

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH STANTON F. WEISSENBORN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Stanton F. Weissenborn, also known as Tom Weissenborn, in Roseland, New Jersey, on October 10, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Weissenborn, thank you very much for having me here today.

Stanton F. Weissenborn: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

SW: I was born in Jersey City, on November 14, 1925, at Christ Hospital.

SI: What were your parents' names?

SW: My father's name was Stanton and my mother's name was Emilie.

SI: Your father was a native of Jersey City.

SW: That's correct.

SI: Do you know anything about his family background, how his family came to the US?

SW: His father died when my father was fourteen years of age and he was raised by his mother and his aunt, and he had two sisters, Thelma and Lorene. ... Thelma was older than he, and who eventually became a teacher in West Orange, New Jersey, and Lorene was younger by probably four or five years. They're both deceased.

SI: It was interesting that your father served in the Air Force in World War I.

SW: My father served in the Air Force. I believe he joined the, or, then, well, it was known as the Army Air Force, in, ... I'm going to say, probably, 1916, 1917. [Editor's Note: During this time, the branch that became the US Air Force was known as the Aviation Section of the United States Signal Corps.] He never went overseas. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Your father.

SW: My father was in the, as I said, ... Army Air Force. He trained, ... in San Antonio, Texas, I believe, at Kelly Field. He knew and I believe he flew with Eddie Rickenbacker [World War I ace], when at [Kelly Field], or once or twice or maybe more, he may have met him at Kelly Field. ... After the war, my father became a stunt pilot. ... I believe he was in the Reserve, but, then, he got out, probably, sometime in the early '20s.

SI: He was a barnstormer.

SW: Yes, yes, exactly, that's the word, right.

SI: Would he tour all over the country?

SW: I'm really not sure of that. I know primarily here, ... in the East, but I'm not sure.

SI: What about your mother's side of the family?

SW: My mother grew up in Hoboken and her father was a banker and an inventor. She had two sisters and two brothers, and she may have had another brother, who I never met, who died, but I'm not sure of that. ... My grandfather was reasonably well-off, because I do know that ... he owned three or four banks at one time. Now, how he came through the [Great] Depression, I don't know, ... and he died in, my guess, ... the early '30s. ... My grandfather probably died in, I would say, [the] mid-'30s and my grandmother died sometime in the mid-'50s.

SI: How did your parents meet? Do you know?

SW: I have no idea.

SI: No, okay. Do you know how your father made the transition from being a barnstormer to going to college and becoming a stockbroker?

SW: He went to Allegheny College. I believe he was in the Class of 1918, but I'm not sure of that. ... Originally, ... the family brought the wooden pencil industry, the capital equipment, or the equipment for making pencils, to this country from Germany and they basically established a lot of the equipment [that] went into the pencil-making industry, which, at that time, I believe was centered in Jersey City. ... As a matter-of-fact, the Weissenborn Family still owns a company called the General Pencil Company, but that would be ... my father's uncles and brothers, and, now, my cousins. So, our branch of the family was not involved in the pencil industry.

SI: When you came along, was the family still living in Jersey City? Is that where you primarily grew up?

SW: Yes, the family moved from Jersey City, shortly after I was born, to East Orange, New Jersey, and then, in 1929, my dad built a house in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. ... I started in kindergarten in Montclair, New Jersey, and went all through the public schools in Montclair, graduating from Montclair High School in June of 1943.

SI: Do you have any memories of growing up in East Orange?

SW: No, not in East Orange, no, not really, no.

SI: What was your neighborhood like in Upper Montclair?

SW: Upper Montclair was a typical residential neighborhood with modest homes. I have fond memories of Montclair. We had a large park that was started in [the 1930s] and really constructed by the WPA [Works Progress Administration] that was at the bottom of our street. I

grew up on Chester Road in Upper Montclair, and this park was known as Brookdale Park. To give you some idea of what the community is, ... as a youngster in grammar school and junior high school, I had a chicken coop in the backyard. So, I raised, you know, when I say chicken coop, probably eight to ten chickens at one time. I was active in Scouting, and we'll get into that later, but, in that area, so that I have very fond memories. We walked to school in the morning, came home for lunch and walked back from lunch, and then, walked back after lunch to school, probably about a mile-and-a-half. ... That was from kindergarten to sixth grade, where I went to the Watchung School, and then, junior high school, went seventh to ninth grade. ... There, we ate lunch in a cafeteria, but I still walked in the morning and came home at night, ... and then, when I went to Montclair High School, that was in tenth grade, tenth grade to twelfth grade, we walked again, but, again, ate in the high school cafeteria.

SI: Your family moved to Upper Montclair basically on the eve of the 1929 Crash and the start of the Great Depression.

SW: Right, and I don't remember very much about the Crash or the Depression.

SI: Okay. Growing up in the 1930s, you did not really notice much of the effects of the Great Depression.

SW: No, not really. My dad didn't talk about that at all. ... I am trying to think when I did it, when I was nine or ten, I met a gentleman, a fellow by the name of Bob (Thistle?), who lived also on Chester Road, and he had gone to prep school, or school, at the St. Johnsbury Academy in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. ... Because of the chicken coop, etc., I was interested in farming and I told him that I would like to work on a farm, as a kid, and, when I was probably ten or eleven, he arranged for me to get a job, during the summer, with a gentleman by the name of Phil Nelson who owned a dairy farm in Ryegate Corners, Vermont. ... The first time I went up there, I went by myself, by train, to Woodsville, New Hampshire, and was picked up by Mr. Nelson. He had two sons, one who was probably two years younger than I and one that was about two years older than I, and I worked there from the day after I got out of school until the day I started back to school. I worked there every summer thereafter until I went into the service, in 1943. I worked in the Summer of '42, but not in the Summer of '43, and we had about thirty-five cows. They were Jerseys, mainly, that we milked, and we milked them all by hand. We didn't get electricity to the farm probably until the early '40s. I really enjoyed farming and that was what got me interested in Cornell, because they had a very strong agricultural college, but I did not enter the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, that was called [then the] College of Agriculture, at Cornell, because I think they took mainly in-state students at that time, rather than out-state students. So, I applied to the arts school, arts and science, and got into that, and I gave up farming as a potential vocation when I came back from the service, because the economics weren't there. When I left for the service, we were selling milk at nine cents a pound and, when I came back, it was still nine cents a pound, and probably drifting down. ... So, I decided to follow my dad in his vocation.

SI: This is leaping ahead a little bit, but, in those summers that you worked there, I guess it would be just one summer, the Summer of 1942, when you were working at the dairy farm during the war, I do not know if these farms were affected by rationing policies.

SW: Right, right.

SI: Did you see any of that or notice any changes in the routine?

SW: No, not really, no, because, obviously, we had all the milk we wanted and, certainly, we had a very large vegetable garden, we had pigs and chickens that we butchered, so that there was all [that food]. I can remember that ... potatoes were a staple of the diet. We had potatoes for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Vegetables, home-baked bread, a little meat, but potatoes are what I remembered.

SI: Going back to your childhood in Upper Montclair, was your family very involved in community organizations or local politics?

SW: No, certainly, I wouldn't say, not interested. My father, during the war, joined the police reserves, but, no, ... as I remember, I would not say that he was active in the community; certainly, God knows what happened to me, but I certainly was after I came back.

SI: Being a veteran, he was not involved in the American Legion or things like that.

SW: No. He was a Mason, but he was not in the Legion or the, what was it? VFW [Veteran of Foreign Wars]. ...

SI: You mentioned that Scouting was something that you were very involved in. How did you get involved?

SW: Extremely involved in Scouting. This was a troop, Troop 12, which was based in Montclair, New Jersey, at the Watchung School. We had an outstanding Scoutmaster, a fellow by the name of O. K. Taylor. Matter-of-fact, he lived probably less than a half a block from where we are at the present time, [Roseland, New Jersey], and he was nationally recognized as an extremely fine Scoutmaster. He was the assistant treasurer of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. ... It was a very large troop. He organized it along business principles. We had, I believe, eight patrols, so that the troop was probably somewhere in the range of eighty to 120 Scouts at one time, very active, and I went all through the ranks, became an assistant patrol leader, patrol leader, junior assistant Scoutmaster, assistant Scoutmaster, went all through the Tenderfoot all the way up to, ... well, I know I'm an Eagle and I believe I've got two Palms. ... Then, eventually, when I returned from service, I became a Scoutmaster myself, for approximately ten years.

SI: Just to stay with that theme, I am always interested to find out how former Boy Scouts made out in the military, because, particularly back then, from what I understand, Boy Scout training was a little more militaristic, more focused on camping, and doing things that you might do in basic training.

SW: That is correct, and we did, we, Troop 12, ... a lot of camping and a lot of hiking. ... Troop 12, which was in Montclair at that time, was part of the Eagle Rock Council. The Eagle

Rock Council had a camp in Oakland, New Jersey, called Camp Glen Gray, and Troop 12 had a camp called Camp Wanaque. That camp today is owned by four or five local towns. I think it's owned by Roseland, West Caldwell, Caldwell Township, Fairfield and North Caldwell. We used to take the train from Watchung Station in Upper Montclair and go to Oakland, New Jersey, and then, hike through and around the Wanaque, the Wanaque Reservoir, to camp, and then, do it back, so that we'd go up on a Friday afternoon, ... on the train, and come back on Sunday afternoon. ... I continued that when I was Scoutmaster ... in Montclair; that was after the war. O. K. Taylor believed in organization. ... The troop was highly structured and, after the Scout meeting, which I believe was held on a Friday night from roughly seven o'clock to nine, we'd have a staff meeting from, basically, nine to ten. ... There was a lot of written reports on what we had done during the week and what we had done with the various members, and we talked about individual issues, kind of human resources issues that you would have with your patrol, if there were any problems, how the kids were coming in their advancement, things of that nature. So, all of that, you kind of think back, now that you query me, probably helped me a lot in getting along with people in the service, etc., and structure. I would say this, is that I didn't find the Army as structured ... and as focused and as accountable as we had in Scouting.

SI: Again, jumping ahead, after Pearl Harbor, did the Boy Scout troop get involved in the war effort? I know the Boy Scouts in general were, but local involvement depended on who the leaders were.

SW: Yes. I can't remember; obviously, patriotism took place. I remember, when Pearl Harbor happened, ... it was on a Sunday and I was playing touch football up the street, in a neighbor's backyard, and my family used to call my sister and I by a cowbell. ... My father rang the cowbell and that meant that I was to come home immediately, which I did, and he told me ... to come in and listen to the radio and Roosevelt was talking, with his speech about the Japanese attacking Pearl Harbor, and he said, "This is going to affect you. You should listen to this, because [it will affect you]," and I think I was fourteen at the time, or something like that, and so that, you know, obviously, I recognized that I was probably going to be involved, depending upon how long the war lasted, which, of course, we had no idea then. ... I can't remember, as far as the Scout troop is concerned, what [we did]. We participated in various things. I remember giving a speech, ... that, as a Scout, I gave the "Gettysburg Address" in Montclair, at a function, probably on Memorial Day. ... That was given in the amphitheater ... outside at Montclair High School, but I did that as a Scout. ... I don't remember what event that I gave that for, ... and I'm sure I was in my Scout uniform when I did that, but I can't remember anything that we [did] as a troop, other than, I'm sure, we, you know, collected things and that kind of thing, but nothing comes to mind quickly.

SI: I have heard, one, of troops organizing drives of different sorts, but, then, they also participated in the Civil Defense structure, as messengers or something like that.

SW: No. I don't remember doing that, any of that, in Scouting at all, okay.

SI: In the 1930s, the prewar era, you were in grammar school, middle school and high school during that time. What were your favorite subjects and what were your interests in school?

SW: I wouldn't say I was a particularly brilliant student. I never had any problem with math, and language was a horror show. I did poorly there. I was active in sports, all sorts of athletics, but I liked math, history and geography.

SI: Since your father had been college educated himself, were your parents encouraging you to think about college and move towards that as a goal?

SW: Yes, as I remember; certainly not the way we do today. College was expensive, I mean, on a relative basis, no way near what it is today, but it was expensive. ... They encouraged me to go to college, but, you know, I was [obedient]; growing up in a German home, the obedience was one thing that we were taught, and a great deal of listening, not so much talking. I can't remember having them constantly challenging me for good marks to get into college, just that I should have decent marks. So, that's about it. I mean, again, ... you take a look at that period and where we are today and what I'm doing today with the work I do ... for Cornell, and the tremendous competition and pressure that the kids have to get into college today, I don't remember that being that strong at that time. ... A lot of kids were, especially the boys, ... thinking about going into the military and that was the primary thing, not college. I mean, you knew that you were going into the military, so, that was your primary focus. Girls, the stress on girls were more on becoming secretaries or going to some sort of a technical school, rather than college. My guess is that less than ten percent ... of the girls in my high school went on to college, that as we know [it], four-year colleges, maybe fifteen to twenty percent, but certainly not a hundred percent of the class, by a long shot.

SI: You mentioned this park that was a WPA project. Did you see any other signs of the New Deal, Roosevelt programs, in this area, in the Upper Montclair area?

SW: Well, just [that] the WPA was very active. I mean, I remember, I think we sold lemonade to them and, you know, we might have sold sandwiches, just to pick up expense money or something like that. ... When I was growing up, I had a farm route in the summertime, I mean, before I went to the farm [in Vermont], where I took orders. I had a little kind of a menu, a list of available vegetables, and we would sell vegetables, take orders for vegetables and eggs and that kind of stuff in the neighborhood, and then, either go by bike or get one of our [parents to drive?], and I had four or five kids that were doing this with me. We'd go up to the farm, buy the vegetables, and then, probably mark them up by a nickel or a dime, or something like that, and distribute them, because they were fresh, in the neighborhood. I remember, you know, getting an allowance of something like a dime or twenty-five cents a week and augmenting it by selling eggs from my chickens or the vegetables, or things of that nature.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, and even before the war broke out in Europe, had you and your family followed the news coming out of Europe and Asia, such as Hitler or Mussolini's rise to power?

SW: The answer to that question is yes. It's hard for me to remember that. I certainly was aware of it, that, you know, ... certainly, my parents encouraged me to read the newspapers, which I did. Schools were certainly concerned, and taught that. ... Again, that's a little fuzzy to remember exactly, but I certainly was aware of it, let's put it that way.

SI: Do you remember any discussions, or maybe even debates, on whether the US should get involved or support Britain more?

SW: No, no, I don't remember that. I'm sure that went on, but I don't remember it, okay.

SI: Were you aware of the German-American *Bund* and those activities?

SW: ... Well, aware of it, not overly active. You know, again, when you bring up things of that nature, because of our name and the fact that we were German, I don't remember anybody discriminating against us. My parents spoke German at home, not [regularly], more ... when they wanted to keep something away ... at the dining room table, because we ate at the dining room, in a fairly formalized setting. ... They would speak German at the table when they didn't want my sister or I to understand what they were talking about. We picked up a little of it. I could [pick up some of it], you know, I recognize some German words now, but, certainly, my aptitude for foreign language is terrible, so that I didn't pick up a lot, but I certainly remember them talking German. ... Especially in my mother's family, her parents, basically, were German also, so that they would ... speak German, also. ... You know, I didn't notice any, as I say, discrimination or [ill-will] against us because we were German, or German-American, I should say. ... I believe my grandfather and grandmother on ... my mother's side were probably born in Germany. My father's father was probably born here, and I don't know where my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, was born, but their parents, the grandparents, my great-grandparents, were all born, to the best of my knowledge, in Germany.

SI: It is interesting that the language was kept up to an extent at home, and you mentioned these other German qualities in your family.

SW: Yes, right, right.

SI: Were there any cultural traditions, other things from the German background, that lived on in your family household, like foods?

SW: Well, no. I mean, we ate family style, that, no, I wouldn't [say so], other than obedience, you know. ... I remember my grandfather, my [maternal grandfather], because I never knew my father's father, but I certainly knew my mother's father, and he was somewhat autocratic and always appeared [in formal dress]. Whenever I saw him, he always had a tie and a suit on. We were dressed formally, always dressed well, and, you know, wore; certainly didn't dress the way kids do today, by a long shot, but ... I think that was somewhat normal, at that time, okay.

SI: Religion and your church, did that play a big part in your life growing up?

SW: I went to Sunday school every Sunday. ... My father was, his family were, Christian Scientists. ... For one reason or the other, he did not encourage us to join that faith, and that [may be related to the fact that] his [nephew], my cousin, died at about nine or ten, of diphtheria, as I remember, and that could have been prevented, because of the fact that they never took my [cousin to a doctor]. This was my Aunt Lorene and that was her oldest boy, John, who was probably five to six years, maybe seven to eight years, younger than I. I knew him, but not well.

I didn't know him that well, and I think the way my aunt and uncle treated John disappointed my father, ... the fact that they never took the kid to the doctor's or whatever had an impact on my Dad and his belief in Christian Science. ... My mother's family were Lutheran. We did not go to the Lutheran church, we went to the Congregational church in Upper Montclair, the Union Congregational Church on Cooper Avenue. After I was discharged, I became a Scoutmaster at Troop 9, which met at Watchung Congregational Church, but I wouldn't say that religion played an active [role] in my life. I went to Sunday school, joined the church, but never was active in Young People's or those kinds of things, because of Scouting. Scouting, basically, was the central thing in my life at that time.

SI: What about in high school, with athletics?

SW: High school, I was active. I played football, I played soccer. I did not play basketball. I played all three or four years that I was in high school. ... I was relatively small, was probably five-[foot]-eight to five-[foot]-nine, and didn't weigh very much. I weighed, maybe, 130 to 140. I got a little heavier [laughter] when I ... got into the service and was older. ...

SI: Was your high school affected by the war at all? Pearl Harbor happened right in the middle of your high school career.

SW: Yes, the high school, obviously, ... when the war started in 1941, I went in the service in 1943, so, I was a sophomore and Pearl Harbor was December 1941. So, I was probably a junior in high school, at that time, and we were certainly well-aware that there was a war going on and realized that, eventually, we would be going in. ... At the various auditorium functions and things of that nature, I mean, there was a heavy, as I remember, a heavy presence ... that there was a war going on and there was activity, but, as far as joining a particular anything that had to do with the war effort, I didn't do anything, other than, again, Scouting took an awful lot of time, okay.

SI: There was no plane spotting or anything else.

SW: No, no.

SI: Do you remember any changes right after Pearl Harbor, like the implementation of rationing programs?

SW: I worked in a grocery store in Upper Montclair. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SW: Okay.

SI: You were saying that you worked in a grocery store.

SW: I worked in a grocery store in Upper Montclair and I was conscious that we had food stamps, so that, ... it's funny that you bring that up, ... you know, I didn't manage the food

stamps, I certainly remember that we had them, and, also, gasoline rationing, of course. I probably was more conscious of gasoline rationing than I was food stamps, but I certainly had those, all right.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You said you were more conscious of gas rationing than food rationing.

SW: Right, right.

SI: In your role in the grocery store, did you see people trying to cheat the system, or anything like that?

SW: Maybe a little bit, but not a great deal.

SI: Civil Defense activities, the blackouts and the air raid drills, was there any of that?

SW: No. The only thing I remember there is, my father was active in the police reserve, which had to do with Civil Defense, and I do believe that there were [times], one night a week, he would be out, you know, watching a pipeline, or something like that, a water main or a water pipeline, in Clifton or Upper Montclair, but, other than that, that's a little vague at the present time.

SI: You actually started at Cornell before you went into the service.

SW: I started in Cornell in June of [1943]; I graduated from high school on a Friday and I was in Cornell on a Monday. So, that was in June of 1943 and I stayed at Cornell until; I knew I was going to be drafted when I turned eighteen and I turned eighteen in November. So, I went to school when I was seventeen and I left Cornell, I'm going to say, in late September, October, because I had enlisted, and I believe that I ... entered active duty on the 7th of December, 1943, but I'm not totally sure of that. I know it was late November, early December of '43.

SI: Why did you decide to get a little bit of college under your belt? Was it just to kill those few months before you turned eighteen or was there more of a reason for it?

SW: No. I think that was a combination of just, ... probably, to get started, more than anything else, you know, that I think my father encouraged me to, or they encouraged me to start, certainly, Cornell did, and it was kind of the thing to do. I mean, other people did it, also. So, rather than [wait idly], I knew I couldn't go into the service until I was eighteen. Now, I guess guys went into the service when they were seventeen, but they had to have had their parents' permission or something, I forget, but, still, I think it was a decision that both my father and I made. My peers were going to college at that time and, certainly, I could get in. That was the main thing, okay.

SI: Was it just a semester or was it two quarters?

SW: Right, a semester.

SI: One semester, okay. What was that like? Obviously, Cornell must have been very affected by the war.

SW: ... Well, we had ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] and I joined ROTC, as like most people, almost everybody else, did. ... I went up with a number of my classmates. Again, I didn't drive up, I went by train, probably because of the gas thing, which, you know, you don't happen to think of that, but, now, you think of it. ... I went up on the Lehigh Valley *Black Diamond*, as I remember, with four or five friends, and we caught it in Jersey City, all graduates of Montclair High School. ... The transition from home, because of the fact I was by myself and not living with the parents, was a little traumatic, although I never had trouble getting along with people, and, certainly, the academics was a little bit more stressful than I had remembered. I probably made a mistake, or maybe it turned out well; I did take five or six credits of Spanish, which was a disaster, and the other courses, I didn't have difficulty with at all. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Having studied, particularly Rutgers, but other colleges as well, I know they tried to accelerate the courses, which made it more stressful for students. Did you see that at Cornell? Comparing your postwar experience at Cornell with that semester, would you say it was more accelerated?

SW: Accelerated? Well, certainly, going to school in the summer was accelerated, because they went all-year round. ... I wouldn't say the word "accelerated." We took the fifteen credits and, again, we had a heavy influence ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking a little bit about Cornell.

SW: Right.

SI: At that time, had you already decided that you wanted to go into the Army Air Forces?

SW: No. Originally, I was interested in going into the paratroops, mainly because I was a kid and dumb, and eager to get overseas and, you know, fight and all that nonsense. ... When I got to the recruiting office, I met the sergeant, or somebody like yourself, and he interviewed me and asked why I wanted paratroops. He told me that I was foolish to go into the paratroopers, because I could get killed fairly quickly there and that was stupid, and why didn't I join the officers' training program, go into an officers' training thing in the Air Force? and, being that my father was in the Air Force, why don't I try to do the same thing? He convinced me to go into the Officers' Candidate School in the Air Force, which is what I did, okay.

SI: Was that OCS or Air Cadets?

SW: It was Air Cadets.

SI: When you turned eighteen, did you go in right away or was there a lag?

SW: ... I had turned eighteen and, probably, [within] two weeks, I was in the service.

SI: Was there any problem in leaving Cornell?

SW: No, no, there was no [problem]; I mean, Cornell, it was a huge transition, as you can expect. ... They had a number of Army and Navy college kind of programs, which are air cadet and naval cadet kind of programs. ... We'll get into that in a minute, because [of] where I ended up, ... but, no. It's kind of interesting, I've made reference, during ... this chat we're having, to my problems with language, and I remember taking the Spanish final exam and getting a sixteen on the final, the Spanish final exam, and Professor Hinchcliff calling me into his office and saying that, "Mr. Weissenborn, I know you're going into the service and I know you've worked very hard on trying to master the Spanish language and the vocabulary and the pronunciation, etc. So, I'm going to give you a sixty on the exam, ... enabling you to pass and get the credits, under one condition; it's my understanding that the university is going to give the veterans fifteen credits, or sixteen credits, for serving in the service and you're going to need twenty-odd language credits to graduate. I want you to promise me that you will use those fifteen credits, if you come back and survive the war, to Cornell, towards your language credit," and I said, "You can be assured of that, Professor Hinchcliff," and that's one thing I do remember. They recognized that we ... would be leaving for the service and they were hopeful that you'd come back, obviously, but no particular reason, so that I came home and practically went into the service almost immediately.

SI: You came back to Upper Montclair.

SW: Upper Montclair, and then, went into the service from there. That's correct.

SI: What was that like? Did you have to go to an induction center?

SW: I believe I went to the induction center, which was in downtown New York, which is very close to where I work now, and, from there, I believe we left for, by bus, to Fort Dix.

SI: How long were you at Fort Dix?

SW: Hard to remember, but my guess is, probably, no more than two or three weeks.

SI: Where were you sent after that?

SW: I was sent to college, ... in the Air Cadet Program, to Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina, and probably spent, oh, maybe two to three months there, and that, the college there, the courses we took there, was more marching and drill and basic military structure, so-to-speak. The academics, I thought, were a joke, compared to high school and Cornell. I mean, the math was what I'd probably had in junior high school and, ... I mean, it was a total joke for me. I

mean, it was like going to grammar school all over again, and I became a squadron commander there.

SI: What were you told would be the end result of this Air Cadet Program? Was it just a commission? Was it specialized?

SW: No. The end result, we were divided up between pilots, navigators and bombardiers, and, for some reason, I decided to become a bombardier, and we would know that this was just a way stop on the way to ... formal bombardier or pilot training or navigator's school. ... During that time, this two or three months, it became apparent that they were losing a great many crews and planes over Germany. So, arbitrarily, they busted out all the bombardiers and the navigators and told us we were to be trained as gunners. We were taken or transferred from Davidson College to Chanute Field in Illinois, where we would get some exposure to planes, and I was there probably for no more than a month or two, and then, we went to Greensboro, North Carolina, to gunnery school. ... The gunnery school lasted two or three months, as I remember, maybe a little longer, and then, ... we received our gunnery wings, and then, we were to be transferred to crews, but they needed gunnery instructors and everybody with an IQ of over 120 were offered, ... volunteered for, gunnery instructors, and I don't quite know why, whether that was mandatory or that was volunteer, but I became a gunnery instructor and went to, I believe it was Laredo, Texas, [Laredo Army Airfield], where I went to gunnery instructor's school. ... While there, I volunteered for combat duty and was sent to, I believe, Fort Myers, Florida, [Fort Myers Army Air Field], to join a, or maybe it was to; I'm a little hazy here, for advanced instructor school specializing in gun camera work. After Fort Myers, I was sent to Grand Island, Nebraska, [Grand Island Army Airfield], to join a crew, and, again, because of my gunnery instructor [training], I was a fairly senior, supposedly, gunner at that time. ... I believe I was a full sergeant at that time, and I joined a squadron commander's crew, as a tail gunner, on a B-29, okay. ... After that, we went to Puerto Rico for further training.

SI: In general, going from civilian life to the military, was that difficult for you?

SW: No, I had, probably, difficulty in adapting to command, mainly because I didn't think they were too bright.

SI: Taking commands from others.

SW: Yes, taking commands, and why we did various things, you know, during the training; not during the actual flying, but during basic training. I spent a fair bit of time in the kitchen, I know, on KP, because I'd screwed up and didn't follow instructions and decided to kind of go my own way [laughter] or questioned authority. ... I remember that I had some basic training instructors who were from the South and [were], as I would call them now, "crackers," and they basically followed things strictly by the book. ... I guess I was a little entrepreneurial even then and wondered and questioned why we had to do something when it could be done better, and more productive, so that, as a reward for my entrepreneurship, I spent a fair bit of time in the kitchen. [laughter] ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Before we get into the military, had you really had much exposure to people from other parts of the country, like the South or the West?

SW: No. ... As far as traveling is concerned, I don't remember traveling anywhere [but] between New Jersey and New York.

SI: This is your first time meeting people from the South and the West.

SW: Right.

SI: Were there other incidents where there was friction, or did people tend to get along?

SW: No, no. I got along with [people]; ... other than some of the basic training and authority and the way ... the Army did things, no, I wouldn't say so.

SI: You served in North Carolina for awhile, both in Greensboro and at Davidson College, and, also, you were at Illinois and Texas.

SW: Right.

SI: What were your impressions of the people you saw in these different areas?

SW: Well, you don't remember that. ... In Grand Island, Nebraska, I know I had a couple of girlfriends, so, I got a little [social activity], because I never had much impact or association with girls growing up, because of Scouting again.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were saying that you were able to go out on dates and socialize with other people.

SW: Yes. ... You know, I don't remember anything different, probably, about people. We didn't get off the base very often. I remember going in town in Davidson, but probably where I met people more was in Grand Island, Nebraska, ... when we actually trained up there, and that's where I met the crew and ... had the couple of girlfriends, ... who were, you know, in high school at that time, but I don't remember people being different, so-to-speak.

SI: What about segregation? Did you see any signs of segregation in the South?

SW: Oh, no, there were definitely signs of segregation in the South. Montclair High School was; probably, at that time, as a freshman, I believe I was the only white kid, ... there may have been two or three others, on the freshman team that were white, the rest were black. ... As far as the varsity was concerned, there were more white kids than black kids. ... There were some black kids in the grammar school, probably less than three percent. In the junior high school, there were probably less than five percent. When I got to the high school, there were probably twenty-five or thirty percent black kids in high school. I don't remember, you know, too much

evidence of discrimination in high school. ... You know, there was separation, but not discrimination the way that was evident in the South, where you saw "colored" bathrooms and things of that nature. ... I didn't get a strong sense in the Air Force, or in any of my posts, of black people. There must have been, but I just can't remember that, okay.

SI: They served in segregated units or service units.

SW: Probably, yes; just don't remember that.

SI: Jumping ahead, you volunteered to join this unit that was preparing to go overseas.

SW: I volunteered not for a particular unit, I volunteered to go overseas, to join a combat crew, and was assigned. I was accepted. ... I guess that, you know, I was fairly good at instructing, for some reason or the other, and so that they were reluctant to assign me to a combat crew, wanted me to teach other people, but I basically remember that I kept persisting and they let me join a crew.

SI: What was your motivation for doing that, for wanting to go to combat?

SW: Get overseas, fight, you know, that kind of thing, just the normal eighteen-year-old, "Let me at 'em" type thing, when you stop to look at [it], you know. ... I can't remember any specific motivation, other than to do something more than I was doing, become more active.

SI: The year leading up to when you entered the service and during that early period of your service was a very bloody time, for the Army Air Forces in particular.

SW: Right.

SI: Did you know anything about that? Did you ever think about that?

SW: No, not in that sense, in the sense I think that you're leading up to, is, you know, this could be dangerous and they need [me], no, that I guess that I never thought that, though, as the decision was really made for me, in a sense, because they needed [airmen]. ... The people that were in gunnery school with me, probably ninety percent went over to England to be replacements for B-17 crews or B-24 crews. We did train on B-17s and B-24s. I really don't remember any of those folks well. The ones that I remember best ... were those on my crew. There were constant transfers in, transfers out, replacements. I don't really remember too many guys that were with me in training for gunnery instructor. I can't remember, really, too much about the gunnery instructor part of that, of the military career. My guess is, it was probably no more than six weeks of training, ... where I was active in that, maybe because of the fact that it was boring, a little bit, and so many of the guys that I knew were in actual combat crews, so, that's what I wanted to do.

SI: You joined this unit in Nebraska.

SW: Yes.

SI: What was the unit number?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SW: ... I knew you were going to ask me that and ... I think we were the 301st Bomb Squadron, and it was obviously the 20th Air Force, and ... what the wing number was, I can't remember. We had a big "H" on the tail, that I remember, okay. ... [Editor's Note: Mr. Weissenborn served in the 502nd Bomb Group, which used an "H" in a diamond as its tail marker, 315th Bomb Wing, stationed at Northwest Field, Guam.]

SI: You were attached to the squadron commander's crew, you said.

SW: Right, a fellow by the name of Colonel Boyd was airplane commander, so that our plane had a lot of rank on it. The bombardier was a major, the navigator was a captain, the radar officer was a first lieutenant, the co-pilot was a major. By that time, I was a staff sergeant, our radioman was a master sergeant, ... the other gunners were sergeants. So, there was a lot of rank on the plane. ...

SI: That is interesting, because one thing you hear over and over again about bomber crews is how it kind of becomes informal between enlisted men and the officers.

SW: Yes.

SI: I would imagine that would not happen as much on that crew, because of the Colonel.

SW: No, but it was fairly loose, but ... not quite; it's funny that you should say that, because, ... you know, I would always remember, or remember, that Colonel Boyd was a West Point graduate, so that that was another reason that we would be [more formal], that it was a fairly strict [crew], ... and they were older, also. We were eighteen. The radar officer, I think his name was Ricker, ... he was, I believe, a first lieutenant, and he was probably twenty, and all the other guys, I mean, Boyd had to be probably in his late twenties or early thirties, ... which was quite, you know, advanced, because he was a full colonel. The other fellows were probably in their mid-twenties to late twenties, so that there was a fair bit of experience on our crew. ...

SI: How long were you in training with this unit before you actually went overseas?

SW: I believe that I was in training from roughly, I'm going to say, August '44, with this particular squadron, ... because we spent maybe a month to six weeks in Puerto Rico, training, and, from there, we flew back to Grand Island, and then, deployed overseas, but I believe I got overseas in March of '45, ... in the February to April timeframe, of 1945. ...

SI: Does anything stand out about that training, such as what the emphases were? Was there a lot of emphasis on formation flying?

SW: No. I mean, it was just getting used to the plane. It was more for [the flying officers]; it was less for the gunners to do. ... We had cameras, so, we didn't fire the guns. We did when we got to Puerto Rico, and we did fire the guns a bit over the ocean, but we certainly didn't do it over the US. ... I'm trying to think where we did. I don't think we fired at targets, sleeves and things of that nature, in the US, but we did [practice]. There were fighters that would make their approaches and we did use gun cameras, ... and that's where I became a little bit more active, because I was the gun camera instructor and we reviewed the films and things of that nature, but it was mostly just operating as a crew and getting used to the equipment and things of that nature, as I remember. There was some night flying and takeoffs and landings, but it was probably more for the navigators and the pilots and the bombardiers, rather than the gunners, so-to-speak. ... As I said, we did some formation flying, but, ... when we went overseas, because of the fact that the Japanese really didn't have much of a fighter presence at that time, they decided to strip the B-29s of ... all guns, except the tail, and the reason for that is that we were going to be bombing specifically at night, at a fair altitude, so that they figured that the fighters, by the time they got up and reached our altitude, they could only make one pass at us. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were explaining how the tail gunners were the only gunners left on the plane.

SW: Yes, exactly.

SI: Can you describe for me what it was like to be a tail gunner, what the conditions were like, what your space was like?

SW: First of all, because of the fact that we were flying at fairly high altitudes, which were thirty-five to forty thousand feet, ... or well above twenty-five, I think we flew, generally, between twenty-five and forty thousand feet, the plane was pressurized. ... The B-29 was configured, the tail section was pressurized, ... the waist section was pressurized and the bomb bay was located between the waist section and the pilot section, and the pilot section was also pressurized, and you'd go from the waist section to the pilot section in a pressurized tunnel, that, you know, it was kind of like this, about, maybe, three-and-a-half to four feet ... in diameter, to crawl up to the other section. ... To get from the waist to the tail section, ... you had to go out to [the tail], and, there, I had to wear a heated suit and carry oxygen, so that the tail gunner's position was fairly confined. ... As a matter-of-fact, it was quite confined and we had to wear [flak vests], because flak was the biggest problem, because ... we were hit by flak a couple of times. ... I could not wear my chute, because it was a chest pack, as I remember. ... If you wore the parachute on your back, you didn't have enough room between the gun sight and the back of your seat. As I remember, we had both a back and a chest pack (parachute). ... I could not wear either the chest pack or the back and the flak vest, so, what I did is, I put the flak vest on the floor of the plane, ... figuring out that the flak was going to come up from underneath, rather than wear the damn thing, because it was so bulky, and I believe I probably also had the chute, the chest chute, on top of the flak vest, between my feet. So, it was quite cramped. Now, we would not go back into the tail section until we were about fifteen to twenty minutes off the Japanese coast, and then, they would send me back and I'd stay back there until we left the mainland of Japan and got over the water again on the way back to Guam, or where we were eventually

stationed. ... Also, we'd arm the bombs and that was the tail gunner's job, because we'd have to pull the pins, so that I'd have to go into the bomb bay before we got over Japan and pull those pins. When I did this, I had to wear a heated suit, back pack, and use bottled oxygen, which was mounted on my waist, leaving my hands free to hold on and pull the pins. ... I can't remember if they opened the bomb bay doors while I was pulling the pins or not, probably not. ... You know, we bombed with either five-hundred-pound bombs or ... two-fifties [two-hundred-and-fifty-pound bombs], and, also, magnesium, for fire bombs, but it was confining, although we did not spend [the entire time in the tail]. Although the missions were quite long, they were probably ten to fourteen hours, so, we would spend, probably, no more than two or three hours back in the tail. Going to the target and coming from the target, I spent that time in the waist, with the other gunners, who were, ... they called them observers, more than anything else. They really didn't have a great deal to do, because there were no guns on the plane.

SI: Tell me about how you went from the stateside training to overseas. What was that trip like?

SW: Transition? Well, there was a lot of anticipation. ... I believe we flew from Grand Island, Nebraska, to Salina, Kansas, [Smoky Hill Army Airfield], from Salina, Kansas, somewhere in there, we stopped off at Midway, ... as a bond drive, in Chicago. That may have been before we left, but somewhere in that time, because they wanted to ... show the B-29s to the people in Chicago, what they were like, because it was a relatively new plane, and then, we flew to Travis in California. From California, we flew to Honolulu. From Honolulu, we flew to Wake. Then, we went from Wake to Kwajalein, Kwajalein to Saipan, Saipan to Guam, was ... in that rough order, and that probably took us, ten days? to do that, from California to, eventually, when we got to Guam. ... The field where we bombed from in Guam was a relatively new field, ... I would say quite new, which was the Northwest Field, and it was still under construction.

SI: One thing about the Air Force is that training could be just as dangerous as combat.

SW: Right, you've got it. We lost more planes in Puerto Rico, for engine failure, than we did in Japan. When we got overseas, out of our squadron, I think we lost only two planes, as I can remember. In training, we probably lost five or six. I remember being in a plane, lined up in Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico. We were all kind of turning to take off and we were next to take off and the pilot called me and told me that the plane three planes back was having trouble with their gun cameras and the squadron commander had requested that I get off our plane and go back and fix, or try to fix, those gun cameras. ... I jumped off the plane and ran back, got back on the other plane, and the plane I was on lost an engine on takeoff and went down and I think they were all killed, so that, you know, that made me think a bit, when the plane I was on just, they had taken me off probably ten minutes beforehand. That got to me, that, even today, I think of that, okay. ...

SI: The Colonel was not on that plane.

SW: No, no, this was another plane. ... I guess I was doing more of my gun camera work than anything else at that time, and they were using me as an instructor in the squadron, and moving me around between planes, etc., but it was mostly [due to] engine failure that we lost planes.

SI: What about, particularly, dealing with the expanse of the Pacific, losing planes because they could not find the island or had gotten lost?

SW: I don't remember that. ...

SI: Run out of gas.

SW: Yes. It was more engine failure than anything else. We had a couple of practice [missions]. Before we went on an actual mission over Japan, I think we had two practice missions over Truk. Truk was a big Japanese base that they never decided to invade, because of the fact that, ... first of all, I don't think it was strategic, and, also, that they figured that the loss of life could be so significant on Truk, they decided to by[pass it]. It was one of the islands we bypassed, but we used it, because it was a big Jap naval base, to practice bombing. ... There may be one that we lost, for, maybe, navigation reasons or for one reason or the other, ... but the planes that we lost were [mainly due to mechanical failure]; we may have lost one or two to flak. I know that we had [one mission where] our bombardier and copilot were wounded by flak over Japan and we had to emergency land on Iwo Jima. I cannot remember, it seems to me that we kind of crash-landed on Iwo Jima, but I'm not clear about that at all. My guess is, I may have gotten that idea because I do believe they put foam down on the runway. ... We didn't know whether our wheels would come down, because of the fact of the flak. That's vague, but I do know that our bombardier and copilot were wounded over Japan, and I remember that, remarking, because, again, I was eighteen, how beautiful the flak was, it was like fireworks, and the Colonel, Boyd, the pilot, said, "You dumb bastard, they're trying to kill you," and that's what all, whenever you see those big [flakbursts], that flame and explosion, that's pretty damn close to us. ... I remember the plane, you know, bumping up and down with the concussion. Also, as far as when we released our [bombs], ... because we bombed by grid, primarily, and at night, and that when the bombs were released, ... the heat would move us up by four or five hundred feet, so that when the bombs are away, we'd all get a warning to put on helmets, so [that] we wouldn't hit our head. I believe I only fired the guns either once or twice, and maybe saw a Japanese fighter once or twice, but that was it, and I can't remember whether they fired at us or not. They may have. They certainly didn't hit us. The flak hit us. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When flak hits a pressurized plane, does it cause any kind of problem? I think of rapid depressurization.

SW: It's interesting; I don't remember. I don't remember. ... That's a good question. I know we wore oxygen over the target, so that we probably were anticipating that, so that we didn't notice it. I remember the cold. We wore [heated suits], and we did wear oxygen masks. I don't remember, when we were hit, you know, I don't remember actually [being hit]. ... Colonel Boyd notified us that we were hit and that some of the guys were wounded, but I don't remember much about that, other than the fact that we would have to land for first aid at Iwo Jima and the landing could be difficult. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I am not going to ask you about every mission, but what do you remember about your first mission? What was that like?

SW: First of all, it's very difficult to remember in [that] the only, really, ... the mission that I remember probably the best was the last one, and that was because of the fact that it was ... going to be the longest mission, I think, that the 20th Air Force flew. It was the last operating Japanese refinery, as we had been targeting refineries. It was located in Akita, Japan, which is on northern Honshu, and the missions that we flew were mostly refineries in the Tokyo area. ... Other than the excitement of actually, you know, flying over Japan and bombing, because we'd been anticipating this for some time, I don't remember anything particular about it, other than the flak. It's interesting to reflect on this, because of the fact that here you are, eighteen, and it was all *gung ho* and we're finally getting [in], we're finally doing something and dropping bombs, and you didn't really think too much about the danger of it. ... One of the things that was probably most memorable is to see, even at the height we bombed, that everything was orange below us, ... because we did a lot of firebombing, more than [conventional bombing]. When we bombed a refinery, that was different, as we used five-hundred-pounders. Of the, I think I had, I'm going to say nineteen missions, whether Truk counted or not, I don't remember, but we had nineteen missions and my guess is that they were roughly fifty percent firebombing, or magnesium bombing, where you dropped, ... these were probably ... two-hundred-and-fifty-pound clusters and each cluster had something like a hundred two-and-a-half-pound magnesium little bomblets, which had to be extremely destructive when they hit, because they'd be these magnesium [explosives] that would burn very hot, starting fires. ... That was the orange that I saw, and we'd bomb in sectors. So, we'd bomb a grid, rather than a particular target. So, it was just carrying and dumping. When we bombed the refineries, that was a little bit more precision-type bombing, ... and the firebombing, probably, was more bombing in a formation by squadron, so-to-speak, so that you'd bomb [together]. At some point, ... the bomb raids were coordinated with the planes on North Field, in Guam, Saipan and Tinian. So, you could have four to six hundred planes over the target at night. Now, reflecting at what that must have been like on the ground, to have that many [of] these big planes dropping bombs all over the city, ... how they, you know, existed in the city, you know, it's hard to imagine. ... It'd be kind of interesting, at some point, to talk to a Japanese as [to] what it was like on the ground when we bombed at night. It had to be terrible, ... you know, with the magnesium and the fire, ... and because it was fairly flimsy [construction]. The refineries that we bombed, ... they were not in the city. So, we did bomb other cities than Tokyo. I think we bombed Osaka. It was maybe one or two other cities that we bombed.

SI: In flying on the squadron commander's crew, did you have maybe a little more knowledge about the strategy of what you were trying to do, or was it just, "We are flying here?"

SW: No, no. He was just a leader. The briefing would be fairly extensive, where they would talk about ... what they hoped to accomplish and what the particular target was. The debriefing was, more or less, the same thing, as to how effective we were, because, as a tail gunner, I could see more, so that I probably was debriefed more extensively than the other two gunners and the radioman, just because of the visual contact. That was because most of our bombing, we did bomb some during the day, but most of it was at night, so that that was ... more by the fires than

anything else. I couldn't see the exact target, so-to-speak, ... but, as far as strategy is concerned, they didn't really discuss [that]. You know, we knew that we were going after refineries, which were fuel. ... This was before the atomic bomb was dropped, so, they were trying to, I would assume, trying to knock out their fuel depots, ... to limit their mobility on the ground, the [Japanese] Army's and the Air Force's mobility. That was the extent of it, as I remember. They talked about what kind of opposition ... we were likely to meet, where the gunnery emplacements might be. We could see some; did they show us film? Weather was a big thing, ... how many planes would be involved, that kind of thing.

SH: Would the Colonel's plane always make the mission, or would they only go every so often?

SW: No. ... To the best of my knowledge, we flew every either two or three days on a mission, so that the missions were fairly concentrated. After you did five, I think, ... they'd give you a rest, of a couple of weeks, or something of that nature, but, generally, the squadron commander led the squadron. ... We were the lead plane, and, when we bombed in formation, they would bomb on our release, our orders.

SI: Had the more senior officers on the plane been on earlier tours, maybe in Europe?

SW: Not to my knowledge. I don't know that, but not to my knowledge. Boyd may have flown ... in the European Theater, but I don't remember. I seem to think he did, but I don't remember. There may have been others; the copilot might have, the navigator might have, but the bombardier didn't and the radar officer didn't, either, because we had a radar wing, [possibly a radome or dish installed on the lower outer fuselage of the aircraft], which was a little bit unusual. This was a later configuration of the plane.

SI: You said your last mission was your most memorable. Does anything else stand out about the mission?

SW: ... Just the length, and the last mission, we did hear that the second atomic bomb [had been dropped], because I think that this might be the last mission we would fly. I believe there was a documentary made of this mission. [Editor's Note: Mr. Weissenborn may be referring to *The Last Mission*, a 2003 History Channel documentary.] Somewhere, I have a tape of the last mission, which I've only watched once, I want to watch again, because it brought back memories. I think there were some errors in it. ... That one was one that, really, there was little or no opposition and I think we heard that the Japanese ... either had surrendered or were seriously thinking of it, and there was a question, this was when we were in the air, ... of whether we should abort the mission or not, and we got instructions to finish the mission, bomb and knock it out, come back. Whether that was smart, that's something else again, but that was the [order of events]. I know that we ... received word, as a squadron, as a plane, and the folks, ... the planes, that were on the mission, that the Japanese were thinking of surrendering. ... The second atomic bomb had been dropped. After that, when we got back to Guam, we were told, in debriefing, that our crew was selected to immediately, or the next day, within a few hours, take weather and radio personnel to Hokkaido, which was the northernmost island, to land on an occupied Japanese Air Force field. ... I remember when we flew over the field, in preparation, because ... I think there were only one or two, maybe three, US planes that went up there,

carrying these people. The Japanese had removed the propellers from their planes. ... It was probably a bomber base, and these were two-engine bombers and they'd removed one of the propellers, so that they ... couldn't be [flown], to show that they'd recognized [the surrender]. ... When we landed, ... again, I believe I was the first American on Hokkaido after the war, because I was the one that jumped out of the airplane first, and the Japanese that greeted us still had rifles and I had a sidearm, and it was a little bit of an awkward moment, as you can imagine. Here, I was, stupid enough to jump off the plane first, and they were, you know, smiling and bowing and all that horseshit, and I didn't, couldn't, obviously, speak Japanese, nor they English, but it soon became apparent that they had surrendered. Maybe they had white on their [uniforms], they might have had white armbands, or something like that, but we stayed there for a day or so, and it soon became a trading junket, because of the fact that we traded our uniforms, ... and not our rifles or anything, but we traded things ... for souvenirs from the Japanese. So, I got some, and I remember coming back with some Japanese rifles and Japanese swords that I'd traded. What I traded, I have no idea, but we did trade for them. ... That was somewhat remarkable, not remarkable, ... but memorable, going back and doing that. That was one thing that I do remember.

SI: Did you have any trepidation going into it, that you were now going to be among the people you had been fighting for so long?

SW: Not really. Again, you've got to remember that we were kind of brain dead, ... when I say all this was kind of adventuresome. You know, I'm sure the officers probably took this a lot more seriously than we did, but it was a sense of excitement, of anticipation, of doing something new, and that the war was over and we were looking forward to going home. ... You were able to go home based on a point basis, and you got points as to how long you're overseas and how many missions you had flown. I believe I volunteered to stay overseas a little longer, because of the fact that another friend of mine and myself, when we were in Puerto Rico, the Army maintained a kind of a nightclub off the base and the nightclub, basically, had as one of its services, women, who served as prostitutes. It was a "GI whorehouse." ... We thought that this would be a great idea, for us to operate a house of prostitution on Guam, well, [laughter] and we made application to do this, but we were turned down. We were offered the opportunity to operate a club where we could sell beer, sandwiches, food, etc. While we were awaiting to go home, we ran the club. ... We used to buy liquor from the officers, because the officers could have hard liquor, but the enlisted men couldn't. So, we would buy the ration of [liquor], or portion of the ration, from some of the officers and sell it in ... this nightclub, with sandwiches, and we had, we sold, we stripped down the film from the gun cameras and made film for cameras. So, we sold film and that kind of stuff in there. So, I remember sending money back home, ... and we'd also run crap games and things of that nature, my father wondered where the hell I was getting all this money, because he knew what sergeants were being paid, and why the hell I wasn't coming home, because of the fact that they knew something. ... I think I wrote them back that I was enjoying the service at that time. I also played on the Guam football team. By that time, I had ballooned up to, ... I think I played on the offensive line at 217, so that I ... had gotten to be fairly heavy.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: On the record, thank you very much for lunch. It was very nice.

SW: Oh, you're welcome. [laughter]

SI: What were the living conditions like on Guam while you were there?

SW: First of all, this field, as I mentioned, Northwest Field, was ... out in the so-called boonies. There were three airfields on Guam.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SW: What were you going to ask me?

SI: You were saying you were out in the boondocks of Guam.

SW: Oh, yes. We lived, originally, in tents, and then, in Quonset huts. We lived in tents for, probably, two to three months. I was on Guam for almost ... a year. I'm going to say more nine months to a year, ... because I was discharged in April of '46, and we probably lived in Quonset huts for maybe the last three or four months, when they built those, but, previous to that, we basically lived in tents, and we started out in so-called pup tents, and then, they gradually moved us into probably four or five-man tents, as the base got built. ... I can't remember where the officers lived. My guess is that they had some sort of wooden structures for the officers, but I don't remember, okay, and, as far as the [locals], we did not get into, I think I've only been to the capital of Guam once, which was Agana, and we seldom got off the base. We got off, I mentioned swimming, and I'm trying to remember whether the ocean was part of the base. It certainly wasn't fenced, so-to-speak. I think the Japanese still had some sort of presence on Guam, but they really didn't bother us, in the mountains or something like that. ... I don't remember any issue with the Japanese.

SI: Individual holdouts, something like that.

SW: Yes, that's right; lush vegetation, but I don't really remember too much about that.

SI: What about the weather? Did that affect your life or your operations?

SW: The weather affected the bombing, ... well, and flight. You know, did we have a, you know, as you might expect, hurricane season? I don't remember that. The weather, clouds would affect [us]; well, clouds didn't affect us very much, because of the fact that we were bombing, basically, above the clouds. We had ... an advanced, one of the latest bombsights, and we bombed by radar, so that we didn't have to have clear visibility to bomb. ... To the best of my knowledge, I think our bomb wing was one of the very few wings that were equipped with this radar wing under the belly, so-to-speak. ... Most of the other B-29s probably bombed during the day and they maintained a full set of gunners, ... you know, or crew, while we were, basically, a stripped-down version. So, we could fly longer miles and at higher altitudes. We were more precision-[oriented] and able to bomb more strategically because of the advanced bombsight and the radar wing. How effective that radar wing [was] was something else again. I

mean, my guess is, ... we were reasonably successful. I think, as I remember, we only had to go back to a target, I think, one target, we visited three times, but, other than that, we did a pretty good job on the first bombing raid, as far as destroying the target, and this is all at night, but, when you have that many planes, I mean, you should be able to do a reasonably decent job, I would think.

SI: You mentioned that, in-between missions, you did not have much to do.

SW: No. ... Well, it was mostly sleeping, you know, rest. You get [accustomed to different sleep patterns]. That's one thing my wife [says], she says, "You can sleep anywhere," and that's one of the things I think you learn, you know, to sleep, and we did a fair bit of that, but I don't remember, you know, having any [duties], doing anything meaningful, other than resting and preparing the plane for the next mission, so-to-speak.

SI: You did not start the club until after the war.

SW: Yes.

SI: Okay. There was no enlisted men's club or anything like that.

SW: No. ... My guess is, there was some of that, but this stuff that I was talking about was after the war.

SI: Did you notice if anybody had any problems with the stress of combat or had to be removed from flying duty or would not go back up?

SW: No, no, not that I can remember, and we didn't really have any; see, the squadron was, I think, nine planes, and then, in the group, there would be twenty-seven planes, and then, the wing would be either three or four groups, so, my guess is that we probably did not lose more than six planes in ... either the group or the wing. ... I mean, the casualties were not significant, as a result of the war. We lost more in training than we lost during the war. ...

SI: Before we leave your combat tour, is there anything, such as your closest call, that you remember that we have not talked about, anything that strikes you as a chaotic or terrifying time on any of the flights?

SW: No, no. I mean, the flak was one thing. I don't remember, I mean, ... I think we were losing fuel, that's why, it was a combination of fuel loss and the two wounded officers, that [the B-29] landed on Iwo Jima, but, other than that, I mean, in training, I remember, we lost two engines and the captain rang the bell to bailout, but, before he did that, he said that he thought he could land. ... He was going to give the [crew], everybody but the copilot, an option to parachute out or ... to stick with the plane. Nobody took him up on the parachuting; ... we all stuck with the plane. That would be the only, I guess, decision that I made as an individual. The rest of the stuff was [predetermined]. Some of the things, the improvisation, like when I mentioned the flak vests, ... you know, you did stuff like that, but that you either picked up, you

either decided on yourself, or you talked it over with your buddies that were other tail gunners, or something like that, but, other than that, no, that I can remember.

SI: If you want to say anything else about your time in the service, we can come back to it or you can say it now.

SW: No. I mean, ... the so-called getting out of the service, ... I did go into the Reserves and I don't remember, really, much of that. ... I know I was decommissioned as a second lieutenant. How I got to be a second lieutenant, whether that was just [a standard promotion], they gave it to me, or I had to take some courses, I don't remember, but I know that ... I came out as a second lieutenant in the Reserves. I don't remember spending any significant time doing any Reserve duties or meetings. There may have been some, but I don't really remember that.

SI: You did not go back into the ROTC at Cornell.

SW: No. ... No, I didn't [do] ROTC when I returned. You know, subsequently, I've been a very active volunteer in all sorts of things. You asked about ... whether my father ... or mother were active; how I happened to be so active, in a myriad of various ways, probably came as a result of Scouting, more than anything else, that I can think of, but I have been very active in a number of different things, both in school and church and the United [Way?] Fund, and I'm on the board of a pound, or a canine humane society. I've been active in the business [professional associations?], you know, on various committee levels, you know, all sorts of things, and still do. [As a] matter-of-fact, this is a total aside, I'm thinking of, if I have any money left, after this debacle that's behind me, leaving some money to establish a deanship or an endowment to encourage volunteerism at Cornell. [Editor's Note: This interview took place during the financial downturn of the Fall of 2008. Mr. Weissenborn is referring here to the stock tracking programs open on his computer.] ... They do have a public service center at the present time and I would be leaving some money to endow that further and do some programming. I've gone so far as to talk with the university, but I haven't succeeded ... with this yet, of making [it so that] every student has to take a one-point credit course in volunteerism at the university. We have a very unusual requirement now, where the university requires you, to graduate, you have to be able to swim, and they have a swim test, which is kind of interesting. They've had that for some time, and I thought something similar for volunteerism would be a great idea, because, you know, when you stop to think of the kind of education that you've had and, with this, what you're doing, in a sense, lends itself to that same type of kind of program, and, if it helps to develop yourself, as well as lend your particular skills to a not-for-profit organization, [that is ideal], but that's an aside. Anyhow, no, that's generally [it]. I guess, you know, when I look back, I certainly enjoyed my service time and, you know, I'm sure I matured tremendously during that time. I never actually gave a lot of thought to my mortality, and I don't remember any of us giving any thought, ... and maybe that's because of the fact that we didn't lose too [many]. I mean, it wasn't like the European Theater, where ... they'd lose thirty to forty percent of the planes on every raid. I mean, I can't imagine what that must be like, to know that, here, ... you've gone five missions so far and a third of every plane, or thirty percent of every plane, of every mission, is lost. When the hell [is] it going to be your turn?

SI: Yes.

SW: That, we didn't have that. I mean, it was [the case that] it took a lot of time to make these missions, but the capacity that we had late in the war, the Japanese just didn't have the tools to be very effective, at least for the Air Force, at the end of the war, for bombing. Now, certainly, at the beginning of the war, they did, but not at the end of the war, not in the last year or so, and it would have been [different if the invasion of Japan had gone on]. I mean, every once in awhile, we thought and talked about the invasion and what role we might play in that. That was before the atomic bomb, and that got your attention a little bit.

SI: Who was talking? Was it just among the enlisted men?

SW: Among the guys themselves, not [officers]; there wasn't any lectures or leadership or anything of that. This is just "bullshitting," so-to-speak, okay.

SI: How did you make your way from Guam back to the States and your civilian life?

SW: Okay, back on the; as I said, ... I did not request to go back immediately. So, I waived some of my points, so-to-speak. I came back in April and it was fairly long as I returned to the States on a troopship, on the (*Breckenridge*?). We docked in San Francisco and returned to Fort Dix by train. ... The night I came home, a couple of my high school classmates were also just discharged, coming home, and I contacted [them]. So, we all went out and got a little bit drunk, or had a bunch of beers, and ended up in the dormitory, ... the girls dormitory, of the Prudential Insurance Company in Orange. The girls called the cops, and the cops came, this was, I believe, in Orange, and took us in, as veterans, and the cop said we would have one phone call to our parents. So, I made the call to my father and he said, "Jeez, you would have thought you would have learned something in the service." He said, "Stay overnight ... and think about how dumb you've been and come home by; do you have any money?" and I said, "Yes, a little bit," and he said, "Okay, take the bus home." Well, another friend of mine called his father and that father came and picked us up and I spent the night at his house, and then, got home, and I think that was on a Saturday. ... Sunday, I spent a good time sleeping it off and my father woke me up and told me that I was going to start, on Monday, working for him before I went back to college, because he was going to keep my little ass busy, so [that] I couldn't ... embarrass him and couldn't get into any more trouble, ... and I went to Cornell in, probably the end of May, early June, for summer school, and accelerated. ... So, I took my end of my last freshman year in the summer at Cornell, and then, entered in the regular fall term as a sophomore. Subsequently, I went and I took advantage of every summer school [session]. So, I went to school, basically, twelve months of the year, and then, my last, the senior year at Cornell, ... I double registered and ... went into the Graduate School of Business. As a matter-of-fact, I think I'm either a member of the second class or third class from the Graduate School of Business at Cornell. I entered Cornell in '43 as a member of the Class of '47, but because of the accelerated program that I was [taking], I graduated undergraduate in '49, and then, as a graduate student in '50, with my master's. ... After graduation, I interviewed for this business, [stock brokerage]. My father decided that it would probably be best for me to get a job other than [in] his firm, which I did, [laughter] and I had three offers with three firms, one at twenty-five a week, one at thirty-seven-fifty a week, and one at fifty dollars a week, so that, naturally, you take the fifty dollars a week. In retrospect, I should have taken the twenty-five dollars a week, after, I mean, looking back at

which firm did better and where I would have had the better opportunity, etc., but I did take the fifty dollars a week and [have] been in the business ever since. So, that's it.

SI: How had Cornell changed as a result of the war? Did you notice any changes?

SW: ... It was interesting, going back, because I was not in a fraternity [before the war], but joined a fraternity after the war. I became very active and still maintain close contacts with the fraternity. Peggy and I return to Cornell once every two years, maybe one-and-a-half times every two years. I probably talk to the undergraduates in the fraternity and the graduate alumni monthly. I was the alumni fraternity treasurer for probably forty years, and just retired from that position. So, I'm an honorary treasurer now, and I talk to the guys or email them, probably, once every three or four days. So, I maintain contact with the university and with my fraternity, and, certainly, with my pledge class, very actively, and, when we came back, I was not a member of the fraternity. I pledged in the winter of my sophomore year, so that I pledged in, I'm going to say, January of '47, and I was twenty-two then, so that there was a mixture, because there would be guys that would be seventeen, eighteen, and veterans that came back. Our class, at that time, the Class of '49, undergraduate, was probably, and probably still is, today, I mean, one of the largest undergraduate classes Cornell ever had, because of the veterans coming back. The sports were a lot different. I know I went out for the football team as a walk-on, and I'd lost some weight, so, I guess I was 180 to 185. I ended up playing 150-pound football, both ways, for four years. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were just talking about the differences at Cornell when you came back.

SW: Oh, the veterans would be the one thing. ... You know, initially, I was there just for such a short period of time, and it was during wartime, so that the emphasis was [on the war], and I was very young, really didn't drink at all. ... You know, I didn't drink in high school, so that the atmosphere was a lot freer, looser, when I came back, a little bit more party-ish. ... The difference was, really, I was a fair bit older and, you know, you kind of mix up the lifestyle with your age and your maturity, certainly more responsible coming back, interested in getting out, ... and probably a lot more serious.

SI: Had you made the decision to go from agriculture into business before you went in the service, or was that afterwards?

SW: Yes, afterwards, more or less, yes. That wasn't much of a change.

SI: You mentioned the veterans, and I hear this a lot, they just wanted to get out; you were much more serious.

SW: Yes, yes, right.

SI: That obviously must have had an impact on the rest of the student body.

SW: Well, it was a mixture, bear in mind. ... I mean, you had guys that were coming back that were probably twenty-five, twenty-six, and then, ... you had the freshmen coming in that were seventeen, and you had guys that had only been in the service a year, some which were never overseas. So, there was a huge mixture, and I would say the girls, [there were] probably more girls, because, you know, then, they started to enter the workforce, the serious workforce, compete, be equals, rather than, you know, moms, so-to-speak. You began to see some of that. It was early, but you began to see some of that, but I think the major difference was just age, more than anything else.

SI: Joining the fraternity, was that something you did because it was the thing to do at Cornell or did you have a more personal motivation?

SW: No, not necessarily, no. First of all, this is a very good fraternity. I mean, they were leaders on the campus and, ... again, I was fairly active in some of the stuff, so that ... I kind of leaned [toward them], I respected them. ... It was a jock house, but, at the same time, our GPA was probably 3.5 to 3.8. So, they were smart jocks and older, intelligent, you know, jocks, that were a lot more mature and weren't party types. I mean, we partied, but it [was] a bunch of good guys and, you know, ... I've often said that the leadership, even today, among the alumni, my guess is, eighty percent of them are from the Greek system, from the Greek background, it seemed, for one reason or the other, and Cornell is unique in one sense. ... I don't know how many Rutgers has, but we've got fifty-six fraternities at Cornell.

SI: I do not think it is near there.

SW: And probably eighteen sororities. I mean, Cornell has, my guess, I mean, it's much like, the university is very supportive of fraternities, similar to the South, so that they are very strong; in our [fraternity], I can't remember, we've had three or four chairmen of the Cornell Board of Trustees that are fraternity brothers of mine. ... I don't think there's been a time, ... in my lifetime, that we haven't had a guy on the Board of Trustees. So, you know, the guys in the fraternity, ... my pledge class and the pledge classes around me, are guys that ... have been senior or chief executive officers of some of the major corporations, founders of many of the so-called postwar corporations, presidents of universities, very active in government, I mean, a good bunch. So, you know, when you associate with people like that, some of that's got to rub off on you. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: When the Korean War broke out, if you were still in the Reserves, did you have any fears about being recalled?

SW: I wasn't in the Reserves at that time, no. ... To the best of my knowledge, I never; that was when, in 1950? ...

SI: Yes, 1950 to 1953.

SW: All right, because we were married in '52; no, I didn't look upon myself as being a candidate for that. Now, whether I was too old or [what], no, I didn't even think about going to Korea.

SI: When did you meet your wife?

SW: I met her just after ... I got out of the service. So, I met her in, probably, '46, '47, and then, re-met her in '51.

SI: Okay.

SW: Okay, '50, '51. So, I didn't know her while I was at Cornell, I mean, not really. No, I didn't. I knew of her, but did not know her, because I, ... basically, either worked during the summer or went to school during the summer, I really focused on graduating.

SI: She is from the Maryland area.

SW: Pardon me? No, she grew up in Glen Ridge and Montclair. So, she's local.

SI: I am sorry, I was looking at her college. Which college did she go to? I cannot read it.

SW: She went to Chevy Chase, Chevy Chase, which is in Washington.

SI: All right. I thought maybe she was from Chevy Chase, Maryland.

SW: No, no, okay.

SI: She was local to you.

SW: Right, right.

SI: Do you want to say anything else about your career or your volunteer activities?

SW: No. Well, you know, I'm active, still active, ... at Cornell, still active in the fraternity, still active in the business, still ... in the humane society, ... I'm not active in Scouting anymore. I was a football official for ten years. I was active, as you can see, in showing dogs.

SI: For the record, your wall is full of awards.

SW: [laughter] Yes, for the dogs, not for me, for the dog.

SI: However, you raised the dog.

SW: And this, you know, we've gotten a lot of enjoyment [from it]. Now, that dog was an amazing animal and ... that was kind of an interesting experience. He was an international champion and been shown all over the East Coast and we had him in Bermuda, and just a

magnificent animal, and my wife can't, neither of us, can probably talk about him with getting tears in our eyes, because the dog was so great, but, anyhow, ... that was kind of fun, doing that. It's kind of a terrible waste of time, because, if you have a good dog, he wins the breed, and then, you have to stick around for the groups, and the normal shows, ... you can't believe how active [the schedule is]. There's dog shows every weekend, ... and they're in the boonies. ... You meet all different types of people, as you can imagine, and so, we've been in some of the worst motels that you could possibly think of, and with a dog, you know, sleeping with us, and so, it's different, and the dogs, the other one that I have, the bigger one, he's finished also. He's got his championship, but he doesn't like to show. This one was just unbelievable. He'd get [enthusiastic], you know, smelled the damned dog show, and you could see the dog perk up and [seem to say], "What, am I going to knock all the rest of these dogs off again? You know, they're no contest. I'm the best dog here." That was his attitude, and this one would walk up and say, "I'm the worst dog here. Why are you doing this to me?" even though, ... structurally, he's very good, but [he] doesn't have the same verve for it that this one had, but, anyhow, no, ... I'm interested in volunteerism. I've certainly ... enjoyed my Scouting experience, I enjoyed the football officiating I did. I've talked before students; ... I'm very active, at the present time, in academically recruiting for Cornell. So, I do scholarship work and fundraising and, God, all sorts of church work and all sorts of things. So, one thing, I guess, that I got out of college, more than anything else, is time management, so that I don't spend a lot of time on recreational stuff. I don't watch a lot of television, because I think you can be a little bit more productive than just watching television, but that's in my character, so-to-speak. All my kids went to school in the West and stayed there, which is a little bit unusual.

SI: How many children do you have?

SW: Three, two girls and a boy. One girl lives on the central coast of California. If you've ever been there, you ought to [go]. That's a great spot, San Luis Obispo, in that area, and I have a son that's in our businesses, and my business, who's done very well, works for a Swiss bank, Credit Suisse, and he's in Los Angeles, and then, I've got a daughter who is not married and she lives in Aspen, Colorado, has lived there for about twenty years. She's a bartender and she's a fantastic athlete and, although she's banged up her knees and can't ski and skate anymore, but she's a very unusual athlete ... and has a great personality. ... Anyhow, that's, so-to-speak, my life, so-to-speak, as far as the service is concerned. [laughter]

SI: One last question, having been in the stock brokerage business for such a long period of time, what are the major changes you have seen, in general?

SW: Well, first of all, we're going through something that ... I've never seen, and bear in mind that ... one of the things that we didn't discuss, when I was home, while I was either on vacation, in the '30s, or on holidays, I would work for my father. My father had a very small brokerage firm in Newark, New Jersey, that dealt in bank stocks and insurance stocks, and so, I delivered securities for him, or for his firm, in and out of New York, at that time. Now, we have a paperless business, so that you can hardly get a stock certificate anymore. In those days, we would hand you a stock certificate and you would give us a check, and so that ... if you wanted to sell [your stock], you'd have to bring us the stock certificate, sign it on the back, and then, we'd give you a check, after we sold it. That's the way it worked, and I'd have to bring those

certificates into New York, get a receipt, leave them there, and give them instructions as to that I wanted to register that into Shaun Illingworth's name, and, three or four days later, I'd go back and pick up a certificate with your name on it. Then, we'd deliver it to you. These days, there's been [significant changes]. First of all, we were open on half-days Saturdays. The volume on the Stock Exchange would be two, three million shares a day. Now, it's two or three billion shares a day, I mean, it's vastly different. The communication of information is almost instantaneous. The volatility is very significant, the movements on all markets, both equities and bonds. It's been commoditized, so-to-speak, and the computer has played a dramatic role in our business, and we've had a lot more regulation, and we're going to get a lot more, so that there's been huge changes in our business. There used to be a lot more loyalty in the business, so that individuals wouldn't jump around. It was mostly a male business. Today, it's gender neutral. We still have, probably, more males, but, ... in those days, probably less than one percent women. Now, we're probably thirty, thirty to thirty-five, percent women, and it's a lot more mathematical now than it used to be, ... and, obviously, the amounts are significantly bigger. Compensation is significantly [greater]. ... I mean, that's one thing I think that, out of all this, they talk about excessive compensation, and they're right, and the use of leverage is huge, because we didn't have that kind of leverage; a lot more transparency then.

SI: What about the introduction of the average person into the market? From what I understand, obviously, today, the average person can just go onto something like E-Trade and start buying, whereas people did not really do that before.

SW: ... No, no. ... Well, the computer and its accompanying software changed the business dramatically.

SI: However, I mean the average person would not necessarily think of stocks as something they would get into.

SW: Well, it's broader now, and that's a product of your 401(k) and your IRA accounts and things of that nature, and education. Savings is more important, I would think, and whether you're going to have, at the moment, whether you're going to have as much of that, my guess is, the public participation is going to go dramatically down as a result of what we're seeing this past week or so, and it's going to take some time before it comes back again, because ... you're going to remember this, I mean especially [people] your age [late twenties], and your teenage kids will remember their parents talking about this, because of the fact that the parents are going to be saying, "No," more often, because they haven't got the money, or they're going to say, you know, "Is my money [safe]?" They're going to hear, for the first time, "Is my money safe?" and they're going to begin [to cut back], because we have a crisis in confidence. So, there's going to be some of that. ... I think we're in for a very interesting period, especially with, you know, a change in administration and what's going to happen. I mean, I'm not so sure that I would like to be either [then Democratic Presidential nominee Senator Barack] Obama or [then Republican Presidential nominee Senator John] McCain, and it looks more like Obama, you know, taking on what he's going to be faced with. Unless he gets extremely lucky and this thing [rebounds quickly], you know, you've probably heard me say, I don't think you're going to see a "V" bottom, I think you're going to see an "L" bottom. ... It's going to take time to [recover], because the government's going to have to, at some point, has got to start tightening again and

slowing this down, because you'll have inflation again, but my guess is, you won't see people buying the Maseratis quickly, even if they happen to get flush, because they're going to remember. This is similar to the Depression, took some time. I think you're going to see that. ... So, there's going to be an opportunity for a long-term investor, but there's some great values out there at the present time. Many companies are selling less than cash, which is, you know, highly unusual, okay. All right, that's about it. Shaun, I've enjoyed it, thank you very much.

SI: Thank you for all of your time.

SW: No, not at all, and, if I can help, I will talk to this friend of mine, (Macken?). Have you got a card, if you would leave that with me?

SI: I do not have a card with me, but I will write down my information. Thank you very much for your time. This concludes the interview.

SW: Oh, you're welcome, okay.

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

Reviewed by Matthew Mikiewicz 2/17/09

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/10/09

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 11/16/09

Reviewed by Stanton F. Weissenborn 12/18/09