, I believe the Germans declared war on the U.S. after the U.S. declaration on Japan, and Japan's return declaration and whatever. That was only a formality, you know.

TL: How did you travel to England?

PV: We flew.

TL: You flew.

LL: And that the first time you had flown?

PV: Oh no, no, we were flying in training from Montana, where I was based.

LL: Long distance.

PV: Oh yeah. Yes, yes. We flew ... in stages, from Montana to Scott Field, Illinois, where we got some equipment, for personal needs and otherwise. And then we flew from Scott Field to Gander, Newfoundland. And from Newfoundland to ... Prestwick, Scotland. And from Prestwick, ... this is over a period of two or three days. And from Prestwick, to the our base in the Midlands area of Northampshire, near Corby and Kettering. We went back, I went back there last summer, with the ... package tour, with about a hundred others. I haven't been in touch

with any of my crew, and none of them were there. But it was interesting to see the old place, there was nothing left of it, crumbling buildings, and ... one airstrip used by a local flying club. Crumbling buildings and farmland, most of it lying fallow. They plant a lot of a certain kind of wheat that they use, not for bread stuffs, but they use it for stock. For sheep I think.

TL: How did you expect it to look?

PV: The sheep, the sheep, were all over the English countryside. Believe me. Well anyway. What?

TL: I'm sorry. How did you expect the area to look, when you got back?

PV: Well, ... we obviously realized ... the base was not in use any longer. It had been used for a while after the war by the RAF, but then they gave it up, and it reverted to the original owners mostly, farmland, and used this farmland and most of it as I say lying fallow, not being used. And the original control tower structure is still there crumbling, you know. But they still have the flag flying on it, because it is still considered U.S. territory, just that particular one. The flag's flying over the crumbling control tower. You can't go in the control tower, because the bricks might fall on you, so. [laughter]

TL: But the flag still stands.

PV: ... Somebody's duty is to maintain that flag. ... I guess if you do it right, you have to take it in every twilight, and put it up every day, every dawn. Whether they do that or not, I don't know. We didn't go there that early, when we were there. ... And we spent quite a lot of time on that trip, three days and ...visiting the countryside, small "castles" and manor houses of the Peerage.

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

TL: When you landed in England, can you describe what kind of environment you had landed in? Was it chaotic?

PV: No, we were ... never in a populated area, of course, we were never anywhere near London in the beginning. We were first assigned to another group's base for a while, for orientation for a few days. I think that our base was still not ready. The 401st group was, I went over with the original group. We didn't really get a chance to meet those who were flying out of it then. But it was one of the original bases ... of the Eighth Air Force. And they had been flying ever since they started the precision daylight bombing, they called it. How precise it was exactly is another question. When you read books and official documents of the air force, they'll tell you it isn't quite precise all the time, by any means, well in any event. When we went to the base it was not chaotic, no, things were pretty well organized. They'd get you up in at four o'clock in the morning, you had breakfast at five, and briefing at six. And you'd get a separate briefing: pilots, bombardiers, navigators, radio separate briefing, while the gunners put the 50-caliber machine guns in the planes, and you go out to the planes, and wait again, when you were in the plane. And when the control tower fires the flare, they don't send any radio signals, they fire the flare, then the lead plane starts out and all the others follow, and there you go.

TL: What was your first mission like?

PV: The first mission was to Bremen, which is right ... near the North Sea Coast. And there was little or no opposition, as I recall, except that we had some anti-aircraft fire, and it chipped a piece of ... aileron cable in the waist area. The waist area is behind the radio room where the big windows are, we had two gunners, one on each side. And it chipped the cable and the ailerons couldn't be controlled right away, so the pilot you know, peeled off and went right back over the ... North Sea, in the Eastern Channel there. And reportedly, we got ... fired upon by a fighter plane, and reportedly according to the gunners, our ball turret gunner shot it down. I'm at the radio room, you can't see down in the radio room, you only can see up and behind you when you're standing up. So he got credit for that. That's ... the only time that we had ... any problem of having to leave the formation or something like that, the ... first mission. We had lots of holes in the plane from anti-aircraft and some from fighter planes on other missions, but nothing damaging enough to, you know, not even to put one engine out. Those planes could fly on three or even two for a while. They were really rough, tough I should say.

TL: What did that do for your morale, when you saw what happened after your first mission.

PV: Yeah, ... it didn't take long total time, three hours or less, but ... it was quite an eye opener. ... I think we were all a little excited, including the pilot, who never showed it. He had sinus problems, and that can be murder up on altitudes, you know. You'd get above ten, twelve thousand feet, you have to start wearing oxygen and you have sinus problems that can be really troublesome. That's another reason he wanted to know quickly, ... when we might be turning back. I don't know whether he occasionally, took his mask off and, you know, just sort of ... try to help clear his sinuses or whatever, I don't know what that would do for it. Probably nothing. Pure oxygen would be better, because you don't get pure oxygen in normal use, but you'd have to switch it. You know another thing you use oxygen for? To get rid of a hangover, to help burn it out.

TL: You're kidding. [laughter]

LL: Really?

PV: Oh sure, sure, we'd go out to the plane some days on mission days and we were drinking too much, and you take a couple quick breaths, you feel like a little high, you know. Then for a while you're literally like this. A little light-headed.

TL: Snaps you out of it? Did you ever get instructions to fly at extremely high altitudes or low altitudes?

PV: No, well low, yes, not high. No more than 25,000 feet. That plane really couldn't, well it could have, I suppose, but they never really did go any higher than that. When you're out bombing, as I say, it was not necessarily as good as ... everybody had hoped it would be. Not just with our group. But not above twenty-five, ten thousand feet once, twice. Twice. They got us up at noon. Getting up at noon is like saying don't go to bed. What am I saying noon,

midnight I mean. I was thinking about twelve. You'd get up at midnight, breakfast at one, briefing at two, you'd take off around three. That's the way it went. From three until about seven in the morning we're flying back and forth, east and west across England. Squadrons, groups, different wings, are doing this. They all have their separate pattern to fly, so you know, they don't bump into each other. And what this is doing is agitating the German Luftwaffe radar, you know. They know we're in the air, and they don't know what the hell to do about it. And everybody is alert and whatever. Comes daylight, the first formation, of just the group formation starts down from about 15,000 feet, and by the time they get across the channel, and crossing into the Calais area of France, they're down at 10,000 feet. And the target is the edge of a field about fifteen, twenty miles in from the coast. The map shows nothing but trees. There's a ... point there, that point where the trees are that's what you hit. We went in, beautiful weather, you know, less than an hour ... after dawn, hit it, and went back. It was a long mission, times in the air, but that's all there was. A day or two later, go back, go back and do the same thing, same routine, except by the time you got over the same target, do you know what happened? The sky got black with anti-aircraft fire. We were just walking on it, the planes were just bouncing like this, like crazy. ... The explosion causes the plane, it's like hitting an updraft or a down draft, or high winds. If you've flown commercial air or otherwise, you know you feel that. You know that's what it's like, only even more so. It's the concussion that's doing it. Actually, of course, if you can get hit directly with one of those shells, you're out. Yes, that was the only time at that altitude. Otherwise, it was either between twenty to twenty-five thousand feet on bombing missions.

TL: Did you feel like you had no control being in that little radio room by yourself?

PV: That's right, you had no control at all. You either sit down at the ... radio stool, or you stand up and you look up and back.

LL: Did you have any background in radio technology?

PV: No, not really, three or four month training. It was about 80 percent getting proficient in the use of Morse Code, using the Morse Code. The rest of it was just an elementary trouble-shooting on radio. You know, things that you had to know about. For example, that time that we went out of formation, that first time, the pilot wanted to call the control tower at that base we were at. Well, all the control towers are on the same frequency, and that voice frequency from each individual plane, command frequency they call it, all control towers in the 8th Air Force, or at least in the 1st Division of the 8th, are all in the same frequency. So if he did, from that point over the channel everyone in England, every base in England would hear him. I told him that, he said, "I want to talk to the base, fix it so I can." I said, "Yes sir." So ... there's a resistance thing in the antenna, all you have to do ... I said, "Lay off it, don't touch it yet." I unscrewed the resistance, take it off, and he announced that he was coming back in ... with a cut airon, airon, A-I-R-E-L-O-N, something like that, cable. And everybody in the 1st Division, or in the whole 8th Air Force heard him. When we got back down again, and I get a debriefing from the Communications Officer, "How did that happen?" he asked, I said, "Lieutenant, how do you think that happened. The pilot ordered it". "Don't do it again!" he said. You know.

TL: Was the pilot ever reprimanded for that?

PV: He was told about it, yes, but I don't think he was, you know really reprimanded at all. Of course, it could be a dangerous situation, if the whole cable broke it could be a real problem, you know, landing the plane.

LL: How did everyone on board the plane get along, between the pilot, and yourself?

PV: Oh, fine, fine. All the, most of the men were bunked together in the same section of the barracks, and the officers were bunked together in the same, small quonset hut. Quonset, did you ever hear of Quonset huts? Q-U-O-N-S-E-T, made of sheet metal. They're usually like Eskimo mounds, igloes, you know, shaped like that, usually made from sheet metal. And put five or six of them together, you'd get enough room for three or four enlisted men crews. That's, those incidentally were not left when I went back last summer. They were all gone, so apparently the metal was still worth something to somebody who got it. They took it away.

TL: Speaking of hocking, did you notice a lot of people selling off rations to people in London? Or anything like that?

PV: Well no, you wouldn't, if you mean U.S. servicemen selling, no. Nor others either. What I regretted being young and foolish, at the time ... what I regretted now and ever since then, I didn't go around sightseeing, really sightseeing, you know and getting to know people and whatever. I've regretted this whole routine of drinking, and if you pardon the expression, whoring. I regret that now, and ever since then. But then you wouldn't know about it, because wherever we were there were other Americans also, and the English were serving them there, bartenders, waiters, waitresses, maitre d's, whatever, desk clerks, they were all the same way towards you. You didn't know anything about them, you just knew their face and their name after a while. I don't want to suggest that I was quote "W-H-O-R-I-N-Ging" a lot, I wasn't, you know, I don't mean that, but, you got scared and you thought that you should have fun.

TL: I have a question about the bombs. From 1942 to 1944 they were just the size of like 53,000 they grew, they went from 53,755 tons to like 1,200,000 tons. What happened with the planes to be able to hold the bombs at a higher weighage. Do you know if there was any different type of requirements that they needed to do, or were the planes just able to handle it?

PV: Well, I'm not quite sure what you mean. Many more bombers meant more tonnage dropped. The B-17 could carry, its standard load was twelve 500-pound bombs. That's all. Which is what 6,000 pounds? Which is three tons. Those are HE, high explosive type. ... We also carried fragmentation type bombs, smaller ones. Types that broke up into larger pieces before they exploded like a Chinese firecracker, only much more explosive, if you know what I mean. And actually either the HEs, 500 HEs, or the frags were the only ones that I recall carrying. The B-17 couldn't carry any more than 6,000 pounds. The B-24 carries about 2,000 pounds more. That was another World War II bomber. I don't know, of course, the B-29s were flying over Japan, could carry even more, because it was a somewhat larger plane. But what the B-52 could or does carry in terms of weight load I don't know, probably quite a bit more than that, sure. The B-52 is similar in size in most dimensions to a 747 a little smaller. You've seen 747s, I'm sure, then you've been close to them, fairly close to see what size they are. A B-52 I

guess is smaller than that. I suppose it could carry a lot of ... bombs, a large load. But talking about high explosives, ... I don't think that the nuclear devices are necessarily heavy, not as heavy as the high explosive types in total weight comparison. I don't know.

TL: That's really interesting. With your plane, did you name it anything?

PV: No, we didn't at the time. Excuse me, I'm going to take this sweater off, do you mind? At the time, our pilot wasn't too keen on it. I don't know if there was a disagreement or something. Also at the time, they came out with a directive not to do it anymore. Only because you could never know for sure whether you would have the same plane everyday. You know, it would depend on whether the plane was in condition or not. You kind of let the ground crew decide who should have what plane or whatever. Sometimes you'd come back and you wouldn't hit ... any flak, which is anti-aircraft, or any other holes or damage, but the engines might have problems, you know, oil leaks or whatever. ... Those planes were famous for oil leaks. Or it might be another problem with it. So, you never know which plane you'd have. I know there has been a lot of stories about planes, like the Memphis Belle, and a few others. The Memphis Belle goes back again to those August-September 1943 raids I believe, if you saw that movie. ... They do a play on that, ... that's not documentary, that movie, but it's similar to what was going on. But I think it was exaggerated just to make it even more.

TL: What parts do you think were exaggerated?

PV: Well I don't know in detail, ... the constant crisis, so to speak. Oh sure, while you're under attack, and all [of] you have a problem, after you're damaged, and your plane is damaged, you're always on the alert for something. But I just think the tendency of a movie maker to make it ...

LL: Overly dramatic.

PV: ... to keep the tension going all the time.

TL: Right.

PV: You know. I must warn anyone and everyone, that I never went through an experience like that. On January 11, of '44, we, the whole 8th, was on raids leading up to Berlin, never got to Berlin or its neighborhood, to places like Oschersleben. And the Luftwaffe decided to make a real event out of it. They had every plane in the ... air that day. And we had quite a few attacks on us, and we made it alright. One P-51 commander by the name of Colonel Howard, won the Congressional Medal for that raid. He shot down five or six. And not only that, one of our ... sharp-eyed waist gunners, named George Peacock, he knew he was out there, he said, told everybody, he kept saying, you know everybody's talking on the intercom, watch this, twelve o'clock high, down low, three o'clock level. These clock positions are like on a ship you have aft and port, or it's port and starboard and two points off and whatever. Well in a plane you use it by clock. Twelve o'clock means straight ahead obviously, six o'clock straight back, nine o'clock to the left, three o'clock to the right, and all the points in between, high, low or level. So we're all saying, you know, we're seeing all these Luftwaffe planes, and then the waist gunner says, "There's a P-51 out there, watch out, don't hit him". "A 51", he said, "Hey ...there's no 51

out there." ... He says, "There's a 51 out there, watch it!" And there surely was. Finally most people were able to see him. Then there were others in his squadron, ... but they were scattered all over. They were small squadron and they decided to take on the whole Luftwaffe, or so it seemed then. Those guys are something. ... They were something else, the fighter pilots. ...

TL: Did you guys have any good luck charms, you know, to get you through these missions, or anything, or rituals that you would do?

PV: Well I don't know. I always wore the ... same socks, [laughter] until they got so damn stinky that I had to wash them. Otherwise ... not much, not much. I think I had a habit, every time we had a mission, they'd give us fresh eggs and bacon or sausage, you know, over in England. And they, the air force had to fly them over. The English didn't have enough, you know, they ... have chicken farms, but not nearly as ... [many as needed]. A lot of fresh food had to [be] flown over, and the day you flew, that's what you got, you got fresh food. And the other food was good on days even in regular mess. I used to skip the sausage and take the bacon. Something in the back of my head said, "Eat the bacon, ... don't eat the sausage." You don't want any wienerschnitzel and sauerkraut for supper tonight, I don't know, something like that.

LL: So this is a ritual then.

PV: Yeah, yeah, right.

TL: Was it something you did for your first mission and you made it back safe, so you continued doing it?

PV: Yes, and I still prefer sausage to bacon, I still prefer bacon to sausage, I should say. [laughter] I never was much for carrying good luck charms or things like that. What I should have done most of the time was take my glasses along with me. I am 20-30 and 20-45 or something, I don't know {vision rating, i.e., 20-20.} But I frequently didn't. When you're twenty years old, or 21 or so, you seem to feel it better not to wear them. But, by the time I started going to class here, I couldn't do without. And haven't since, obviously.

TL: I just do contacts, I'm lucky. I also heard that the thirteenth mission, that the men always had to fly was always the most traumatic, I don't know if it was blown out of proportion, but can you recall your thirteenth.

PV: No, I don't recall any of that. I don't recall any of us thinking about that. I went ... on sick call one time. I had two missions in a row to replace operators who had frostbite on their cheeks. The B-17F didn't have a hatch over the radio room, and at 25,000 feet in the winter, or even not in the winter, it gets pretty damn cold up, below zero. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, sometimes. And you'd get frostbite, and the surgeons would ground them, because in order to treat it, you know, before it got any worse. So I was assigned two missions in a row. One of them was the second one over the Pas-de-Calais area. I never explained to you what the target was. The target was the launching platforms for the buzz bombs. They were in the Calais area, not too far from the French coast, obviously. ... So they had time to get over to England, to London. They didn't tell us what they were, they called them ski sites. Well anyway, the second one of that I went

with another crew. And then the following mission I went with another crew. You didn't, weren't supposed to fly every mission ... unless the division or headquarters said, "Maximum effort." ... We had ten crews per squadron to start with and six would fly each mission. And then each, every third mission, the squadron would be off. So I flew two of those and then I went into sick call. And I was getting the feeling, you know, if this keeps going on, and I gotta fly with other people, something is going to happen to me, and I want to go with my crew where nothing ever happens to me. And they put me down as a little case of combat fatigue. But I got out the next day. They came over the whole bunch of them, to cheer me up, and so they let me out the next morning. I wanted to get out, out of the hospital.

LL: And these were guys from your own ...

PV: My crew. Including the officers, they came over to visit, you know, "How you doing? We don't fly tomorrow, why don't you come over, we'll go ... to the local pub." So that's, that was that.

TL: So there was strong unit pride and support going on.

PV: Yes. They put me into a so-called "rest home" after I had my month off when I came back to W.S.. They sent me to Atlantic City, where they were reassigning, and they put you in the old Ambassador Hotel, and, of course, you're drinking and playing after a month off at home. And I went to an interview with a psychologist and a doctor. He said, "Well I think we ought to put you down in Don Cesar, ... which is a resort hotel, down in St. Petersburg on the beach, and I was down there for six weeks.

TL: A free vacation.

PV: Yeah, so after two or three days of getting up at ten or eleven in the morning, they come around and get you up at eight, then seven, and get ... you off this [easy schedule]. You can't go to town, except once a week and you only got two hours there. You can't stay any longer. They stop you from drinking, and the best part of it is that we had dances ... at the hotel. Where the cream of St. Petersburg's deb society would come, entertain, talk and dance, and whatever, and whatever, of course, didn't include anything naughty. Naturally.

TL: That was only in Europe.

PV: That was in the states too, but not there. [laughter] Not with them, of course. Alright, what else? I think I'm talking too much about my personal experience.

TL: No that's the part that we really want, we need information.

PV: Who is going to hear this?

TL: It's going to be put into an archive, where students in the future can go and listen to your tape and be able to learn about the experiences of a World War II veteran.

TL: Would you like to go over more military type things?

PV: Whatever, whatever, you ask, you ask me. So what interests you. You ask me one question and I keep on going on and on.

TL: That's what we love, really. When you were flying, did you realize that you were attacking people and possibly civilians or did you try to block that out of your mind?

PV: Well yes, you do [there]. You know, you hope, that the target is military, even though civilians working perhaps down there, in military places. The target is supposed to be and is military. You think about that, and of course, the history in fact shows, that lots of, some civilian areas, we'll say, were hit. But ... not deliberately. I have no comment on ... the infamous Dresden raid, because I don't know anything about it. I wasn't there, I was over here in the states, I was assigned to Colorado Springs. I don't know whether they deliberately tried to do that or not. The record appears to show that they did, ... we went over there, our U.S. bombers with fragmentation type bombs and the English came at night with incendiaries. According to the story. Sort of like ... the German Hiroshima without the nuclear.

LL: What were your feelings on that dropping of the atomic bomb?

PV: Well, at the time, you know, I was not going to be assigned over there anyway, but at the time, you felt, "Well, look at us, look at what we've done," you know. The estimates, I don't think the estimates, of [the] ... toll was as much as it turned out to be at all. I mean the estimates reported at the time. If they had reported that hundred of thousands ... would be would be killed, I think a lot more people would have objected to dropping it.

TL: How do you think being a reporter ... I'm sorry go on.

PV: Well, I know a lot more people would have objected to that and there wouldn't have been a second one perhaps, you know, because ... it would have been a political debit obvious ... on President Truman. I don't think it was just to say, because he was in the military, he did it. I think he was convinced that it made the difference between ending the war then, or stretching it out for another year. Whether 200,000 lives are worth it or not is another question. ... I don't know the answer to it.

TL: I don't think anybody does.

PV: ... I don't believe that we would have lost 200,000 men in that, trying to take Japan. Nowhere near that. Particularly, we've got control of the air by that time. But it would have been a logistic problem because you had no, you had to come from Taiwan, or Formosa, I guess, would have been the closest place, you know, to make invasion landings in Japan. It would take time and all. But otherwise, you didn't have the short distance across the Channel, like you did in Europe. Relatively short at least. ... I would imagine the scars from that, you know, both in Japan and the U.S., will last a long, long time. The scars from the European situation will maybe even [last] longer. And unfortunately, I would imagine that quite a few people, Germans and ... Japanese, are still very antagonistic towards the U.S.

TL: I can see you're visibly distressed over the entire situation.

PV: Well, you know, you think about it and I ...

LL: They're tough problems.

PV: The only thing we can hope for is, in this, it's still not peaceful in this nation, in this nation, in this country; in this world rather. The only thing to hope for is that we finally cool these conflicts off. Unfortunately, I guess historians will say in the future, that the economic conflict can be ... just as difficult, ... to deal with as an outright physical war conflict.

LL: There are probably some left that I ...

PV: The salvation of the world is not selling more for less. Business of America is not ... what's good for General Motors is not necessarily good for the U.S. What's good for Sony is not necessarily good for Japan, or Toyota or vice versa.

TL: Do you own a Japanese car?

PV: My wife has one yes, she has a Honda. It's ... not problem- free, but it's not bad. She likes it. We got it at a time when we needed something. ... It's a two-door hatch-back Honda. ... I have an Oldsmobile, that's even ... less of a problem, it's an '86 model, almost ten years old now. But that hasn't been a problem at all. And ... now they, Japan, dropped the tariffs, they didn't dropped them all, of course. I get the feeling that we have to work together or be together, and not try to outdo one another, ... you know, to the extent of being detrimental. When and if that will ever happen, I don't know. ...

I brought copies of discharge and records and citations for Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross. The others are flight records.

[Break]

TL: How long did it take you to become a staff sergeant?

PV: Well that is the tech order for the job. Not for radio operator, but for a flight crewman. The radio operator was permitted to be a technical sergeant which is a five-stripe instead of four. But since I was the second operator assigned to the crew, the first operator had gone through radio and gunnery school. When I got there they saw how incompetent I was as far as gunnery is concerned, and they knew I had a good record as a radio operator, so they made me the radio operator. And the initial radio operator who was a short, squat fellow from Milwaukee, named Casey Stengel, we call him Casey, his name was Percy. German family, incidentally, S-T-E-N-G-E-L, he didn't talk much about it at all. I think he was only first-generation. He became the belly gunner, the ball-turret gunner. ... I became the radio operator, but he kept the rating. The pilot told me, he said, "He's going to keep the rating." ... Okay, the difference in pay, you know, that's all. Not much.

TL: So you did not get an extra boost of momentum in being promoted, it was just getting the extra pay?

PV: I went from PFC to staff serjeant in three months. No, I accepted the situation. You know, the pilot didn't do it on his own. He checked with the squadron commander and you know, he knew that's the way it would be. ... You know, I had no objection to it. Because, I didn't want to be one of the gunners, and nobody else was suitable for the ball-turret. He, this fellow Casey, was.

LL: Okay, before we sort of move onto your post-World War II experiences, Tara, do you have any more questions on this topic?

TL: Yeah, I just have one real quick one. What were you fighting for back then, and what do you think you were fighting for now in retrospect?

PV: Well, I guess, ... I thought I was fighting for the country back then, against the villainous Nazis ... and the sticky Japanese. Which is, I guess, the way most people looked at it. Personally, ... as I've indicated before, I had a lot of adventuresome feelings in me, and I wanted to get out and do things and go places, whatever. I think that's why I got in before being drafted. And, I guess, I thought [of] myself as a hero to a certain extent. That didn't last long, you know, from what I said. You find out, when you're with a bunch of other heroes, who know they're not heroes either. [laughter] That's about the size of that. In retrospect, since then I think obviously, that the U.S. had to get into the situation to stop both the Germans and the Japanese. Japanese weren't just "economizing" the Far East, they were taking it over, a lot of it, and the Germans over Europe, too. And, it certainly would not just be a case of loosing the markets in Europe and in the Far East. You know, we had, eventually, a case of squeezing the U.S. out. If they were permitted to expand. But [from a] realistic point of view, I don't think the Germans could have kept control over Russia in any event, for any length of time. Nobody could, even the Russians can't. [laughter] And certainly the Japanese couldn't keep control over China either, not even small parts of it, too long, you know. But ...

TL: You were a reporter for the Asbury Park Press for a number of years after the war. Looking back what did you think of war reporting? How much of the reporting was propaganda?

PV: Oh sure. Oh sure. ... There is always the element of that in there. Because the press got its information from military sources or from government sources. And there had to be a certain amount of that, of pre-positioned propaganda. When the situation looks bad somewhere you make it seem not as bad, you know. Even if you know it's bad. If the Germans are taking Stalingrad, then the Russians radio to Moscow to Stalin, "Oh no, they don't have it yet." Vice Versa, when the Russians are taking it back, and when our reports go from bomb drops back to 1st Division Headquarters, they read, sound better than they really are sometimes. Even though ... the bombardiers are watching closely for the bomb bursts, and the pictures are being taken. Later the pictures are blown up, and we say, "Oooh, we missed that, you missed that, you missed this". But, you know, the next day in your paper, "one thousand forts bombed Schweinfurt."

One thousand, you know, there might be different targets in the area, not just Schweinfurt ball bearings.

TL: Only the good things were reported.

PV: Mmmm. So they bombed Schweinfurt, and maybe they bombed Schweinfurt and quite a few of its suburbs, I don't know, but certainly not deliberately as I say.

TL: Right. Would you have reported it the same?

PV: Sure. ... Well I would do it--you mean if I were reporting back with the bombs? What the effectiveness was? I guess I would do what I'd be expected to do. The commander who took us over Frankfurt three times, you know, when ... at ... 20 to 25,000 thousand feet would be a very windy situation, ... and we tried to get lined up right. He did what he was supposed to do, and was right. But each time we went in a certain area where the military target was, whichever it was, the sky would open, you know, with anti-aircraft. Thankfully, because the wind was blowing us around, they must have been blowing the shells around too, they weren't getting too close. [laughter]

TL: So I'm sure you are a proponent of high wind gusts.

PV: Yeah, that commander happened to be a star halfback at West Point in the early '40s and late '30s, Jerry Maupin. He was a lieutenant colonel then, I think. That was back in the days when ... Army had a good football team. Well they had a pretty good one this year {1995} too. They almost beat us.

LL: Almost.

TL: Yeah, that's the key word, almost.

LL: Can you think of anything that we did not ask you, that perhaps we should have?

PV: I really don't know. I really don't know. ... At Colorado Springs, after England, I told you about spending time at home a couple of weeks while the colonel assigned the plane was in Washington. Then, of course, the ... engineers who stayed in Washington got him to promise to call them within twelve hours of when he intended to leave, and hopefully the day before, you know. He just made it by about twelve hours, and they called me quickly, and I just got there in time. He might take off without me.

TL: Would you have been listed AWOL?

PV: No, I don't know what he would do, if he would have taken off without me. Maybe he would have waited a while. That's not important, who am I. ... I went to see, one time I had two days and I went down to Plymouth in England to see a fellow I knew in the navy down there in the area.

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

PV: Once I started school here, I forgot a lot about the war. I remember the first few weeks of that term, I started in February, they had midterms then, I don't know if you still have midterms beginning ...

LL: Yes.

PV: You do. Well anyway, I joined the Am Vets. Which was a new organization, just veterans of World War II, and we set up a booth at the corner of Hamilton and College Ave. ... to give directions to any newcomers, for new students who didn't know which buildings were where, where you wanted to go. So I staffed that booth, but I didn't know much about the whole section myself. But I was there for a while, you know, then I gave it up. Then they took the booth away, because nobody was paying any attention to it. And ... the front office in Old Queens wanted to get rid of it. So I was told. But if you're interested, there wasn't enough ... dormitory space for that class, that started then, nowhere near [enough] ... But they billeted us in this converted garage on a street called Delafield Street on the other side of Easton Avenue. Do you know where that is?

LL: Yes, I do.

PV: You do. We were there for two years. It was ten of us at one time, eight of us. I was downstairs in the one room in the back with this one friend from Paterson, and the friend who is meeting me today was upstairs for a while, and then he started to commute from Newark everyday. I went to Ford Hall in my junior year. That's when we were allowed to, when you became a junior, you could go dorming.

LL: So it wasn't until you were a junior that you would be assured on-campus housing.

PV: Yes, right, right. The class that I think that entered in September, of '46 was even larger, the Class of '50. ... September '46. ... I went through the summer of '46, so I had an extra semester in. That's how I got out. I finished in June of '49.

TL: What was dorm life like at Ford Hall?

PV: Quiet.

TL: It was quiet?

PV: Yeah. Do you know, I never went to the Corner Tavern once.

TL: Really?

LL: Never?

PV: In three and a half years. Never. Never. We went downtown occasionally to one of the ... diners down there, when they had a special going, you know. Instead of going to the Commons. ... But they never had anything to drink there. I never went to the Corner Tavern once, I don't think that we went anywhere else either. As I say, my folks couldn't help me a hell of a lot, you know, living expenses.

LL: You mentioned before that the G.I. Bill was really crucial to your college education.

PV: Very crucial to a lot of people. The most crucial part is tuition and books, the incidentals are involved with that. And the living expenses were 65 dollars a month. ... Which is not a heck of a lot. Even then it wasn't. Now it's even less.

TL: It's the grocery bill for the week. [laughter]

LL: Did you make any use of the other G.I. Bill benefits, besides the tuition.

PV: Yes, ... when I graduated I couldn't get a job. At the time, even though a number of papers were expanding for suburban coverage. The ones in my area didn't, and I didn't look too far out ... so I applied and was accepted at Missouri for graduate school. But they didn't tell me, before I went out there, was that I'd have to take the whole panoply of journalism courses all over again, because they wouldn't accept any Rutgers journalism. They accept the Arts and Science credits, but they wouldn't accept any journalism credits.

TL: You're kidding.

PV: No. So I had to go through the whole thing. It would take me two years or more to get a master's. ... I gave it up after the end of August, after the summer term, came back and had a job in Passaic, Clifton first, in Passaic County, near Paterson, ... [at the] Passaic Herald News.

LL: What led to your interest in the area of journalism?

PV: Well it wasn't so much interest in the area of journalism, I was interested more of politics, you know, national politics, and government. After coming back and going in the states, I had a talk with somebody that I was assigned, that I bunked with in Colorado Springs, Peterson Field. And we talked a lot about government and politics and what not. And I was writing a lot of letters to home and friends at the time. And I ... it was suggested to me that I seemed to like to write, so when I was accepted here I took the journalism curriculum. Now you call it communications, I suppose.

LL: Yeah, well, no there are still journalism majors as well.

PV: Are there? Print journalism or broadcast, whatever, there was no broadcast courses at that time. I don't think. I don't think I would be interested in any event. I don't know, my voice might be good enough, but I wouldn't be good enough for television, you know. I'm not pretty enough.

LL: Had you been interested in world politics prior to World War II?

PV: Yeah, a little, but ... not really that much. Until I ... came back to the states. Not before that. Not a great deal, I read up on it and I liked the history courses in high school, you know. I liked the English courses, in High School. I liked to read a lot. I read all those boys books, like Tom Swift books and all the others, whether you ever heard of them or not. I did a lot of reading when I was young, I still do.

LL: Was becoming a journalist your dream growing up?

PV: I probably never thought about it. I guess I was more interested in writing. Ever since I've been retired I have been lazy. I always find something else to do, fix up the house or something like that, you know.

LL: So it wasn't until someone approached you and said, "Well, you enjoy writing, maybe ..."

PV: Yeah, this fellow I knew in ... Colorado Springs, Peterson Field. Also I think somebody in the family, a couple of people in the family mentioned that. When I went through high school, it was expected, maybe you should go into engineering, something mechanical so you study German. So I took German for two years in high school. And .. when I had to decide on two years of foreign language here, I decided if you're gonna, you know, know a language, somewhat, you ought to go back at it, you know, even though its ... three or four years interrupted between it. So I went back and I had two more years of German. If I had to sit down and talk to a German, I'd be out of luck, you know, because I don't know. I don't know if I mentioned before, my family, my father and his sisters, they didn't talk Dutch. They didn't know a heck of a lot of it anyway. They were brought up here, their mother, of course, and their father did, and she talked very little. Just little idiom things, you know. She wasn't interested in entertaining me. My mother's mother, the Irish grandmother, like to entertain me with Gaelic songs and poetry and things like that. [laughter] But I didn't know any Dutch, and I never heard any Dutch, and my father and his sisters and brothers wouldn't let their mother talk Dutch in front of me, you know. I guess that's true about a lot of first-, second- generation situations. I know it's the case in my wife's family, ... who ... were Italian. And they made their grandparents learn English, and they didn't learn their grandparents' versions of Italian and whatever, you know, to communicate with each other.

TL: The same thing happened with my family. I guess they want to be as Americanized as possible.

PV: Yes.

LL: Just to get back to your years at Rutgers. What would you say was your most vivid memories of Rutgers, starting with '46 through '49.

PV: You know, that's difficult.

LL: You know, was it the crowding?

PV: I guess so. I worked ... for Targum for two years as a reporter. You know, I didn't do a heck of a lot. I did have one piece in what we called the Anthologist, which was a magazine at the time. I don't know whether it still is or not. I talked about the problems and the idiosyncrasies of being left-handed. That's what it was all about. I liked doing that. There's one course I took that I didn't like with Professor Kenneth Jennings, who used to be the city editor of the Home News. He taught editorial administration. He sounds just like a city editor who faced a deadline in an hour, and he has four big stores breaking on him, and he's hollering all over the news room, "Get down this. ..." That's the way he conducted the course. Maybe that's what he wanted us to get the feeling of, I don't know. ... They rated grades one through four, one was A, four was D. I got a four in that course. Of course, I cut it too many times. [laughter] You know that's ridiculous thing to do.

TL: Did you have any girls in your journalism classes?

PV: We had some from, as you put it, from NJC, Douglass in other words. Yes. Yeah, we had a few that were taking journalism at Douglass, NJC.

LL: How did you guys get along?

PV: All right, I didn't have much contact with them, they were relatively few. Those who were very, fairly attractive, and intelligent, were taken up by others, who had more money to spend on 'em, I guess, I don't know. No, there was, they got along fine I suppose. ... There weren't any women billeted over here on College Avenue. I'm not suggesting that all N.J.C. "girls" {women} were drawn to richer men.

LL: Right, right.

PV: They were all over there. And I didn't have much of a social life, a couple of times in the senior year, I had some dates, but I didn't, didn't turn out to be anything else, but some movie time, and ... time in the snack bars over there. My daughter went through Douglass.

LL: Yeah, both your children went to Rutgers.

PV: Yeah, my son only went two years, his mother convinced him he should try mechanical engineering, and he went into business the second year. And then he said, "I can't take this Dad, I don't like it. I want to go to work, I want to make money".

LL: Is the fact that you came to Rutgers, was that part of the reason your children came to Rutgers?

PV: Well, yes. But, ... also my daughter was an A student at Brick High School, my son wasn't. And she was accepted. ... Where was she accepted? She wasn't, she didn't apply to Princeton ... or Harvard or Yale or Columbia, ... she was accepted at Seton Hall, she was accepted at ... Trenton State. And I think she applied to Temple, but the best one she felt was best ... was Douglass, or Rutgers rather. By that time the curriculum had changed, ... you weren't required

to take two years of arts and sciences like we were. You had a minimum of that, you had electives you had to take. So she had practically four years of computer programming. That's what my impression is, that's what it was. I don't know if they still do it that way or not. And I'm not sure I got the right impressions.

TL: It's whatever they feel like that year, I think.

LL: No, they actually have a pretty extensive core, that they make you take.

PV: Oh really.

LL: I'm a Douglass student.

PV: You do have to take a core, now. Isn't that true that you didn't in the early 80's.

LL: I'm not sure about the early 80's, but they do have a core where you do have to take certain language requirements, certain math and science requirements, humanities.

PV: ... Let's see, ... she will be 35 this year, so she ... graduated about fourteen years ago, which is '81, and somewhere around '78, something like that. Where you have a situation where you just have certain electives, and have your major for almost four years. That's my impression of it. ... I didn't check with her every year, what semester or whatever she had.

TL: Did you ever want your son or daughter to join the military? Or did you want them to stay as far away as possible from the service?

PV: No, whatever. ... I never showed any preference like that, no. Unless they wanted the military life. You know, they were not in a situation ... of being eligible for draft in the Vietnam situation, or ... since then. ... But [neither] ... my daughter no[r], my son ... had any inclination. He might have at one time, when he was really [young]. ... Actually, while he was here, he was really footloose. He was spending more time at the Corner Tavern or, he probably wasn't, because he was over on Busch.

TL: Oh, he was on Busch too.

PV: On Busch.

TL: I live over on Busch too. I was a transfer student. I was put over there.

PV: Yeah.

TL: How did you meet your wife? I wanted to ask you that too.

PV: You're really asking key questions, aren't you? [laughter]

TL: In a tavern. ... I'm thinking of a song, [sings] "In a tavern, in the tavern." I'm thinking of two different songs. In a tavern, in Paterson actually, she went there with a friend. She used to go there on Friday nights, for an hour or so, you know. I had a room nearby. I was working at odd jobs at the time. Three years after I was with the Herald News, my mother got seriously ill. I stayed home with her, and she died in December, and thereafter I was working odd jobs. ... I was spending my time in New York and writing and not doing well. So I came back to Paterson, and I got a room and went to work at odd jobs. People in Passaic didn't want to hire me again, until I showed some inclination that I wanted to stay at it. So I met my wife, she got me back on the grind, so to speak. I went to work at Kearfott General Precision, and Public Relations. Two years of that, I went back to newspapers and stayed at it. We were both getting on in years, I was 36, she was 32 when we were married. We both threatening to be bachelors, full-time, long-time, whatever.

TL: Odd enough, in these days, those are the typical ages.

LL: Yeah right.

PV: What is?

TL: Those are the typical ages for marriage now. A lot of the time.

PV: Yes, after living together for ten years or so, [laughter] or something. No, I don't know.

TL: How long were you dating before you were married?

PV: How long have we been married?

TL: Yeah, how long have you been married, and how long were you dating before you got married?

PV: Well we started dating in the early, mid-early '58, I think. We married in December '59. We had some squabbles before ... our marriage, and we've had a few afterward. We've had two children. My daughter has three now, and her youngest is going to be a year old in March. And the youngest is a girl--the first girl, and the other two are boys. Seven, and the one was just three, the second one.

TL: And how many years have you been married now?

PV: '59 through '95 ... 36 ... in December. It was ... 35 last December, right.

TL: That's great.

LL: Yeah, that's wonderful.

PV: That's not very wonderful, really. Considering my age, which you know too, don't you?

TL: I never bothered to figure it out. I don't really care.

PV: Oh, you don't care about that, okay.

TL: It's only what you feel, not what you are.

LL: Do you have any more questions?

TL: No, he answered every question that I had.

LL: Okay, well I just want to thank you.

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

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