RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH P. RICHARD WEXLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Richard P. Wexler on November 18, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Carmen Godwin: Carmen Godwin.

KP: I guess we'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. First of all, why did your parents decide to move from Russia to the United States?

Richard Wexler: Why wouldn't they? At the time, I think, they left Europe, they were in an area which had sometimes been Poland, [had] sometimes been Lithuanian, [had] sometimes been Russian, but most of the time it was Russian. ... Life there was not good. It was horrendous, really. ... The first opportunity they got to immigrate they did. [They] came over in steerage. ... My mother, I think, was almost spirited out ... of her little community, so that she wouldn't be seen leaving, because the restrictions were pretty severe. Army duty, I think, in Russia, was also severe, except, if there was only one male in the family, they would not conscript him. It was amazing that, in some families, brothers would take different names, just so they ... would not be part of the whole family. ... They came over here somewhere around the 1890s, somewhere in that area. I don't know. One of my regrets, I have, [is that] we never sat down and really went over my parents' history. I regret that to this day. ... Down in Virginia, a nephew of mine was there. ... He's been doing some genealogical work and he ... picked up some of the details, but not too many of them. So, I think they came over [when] my mother was about seventeen or eighteen. My father was a few years older and they immigrated to New York City. They were there, well, the first child must have been born around, let me see. My oldest living brother, who's now deceased, but, he was born in 1904, and the first child was a daughter that died from pneumonia when she was about two. So, if you back off there, 1904, 1902, ... they must have gotten married around 1900, Christmas-time. And, we celebrated. That's one thing we celebrated. ... Christmas Day was my parents' anniversary. That's about all the detail we got out of that. I was born in New York City, too, but then, left for New Jersey. I must have been two or three years of age. I think the first move was to Elizabeth. We stayed in Elizabeth a few years, and then, went to what was called East Rahway, which is an area between Rahway and Carteret. It was a kind of a farm house out there. My father, with his brothers-in-law, was in a coal and ice business, and I can even remember, we had a big, ice-water pond. In those days, it was pretty cold in the winter, and this little pond would freeze, maybe eight, ten, twelve inches thick, and they would cut ice logs out of that, and store it in a warehouse in sawdust for delivery, ... subsequently. I remember that, but, we were there a couple of years, and then, moved into town, into Carteret.

KP: I'm curious, were either your mother or father victims of pogroms?

RW: Not directly, but they were surrounded by it, you might say. It was constant. There was always harassment. ... There was always harassment because they were Jewish. ... That's one of the main reasons [they left]. The harassment was more severe, depending on your religion. I don't know about Catholicism. I don't know of them, but I do know, as far as Jewishness was concerned, ... it was tough. It was very difficult.

KP: How observant were your parents growing up? Did your parents keep a Kosher household?

RW: My mother did, originally, yes. She always really did. It was strange. ... My wife and I also had a Kosher home, until ... I went into the service in '41, '42. We were in El Paso and ...

KP: It becomes a little more difficult to stay Kosher in El Paso.

RW: Yeah, it does. ... That's part of the story, too. But, we got very close with another dentist in 342nd Medical Regiment, Robert Whitaker, Bob Whitaker and Bert Whitaker. She was one-eighth Cherokee, I think. Two delightful people, and, we had dinner at their house, one night, [and I] thought we had lamb chops, and all that sort of thing, which turned out to be pork chops. ... That was the first time that my wife [or] I had eaten [pork]. Of course, I had been at school, and all that, so, it didn't count, but, she had never had anything like that. So, when she got home, after I was ready to leave, she would take, you know, how Kosherness is dairy and non-dairy? Well, she had a dairy frying pan, and she had a piece of liver in her hand. ... She said, "Do I or do I don't?" Finally, she said, "Bingo," off went the meat into the dairy pan, and that was the end of our Kosherness. My family's never objected to that. There was no objection to that. But, those are the interesting things you run into.

KP: Were you a member of synagogue with your parents growing up?

RW: Yeah, well, that's been another family [tradition]. I don't know if you'd call it a family [tradition], ... but, I was taught, Hebrew-wise, in Carteret, by a man who was a butcher, and that's how he taught. He was horrible. There was no interest in there, just enough to get confirmed, and that was it. He left us with no interest in it, and I neglected that for many, many years. I think I, probably, was, maybe not derelict in my duty, but, ... in those days, we worked awfully hard. I put in sixty hours a week in the office, and by the time Friday night or Saturdays [came along], I worked Saturdays, Friday nights, everything. So, you didn't have the opportunity to say, "Gee, I ought to go to temple," or, "I should go to synagogue." It wasn't available. It wasn't possible. But, during the high holy days, of course, we always went, yeah, which [I] brought, I don't know whether I put that in there or not, but during our 1942, Louisiana ...

KP: You mentioned the chaplain.

RW: Yeah, Chaplain Pond. Boy, this guy ... I did bring it and put it in there. [His memoirs] Yeah.

KP: Could you maybe tell that story, because you, apparently, tried to fast on Yom Kippur?

RW: Not only [tried], I did. I actually did.

KP: You successfully ...

RW: Strangely enough, that's the only time in my life I have fasted for twenty-four hours. So, he came into the tent. He had breakfast with us everyday. He said, "Didn't see you at breakfast this morning, did I?" I said, "No, sir." And he was sharp, he says, "[Is] today Yom Kippur?" I said, "Yes, sir," and, from that point, he would have given me anything I wanted. No matter where I saw him, he said, "What can I do for you?" After ...

KP: What denomination was he?

RW: Chaplain Pond, I think, was Catholic, but he was ... a good guy. He was a really down to the earth individual.

KP: You told another story, also. [laughter] He was pretty earthy, he could tell ....

RW: Quite. Oh, yeah, absolutely. No question about it. He was very well liked. The only problem that he had was, he would get seasick just reading the order to move from here to there by water. He and Jimmy (Butera?), both of them were terrible. ... We had one landing exercise and one of the landing craft got lost for six hours. Who do you think was on there? Jimmy Butera and Chaplain Pond. They kissed the ground when they finally landed after six hours on the ocean. It was terrible. They were awful, but he was really down to earth. Everybody liked him. Nice guy.

CG: I was kind of curious, what did your parents do for a living while they were in New York City?

RW: My father, in New York City, ... I don't know how good of a tailor he was, but he was in that type of a [business]. My mother was a home-worker, of course.

CG: What made them decide to move to New Jersey?

RW: Well, there was a business opportunity, I think, that came up in this coal and ice business, and with ... four brothers-in-law and my father, there were five in it all together, and for quite a few years. They built it up quite well [and] worked hard, of course. ... On Saturdays and Sundays, even then, I would get on the ice wagon. ... It was horse-driven, and we would make our rounds. I even got paid for it. What did I get paid? Five bucks, I think, doing it for ... Saturday and Sunday, yeah.

KP: Where did they get the money for the business?

RW: They probably pooled it. I don't think they borrowed, because they were not the borrowing type. No. You just didn't borrow money. You saved it, whatever you could.

KP: How much family did you have that came over to America, on both sides?

RW: Oh, on my wife's side? My wife still has an aunt living who's ninety-six years of age. [She's] got all her marbles and you'll get all the history out of her and she remembers everything. Some of my wife's family immigrated to Canada, some to Boston, some to the New York area, I think, even some to Chicago. ... My family mostly were metropolitan, mostly metropolitan, yeah. I don't remember any of them that were not. So, they were within reasonable areas of one another.

KP: On either side, did you have family that stayed in Russia?

RW: The only one would have been [my] grandmother on my mother's side. She did not come over. The grandfather did and he was here. He died when he was ninety-three, and only because he fell down a flight of stairs, ... really healthy man, yeah. But, otherwise, she would probably be the only one, that I can recall offhand, who did not emigrate to the States.

CG: Do you know any Russian?

RW: No, but, strangely, when my daughter was growing up, she must have been ten or twelve, we had a babysitter who was Polish. Eleanor was Polish. ... One day, Eleanor taught Nancy the Polish National Anthem. ... When we were in Rahway, where my parents lived at the time, Nancy started to sing the Polish National Anthem, and my father joined in. Yeah, and he hadn't been home for thirty, forty years, probably, but, he did know the Polish National Anthem. Yeah. That's interesting.

KP: Did your parents speak Yiddish in the house at all?

RW: Rarely, rarely. I remember, they took us to a Yiddish play. I didn't understand a damn word of it. I thought I'd understood some Yiddish, but that was so deep that I didn't understand any of it.

KP: Where did you see the play?

RW: It's on Second Avenue. They had several Jewish theaters there. [There were] very famous actors. ... I couldn't understand a thing. Everybody's laughing, I didn't know what the hell they were laughing about.

KP: You mentioned that your father probably got the money to start the business from the family. Did you have any sort of formal family guild on your side of the family, like a family pool, that met frequently and pooled money?

RW: Not a financial pooling. No, no, we didn't have that. Somebody tried to start a family circle type of thing, and that didn't work out, but, on my side, we have a Wexler family circle. There are about six families. We even have a large cemetery, which I take care, of about 120 graves. It was bought about, must have been, close to fifty years ago. ... We used to meet every year, twice a year, three times a year, which we don't [anymore]. You know, things get

separated. The paternal and maternal heads of families, they are deceased, and the progeny, you know, they get married and they go off in different directions. So, we stopped that some years back.

KP: How recently did you continue to have these meetings?

RW: Up until, it must have been eight or nine years ago.

KP: Oh, so it's still fairly recent.

RW: Yeah, about eight, nine years ago. But, I ... send a letter out every three months anyway with our family finances of the year, ... the cemetery finances, and how we take care of it, and whatever history I ... pick up. The history is who died when, usually. ...

KP: Where is the cemetery located?

RW: Right near Westwood, in that area up there, right off the Parkway. Matter-of-fact, ... last year, we got three in a row, which was a little bit ... a very favorite sister-in-law of mine died from pancreatic cancer. Just about the same time, my brother died, after five years of ... Parkinson's [disease] and, ... I had a cousin who died from a cardiac problem, all within a very short period of time. It was up to me to take care of all that. But, now, I have a ... niece who lives in Madison, who will take over for me when I go ... out West. So, ... I have a successor.

KP: A successor.

RW: Yeah. She's a teacher and a very smart gal.

KP: Where does she teach?

RW: She's now teaching at Westwood. ... She's head of teaching disabilities sections and she's very good at it. Of course, she's a Penn State grad and she didn't like what happened with the Michigan game. They got ... murdered, as Rutgers is getting murdered these days. Yeah, it's a shame. Who's idea was it that Rutgers would get into this league? ... We're not prepared for it.

KP: I'm not exactly sure.

RW: We're way over our heads there.

KP: I'm not sure who.

RW: Yeah, yeah.

CG: So, how old were you when you came to Carteret?

RW: Let's see, I probably was eight or nine, just about.

CG: Was there a specific reason for moving to Carteret?

RW: Well, because the business my folks were in, with their brothers, got larger than the little farmhouse place that they had and was too far away from town. It was, oh, about two and a half miles. Today, two and a half miles is nothing, but, with horse and wagon, two and a half miles was a lot. So, they moved to an area which was next to a railroad track, because coal cars would more easily handle their coal bins, and the ice, and all that sort of thing, who had warehouses. And, we had two houses next to each other, where our families lived, two families, up and down. So, there were four families, very close together, at that time. So, that was the main reason that they relocated and stayed there for quite awhile. And, ... my father went and one of the brothers-in-law, started a branch out in Rahway, and my father went with him in it for awhile, and then, my folks moved out to Rahway.

CG: How did they get started in the fuel business?

RW: Coal and ice? I have no idea how they gravitated into that. I think it had been started before my father. I think my father was one of the latter to get into the combination. I don't think he was one of the originators. But, Carteret was an interesting growing up period. I got real involved in the sports, you know, things of that nature.

CG: Did your mother have to get a job at that time?

RW: ... My mother worked on us four boys, said, "You will learn. You will learn, regardless." No question about that, "You will go to school. You will behave yourself. You will do your homework. You will go to college. What do you want to do? That's what you're going to do." Yeah. She didn't say, "You will do this or you will do that," but, "You will learn," for which we're all grateful. My oldest brother was a mechanical engineer, out of Steven's. I think he graduated second highest [in his class]. I'm the next. Of course, I went to dental school at Penn, and then, my brother below me, he went to dental school out in Washington University, in St. Louis. And, my youngest brother, he's the only surviving one now, became an electrical engineer ... out of Virginia, because he had been in a Signal Corps outfit during World War II, which was very interesting. I don't know if I brought that out, where we, the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. ... His outfit had been bivouacked near a small Belgium town called Houyet, H-O-U-Y-E-T. And, they bivouacked in a field, near the town, and the people of the town said, "Unh-uh, we can't have you doing that, we will take you into our homes." So, he came in this family home with Mama, and Papa, and Marie, and three brothers, I think. To this day, he's in touch with them, constantly in touch with them. ... It was very interesting. So, when the fortieth anniversary came up, he said, "How would you like to come along with me?" So, the four of us went. [We] had a good time, really enjoyed it. [We were] well received. He was a great ambassador of ours over there. They loved him, really did, nice kid. ... At one time, the GIs, I think, were having a dance. Marie, I think, was seventeen, and Marie said to Mama, "I want to go." And, Mama said, "You can't go. You're too young." So, she pestered and pestered, and

Mama finally said, "If (Palmer?) will take you, you may go. Otherwise, you may not go." So, my brother took her to the dance. Otherwise, she couldn't go. And, when we finally drove up, when we went to visit, the whole family's all outside their little house, waiting for us. It was really ... a delightful scene to see the welcome that he got. It was marvelous.

CG: You mentioned that you were really into sports in high school. What sports were you involved in?

RW: Everything. Baseball, basketball, even football. ... Don't forget, I was of the first graduating class in Carteret High School. There were what, fifteen boys and sixteen girls, something like that. Our coach was a woman, McCarthy, her name was, and here we have fifteen boys to make a football team with eleven on the team. [laughter] Not easy, but, we did very well, we did very well. ... At that time, there were quite a few semi-pro football teams, and some of the players who had been playing semi-pro from town would come out and help coach us. We did pretty well. In basketball, we were pretty good. In baseball, we were very good. Matter-of-fact, off the record ...

KP: We're back on the record.

RW: So, I also played semi-pro ball, and, of course, Joe Medwick was on that team, particularly. He was a shortstop then, and he pulled a bonehead play, and I told the manager, ... "He's never gonna make a good shortstop. Get him out in the outfield." Well, that's where he shined. He became a terrific major league baseball player, unbelievable, a Hall of Famer. Many of his records still stand. Yeah. Joe was a good, good ball player, elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

KP: What was his last name again?

RW: (Medwick?). Yeah. Ducky Wucky Medwick. Yeah. That's his nickname.

KP: And, it sounds like you have fond memories of watching him play.

RW: Yeah. And, I played basketball with him. I think, one night, I played basketball with him, and I fed him, and, I think, he made sixty points. I kept feeding him. He could throw a football seventy yards, he could kick it seventy yards. They had a championship football team when he was in high school. ...

Well, that's one of the problems I had at Rutgers. Here is our original teachers, being [the] first class, were recent graduates and [they] were not that good. They turned out to be much better teachers later on, but they weren't then, and we had a tough time. I would be in an English class with students from Newark and they, whatever we were doing, ... already had, the same thing. In Physics, they knew it. So, I'm starting fresh. I didn't learn very much in high school. I got through all right, but didn't learn very much. They killed me over here. I finally went to Mr. Porter. I think it was in Physics. Mr. Porter, ... he had a Ford and he would make precise turns this way, you know, everything sharp. But, he was a nice guy. I went up to him one day, and I

said, “Look, I'm never gonna use Physics. I'm being snowed under. I gotta pass it for entrance into dental school and, after that, Physics is gone. But, I have to pass it.” And he got me by, for which I was very grateful to him. We had a Professor Cole in Physiology, came up from one of the southern states his first year here. He was not a nice teacher. He'd give you nothing but footnotes, and footnotes were what you had to go to the library. And then, Chemistry, I was good in Chemistry and, all of a sudden, my grades in Chemistry started going under. I forget his name. He said, “... What's happening?” I said, “I haven't got any time anymore because we're spending all our time in the library trying to read all this stuff that we are being given in Physiology.” He said they'd been hearing about it. ... The final exam was on nothing but footnotes, and I took one look at that and I did not complete it. I just passed it off as an incompletion. It didn't hurt me any. ... But, the other, Chemistry was fine, and Porter got me through Physics and the other stuff. And, here, I'm playing basketball and I'm playing baseball, too, so, you know, some of the time is being taken up there, which I was very grateful. We had a baseball coach, Jacklitch, who had been an old time catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers. His fingers were all gnarled from being broken up, but, he knew so much baseball that he taught us. To this day, I appreciate it, because, when I look at a baseball game, I look at it completely differently than most people look at it. They don't see what's going on, they don't know what's going on. They say it's slow. Baseball's not slow, if you're looking at certain things. I remember, during the war, we were in St. Paul, my wife and I, and I said, “Minor league game tonight. Let's go.” For fifty cents each, we went to the minor league game. ... During the game I said to my wife, “Look at that second baseman, watch him.” He was good. He turned out to be Red Shoendest, who turned out to be a very good major league ballplayer. But, I could tell right then he was a good ballplayer. So, Jacklitch, I really appreciated every little thing that he taught us, to this very day. [The] basketball coach was Hill. Hill also taught basketball at, I think, Union, in New Jersey, Union High School. He was a good coach, a very, very good coach. So, I enjoyed all that.

KP: It sounds like you got to quite a few professional games growing up. Did you ever go to any Yankees games?

RW: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Not only that, but that's how I brought my family up. Nancy, my daughter, ... we started taking her to baseball games at the Polo Grounds when she was five-years-old, maybe. Yeah. She got two exemptions, one in high school and one in college, for knowing about something in baseball, like the Bobby Thompson homerun, ... and a couple of other things. First time, she came home from high school, she says, “You want to see what happened?” The teacher, who was an aficionado of baseball, too, asked a question. Three hands went up, two boys and a girl, and these boys were saying, “What does she know?” She knew, she got the [answer]. Same thing happened in college. She was the only girl who knew what was going on. Now, my granddaughter I'd start taking to a Giant football game when she was five or six, sit in my lap, and we would discuss [the game]. She's now a senior at the University of Arizona. She's on the communication staff. She has a by-line in their magazine, in their daily paper. ... She's a sports person. She knows her basketball, she knows her football. ... I haven't been able to teach her that much baseball. But, that's her future, ... communications in sports is what she's aiming at. Yeah. So, that part's been very interesting. So, we used to go to twenty-five, thirty baseball games every year. Every year.

KP: Which team did you follow?

RW: Giants, always.

KP: Always the Giants?

RW: Always went to the Giants. As a matter-of-fact, if somebody walked into our home and turned out to be, say, a Dodger fan, my daughter, Nancy, would turn them around and say, "You can't come in here." She knew the averages of every ballplayer. She knew it all. She was very, very good at it. I remember coming out of Giants Stadium, one day, I think the year we won the pennant, and met a friend of ours coming out, too, and there were tears coming down Nancy's face, and he said, "What's the matter with her? Doesn't she feel well?" [I said], "Yeah, she feels fine, but we lost today." We lost one to nothing, yeah. ... I think more families should do something like that, get their kids so interested. And, in the office, every once in awhile, a parent, usually a mother, would say, "Oh, that boy of mine, I don't know what I'm going to do with him." I said, "What's the matter?" "Sports, sports, sports, sports." I said, "Well, what would you rather have him do? Go out on the corner with all these jerks and get into trouble? Leave him alone, his marks will get better, but keep him interested in the sports." Yeah. A lot of interesting things happened in the office, really. One of the main things, I think, and this comes back from a lecture I heard from the NEA annual session, and a mother will say to me, "You know what I would like my son, or my daughter, to be?" I said, "Wait a minute. You have no right. You absolutely have no right. What you're saying is absolutely wrong. There is something in this world that anybody can do, and do better than they can do anything else, and be happy at it. Forget about the dollar sign, [it] doesn't mean anything." I said, "Do you want them to do something all their life that they hate doing and they don't like to do?" A friend of my father-in-law was a manufacturer of children's outer winter garments, very successful. Mr. Grear, I remember him. I said to him, "You don't look so happy. What's the matter?" "That son of mine." The son is now twenty-six, married, with three children. He says, "He comes into the office." He works with his father. "... And, the lights go out of his eyes. If I say to him, 'you know, my clock isn't running right, my car isn't running right' or something mechanical,'," ... It wasn't even computers, but in that vein. He says, "He comes to life." He said, "What did I do to him? What did I do?" [He] said, "Because, as he was growing up, all that we were talking about is him coming into work with me." I found that even with some of my dental classmates. Jack Sholderer, I can remember, his son ... was going to Villanova. He had already been accepted to Penn Dental School, and he was a senior, and he calls up his father, and his father was telling me this story. He said, "I'd like to come home and talk to you." He said, "Fine." [He] came home. [His father said], "What's the problem?" "I don't want to go to dental school." [He] said, "Who said so?" He said, "You did. All I heard growing up, all my life, 'Jack Sholderer and Son,' 'Jack Sholderer and Son,' all my life." Then, my bridge partner, Jules Brechner, had a son who was going to Princeton, six-foot-two, six-foot-three, tennis player par excellence, handsome kid. His freshman year in dental school, and I speak to him, go down there, and speak to (Evey?). Our maid, who was our maid for about fifty years, delightful child, delightful woman, I said, "What's with Dave?" She said, "He doesn't want to go to dental school. He never did want to go." So, I

said to Jules, I was riding down to Penn with him one day, and ... he had had a heart attack, and I said, "What's cooking with you?" And, he says, "Well, I'd like to practice a half a year up here, and a half a year down in Florida." I said, "Who will take your practice here?" "Oh, Dave." So, the same thing. Subliminally, it was Dave. So, Dave flunked out after his freshman year. He went in with his father-in-law in public relations, or something. I saw Jules a year later. "How is Dave doing?" "Fantastic." [The] guy's happy, he's married, ... everything's great with him. And, again, you do what you want to do, what you're happy doing, and that's what you call success in life. Yeah.

KP: You originally thought about going to law school.

RW: Originally, I thought so. Yeah, but, all of a sudden, it was my freshman year at Rutgers, I said, "No, that's not what I really want to do." Somehow or other, the bug hit me, and I said, "No, I want to go to dental school." Again, it was my choice. It was my choice. Where the law thing entered my mind, I don't know. ... I don't think it was my mother, but, something must have [been said], whether it was somebody I knew, or whatever, but ... I wasn't happy with it. So, when I changed my mind and told my mother about it, [she] said, "Fine, you do it. We'll help as much as we can." So, [it] worked out fine. I was happy.

KP: Before continuing with Rutgers, I just want to back up and ask a few more things about Carteret.

RW: Yeah. Sure.

KP: One thing a lot of people have memories of, in the 1920s, is the Klan. Do you have any memories of the Klan around Carteret?

RW: You mean in a negative fashion?

KP: Yeah. Any Ku Klux Klan action?

RW: No. None. None whatsoever. None whatsoever.

KP: There were never any marches?

RW: No. No. A matter-of-fact, there weren't any homosexuals either, believe it or not. I don't recall any, or even a tendency to it, even [though] future history showed differently, or consolidated that viewpoint. No, there wasn't. What we had growing up was, a author by the name of Smith wrote a book, title of which was, <u>What Did You Do Today? Nothing.</u> But, it was about a boy who had left the house around, after breakfast, and didn't come home until supper time, who was busy all day long. Doing what? Congregating with his friends. If we had a field, we could play a little baseball. If you had a court, you would play basketball. But, you were doing [things]. To give you an idea, I took a four-hole button, one day, and I put some dental floss through it, and I started to spin it in front of my daughter, like this, [demonstrating],

spinning, and she said, "Can I take that to school?" She was in high school. I said, "Of course." So, she took it to school. What do you think the kids asked her? "Where did you buy it?" Where did you buy it? We never bought anything, we made it, you know. We would take a peach pit, and we would sit on the curb and run it along, and make a hole in it, and have a ring. A (caddy?), wanted to play caddy, we would whittle our own caddies. No matter what it was. Fly a kite, we would do it all ourselves. "Where did you buy it?" "What'd you do for me?" In other words, we learned what to do for ourselves. Now, they turned it around the other way. ... "What have you done for me lately?" You know, and I think that's the sad part, I think that is really a negative part of what's been going on.

CG: Do you have any memories of an area of Carteret called Chrome?

RW: Chrome was part of Carteret, but it was the lower part. But, it was still part of the community, ... yet, it was almost a community within itself, with the same governments as the Carteret parts, which was up the hill. One was down the hill, one was up the hill. Yeah. How'd you know about Chrome?

CG: A friend of mine told me that his grandmother used to live there and that it used to be a much nicer area than it is today.

RW: Yeah. It was a lot nicer. It wasn't a fantastic area, because it was situated closer to industrial, like copperworks and other manufacturing plants down in that area. There weren't exactly some ghettos there, but there were some areas which were not that well built-up or maintained. Yeah. I think, the Carteret section, the upper hill section, ... was a little nicer than the Chrome section. Maybe I was prejudiced, I don't know. [laughter]

CG: I also read something about the fire trucks being horse-drawn. Do you remember that?

RW: Not horse-drawn, no. I don't remember the horse-drawn fire trucks, no, I don't. No. I do remember one of our policemen, I forget his name, I think it was of Polish extraction. He could hardly speak English. ... [If] people from New York wanted to go to the New Jersey Shore, they would take the Staten Island Ferry, they would drive over to (Tottenville?), take a ferry over to Carteret, and then, drive down to the shore. Well, the lines to these ferries were, on some days, ... unbelievable, but, some motorist got lost and, sure enough, stopped this cop and asked him, "Where's the ferry?" He says, "Down by the water, you damned fool. What did you think?" [laughter] ... That just ran around the town. I don't know how it got out, but that just ran around the town. But, we had a mayor, Joe (Herman?) was the mayor for, I don't know, twenty, thirty years. He ran the town there.

KP: What years were these, roughly, Joe Herman's mayoral years?

RW: Joe Herman was mayor, probably, from 1920 to 1940, maybe, yeah.

KP: A Democrat or a Republican?

RW: Probably a Democrat, yeah. One of his sisters was made the superintendent of schools. If you wanted anything, or got into any kind of trouble, I know Ted Daniels, who was a classmate of mine at Carteret and here at Rutgers, got into trouble stealing some signs for his room and he got caught, put in jail. And, the first thing he does, he calls Joe Herman to get him out, which he did. [laughter] Yeah, but he got caught stealing road signs, Teddy Daniels.

KP: In Carteret, what were most people's ethnic backgrounds? How many were first generation Americans? It sounds like you had a pretty big Polish community.

RW: It was ... a Catholic community, more than a strictly Polish community, although, there were areas, as there are, weren't ghettos, but, there were areas where people were more comfortable living. John Street was Polish. There were other streets. I think it was very diverse. I think it was quite diverse. I don't think it was dominated by any particular sector, or religion, or anything. I don't think so. I didn't feel it, anyway. ... We were very happy. I was happy growing up in Carteret. Yeah. It was a good bunch of years. [I] enjoyed it.

KP: Do you remember if your parents were Democratic or Republican in the twenties, particularly the '28 race between Hoover and Smith?

RW: Our parents were probably Democratic, yeah. I would say that they certainly were not Republicans, no, or anything. I think they were Democrats.

KP: When you were a teenager had sound come to the movies yet?

RW: No, not until I was in Philadelphia. ... [An] Al Jolson movie was the first one I heard in sound.

KP: Could you maybe talk a little bit about it? Did you go to the movies a lot?

RW: Oh, we went to the movies. ... Folks used to drive us to Elizabeth, every Friday night, to a movie. And then, we had movies in Carteret. Of course, ... you'd go every week, because you had serials. There were all these serials that were very popular then, Pearl White, and all that type of thing. ... So, for five cents, you went to the movies. You know, ... you're right, that was a ritual, practically a ritual, yeah.

KP: You were a young boy when World War I broke out.

RW: Oh, yeah, because, I can remember, I had the Swine Flu. [It] almost killed me.

KP: The 1919 influenza.

RW: Yeah, yeah. It almost killed me, yeah, which is very interesting, because ... there was a decision, what was it? Fifteen years ago, or so, where our National Institute of Health and CDC

had to come to conclusion, because they felt that there was a very, very good possibility that the flu virus, it changes it's form, it mutates almost every few years, it seemed like it was gonna start to mutate back to what the Swine Flu looked like. If so, what do we do about it? ... And, I remember going to a health meeting, I think there must have been a thousand people there and it was conducted by the National Institute of Health. "What do we do? Do we come up with a vaccine and vaccinate everybody, or do we not? If we do not, and it hits, we're in very serious trouble. If we do, and it doesn't, where are we?" So, that's where the decision was made to come up with a vaccine. Some people developed problems from the vaccine, so there was a little bit of a problem there, but, if you stop and think that, if we did not do that, and ... it did mutate to the Swine Flu, we'd have lost, over the world, ten million people, easily. I remember having to sleep out in the car, in a lot, out of the house, for, I think, a week, while I had that Swine Flu, so I would not be contagious to anybody else. It was serious.

KP: How old were you at that time?

RW: Seven, eight, or ten.

KP: It must have been very scary.

RW: Oh, it was scary. I was sick as a dog. ... So, at that lecture, I said, "Okay, I had this thirty-five years or forty years ago. What's my situation?" They said, "You'll probably still have some immunity, still have some there, but take a shot anyway." Yeah, which I did, of course.

KP: Do you have any memories of World War I, in terms of parades, bond drives or scrap drives?

RW: Mostly, the fact that I had an uncle who went in and got wounded. He was wounded during World War I. ... There weren't any parades. I just remember ... being driven down to Fort Dix in an open touring car. They had the isinglass curtains. It was raining like hell, it was awful, all this mud, and everything else. But, I don't have too much reflection on [the war]. Of course, when the war was over, it was a different story, but, not during. During the war, there weren't any kind of parades.

KP: So, do you remember Armistice Day, November 11, 1918?

RW: Not particularly. I can't recall any specific [things]. I know we had some bonfires. That's what we had. Of course, we had a lot of fields, you just piled up a lot of junk and made terrific bonfires. [We] did the same thing when Joe Herman got re-elected. We always, always had bonfires. Yeah, big bonfires out in the field.

KP: You were young, but, do you remember that there was quite a strike once at the Williams and Clark fertilizer plant? There were a number of deaths and the sheriff was involved.

RW: I think that was after my time. I think that was after I left Carteret. I know that ... Williams plant was right across the street from the temporary high school that we had been using. It was ... actually a grammar school turned into a high school, before they built the new high school. In my junior year, they built a new high school. But, during the freshman and sophomore years, the Williams plant was right across the rails. But, I don't remember at that point.

KP: Well, you were very young. It was in 1915 that this took place.

RW: Yeah. Well, I know we had a race riot, but, I wasn't there. Where was I? During the war? There was a ...

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

KP: You couldn't remember. You were saying ...

RW: Oh, yes, I do. Now, I recall. We were in Washington. The senior class had gone to Washington, on the graduation trip. While we were there, that would be in 1922, ... we heard about the race riot. ...

KP: These were race riots in Carteret?

RW: Yeah, in Chrome.

KP: In Chrome?

RW: Yeah, it was in Chrome. [laughter]

KP: How did the riot get started?

RW: Probably, as most riots get started, over nothing. Just a couple individuals of one color and another not agreeing on something, ... starting a fight, and other people started to join in. Somebody got killed there, I know. There were some deaths.

KP: How destructive was it?

RW: Not very. There was no burning of houses, or anything of that nature, no. Just physical violence, ... yeah.

KP: How large was the black community?

RW: Not very, no, not very. But, they were mostly situated, again, down in the manufacturing area and those ... plants down there, in the Chrome section, mostly. I don't remember any from up in the Carteret area. No, I don't recall.

KP: I'm curious about your father. You were in dental school by the time the Depression hit, but how did the Depression hit your father's business? How tough was it?

RW: Oh, 1929 was not a pleasant year for anybody, really. I don't think there was [a large let down], because they dealt mostly in necessities. You can't do without heat in the house. You can't do without refrigeration in the house. There were no refrigerators. They were all iceboxes, no refrigerators. So, I don't think there was that much of a let down in the business section. By that time, my brother had graduated out of Stevens and was working at the Mack Truck in Scranton, I think it was, and he would, financially, help me along every once in a while, which I repaid later on, yeah. But, tuition was two-hundred dollars a semester. So, it wasn't so terrible. Everything else was a lot cheaper, ... necessities, like books and equipment, that you were to have to buy on your own. We got by pretty well. You know, it worked out well. [I] managed, put it that way.

KP: When did your father's business make the transition from horses to trucks?

RW: [The] first truck was an ACME truck. It was a big one. I think it could handle about three tons. That must have been, wait a minute, ... where was I? I was in high school then. It must have been around 1920, '21, in that area. There was a big ACME truck, ... the first truck that they bought. Oh, which, this is another point, my father had some impacted wisdom teeth that were really giving him hell, and the oral surgeon was in Newark. So, I drove with him to Newark. He had the impactions removed. I was ten, I think, maybe eleven, twelve. Halfway home, he says, "I can't drive anymore." He says, "Can you finish it up?" I said, "Sure," 'cause we had a big yard in the back. I always used to practice with the ... Model T Ford. I got behind the wheel and drove all the way home when I was twelve-years old. [laughter] No problem. No problem. Yeah.

CG: I was curious, where did you meet your wife? Was she from Carteret?

RW: No. She was, originally, from Brooklyn, but, I met her up in the mountains. She was there visiting a friend of ours during the summer. I had just finished summer school here and I lost fifteen pounds. It was a rough summer school. My mother was up there also, ... taking a little vacation. ... So, we happened to be at the same residence that day, so, I met her then. She was fifteen and a half, yeah.

KP: When you say the mountains, where do you mean?

RW: The Catskills, naturally. [laughter]

KP: Did your family go there regularly?

RW: You know, during the summers, they would go up there for a few weeks, you know. We used to travel, I think, with three cars. That was the first caravans that I'd been accustomed to driving in. Three cars, the same families would go up there, the same area, every year.

CG: Did you travel a lot before you joined the service, vacation-wise?

RW: Probably, yeah. Travel was not what it is today, of course. Travel usually was by foot. ... Well, high school, from home, was a mile, so, we used bicycles. We didn't walk, but sometimes we walked, before we got to the bicycles. But, we either bicycled, or walked a mile during lunch time, walked back again, and afterwards. You know, kept in good shape that way, yeah.

KP: You mentioned that you were not as well prepared for Rutgers as you thought. Had you thought of other schools besides Rutgers?

RW: No, I didn't. I really didn't. Rutgers was my first choice. Why would Rutgers be my first choice? My brother might have had some influence there, because he was going to Stevens at that time, and he was commuting. I didn't commute. Probably, my brother might have suggested it, and I said, "Good idea." Financially, of course, it was the wiser thing to do anyway, rather than go into the city to one of the bigger schools, which would have been much more expensive. I had a real good two and a half years here at Rutgers. Yeah.

KP: You were only here for two and a half years, yet, you've felt very loyal.

RW: Yeah, that's right. Oh, yeah. I've kept it up since. I've always come back, always supported as much as I could. I belong to the Henry Rutgers Society and I've donated a lot to the Foundation, et cetera, et cetera. But, my philosophy has been, I said that the tuition was two-hundred dollars, but that did not cover the cost of my education, somebody else contributed to that. So, ... when I graduated, and was able to, I figured it was my duty to contribute, as somebody else did to my education, that I would contribute to other peoples' education. ... That philosophy has stayed with me all this time. I could not tolerate, now, I got this more from my classmates graduating at dental school because dental school was pretty rough, ... once they got their diploma, they would say, "Well, I'm through with this school." Not thinking, "What would I be like? What am I gonna do with my life, if it wasn't for this education that I have received?" And, a lot of them, even later on, just would not support that. I couldn't understand that, [I] just absolutely could not understand it. To this day, I say to myself, "Where would I be without Rutgers and Penn? Just what would I be doing?" I have no idea, because I finally did what I wanted to do. And, these two schools made it possible. And, people who donated to these schools made it possible.

CG: So, you were on scholarship?

RW: No. No, I was not on scholarship, no.

CG: You received financial aid?

RW: No. None at all. There's only one man, that I know, in all my academic life ... Lester Burket, at Penn. ... Oh, this guy was unbelievable. He came from the state of Washington. He graduated Penn Dental with a ninety-six average, and then, went to Yale Medical School, which he finished in three years. He was unbelievable. He would take notes, go home, type them up, and never look at them again, until the night before the exam, and he comes up with these ninety-nines. The first Physiology exam we had at Penn, which was not easy, [laughter] old Dr. (McGlone?), he was the instructor. I think the median was around fifty-five, something like that, except, Mr. Burket got a ninety-six. The lecture after the marks came out, Dr. (McGlone?) is giving a very complicated lecture involving a lot of mathematics, ... he finishes his one-hour lecture and, with a smile on his face, "Is that right, Mr. Burket?" And, Mr. Burket says, "No, sir. It's wrong." It was wrong. That's how smart this guy was. This guy was unbelievable. Besides being a real (ray of light?), ... he was dean at Penn for twenty-one years after that. But, brilliant! But, he's the only one I know who was on scholarship. He earned it, he deserved it. I don't know of anybody else, no. Today, it's different. What do you got, forty percent or more that's on scholarship, or aid of some type or another?

KP: One of the things we noticed, when reading the old *Targums*, we were struck by the three Fs, fun, fraternity, and football.

RW: And, football, yeah. [laughter]

KP: In fact, you played football in high school.

RW: High school, not here. No, I was too small for that.

KP: But, I would be surprised if you did not attend football games.

RW: Oh, it was constantly, [I] always did that.

KP: But, you were not in a fraternity?

RW: Here, no. Not here, no. I was independent here. [I] couldn't afford it, for one thing. I was in a fraternity at Penn, but not here. ... That's professionalism. That's another matter. Yeah.

KP: Could you maybe talk a little about the social life? How much did you participate?

RW: Here?

KP: Yeah.

RW: Well, I knew a gal in New Brunswick. She later married a fellow from Perth Amboy and came visiting us in Carteret, I remember, Mary, something-or-other. ... I had a couple of dates at Douglass with a gal who lived practically next door to me in Carteret. Outside of that, I was too

busy. Too busy with the sports, and the studying, and playing a little poker at night with some friends of mine. Just wasn't any time for social activities.

KP: Do you remember your roommates at Rutgers?

RW: Teddy Daniels was one. Joe Ruggieri, from Raritan, he was another one. And, at Hegeman, I lived alone. I was alone at Hegeman. That was about it. And, we had lived, originally, down on George Street, way down in a rooming house. Joe, Teddy, Rosenblum, and myself, there were four of us. Yeah. This was on George Street, but a pretty good walk. That was for several months, until something opened up here. Was it Ford Hall? Maybe Ford, yeah. And then, the sophomore year, I was at Hegeman. But, the social life, we didn't have time for that. Just wasn't the priority at all. Never even thought of it.

KP: You did not go to the dances then?

RW: There really weren't that many. There were, once in a while, but, no, I didn't. I have two left feet anyway, to this day. [laughter]

CG: You played basketball and baseball your freshman year.

RW: Freshman year.

CG: Why did you decide not to continue?

RW: Number one, of course, was the time element. Number two was, I don't think I had the stature, or the ability to overcome my stature, for either sport. In the sophomore year, I was out on the baseball field. I didn't play. I wasn't good enough for that. But, I did help Jacklitch out on a lot of the things, so that I was involved there, but, not really directly. The basketball team, they were pretty good. I remember Nelly Rorbach was center. ... He was, I think, maybe five-eleven. He was the center at five-eleven. Now, they are seven-eleven. [laughter] Yeah. But, I always kept my interest in that, sports, constantly. A lot of it started here and in my own activity in Carteret. ...

KP: Do you remember your hazing as a freshman?

RW: Here?

KP: Yes.

RW: I don't think there was that. I don't remember any hazing.
KP: You did not have to wear a dinky?

RW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But, that was a normal thing that everybody did, but, I don't remember any hazing, per se.

KP: I think there was a ceremony where you had to sort of walk around, I forget how they were dressed but ...

CG: I remember reading something about having to turn their outfits backwards.

RW: [I] don't recall that.

CG: No?

RW: No. [I] don't recall any of it. I don't recall any hazing of that type.

KP: Do you remember your class dinners at all?

RW: Yeah. Every five years, I was back at most of the annual, or bi-annual, five-year dinners. I missed some of them. I was away. But, most of them, I was here.

KP: But, you do not remember any during school? For example, I have read that, often, the sophomores would try to disrupt the freshmen class dinner and, in one case, the freshmen class president was kidnapped and dumped off in a different part of New Jersey.

RW: No, I don't recall any. I really don't recall any of that measure, no.

CG: I was kind of curious, do you remember anything as far as prohibition is concerned?

RW: I remember prohibition. Oh, yes.

CG: Did you ever know of any places where people could go to sneak a drink?

RW: Well, I know somebody, a personal friend of mine, who disappeared. He was a bootlegger. He disappeared one night. Never found him.

KP: He was from where?

RW: Carteret, yeah.

KP: How old was he?

RW: He was in his twenties, mid-twenties. [He] just disappeared. Yeah. I think he was trying to (stash?) out an area that belonged to somebody else and he just disappeared. Nobody ever saw, or heard from him again. [He] probably wound up in the river. Yeah. But, speak-easies, we weren't really into drinking, not even beer.

KP: Did you know where they were in Carteret, or here in New Brunswick?

RW: Well, in Carteret, we knew there were ... places that it was available, bootleg, because the bootleggers were very active there. Of course, you had the Kill Van Kull River, which was an avenue of commerce at that time. Here, it never entered my mind here at Rutgers. It just wasn't part of the act. No, drinking was not part of the act at all. As I say, we just got too busy with the necessities to bother with the non-essentials, which that was.

KP: You had to attend Chapel. Do you remember your feelings about mandatory Chapel?

RW: Neutral. You had to be there, so you were there. It doesn't matter. No, that's fine. I had no quarrel with that at all. That was okay. Yeah. I felt that was part of growing up, you know. So, no, I don't recall [Chapel] being a bother, or trouble, at all, no.

CG: What about the mandatory ROTC?

RW: Oh, yes. That worked out pretty well, because after the ROTC here, I had ORC at Penn and then I went to Carlisle, one summer. So, that was a continuation, one to the other, and what we had done here was very beneficial, later on, having had this experience here. And, all that turned out to my benefit during World War II, also. You got to where you more easily accepted what was going on, because none of it was that strange that you had to make accommodations for whatever mind-set you might be having about something. You would just, whatever had to be, what we had to do, you just did, that's all. [You] hoped that you survived, yeah. That worked out fine. The ORC at Penn was, I think, seven o'clock in the morning. [laughter] Colonel Oliver, yeah, he was a nice guy, a retired colonel, who was our teacher there. We got paid, not very much, but we got paid twenty cents a day, or something like that. [laughter] Yeah.

CG: I remember reading something about Colonel Oliver serving in the Spanish-American War.

RW: Could have been. He could have been, yeah. But, he was a nice, tall, erect, no-nonsense guy. But he understood that if we fall asleep there was a reason for it, in class. Yeah, he was all right. We enjoyed him.

KP: There was a sentiment, in the late twenties, and even into the thirties, that we really needed to avoid another war like World War I. There was even some criticism of mandatory ROTC.

RW: Yeah, I know. I know.

KP: Do you remember any of that sentiment?

RW: No, we didn't have it at that point. No, there was no "contrarians," you might say, that would say, "We shouldn't be doing this, we shouldn't be doing that." No, that came much later. That was not part of our mind-set either, no.

KP: Did you have any thoughts of making the military a career when you joined the military?

RW: Well, my opinion of the military is this. If you like it, there's nothing better. If you don't like it, there's nothing worse. ... I couldn't possibly see that as a career. It just didn't fit my personality or my desires. No, that wasn't part of it, maybe, because I already had my mind set as to what I wanted to do with my life. Yeah. And, some of the regular army people that I've seen, I didn't particularly like. They acquired some characteristics which were not good. Some of the first sergeants were regular army first sergeants. When push came to shove, they weren't there. They weren't there. They were not as forceful as they could have been, and were not good role models either, you know.

KP: In terms of?

RW: Courage. Courage.

KP: What about drinking? I've heard the old time Army was hard drinking.

RW: Oh, yeah. They were. That's another peculiar thing about hard drinking. We would have inspection every week, every Saturday, and, my assistant, my dental assistant was (Curry?). Yeah, that's his name. Curry was a hard-shell Baptist. [He] came from a hard-shell Baptist family. In only one footlocker was any liquor ever found. That was in Curry's footlocker, which tells me that ... depriving an individual, when they're growing up, of what is common for other people, is not a good idea, because, then, it makes them say, "Oh, boy, I'm leaving the family. I've never had wine, or I've never had any whiskey, or anything. I'm gonna have it now." And, they turn out to be, I think, the worst drinkers. I may be wrong, but, as far as alcoholics, and I don't think I've ever seen figures broken down as to religion, but, when I was growing up, we would have our Passover. The whole family would get together on that, and you had four times that you would drink wine. Well, the youngsters would get a little bit of wine with a little (Vichy?), a little seltzer. So, ... when you got away from home, it was not that big a deal anymore, because, ever since we were about three or four years old, every year, we would have a little wine. But, some of them, they were just terrible at it. We got to Australia, I think, after a couple of weeks, we decided to have a good beer party, and we got a keg of, what the hell was the name of that beer? But, it was raw, greenish beer, and, these GIs guys could drink. They could drink you under the table any time. They were so sick the next day, they were unbelievable. They were sick as dogs. They, finally, got over that. [laughter] We also had a second lieutenant who had been a duderancher, out in Colorado, I think it was, where people would take a week or two on a dude ranch, and he could drink you under the table without any question. We had been in the jungle for about five months when he hooked a ride down to Sidney, Australia with one of the fly boys. They would go down, so, he came back. I said, "Okay, what happened?" He says, "I'm ashamed to tell you." I said, "What happened?" He said, "We got down there about five o'clock in the afternoon." Well, five o'clock in the afternoon, all the pubs are closed. "So," he said, "We had to wait about an hour or so, [with] this buddy of mine, to go in, and we bought a half pint of liquor. Then, we went back to our room and we drank half of that half a pint of liquor." He said, "I didn't wake up until the next morning.

I was never so drunk in all my life." So, he had been without any liquor for five months and it just knocked the hell out of him. [laughter] He said, "I'm ashamed to tell you." This guy could drink. Oh, unbelievable. ... Also, in the medical department, you would have grain alcohol for medical purposes. Well, we would swap around. We would go over to quartermaster and say, "Okay, for this pint of grain alcohol, what do we get?" You'd get Coleman lanterns. You'd get the store. ... So, we would tell him, "Now, watch out. This is grain alcohol. This is powerful." "Oh." We find out later, they couldn't handle it. That was about 190 proof. [laughter] They said, "Oh, we can drink." But, they couldn't. Whether it was the absence of hard liquor, up to that time, or the heat, or whatever was going on, but, it just knocked the hell out of them. But, we could swap with the quartermaster most anything. [If] we need[ed] a half dozen Coleman lanterns, a half pint of grain alcohol, that'd take care of it. Make a deal. I was also tobacco officer, overseas. Cartons were forty cents a carton, and I'd get a quota, and would always have some left over. This medical buddy of mine, Chaffin, who was a one handicap golfer, we'd go down to the golf course, whenever we could to get away, and I would swap a couple of cartons of cigarettes for a bottle of scotch. American cigarettes, boy, they'd [give you] pretty good ... scotch liquor. Yeah, so, we would keep swapping around. We would barter. I must have put in there the fact that we bumped into a sergeant down [on the] Brisbane golf course who had been in headquarters down there for two years. You learned a lesson from a guy like that. He was playing snooker, playing a round, and Chaffin, this buddy of mine, he was six-foot-two, two-hundred-and-ten-pounder, who was, I say, a one handicap golfer. I played golf with him, once. I don't know how he tolerated me, but he played with me. He could handle a shotgun like you wouldn't believe. We went out quail hunting. We'd come back with twenty quail. I would get one, he would get nineteen. He would go out fishing, he came back with two hundred small-mouth bass. Bowling, he bowled 299 and, … he was just a tremendous over-around, besides being very clever, mathematically. He would play poker. You go out on maneuvers, you play poker. What are you gonna do at night? And, no matter what kind of cards he held, he always came back with chips, always came back with money. Psychologically, he was a fantastic psychologist. You just ... never knew what he was doing. That's the kind of an individual he was. That was one of the things I put down there, is that, [it's] not a good idea to get too close to somebody in the service, because he and I, we got along very well, and, unfortunately, he developed lymphoblastoma overseas and, eventually, died from it at a very early age. It was a terrible waste of humanity, because he was an unbelievable person.

KP: I wanted to sort of back up a little and ask you a bit about dental school and, first of all, why the University of Pennsylvania?

RW: Why Penn?

KP: Yeah.

RW: Well, I was not enamored of going to New York for anything. That was not a priority. I didn't particularly like New York, although they have some good schools there.

KP: You didn't like the city?

RW: [I] didn't like the city. The city never impressed me very much. And, Penn had a good reputation, I had found out from the dentist I had frequently used at home. I think he had suggested it, and I didn't think I had the requirements, but, they told me what to take. That's why I took my six weeks in summer school and got, what did I take there? Chemistry and, something, Biology. I got all my credits and got in, all right. But, it did have a good reputation. To this day, it has a good reputation. Maybe that was why I picked Penn. I enjoyed that, too, really enjoyed it, had fun with it. [I] played on the championship fraternity basketball team of the university. I think there were sixty teams in there. We came out number one. It was good. There's always something to keep yourself interested in things.

CG: Your fraternity ...

RW: Alpha Omega, yeah, it's international. It's the largest in the world. [They] do a lot of good things.

CG: My dentist is a graduate of Penn and, also, he was a member of your fraternity. He said it is more of a professional fraternity.

RW: Yeah. ... There was a nightclub singer, what the hell was her name, who was entertaining at one of our national conventions, and she said, anytime she'd pass a group of participants, what do you think they'd be talking about? Dentistry. They weren't talking about world affairs, or women, or whatever. [They were] talking about dentistry, every time. So, that's a good part of it, because you have everybody, from freshmen to seniors, living in the same area. So, anytime you need to know anything, you need any questions, it was answered ... for you, right then and there. Even at school, in the labs, we would help each other out. It was advantageous, being in a professional fraternity.

KP: Were there other fraternities in dentistry?

RW: Oh, yeah, there was Delta Sigma Delta. There was ... I would imagine there were about four of them.

KP: Where did you live when you were at Penn?

RW: Fraternity house. Yeah, 4034 Spruce Street, to start with.

KP: Did you have initiations?

RW: Yeah, there, you talk about hazing. You were just dropped off, God knows where, and you had to find your way back. It took hours. You know, we were way out in the boondocks, at two o'clock in the morning. "Find your way home." That's about what it amounted to.

KP: You all had your clothes on?

RW: Oh, yeah. There was no physical initiation at all. It was just getting you lost and finding your way back out again. I guess, we were a little more mature at that time. [laughter]

KP: Can you talk about learning to be a dentist and dentistry as a practice?

RW: Let me give you an idea of motivation. We had a pioneer, Dr. G.V. Black, Green Vanemar Black, who, some of his principles are still valid today, and what, I'm talking 1907, 1905, who said, "The primary objective of every professional person is to put himself out of business." And, when you stop and think about that, that's why I spent twenty-seven years as chairman of the Council on Fluoridation for the state of New Jersey, for the Dental Association. But, if you stop and think about it, this is what it's all about, that's why the changes. It's got to evolve. It can't stay the same. I think that's what kept me in, my last five years in practice, I believe. I spent sixty-one years in practice. I think the last five years was the newer developments of cosmetic dentistry, adhesive dentistry, and all that, which was preventive. I just love preventive dentistry. Yeah.

KP: It is a little bit ahead of the time, but I want to make sure I ask you about fluoridation. From your perspective, it is certainly a common sense, preventive measure but, particularly after World War II, there was quite a bit of controversy over it. For example, the John Birch Society believed it was part of a Communist plot.

RW: Oh, yes. Naturally. … Of course.

KP: Could you maybe talk a little about the struggle for fluoridation?

RW: Oh, God. You know, a crazy thing happened two nights ago. I got a call from a reporter, from the *Bergen Record*, on fluoridation. I've been out of it, now, six, seven years, at least that many. And, we got to talking about, again, … why New Jersey is forty-sixth in the nation. What I could not get across, well, it's so complicated, this "anti" business, it's so complicated. I came to the conclusion that, in the strata of society, anybody below you, if you say, "Yes," they automatically say, "No." Automatically. [If] you say, "No," they automatically say, "Yes." No question about it. The fanaticism, primarily, is, government or anybody shouldn't do what you can do for yourself, which violates Abraham Lincoln's precept, ... "Government should do what people cannot do for themselves." But, what I could not get through their thick skulls, and they would tell me, "Oh, it's not the same." ... What's the history of fluoridation? Is it a natural occurrence in nature? And, all we did [is] find out what percentage was the best, from the natural occurrences, and could we duplicate it? The chemists say, "Yes." The engineers said, "Yes. Duplicate it." And, we wound up with exactly what nature's been doing. And, these "antis" said, "That's different. That's different." Why is it different? "It's just different. [It's] not the same thing. One is natural and one is not. You're adding something." I said, "No, we're not adding. We're correcting something. We're correcting a deficiency." "No," again. And, most of the "antis," they have a lot of money, and they do a lot of propaganda work, and they organize so that what I have found, politically, and that's what the problem in New Jersey is, not

pure politics. If you have a project, a legislative project, and ... there are letters coming in, this pile is so high, this pile is so high, I don't care which pile it is, this one wins. And, if you organize well enough, which the "antis" do, because you can get people to vote to be against something, and be vocal against it, rather than people ... they say, "There's nothing wrong with it. Why not?" They're other ones, they say, "Oh, no. It's bad, let's do something about it."

KP: Who were the "antis" in New Jersey?

RW: Unfortunately, you've had one dentist, down in Cherry Hill, one dentist in Clifton, one dentist in Boonton. To me, I always questioned their motivation. Is this hitting your pocketbook? Is that what your motivation is? And, they'll say, "No, no." But, I believe that that was their main motivation there, because, scientifically, if they wanted to, they could see that they were completely wrong. And, they were to be used by other people, the John Birchites, the other radical people, who had plenty of money to direct programs. [As a] matter-of-fact, they used to bring a Dr. (Yamayanis?), from Chicago, to appear. A matter-of-fact, he even went to Australia. He's a professional "anti." He went down to Charleston, South Carolina, and the judge threw him out of the court. He says, "You're a professional. I don't want to hear professional people. I want to hear people who don't have any self-interest in this." And, whenever I've been interviewed, either radio or television, devil's advocate would always say, "Why?" And then, I'd quote Dr. Black. I said, "This is progress, this is what you have to do." Politically, it's another matter. That's so complicated, to get into that, we can talk for three hours here.

KP: I'm also curious, I know that John Birch was opposed, but, what were some other groups that you remember?

RW: Christian Scientists, they'll do it. Chiropractors. People who have a self-interest. They have a self-interest, too.

KP: Any particular successful battles that you have won or lost?

RW: Well, all the losses were very traumatic, really, because I find myself as a failure, because I could not convince somebody that what we are talking about is [true]. ... Now, when I was in El Paso, I was checking thousands of recruits, thousands of them and, as army dentists will tell you, it came to a point when we'd say, "You're from the Northeast. You're from the Southwest. You're from Illinois. You're from Colorado." You could tell from the structure of the teeth. I remember, the kids from New Mexico, their teeth [had] a little yellowish color, but you couldn't find a cavity, or filling, or anything, in there. Or, you get the twelve or thirteen communities right here, in the state of New Jersey, which have had a natural fluoride content. Why, for instance, Trenton has been fluoridated for forty years, or something like that. Lawrenceville, right next door, has a referendum, and they will not take the experience of anyone. If you have … all these communities fluoridated, and you have one in here who's thinking about it, they will probably say, "No." The fact that these are … that doesn't mean a damn thing to them. Of course, people are going to come in, and say, "Oh, no. This is no good. This is Communistic.

This is artificial. This is forcing something down your throat." They come up with jillions of ideas. The latest thing, of course, you get AIDS from fluoridated water. Sudden Infant Death, that comes from fluoridated water. The fact that Solomon made his decision because one of the women lost a baby from Sudden Infant Death, I'm sure they didn't have fluoridated water then. But, that didn't matter. You had another dentist, by the name of Sheft, that was his gig, was Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, which is, you know, when you stop and think about it, it's so stupid. But, people believe it. You can get a lot of people to believe anything, because it's seen as a negative, you can believe it. ... Even if a letter is written to a newspaper, unless there is an answer right next to it, they're gonna believe that letter and you're not gonna change their mind. You can write after that as much as you want, you will not. It just will not happen. So, I just became resigned to the fact that, what I am going to do and what I have been doing, is to try to educate people. Maybe, eventually, it will help do some good. But, I can't force them to do what other people are counteracting. It's been a big disappointment in my life. It's a very big disappointment.

KP: When did you become so actively involved in this?

RW: After I got back from service, because of what I was able to see, what the results are. Of course, we have two thousand communities in the United States that are naturally fluoridated. Yeah. Couldn't do it. Couldn't do it.

KP: My stepfather grew up in the twenties and has a lot of memories about the drills, the dental drills, being not as quick.

RW: Well, you went from maybe 6,000 RPMs to 300,000 RPMs. And, at 50,000 RPMs, vibration ceased. There's no more vibration. [As a] matter-of-fact, the progress, in that aspect, has increased the longevity of dentists. Why? Because, if you have to use three or four pounds of pressure to get anything done, you are under stress all the time. Now, … you know, you get your little pinky up in the air and it's like that. It's easy, nothing to it. There's no stress, it doesn't come back to you. So, you're enjoying it now. But, otherwise, ... you make a slip at that pressure, you'll cut a tongue, you'll cut a cheek. Whatever, it's not there anymore. It's very gentle. And, it goes, I say, 300,000 RPMs, and diamond cutters, or carbide cutters, you don't even know what's going on. …

KP: But, you used to have patients who would have to spend a long time in the chair.

RW: Oh, it took a long time, forever, to get something done.

KP: Yeah, I mean, the most common, simple cavity would take ten or fifteen minutes then.

RW: But, what it didn't do, it didn't improve the results. The results, then, were as good or, maybe, even a little bit better than they are today.

KP: In what ways?

RW: You were much more careful. You were much more accurate. I've seen even so-called amalgam, or silver fillings, that I put in forty years back, were still functioning. But, in areas where you would try to put in the newer plastics, they don't have that resiliency to last. So, you do something differently, which is a lot more expensive. Then, you'd get these people who'd say, "Oh, no, these amalgam, that's bad for you, the mercury." There's all kinds of mercury. The mercury that's used in amalgam is not bad. [As a] matter-of-fact, "It's more harmful," these people were saying. Why were these people, all of a sudden, [complaining]? They were building machines which would measure the mercury content, while you were trying to say, "Drill out an old filling." ... So, they were selling machines, so, that was their gig. But, if you started to remove all of the amalgam fillings that people were having to replace with gold, or whatever, number one, you were creating a lot more mercury vapor in five minutes than you can get in fifty years. Okay, so then, what are you going to replace it with? Gonna replace it with gold? Now, you're talking a difference between something that costs, maybe, fifty dollars, and something that costs three-hundred dollars. [Are] you gonna do it? I just ... fractured a cusp on one of my teeth there, clean break, to be replaced with one of the newer fillings, the plastic fillings. The charge, of course, I get a rebate on mine, a courtesy. I get a fifty percent courtesy. My bill, for that one thing, which took ten minutes, was eighty-two dollars, which means the regular fee for that was one hundred and sixty, one hundred and sixty-five dollars. ... So, you just took the economics and you've changed it completely there. But, it's all for the better. Cosmetic, it's all for the better. No question about it.

KP: I've also read, and been told ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Richard P. Wexler on November 18, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

CG: Carmen Godwin.

KP: I was just saying that people used to, I've read, lose their teeth much earlier than today.

RW: The figures, if I can recall them, at age forty-five, fifty percent of the people had lost half their teeth. … At age sixty-five, about the same amount lost all of them. I would venture, with all the knowledge we have today, with the fluoride rinses that we have, with the fluoride drops we have for the children as they're growing up, which influences the structure of enamel, with the fact that people do see their dentist for preventive work more frequently than they used to do, which would be in the care of the bone which supports the teeth, because, once you have healthy bone around teeth, you're gonna have healthy teeth, no two-ways about that. Now, my father had full upper and lower dentures. My mother, well, when she was eighty, or closer to ninety, had one full denture and one partial denture. My wife, who is eighty-four, has, except for the wisdom teeth, which I removed, ... every tooth in her mouth. She's got bone like you wouldn't believe. If she lives to be a hundred and twenty, she'll still have all her teeth. I am eighty-eight. I have one

bridge, that's all, and I have my own dentition. What people don't understand about dentistry, and the dental apparatus, is that your digestion starts there. Number one, the teeth, and the way nature has developed them, certain ones for just cutting, certain ones for just nibbling at, certain ones for really chewing hard, is to break up food to that extent and mixing it with the saliva, which has ... its own enzymes. ... Digestion starts in the mouth, before it goes down to the stomach. If people begin to understand that, I think, they would take better care of themselves, because, that's the way we are. It's what we do for ourselves that really counts. At eighty-eight, I'm a very healthy individual. I had a knee done, [a] usual male problem when you get to be very old, but that's under control. But, outside of that, my wife has got a little problem with her eyes, which is glaucoma, and Graves disease, which is hard to handle, but, other than that, she's very healthy at eighty-four. She doesn't look eighty-four. She looks great. So, your statement is absolutely correct. … Of course, I don't get that many professional journals anymore but I haven't seen the modern figures on that, but, I'm sure … that you're right that people are keeping their dentition much longer.

KP: I'm curious, you were going to dental school when the Depression really started to hit. You graduated right into the worst of it.

RW: 1932 was not a good year.

KP: What were you thinking about your prospects as the Depression worsened?

RW: The prospects were not that great. [I] got married in '34. There were times that we would have no more than maybe ten or fifteen dollars a week to live on. And, you scrimped and you saved and you managed. We frequently speak about the fact that with our friends, in those times, we had a lot of laughs. We [had] a lot of good times. We enjoyed each other. Of course, again, everybody is closer together, because transportation was not as it is today, where you can go from here to there in no time at all. It's only where your feet took you, most of the time. So that we learned to manage with what we had, because everybody was in the same boat. And nobody could lord it over anybody, "Because, I've got more than you have." [laughter] You know, all that nonsense. Even today, we'll say, "You know, we did this. We did that. We had a good time. We enjoyed ourselves. We enjoyed our friends." So, we have no regrets in that aspect. As a matter-of-fact, it may be not so nice to say, but, I think we have had the advantage of a great, deep Depression, because we understand the value of what you have, the value of money, the value of things. I see more pennies on the street, nowadays, that people will not bother to bend down and pick up. I was at a supermarket, in Atlanta, when a teenager paid for a bill and it was, I don't know, you were supposed to get fifteen or twenty cents change. [She] just walked out. ... The girl said, "Never mind, don't bother." We wouldn't do that. Fifteen or twenty cents was a lot of money for us then, as anything was. So, I think we've had the advantage of that and have learned to live with it. I don't think people today ... things have been too easy. Things have been a little bit too easy. [Take] marriage. None of my friends got divorced. None of them, in all these years. My daughter's been divorced twice. Everybody else we know has been divorced twice or three times. There's no commitment. You know, marriage is not a fifty-fifty proposition, because, sometimes, it's a hundred percent on one side and it's zero on the other, but

you have to learn to hang in there and be committed. As I understand, there are a lot of people, couples who live together before they get married and, six months later, they're done. The primary one is Striesand and Gould. They lived together for about seven years, got married, and, three months later, they got divorced. [laughter] Commitment, you know, before. There's no commitment. ... I can walk out any time I want now I said, "The only time I can walk out now is I gotta get divorced." But, not a single friend of mine, in all these years, has divorced, none of them.

CG: You mentioned that you did an externship.

RW: At Harlem Hospital.

CG: What was that like?

RW: It was a learning experience. It was learning what to do and what not to do, what was good and what was bad, particularly that aspect of it. I did mostly surgery there. It was a learning experience. It was a little transition between school and the outside world, what's going on in the outside world.

KP: What did you learn there that you did not learn in dental school?

RW: I had a surgery teacher ... who said, when it came to removing teeth, "Be gentle. Roll them out," which we did. Then, I get to Harlem Hospital, and there's one dentist, who was built like, excuse me, a brick shithouse, just a solid guy and he would put a forcep on a tooth and you could hear it crack. He'd break every damn one of them and then have to go in and get the roots out. So, I learned that, Professor Swing ... was his name, he was right. Roll them out. So, this is what I did my entire career. That's one thing I learned there, particularly. Again, do no harm. Do no harm. And, I learned that on weekends, there are a lot of traumas people undergo [on] Saturday and Sunday. Because, you know, on Monday, you're gonna be busy with all kinds of surgery, fractured jaws, things of that nature there, because of holiday partying, anger, over the weekend, always. It never failed. So, we learned what not to do wrong.

KP: Why did you extern at Harlem?

RW: Well, I had an uncle who had a business up in that area, who knew some of the politicos. And, in order to get an internship, or anything like that in New York, you had to know somebody. So, he knew the political boss in that area. He got me an externship, which I stayed with for about five months.

KP: Who were most of the clients at Harlem Hospital, because there was still a large Italian population in Harlem?

RW: Yeah. But, it was mostly minority population, mostly minority, yeah.

KP: Were there any black dentists?

RW: Yes, yes. We had, I think there were two there at the time I was there, just two. Quite a number of them. I don't remember the exact number that they had on staff, but there were two blacks. I didn't have any in my class. The only ones I had were ... oh, yeah, (Sea Serecinha?), who was from Thailand, who was one hell of a guy, who went … back home after school, established the first dental school, took care of the royal family, and can drink you under the table any time. So, I said, "(Sea?), how come?" He said, "Well, when you're dean of a school, you know, you have a party set, people to come together, and you have groups together, you have to learn how to drink." He said, "Boy, you learn how to drink." And, he could drink. We were tapping his leg to see whether he didn't have a hollow leg. [laughter] Yeah. He had four wives. [laughter]

KP: He sounds like a very interesting man.

RW: Oh, (Sea Serecinha?) was a very interesting character. Yeah. Nice guy. He was really nice. We all liked him.

KP: You came back home to Carteret to practice dentistry?

RW: Yeah, that was, maybe, an unfortunate thing, because a dentist I had known, who was also a graduate out of Penn, committed suicide.

KP: Do you remember why? Were there financial difficulties?

RW: No, it wasn't finances at all. It might have been a health problem. I don't know. And, to take over a practice where somebody had committed suicide was not the greatest thing in the world to do. Because in peoples' minds it sticks in there and it didn't work out. I was there four or five years and decided I'd better get out of there. The other thing was, I was too well known. I had too many personal friends who didn't think it was proper to pay their bills, either. And, even then, in 1932 to 1937, it was important to make [the bills, and] the finances were a little bit important. So, I decided to leave. Then, a classmate of mine, who happened to be a good friend of mine, … was up in Clifton. So, I went to see him, to see what were the prospects up in that area. And he suggested that this little town of Wallington really could use a good dentist up there. And, I was very fortunate. When I got there, I went to see the town clerk and the secretary from the Board of Health, who were very beneficial, who pointed out the fact that, "We really would like to have you around." As a matter-of-fact, they pointed out a place where an office might be available, which it turned out, was a widow with two young girls. That worked out all right. Matter-of-fact, the first day I opened, people were waiting for me.

KP: Which is a good sign.

RW: Yeah. Yeah. We got along well, because I never took care of anybody I didn't like. [If] I didn't like you, "I'm sorry." There were a couple I threw out. "You and I, we're not gonna get

along. I suggest you go someplace else." And, after a while, I got very lucky. My daughter had gone, for a couple of years, to Michigan State. Then, she went to Eastern. She decided that wasn't what she wanted to do. Then, she came back and went to Eastern Medical Technical School in New York, for about a year or so. Then, she came in with me and she stayed with me for twenty-seven years. And, [it] got to a point where I just did my work. Forget anything else, she got it all. She's good. She was very, very good at it. [The] phone would ring and she would start a conversation and, finally, she'd hang up. It would be somebody we hadn't heard from in, maybe, two years. She was asking about the children, what school are they at? She remembered they were in one grade, or another grade, remembered their names. I said, "Nancy, how do you do this?" She said, "I don't know. It just comes to me." That's the kind of person she is. So, … people would, kidding around, they would say to me, especially the women, "Oh, you got to get rid of her." I said, "When she goes, I go." And, that's what happened four years ago. She decided she'd like to move out to California, because her daughter, at that time, was graduating public school and she wasn't too happy with the people that she was involved [with] here. And she checked out some of the school areas in southern California and she went to Poway. She went to Escondido. She went to a couple other places and didn't like them. But then, [she] saw, all of a sudden, in (RB?) that they were building a new high school, beautiful. It's a gorgeous school. Turned out to be a damned good school, best move she's made. So, she left four years ago, and I quit.

KP: So, your daughter became a dental hygienist?

RW: No, she was just my factotum. She did everything.

KP: In other words, she ran the office?

RW: She ran everything, she ran the books, she ran the prices, she ran the insurance, she ran appointments, she ran everything. Now, we never had anybody, more than one person, out in the waiting room at one time. We never had eight or ten people [waiting], which to us was a terrible thing to do. A busy practice doesn't need a full office.

KP: I've actually found that, for the most part, dentists are much better than doctors.

RW: Oh, no question about it. That's mostly the staff. Or they will say, "I don't want to wait for anybody, just keep the office full." No, we never waited. No, it was fine, worked out great. I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it.

CG: I remember reading about a bill signed by the Governor of New Jersey ...

RW: Governor Moore.

CG: I believe so, that limited advertising by dentists.

RW: Yeah. But then the Supreme Court turned that over.

CG: So, it never affected you?

RW: No. No, because we were very ethical. We didn't think about advertising, anyway. But, the Supreme Court turned that over, and, I think, that was the beginning of the bad part of medicine, dental, whatever, lawyers. … Two lawyers in Arizona had sued the state for the permission to advertise and, finally, the Supreme Court says, "You can't stop them. That's the law. The Constitution permits it." And, from then on every time I hear on the radio, there's somebody advertising he's a plastic surgeon, and he's this, and he's that, I say to myself, "If he's that good, why is he advertising?" Who was it? Warren was Chief Justice at the time. So, somebody asked him, "Can these professional people do that?" He says, "Sure, … but, I wouldn't get anywhere near them. I'd stay away from them." That's my opinion, too. I don't know why you have to advertise, if you're that good. If you have a good reputation, that's all you need. So, they spent thousands and thousands of dollars [on] how good they are, they do this, or that, and the other thing. I don't think that was a good point of our history. It was inevitable, but it was not a good development.

CG: Were you a part of the Dental Reserve Corps?

RW: Before I went in the service, I was in the Reserve Corps for nine years. Yeah, we had monthly meetings in Englewood and our correspondence courses, and all that. So, by the time I got in the service, I had, what you call, fogies. I had three fogies. For every three years that you're in, you get a fogie, which is a ten-percent increase in pay. Even though I was a second lieutenant, I was getting captain's pay. So, developments that happened later on, [it] didn't bother me too much that I didn't get my promotion until later, yes. That was another story. Again, it goes back to a regular army, he was a major at that time, medical. He was regular army, [a] nasty person. Six-foot-three with an inferiority complex, but, he was nasty. He was really nasty. I didn't like him. Nobody liked him. He'd say, "I'm gonna send you down to Brazil." I'd look him straight in the eye. I said, "Whenever you're ready, I'm ready." [laughter] Yeah, if you ever looked him straight in the eye, he would back off. He was awful. He was Colonel Hall. He was awful.

KP: When you were in the Dental Reserves, what were you learning in the course of all this?

RW: Well, you know, we were learning all about organization, map reading, duties, whatever. It was tough, courses, especially, the map courses were tough, protocol, everything. Matter-of-fact, it came in very handy. And I probably put it in there because when I got to El Paso, with the 342nd Medical Regiment, to report into my colonel, Colonel Ferguson, I went in, made a sharp turn, faced him, threw him a nice, snappy salute, reported, told him who I was and all that. And, when we got talking, I took a step backward, threw another salute and started out and he stopped me. "When'd you get to town?" I said, "This morning, Sir." " You found a place to live?" I said, "No, Sir." "Go look. Don't come back until you find one." The next day, … I saw my first sergeant. He said, "Boy, was Colonel Ferguson impressed with you." He says, "Most of these guys, they come out of school, they don't know anything. They don't know how to salute. They

don't know to do anything. No protocol, whatsoever." So from that point on Colonel Hall didn't bother me anymore either, because Ferguson told him, he says, "You don't chastise any of my people. I will do it. Me. Not you." … So, a lot of little things helped. Something in there I didn't put, you talk about what happened after service. I had been in practice, I think, back in practice a couple of years. There was a kid, by the name of Hicswa, who lived in Wallington, who got drunk in Tokyo and killed a Japanese. [He was] tried, sentenced to death at Fort Leavenworth. When he got to Fort Leavenworth, the town had a meeting. I was invited. "What should we do?" So, for two hours, they talked. They want do this, they want to do that. After, "What do you think?" Now, I know army people. I said, "You scream. You scream. You write to your legislators. You write to the President. You write to the Department of Defense. You write to the newspaper. You write everybody. You scream," which they did. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. About a year went by and they had another meeting. I was invited, same group, big group there. And, for two hours, they're talking again. "Well, we should do this, we should do that. ... So, what do you think?" I said, "Keep your mouth shut. Nothing. Quiet. Leave it alone." Three months later, … the kid was discharged. You have to know when to scream to these army people and when to let up.

KP: When was this case?

RW: Let's see ...

KP: In the 1950s?

RW: No, it was earlier than that. No. What was it, '46, '47? Could have been 1947? About 1947.

KP: You were fresh from the service.

RW: Yeah, I know. I know these guys. I know these regular army people. I know them very well. I got to learn a lot about them.

KP: How are they as professional dentists or doctors, not so much in terms of their personalities, or as administrators, or leaders?

RW: Oh, they were all inductees. I didn't know of any that was in the regular service.

KP: You didn't know any regular service dentists?

RW: No one, no. Except for the division surgeon.

KP: All inductees?

RW: All inductees. All of them.

KP: So, your comments about regular army people are more the nonprofessionals.

RW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. The nonprofessionals. [I was] much more in contact with them, because the professionals, some of them are very good. My regimental commander, I liked. He was a good guy. Because, with this division surgeon, in my Colonel's presence, I called him a liar. Now, you don't do that to one regular army man about another regular army man. You don't do it. And, I know you don't do it. And the Colonel asked me, "Can you prove what you're saying?" I said, "Of course, I can." … I still don't know what I put in there, because things keep coming back. Six weeks before you go overseas, we were in the regular clinic. Normally, we have our own little clinic for the regiment. You go to the regular DC clinic. And we were using what's called a contra angle at that time. That's before all this high speed, of course. You know, this number sixty chest, which is not bad, but, it was belt driven, and we had little, what we called, contra angles, this way. When you're working back here, you can't work straight in, so they're contra angled. Well, there are gears in here and they were all wearing out. [They're] non-replaceable. So, I told the Colonel, I said, "Look, give them to me. Give me a few days off. I will take care of them." And I took all the gears out and I reversed them and I got them back in good shape, because I wasn't doing any dentistry then. So, when Colonel Hall saw my record, he says, "Oh, this guy's goofing off." So, he goes to my Colonel, Colonel Finley. He says I'm goofing off. Finley calls me in, I called him a liar. So, I go back to the DC clinic. I said, "I want to see my records." He said, "You can't." The lieutenant colonel says, "I can't give them to you." I said, "I want to see them." "I can't give them to you." I pick up the phone, call Finley. … He said, "Finley wants to talk to you." I got the records. And, when I brought it back to Finley, he said, "Okay, I see a conflict of interest with Colonel Hall." I said, "Remember that. I have a conflict with him." Which happened later, ... in Australia, I'm at officer's call, and Finley says to me, "Where's your captain's bars?" I said, "You know, Hall and me, we don't get along." He said, "I sent him a letter. I want him promoted." An hour later, his aide comes down to my tent. "Hey, what do you got on Colonel Finley?" I said, "I don't have anything on him. Colonel Finley now understands me, and he knows where I come from." He says, "Boy, did you want to read that letter that Finley wrote to Hall?" [The] next day, I had my captain's bars. The next day.

KP: Why the conflict? Do you know why?

RW: One of the roots, before going overseas you're allowed two weeks off to go home. I've been at dental clinic, at this time. I put in for two weeks leave. It's refused. In my chair, I have the first sergeant, personnel, from the division. So, I tell him my story. He says, "You want to go home?" I said, "Of course, I want to go home." "You'll have your orders this afternoon." He cut my orders. So, against Hall's wishes, I went home for two weeks. When I got back, all the lieutenants had been promoted to captain. Not Wexler, Wexler's still a lieutenant. With all the conversation I ever had with Hall, he knew that I knew that he was an introvert. He didn't like that. He didn't like that at all. So, that was really the beginning of the problem with Hall. Not a nice guy. I just would not give in to him, just wouldn't. ... It was another young dentist, from Montclair, that I had known, ... he got a nervous breakdown from Hall. Hall made him absolutely miserable. He would threaten him with this, threaten him with that. He wouldn't do that with me, because he knows I'd look him in the eye and he'd back off there. So, he didn't like

me. I didn't like him. We both knew it. But, Finley, my boss, my regimental boss, he knew that I was right, and Hall was wrong. And, no matter when Finley saw me, we got along fine. He was a regular. Ferguson, my 342nd, was a regular and a good guy. No, he was a regular. They weren't all bad. ... To give you an idea, commander of the division, General Mudge, graduated second or third highest from military school. We are now in the Admiralty Islands, to set up. Matter-of-fact, when we were due to land, … MacArthur was on another destroyer accompanying us, and before any landings, they always sent in a team to look at the area. They could send them in by submarine and pick them up a day or so later. They report to MacArthur, saying, "That beach, don't you dare. It's so heavily defended, you'll never make it." So, MacArthur took us all the way around. But then, there was this road, from way back there into where we were bivouacked. So, when the infantry captain comes into our medical tent, you know, we were medical guys, he said, "What do you think of this?" "What?" "We got orders tomorrow to go up this trail for two miles, investigate, and then, come back. What do you think?" I said, "You're gonna get your ass blown off. If you get a thousand yards up that road, you're gonna get a lot." They didn't quite make the thousand yards. And we really, really caught it. Yeah. Now, how much respect are you gonna have for General Mudge, number two out of the military academy, to pull such a stupid thing that we medical people would know is not gonna work? It's awful. So, some of the respect for some of them, I just didn't have. From what we had heard, General Clark, in Italy, was a bastard of the first order. He was responsible for more deaths, more GI deaths, than anybody else in the service, because he didn't care. He didn't care. He was like the Russians. The Russians wanted to clear a minefield, so, they sent a bunch of troops through there. … They said, "We got more men, who cares? That doesn't make any difference." But that's all Clark was about, and he got his men killed. But then, you can't have respect for individuals of that type.

KP: What did you think of Douglas MacArthur?

RW: I liked him. I really liked him. The small contact that I had with him was, again, in Australia. Now, the kitchen is always inspected by medical department personnel, everyday. We're always there. So, any kind of inspection goes on, we're involved. So, MacArthur comes. This is gonna be just a couple of weeks before we were to go up north. And, we're now into the kitchen area. And, he gets to see the mess sergeant. "You have enough food?" "Yes, Sir." "How's the quality of the food?" "Fine, Sir." "Any complaints about the food?" "No, Sir." And then, MacArthur blew his top. He says, "Never, in the history of warfare, you can go back as far as you want, never, do the GIs never complain about the food. There is always. When I ask you a question, you give me a straight answer." And, that sergeant, he shrunk down on the spot. And, again, he would accompany landings. He was always there. And, he [would] be on shore. ... I'm in the forth wave. He might have been in the sixth, or seventh wave. Right after we established the beachhead, he'd be there. ... That I respect. All the other egomaniacs, well, that's another, different matter, but, he was entitled to it. He produced. He did a good job. I liked him.

KP: You had talked a bit about your duties, and one of the things I was struck by is that, people thought that going into the service as a dentist that you'd be comfortable.

RW: Oh, yeah. ... Sure. [laughter]

KP: In fact, you alternated between being a practicing dentist and being, basically, a corpsman.

RW: We were right on the front line. We are the first line of treatment for somebody getting hurt on the firing line. Number one. We were right there. Yes. The first … man who was killed on Attu was a dentist. First one killed up in Attu was a dentist. We had quite a few killed. We never wore an armband, a medical armband. No, you're a target. No, we didn't.

KP: Apparently, it sounds like you carried a ...

RW: A .45.

KP: Regularly?

RW: A .45, all the time.

KP: Did the other medics or doctors also carry something?

RW: Yeah. They carried a .45. That's where Butera got himself in trouble. I think I might have put that in there, too. Because Chaffin and I were out on a two week patrol, into the interior. When we got back, Butera, who was worth a million dollars to any group because of his sense of humor, he had an unbelievable sense of humor, Butera was evacuated. "Why?" "Well, he accidentally shot himself through the web, right through here." "How did that happen?" "Well, we had a red alert during the night. So, he threw off his safety on his .45 and did not put the safety back on when the alert was canceled. He got up in the morning and he picked up his gun and yawned. And, when he yawned, he pulled the trigger, and he shot himself right through the web here." And, I said to myself, "He's a surgeon. How in the hell is he going ..." Well, when I was evacuated, finally, he was at the 35th General Hospital. And, I said, "Jimmy, how's your hand?" [Spreads hand wide apart] And, I said, "How come?" He said, "I pulled, and I pulled, and I pulled, and I pulled, and I pulled, and I pulled, and it was back to normal." … He said, "It hurt like crazy, but, I, every day, pulled and I pulled." And, he got that web back where ... he had full control of his thumb again. So, I said, "Jimmy, I'm gonna be evacuated." I had jungle rot. I had malaria. [The] malaria didn't show up until later on, but, I had jungle rot pretty badly. I had dysentery, all that sort of thing. I said, "Jimmy, I'm getting out of here. Get me out." "Do you want to go by hospital ship?" I said, "No, that's three weeks. I don't want to go by hospital ship. I want to fly out." He says, "I can't get you on the first plane." I said, "How come?" I said, "Jimmy, we're friends." "I can't. We got an action going on up north. All the planes are busy. When we come back, we have a whole bunch of top notch people who are already set to go back to the States." I said, "Jimmy, this pith helmet ..." He said, "Yeah." "... for the second plane." He says, "You got a deal." So, I was on the second plane out of there. I gave him my pith helmet. [laughter] I forget what I paid for it, probably two cartons of cigarettes.

KP: Where did you get the pith helmet?

RW: Probably two cartons of cigarettes, I think, I got my pith helmet.

KP: Was it in Australia you got it?

RW: Yeah. Yeah. So, Jimmy got me out there in the second week. Now, I'm home, I'm on the fluoridation thing again. I'm down at [the] Trenton Department of Health. The Public Health Council's got a meeting. They want to know what's going on. Fine. I walk in, there's a rectangular table, a gentlemen sitting over there, and his name, Butera. Right here. I said to myself, "It can't be. It's impossible. Butera comes from Texas. What's he doing up here in New Jersey?" "Jimmy Butera? Oh, my cousin," [laughter] [he] said, "How do you know him?" So, we went through the whole thing there. I said, "What a small world." Butera.

KP: Before continuing on with the Pacific, we have heard about your experiences at Fort Bliss, but, also, your journey through the Southwest, both before, and then, after the war. Did you travel much growing up?

RW: Growing up? No, I didn't. I got the bug, later on.

KP: But, you saw a lot of different parts of the country in the military.

RW: Oh, yeah. A good part. Alamogordo, White Sands. I went to Carlsbad Caverns, that whole area there. It was a beautiful area. Cloud Croft. Colonel Ferguson, I don't know whether I put that in there, thought that he had worked us pretty hard. He says, "You know, you deserve a little vacation. I'm gonna take you up in the mountains," Cloud Croft, ten thousand feet up. During the day, it was gorgeous, at night, you froze. I had four blankets. Two blankets underneath, four blankets on top, and still cold. And, we had canvas water buckets about four inches high, full of ice, in the morning. But, during the day, it was just gorgeous. And, we were there for about ten days and really felt good coming back. So, I come home, have dinner, sitting on the couch, my wife says to me, "May I have a cigarette?" She didn't smoke. She says, "May I have a cigarette?" I said, "Okay." I give her a cigarette, and then, she made one mistake, she inhaled. That was the last of them. She was gonna show me that she can survive another ten days, here and there, because all the other women, they're all in the same boat, and they're all smoking. She's gonna learn how to smoke. But, she made a mistake, she inhaled. [laughter] That was the last of it.

KP: I was really curious, you saw the twilight of the cavalry.

RW: Yeah. Yeah.

KP: And, I was also struck by the hazing that ...

RW: Some of them get. Oh, yeah, they did get it.

KP: And, I guess, from your army experience, had that been the first time that you experienced overt anti-Semitism?

RW: Yeah. Yeah. Don't forget, we had a lot of Texans, and a lot from the South. Matter-of-fact, one of the medical officers was from Jackson, Mississippi. They all thought that, especially if you were a Jew from up North, you had to have horns. Which put a burden on us, because we can't allow you to think that of us, so, we have to show you you're wrong. But, that didn't change their minds ... anyway. I was the good guy. I'm the good Jew. This Crull, from Jackson, Mississippi, was as bigoted as you can imagine. However, when he came to El Paso, he was always broke, and he didn't have any money until payday. So, by the time three weeks was gone, he was absolutely broke, and I would lend him some money, interest-free, of course. [laughter] What do you think of it? And, he would pay it back. I would take him to post, and I'd take him back from post, and all that sort of thing. So, we're in the car coming home from the post one day. He's sitting in the front. I have three in the front and three guys in the back I'm taking off the post. And they're starting to talk about these new medics that come in from the north, northeast, and the trouble that these guys were having on the horses. ... One of them says, "You know, we know how to take care of these guys." And, Luther Crull's face turns beet-red, and he turns to me and says, "Oh, we don't mean you. You're a regular Jew." That was the first, really overt expression of anti-Semitism that I had seen. Whatever they say behind their back, I don't know, but, overt, that was right there. Sure, these young [guys], they would get out of medical school, they're right down with us. And the horses were there. I mean, they were put on them right away. And, boy, I know I had raw thighs.

KP: You wrote that horseback riding was not natural to you.

RW: No. Can you imagine these guys? So, ... we had hills, and mountains, and you're not allowed to hold on. You have to grip with your thighs, to make sure you don't fall off, and all that. But, we had a Captain Hood, from Rochester, who was short. He was about, maybe he was five-foot tall. And, invariably, and it happened almost everyday, and his only luck was that we were out in the desert, which is nice, soft sand. But, horses are very crazy. They'll shy away from crazy things. You'll be going, all of a sudden, they're going over here, and Hall would go this way. He'd fall off everyday, climb right back up again, and start all over again. This was Captain Hall, not Major Hall, Captain Hall. But, that was not hazing, that was his fault. But, most of these guys, their wives would tell my wife, "During the night, they're screaming and, at night, they're dreaming, they're so traumatized. So, they can't even sleep at night, just to think that tomorrow, we're gonna get on that horse again."

CG: I read something that stated that the army could not decide where the Dental Corps belonged, whether they were attached to them, under them, or attached to the Surgeon General. Do you remember that being a problem?

RW: Well, you see, as a reserve officer, having had that many years, we were part of the Army of the United States, the inductees, so to speak, not the regular army, the Army of the United States. And, only those who actually came out of military academy, who were physicians, ... you

could consider regular army medical personnel. Some of the others, and one of my instructors from Penn, was a lieutenant colonel. He was taken in as regular army. But, they're a very tight-knit society. They don't want just anybody, or just everybody. So, I don't think, in their mind, they were too concerned that all these medical department people they're bringing in should be part of the medical, regular detachment. No, you're separate. You're Army of the United States and that's all right. I didn't see any differentiation there at all. No, that didn't bother me. No. But, I just came to the conclusion, these guys are all not that smart. There was another good [one], you're talking about the dental surgeon of Sixth Army. First Cavalry Division was under the Sixth Army, based in Texas. They would come around every once in a while and inspect us, which I think is good. People say, "You know, inspections shouldn't be announced in advance." I said, "No. No, you're wrong, they should be announced in advance, because then, you're gonna clean up everything, and get everything in good shape." Coming in, you know, anonymously and all that, that doesn't prove anything. That's nonsense. So, I was in the dental clinic at this time. Oh, gee, I wish I remembered, he's a three star general, Dental Corps, comes over to my chair, takes a look at my slip, and what he's doing? ... Whatever you would do, you got a record. He says, "Lieutenant." I said, "Yes, Sir." "How come you marked that MOD as an MO and DO?" I said, "Very simple." I said, "In this clinic, you are not marked on quality. You're marked on quantity, and it takes me an awful lot longer to do a three-sided filling as a two-sided, and I'm only gonna get credit for a two-sided." That's one filling. He said, "Well, who does that?" I said, "The boss here, Lieutenant Colonel. That's the idea." And, he went back to talk to him. I didn't see him again until we were on Hawei Island, after our first, or second, or third combat. We were resting on this small island, which we had to take, or capture. And, I'm working on Chaffin. I work, always, under anesthesia, which is another point. Down in El Paso, my medical major, Theusen, says to me, "I've got a complaint about you." "Everybody's got a complaint about me." I said, "What's the complaint?" "You're using too much anesthetic." I said, "Major." He says, "What?" I said, "That's the way I work. I don't work without anesthesia. I work here the same way I did in my office back home, as a civilian." He said, "Oh." He says, "Forget about it. I'll take care of it." So, now, I'm working under anesthesia in a tent, down in this little island of Hawei, and there's a runner, he comes running, and he's breathless by the time he comes down. "You're wanted up at headquarters. Now." I said, "Who's there?" "Sixth Army Dental Surgeon." I said, "Go back, tell him I am working under anesthesia. As soon as I'm finished, I will come up to see him." What do you think he did? The general came down to see me. That's a nice guy. He looked at me, and he said, "Oh, I remember you." I said, "From El Paso?" [laughter] He said, "Yeah. I remember you." Yeah. So, I never did anything bad, but, I wouldn't cowtail to them to a point where it's ridiculous. To knuckle under some of these jerks, I just couldn't do it. That's why I tell you, at this point, you yell loud and hard and, at another point, you keep your mouth shut and be quiet. So, you have to understand … what they're all about.

KP: By the army's standards, you were fairly old.

RW: I was the second oldest in my regiment. Yeah, my detachment.

KP: Where old is often twenty-three or twenty-four, you were ancient almost at that time.

RW: Yeah, but, when it came to, what the hell was it called then? Where we had to crawl under wire with live bullets.

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

RW: There's too much involved. Hitler is on the rampage in Germany. I said, "I just can't, I have to go."

KP: I'm curious about that, because you ended up not fighting against Germany, but against Japan.

RW: Same difference. Same difference.

KP: In the 1930s, how much did you know about what was going on in Germany?

RW: In the thirties? In a way, I had a friend of mine, in Carteret, who lived in Chrome, who went to Germany, to medical school, and he began to see what Hitler was doing, and he got out of there and came home. That was my first hint that ... something serious was going on in Germany. That was the first of it. Yeah. As a matter-of-fact, I think, ten years after that, he decided, he was very good with his hands, he still is, he said, "You know, I'd like to go to dental school, but, I'm out of school for ten years. I don't think they'd accept me now." I said, "Where do you want to go?" He said, "Well, I was thinking Washington, in St. Louis." I said, "No. How about Penn?" "Oh," he said, "I can't get into Penn." I said, "Let me see what I can do." So, I called Dean Turner, down at Penn, and I explained the situation. He said, "Send him down." They accepted him. He's turned out to be a very good dentist, yeah. So, he was the one that got out of Germany, now. Seeing what the problem was beginning there, because, even his classmates were starting to look at him a little funny, and he said, "No, I got to get out of here." And, he did. He got out in time.

CG: I was curious, too, because you could have received a deferment, right?

RW: Yeah. I didn't have to go in.

CG: Were you concerned about what would happen to your practice?

RW: In a way, but, I got a little bit lucky. I have another close friend of mine who had a practice in South Orange. He said, "I'll come in for a day or two." Which he did and he kept it going so that when I got back I didn't have to start all over again. Although, my hands were in absolutely horrible shape. I couldn't work. I lost all my nails. I had an infection around the nail bed and all my nails were gone. They looked like sausages. I mean, I was wearing white gloves on there, medication, all that. So, I wasn't ready to go back to work for quite a while afterwards.

KP: Did you get any sort of disability?

RW: Yeah, I got ten percent. [laughter]

KP: Not very much.

RW: No. Ten percent, yeah. And, I don't think I got it from my malaria, which was the worst part of it. I got it for my dysentery, which is no fun either.

KP: Your training, I guess, I'd like you to reflect on it, briefly. You've talked about going through maneuvers in Louisiana. Could you reflect on that, because you had some problems with the climate.

RW: Down the Sabine River, everything looked like that. That was the Sabine River. That's close-by where we were. It was just rainy and muddy all the time I can remember, and sweaty. I remember, one day, we had a severe rainstorm. I took off all my clothes and went outside my tent, took a shower in the rain, cleaned up. Yeah, it was great. You're by yourself, you're out in nowheres. So, there was no problem there, with the humidity. But, I just wanted to get rid of all this. When you live in this Southern heat for long enough, it starts to get raunchy. Yeah, with no possibility of bathing except what we used to call a whore's bath. A whore's bath, you know, we had these helmets, which were waterproof, turn them upside-down, fill them up with water, and you use that for your [bath]. Of course, there was no such thing as showers, no. Not unless you go down to division, you can get [one] there. But, that's what we used to call them, whore's bath. And, we'd use cloth, and just wash ourselves off, yeah.

KP: Your role was not only a dentist, but also a corpsman.

RW: Oh, yeah. We were physicians.

KP: When did you get training to be corpsmen?

RW: As a reserve officer, six weeks at Carlisle. We had a tough camp.

KP: When did you take that six weeks at Carlisle?

RW: That was my after my junior year at Penn.

KP: So, you had that in the early thirties, at Carlisle?

RW: Yeah. That would have been ‘31.

KP: Did you get any sort of refresher once you were with the regiment?

RW: Some of them did, but not I. I didn't, because I'm the old-timer.

KP: So, in many ways, you are going through training with a unit, and you are, in a sense, doing "regular unit activities," the live ammunition and so forth.

RW: Everything, everything, oh, yeah.

KP: But, no specialized detachment study?

RW: No. Some were sent. Those who didn't have the experience to be back, ... a lot of them were sent back to Carlisle. Even after they were inducted, they were sent back for six weeks, or more, to learn the rudiments of military life, and all that. But, of course, I had had all that. I wasn't involved with that. Yeah. But, that's stood in good stead, part of education. Education never hurt you. No matter. The stuff that we learned and, as you were talking, the daily activities, even at peace time, whatever you're doing, is the same for everybody. We do whatever the line officers did. No question about. [They'd] walk twenty-five miles, we'd walk twenty-five miles. Matter-of-fact, I think, maybe, that was the first time that Hall started to dislike me. Because, before I left for service, I went to, gee, that place is out of business, a shoe store had pre-broken in walking shoes and after we lost our horses, we went on our first twenty-five mile night hike. And I was up and down. These guys ... [had] blisters all over them. Hall, with his blisters, and he, seeing me running up and down, I think he hated me right from that point on. Yeah. But, I knew I was gonna come, so I got a special pair of shoes.

KP: I am curious, not only overseas, but at home, one of the issues of concern during the war was venereal disease.

RW: We had lots of that, yeah

KP: Both in the States and overseas?

RW: Yeah. We had lots of that. They were giving 606 injections, that's mercurial injections for syphilis. That was before the days of penicillin. The sulfanilamides came in later. That didn't do much good. But, that's the fact-of-life in military service. No matter when, where, what, how far back you go, it's the same, all the same thing, all over again. Why, didn't the Japanese take Manchurian women, Korean women, as hostages, to service their soldiers? They did that, too.

KP: Your wife was with you in El Paso, Texas.

RW: Yeah ...

KP: What did she do while you were away? Did she work at all?

RW: Actually, ... she didn't. Of course, I would leave every morning around five-thirty, that was five-thirty in the morning, and get back maybe five o'clock at night. But, she kept herself busy

doing things. This was before her Braille days, or, doing things with the other gals. But, she wasn't too lonesome most of the time.

KP: How comfortable were you on pay? You were a lieutenant, but you were drawing captain's pay.

RW: A hundred and sixty-six dollars and sixty-six cents a month.
KP: How well could you live on that?

RW: Not very, not very [well].

KP: Because, rent goes up quite a bit during war.

RW: Oh, you bet, during wartime, rents are absolutely crazy. Of course, we got out of El Paso, the first place we found was a motel. I couldn't afford a motel. Of course, my friend, who was working in my office, back in Wallington, was sending me, maybe, two hundred dollars a month, part of his income there. But, again, I was fortunate. I was getting captain's fogies, which came to a hundred and sixty. Of course, when you're a captain, per se, you get your three fogies on top of that, so, that's two hundred, plus the thirty percent. So, that was a little better than domicile housing, allowance is a little bit higher. You don't save money. You don't save money. You got to be supported, one way or another.

KP: What about rationing? How did your wife make out when you were living together?

RW: Well, number one, the PX. ... Of course, things are very cheap there, but, most of the rationing that we ran into was gasoline. Because, when we first got, ... where was I, was in the Midwest, when I ran out of gas. Oh, I was going from Fort Leavenworth down to Kansas City, from Kansas City, I was going to Colorado Springs, and, somewheres in Kansas, I ran out of gas. And, I was running out, anyway, no more coupons. And, [I] stopped at the review board, draft board, and they gave me more coupons, but, otherwise, we managed. With your coupons, and your gasoline, and with food, you managed all that, especially, if you went to the PX. Things were much cheaper down there. Yeah, [we] managed. But, you were talking about being Kosher in El Paso. This Bob Whitaker I was talking about, I became very good friends with [him]. He went to school in St. Louis. He says, "You know, every once in a while, we went into town, down to the Jewish section, we had a good Jewish meal." He says, "You know, I miss that." [laughter] He said, "Do you think we can get one here?" I said, "I don't know. Let's go down and find out." So, I stopped at the Synagogue, temple. I said, "I'll go in there and I'll ask about it." He says, "Let me go." Now, Bob Whitaker was slim, just as Christian as you can be, with a little, thin mustache. You know, nothing Jewish about Bob Whitaker. And, he's there, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes. I said, "Where the hell is he?" He comes out. He must have been in there half an hour. Big smile on his face. He says, "You know, it must be, you know [being] around you guys all the time. Things are happening." I said, "What kind of things are happening?" "When I got all through talking to the rabbi, he said to me, ... 'You know, I haven't seen you at services lately.'" [laughter] But, it so happened that there had been a Kosher

butcher, but, they had left about a year before, with the deli. Because he thought, maybe, we'd get some deli, some Kosher deli. But they couldn't make it out there, and they left about a year before. Yeah. But, ... yeah, he had a big smile on his face. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you had quite a bit of fun at El Paso.

RW: Oh, yeah. Again, you take the deal they've dealt you and do the best you can with it. It doesn't have to be all jokers, you know, and you manage. You go to movies. You go out to eat. We used to get dinners down in Juarez for sixty-five cents, steak dinner, with guacamole salad and all. We would eat out, every once in a while. We'd take the weekend off and go visiting. I remember one day. Rodkinson, who was a captain of the 342nd, had gone to medical school and he was born in New York, East Side, had gone to school in England, met a girl there, and married her. She's Protestant, I assumed he turned, too. They had a dog, Hamish. Oh, he was a Scottie, he was smart as ever. So, he's got a weekend off, and he says, "Hey, do you mind taking care of Hamish?" I said, "I'd love to." So, they left on a Friday night. Saturday morning, I'd due at post, and, when I got back in the evening, I get from my wife, says, "Do you know what happened today?" And, I said, "No." She said, "This morning, you were pushing against me and I was pushing you away and you wouldn't move." I said, "When?" [She] says, "This happened after you left. I was pushing you away. All of a sudden, I realized it wasn't you at all. … When you left, Hamish got up on the bed, and here he was, snuggling in with me." [laughter] Yeah. Now, we went to visit the Whitakers that Sunday, in El Paso's desert. We let Hamish out of the car. He walks over the curb, over a piece of ground between the curb and the sidewalk, and by the time we get to the front door, he's limping. I pick up his paw. He's got a burr in there. I took the burr out. Now, we're at Whitaker's for a couple of hours. Now, we're ready to go home. We come down the sidewalk, the walk to the sidewalk. Hamish doesn't cross that spot, he goes down to the driveway, goes down into the street, then, to the car. He would not cross that spot again. [laughter] At first, I said, "Hamish, what are you doing?" Then, I realized what he was doing. Smart cookie.

KP: You ran into Bing Crosby.

RW: Yeah, that was a ...

KP: I would be curious about your attitude towards him. It sounds like you had some resentment.

RW: A lot of resentment. ... He was dressed like a bum. He had two friends with him, this was at the railroad station, trying to get tickets, priority tickets, to go down into Mexico, somewhere, to go fishing. And he showed no signs of friendship to anybody or anything. We were all in uniform, not a thing. And, I said, "That bastard. What the hell? We're here, not on our own volition, doing things that ... we may wind up injured or dead or whatever and he's going on a lousy, old fishing trip, doing nothing about it." I don't think he helped anything in the war effort, as far as I remember. I don't think he did much Liberty Bond help, or any of that. As far as I remember, he did nothing and I resented that.

KP: What about Frank Sinatra, because I have read that some GIs resented that Frank Sinatra was here at home.

RW: No, I don't recall any of that.

KP: But, Bing Crosby, this apparently, really ...

RW: Yeah. That bothered me. It really annoyed me. Of course, I was getting my wife on the train to go back for a leave, for a week or so. She got held up near Dallas. The train got held up because Eleanor Roosevelt, it]was a single line track, she was coming West, so, they held up on the side until she passed. They wasted about two hours there. You know, but she learned to be self-sufficient, after a while.

KP: Your wife really did not want to see you go.

KP: No, none of them did, because, who knows what's in store for us? We had no idea. Nobody has any idea. I brought home a piece of shrapnel that landed right next to me, about that big, something that would swirl and hit you, [and] would cut you to pieces. It was like fifty knives in the whole thing there. I still have it at home, that shrapnel. Landed right next to me, evidently, from a mortar. Another two feet and who knows? So, you don't know. You don't know who's gonna be lucky and who's not gonna be lucky. And, that's all about it amounts to. But, what I did find out, psychologically, I think, it has a lot to do with people not giving up smoking, that on the firing line it's the only thing that keeps guys sane. You may get hit, you may get hit, but not me. It didn't happen that way, but, that was the moral attitude that most of them had. Yeah. But, we took a lot of casualties. Even our medical regiment, we took a lot of casualties. That's what, I think, I said there. It's not a good idea, during service, to get too close to anybody. It's too traumatic. It's too traumatic.

KP: I'm curious, what did your wife do while you were overseas? She moved back to New Jersey.

RW: Yeah. She opened up the house again. And, I don't know, she got involved with the Red Cross, ... I think, might have been doing some bandage work at the Red Cross. Of course, she was driving at that time. I bought a car when I was there. No, I didn't. She didn't have a car, because I sold the car before we left El Paso. So, her friends would come pick her up. But, she did some Red Cross work. She's still involved with the Red Cross, with her Braille. She does all her Braille with the Red Cross now. ... Which reminds me, I just read, my granddaughter just did a composition at the University of Arizona, and it was about her grandmother and her grandmother growing up, not going to college, not having a career, and all that sort of thing. … She said, "That was the normal thing then," which is, of course, a lot different than it is today. Yeah, a lot of people … today don't understand it. People didn't have to have a career in marriage, early on, which you do have to have now. Yeah. It's a change in society. ... A matter-

of-fact, she paid off our mortgage on our house, for the little money I sent home. Made a few bucks playing poker, sent that home. [laughter] And, she paid off the mortgage.

KP: You talked a lot about poker games and some guys you knew who had crooked dice.

RW: Oh, yeah. That happened at Rutgers here. The first time I ever ran into that, one of the freshmen, I think it was, somebody accused him of using crooked dice and had him arrested. Went over to one of the courts there, and the judge says to him, "Are you a crooked dice player?" He says, "No, Sir." And, he says, "Your Honor, if you would, send out for a pair of dice," which he did. He said, "Now, call your number," which he did, and he would roll that number. He was an expert. … In the First Cavalry, we had a dentist from Beaufort, South Carolina, yeah, could be, who manipulated dice. You never dare touch them. He would pick them up himself and he would spin them. Not roll them, he would spin them. He would throw them over a car and call the number on the other side. It would land without moving. But, unfortunately for him, fortunately, I don't know, he couldn't resist playing with the GIs, which an officer is not permitted to do, and he was caught, and he was cashiered out. But, he was a manipulator. This fellow at Rutgers, he was not. [laughter] He knew, there was nothing crooked about him. The sergeant down in Brisbane, he used crooked dice. He used marked cards. He admitted it, he told us how he did it. Made a fortune. He bought two brothels. Yeah.

KP: Where did he buy the brothels?

RW: In Brisbane.

KP: In Brisbane?

RW: Yeah. He bought two. He said, "If I stay much longer, I'll be a very rich man." [laughter] But, he said, "I would roll with my dice, four or five passes, and I'd say, 'Oh, these are gonna get cold,' and I would throw them away and use ... another pair of dice there." But he said he never got caught. And, he would take that deck of cards and turn one card up, and deal, deal, deal, deal. That card never moved, the face-up card never moved. Of course, they were shaved. The cards were shaved. Some were wider than others. And he could manipulate those like you wouldn't believe. He says, "Don't gamble with me." [laughter]

CG: I was curious, you mentioned your jungle training. Where did that take place?

RW: Well, besides all the training we had at home here, as soon as we got to Australia, we started. We got to heavily wooded areas and we did a lot of jungle training in there. How to advance, without loosing contact with [the target]. If you were going on the line, through dense foliage, you're not allowed to be too close together because you're too good a target. You have to be spread out, but, not too far spread out. You had to learn how to cross ravines properly, how to survive. There's much to learn about jungle training. What I started to say, a long time ago, was, maybe of the hundred things that we learned in training, maybe you use twenty of them. The advantage of knowing the other eighty is, if that turned up, you would know how to handle it,

even though you weren't using it as a normal thing there. So, we learned an awful lot that we never used.

KP: You mentioned how useful target practice was.

RW: Oh, yeah.

KP: I mean, you actually killed someone.

RW: Yeah. Medical personnel, in a line, if there is a troop line, he's always last. And, if you were in an ambulance, you were also last, because you pick up anybody that needs attention. And, of course, our grenades, you just pull a pin and let it spring and you've got three seconds to get rid of it. The Japs had a compression device and they would hit it on their helmet and activate it. And I heard that and I turned. It was behind me. And there he was. And I whipped out my .45 and, … right from the hip, just let it go. A .45's got an awful wallop in it, and hit him, and he dropped the grenade, and fell on top of it, and then, it blew off. Blew him up. That was the first, and only time I had to use my weapon.

KP: That was one of the things you did use. What were some of the things you trained for and never used? You did gas training and you never ended up having to use gas.

RW: No, we didn't use any gas. Yeah, we had our gas training, yeah.

KP: I'm curious, what proved to be very useful and what became, it was nice to know just in case, but you actually never really used?

RW: Good question, because, you know, you would train in the camp. Every day, you're doing something. For instance, even equitation, we never got to use it, really. Although, when we were in Australia, you know, Australians are great horse riders, too. They had a rodeo going on and some of our guys took part in the rodeo. And it was the first time they were on horses since El Paso. But, other things, gee, I don't know. Just a lot of details, I presume, that just gone by the board. I can't think of them anymore. But, I do know, there [was] a lot of stuff that we were doing that, eventually, we found we weren't needing.

KP: We were both curious about your journey to Australia.

RW: Yeah, by boat, by ship. It was very interesting, yeah.

KP: Did you go in a convoy?

RW: No, we did not go in convoy but we did change direction every seven minutes. It got to a point where you could see your wake. You would be going this way now but you could see the wake you had just made. And we're going in a different direction there, just to avoid any, because, as far as I was told, then, ... it takes a submarine, at least, seven minutes, or more, to get

an accurate aim at any target. So, he changed direction. They have to go through the whole procedure again. But, no, we took fourteen days and we were all by ourselves. We had a shipload, I mean, really loaded. It wasn't bad. I didn't get seasick. I never got seasick. A lot of friends got seasick. I never got seasick.

KP: How comfortable, or uncomfortable, were your quarters?

RW: Oh, God. [laughter] The hammocks were down in the hold, you might say, and one on top of another. I think there were three layers of hammocks. What did we have on board? There was somewhere like fifteen-thousand men cramped into a ship, was what, a twenty-thousand tonner. It was pretty big to put fifteen, sixteen thousand men in one ship. You got a lot of men in there.

KP: Where did you stay? What part of the ship did you stay in?

RW: Way down in the bottom. Down in the hold.

KP: Really, you were down in the hold?

RW: Yeah, we were down in the hold. Everybody else was, yeah.

KP: So, you did not have a separate cabin?

RW: No. Steaming bath down there, really steaming, especially crossing the equator, or close to it, anyway.

KP: Did you have the famous ceremony crossing the equator?

RW: No.

KP: Did you have the King Neptune?

RW: No, we didn't. ... Army life, as everything, is a day-by-day survival, and all this silliness, the nonsense, they don't really go for it. I guess, if it's a passive type of a thing, you might think about it, but, when you're actively engaged in life preservation, these things aren't important anymore. We had a British crew and they didn't do anything, either.

KP: So, you had a British crew, not American?

RW: No, we had a British crew.

KP: What was the name of the ship?

RW: It was either the *Monterey*, the *Maraposo*, something like that. ...

KP: Was it a former passenger ship?

RW: Yeah. It was a former passenger ship. It was big.

KP: Did you have any contact with the British crew?

RW: At mess-time. ...

KP: That was really it?

RW: Yeah. ... The food wasn't bad. It was quite tolerable. It was quite tolerable. ... A matter-of-fact, we ate up at the Lennon Hotel several times and the locals, they were always like the British, the fork is in the left hand and stays there. They don't switch. They just cut and [eat]. We cut, switch. We're silly to do that. It's nonsense. That's one of their characteristics, yeah. And, we played golf with a couple of the gals there. One was a lefty. You know, Chaffin was a good golfer.

KP: How long were you in Australia?

RW: About five months, I think. Yeah. We were about twenty miles outside of Brisbane.

KP: And, what did you think of the Australians?

RW: Civilians, to the American military, is no problem. The military Aussie, to the American, that's a problem. Yeah. They'd say, "Oh, what's the fruit? Green on the outside, yellow on the inside, that's what you Americans are." That was their [saying]. And, if you were walking down the sidewalk by yourself, or maybe with one other, and four or five Aussies would come the other way, you had to give. They'd have knocked you over. You had to give. Yet, we had the ANZACS [Australian-New Zealand Army Corps] with us. Oh, terrific, no problem, terrific. But, in the city, it was animosity.

KP: Yeah. I've heard that, behind the lines, the Australians in particular, it was somewhat a stereotype, at the drop of a hat, particularly at a bar, there would be a fight.

RW: Oh, yeah. [laughter] In a bar, if you turned your beer glass upside down, it meant that you were ready to fight anyone who dared. And, some of their words, which, to us, were very passive, to them, it was, "Hey, you looking for a fight?" You know, it was very contrary. Very contrary. So, you had friend, you had to learn your cockney language. There's not a lot of cockney there. So, you had to learn ... like the word "knocked-up" ...

KP: I was just ready to ask you about that.

RW: "Knocked-up," in the United States, is pregnant. Over there, you're tired. [laughter] So, when a girl says she's knocked-up, she's just tired. [laughter] So, there were a lot of those expressions there. You had to know them, or learn them, anyway.

KP: I've been told by others that there was a lot of resentment that a lot of American GIs were dating Australian women and that Australian servicemen did not like that.

RW: Yeah. You're right, no. No, you're right there, because Chaffin had dated one of them and she told him about that. And, whenever he was with her, walking, or anywhere, he [was] telling me, the looks that he was getting from the [people]. And, he reported to me that, yeah, she told him that the Aussies would complain to her, that she was dating an American, not them. Yeah, that's true. That happened. ...

KP: What did you like best about Australia, because you were actually there for a fair length of time?

RW: Yeah, it was long enough. They have some habits that, like, for instance, … when we were alerted to go up north, we had an LCI, which took all our heavy equipment. And, we also had longshoremen, Aussie longshoremen, [who] were supposed to put it on board. But, it happened during their teatime, and they refused, and we had to do it ourselves. So, nothing interferes with their teatime, no matter where. I mean, at camp, even if they were doing something for us up there, teatime came, that's it, you got to take your hour off, whatever it is. My close contacts at the golf course, there was no problem there, because we were all golfers, et cetera.

KP: What golf course did you play at?

RW: I know it was outside of Brisbane.

KP: It was not a military golf course?

RW: No, no. No, it was a public course, just outside of Brisbane. We had to find transportation to get there. It was a pain, but, we enjoyed that. There's no problem there, because you got mutual benefits and mutual interests, so, no animosity there, whatsoever, about anything. But, just … down in the streets, walking in the streets, you've got to be careful when military would come the other way, if they're in groups, yeah.

CG: How often did you get the opportunity to go golfing?

RW: Well, you, actually, made the opportunity. [laughter] Yeah. We'd go over to the boss and say, "Do you mind if we take a few hours off to go down to the golf course?" "Go ahead." That's right, go ahead. So, we'd catch the train or if there was a car going in, we'd hop a ride. But, I think there was more social activity going on overseas, with the hospitals and hospital nurses, and et cetera, than there was back in El Paso.

KP: Well, speaking about the nurses, since you just raised it, how many women were assigned to your unit?

RW: To our unit? None.

KP: None?

RW: None.

KP: So, when you were in El Paso, you didn't have any nurses?

RW: Oh, no, no. Only down at the general hospital, was it Beaumont? Beaumont General Hospital there, but, not assigned.

KP: And, when you moved to Australia, it was the same?

RW: It was the same. The tables of organization didn't call for it.

KP: Did not call for it?

RW: No women nurses. No. ... The corpsmen were supposed to take care of that. Then, you go from the front line, a collecting company picks you up and takes you to the clearing company. And everybody there is trained for their job. And [from] the clearing company, you go to one of the hospitals. Line of evacuation. So, there wasn't really a need for [women nurses] because nobody stayed long enough at any of the detachments to require the necessity for a nurse. The surgical, they did, of course. But, no, we wouldn't have any use, in that respect.

KP: So, your contact with nurses was much more peripheral?

RW: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

KP: You had several very interesting stories.

RW: ... In the dental clinics, they did have dental hygienists. They did have assistants who were female. Yeah. That's true.

KP: And, that was at ...

RW: At El Paso.

KP: At El Paso.

RW: Yeah. El Paso and at other places. All the dental clinics.

KP: And, they were military?

RW: No, they were civilian.

KP: They were civilian?

RW: They were civilian, yeah. ...

KP: So, when you got overseas, who was your dental assistant?

RW: Curry was my dental assistant. [laughter] Yeah, my hard shell Baptist. But, I didn't do much dental work, because most of my men, I was in charge of, what, fifteen hundred men, they were in pretty good shape before we left. We made sure of that, yeah. So, a little emergency work here and there, but, nothing [big]. I don't know whether I put it down there, but, I was doing a filling for one of the GIs, and we were using silicates, at the time, to fill front teeth, not the new stuff. And in a humid area, it took forever to set, just to get hard. And, I had just got this filling in and I was holding it there. And Colonel Richardson, from the Eighth Cavalry Regiment came over. And I said to myself, "What's he doing here? I'm the Seventh Cavalry. They got two dentists over there." So, he says, "Do you mind looking at something for me?" I said, "If you can just sit down here and wait until I'm finished here, I'll be glad to." I still said to myself, I said, "What's he doing here? Maybe, it goes back to my anesthesia. [laughter] Did my reputation go to the point that where they said, 'Oh, he works only under local anesthetic.'" And, he was very gentle, very kind and gracious about it. He sat until I got finished, and then, I took care of him.

KP: Why did he?

RW: I didn't ask him. I didn't ask him, "How about his two dentists over in the other regiment?" No, I didn't ask him. I wouldn't embarrass him that much.

KP: What kind of emergency would you be doing? You mentioned this one case.

RW: Well, ... in combat, you're gonna get all kinds of ... it didn't have to be a dental emergency. It could have been a medical shotgun wound emergency, which we had to take care of. It could be a broken arm, a broken jaw, or anything, but, whatever the emergency was, that's what we were trained to do. That's what we learned to do.

KP: So, in other words, you were basically ...

RW: Medical, what is it?

KP: Medical work.

RW: Yeah, we were medical. In combat, you were medical personnel. You're not dental personnel anymore. Yeah. Except, of course, you have a broken jaw, or something like that, need to be taken care of.

KP: You speak very fondly of your voyage to New Guinea. The crew really treated you well.

RW: Oh, yeah. ...

KP: They really went out of their way to make you feel comfortable?

RW: Not only that, but the natives, we used them mostly as bearers, especially one, we called him Alley-Oop. He was funny. Give them forty pounds, they'll walk all day long. And, you got mortar stands and mortar barrels, and all that were pretty heavy, but, if it's not more than forty pounds, they'll put it on. They'll just take it all day long. ... The women were always kept separate. You never saw a native woman. Never.

KP: Really?

RW: Never. Never. Always kept separate. But, the native men and the ANZACS, Australian-New Zealand Army Corps, they were very good. They were good. I was in the hospital there, one of them was brought in for malaria. He said, "What am I doing here?" He said, "This is the seventh time I've got malaria. I'm gonna get over it." He said, "But, they insist that I come into the hospital and get treated." Then, also while I was there, they brought in a bomber pilot who had been shot down. He wasn't shot down, but the plane was so badly damaged that they had to ditch it out to sea. He was on the water for ten days before they found him. I said, "What happened to the other guys?" He said, "I have no idea whether they survived or not." But, he was in pretty good shape, mentally and physically, but, he was on water ten days before they found him. Yeah. But, they didn't give up. They just kept looking.

CG: You had mentioned processing Marines. How did that happen?

RW: From Guadalcanal, no, the Solomon Islands, I have no idea, but they were evacuated through us. We were at Lae-Nadzab area in New Guinea, and the Solomons are just across the straight from us. So, whether or not they didn't have enough medical personnel over there, I don't know, but they processed them, too. And we took care of their original injury, whatever we could, and then, processed them back to the hospital. But, they came through us. Yeah. Quite a few of them, pretty well beat up.

KP: A lot of the early campaigns in the Pacific were, in many ways, medical disasters for various reasons. One of them, Atabrine, hadn't been fully deployed.

RW: No.

KP: Certain basic precautions were very difficult in combat situations, in terms of the treatment, and so forth.

RW: Oh, yeah. Dysentery. Oh, yeah.

KP: Dysentery, and so forth, that it really took a high toll. You were not part of the first wave at, say, Guadalcanal or the Philippines, but, what got back to you, in terms of what needed to be done differently? For example, there was quite a bit of resistance, I've read, to taking Atabrine.

RW: No. That was propaganda. That was Tokyo Rose propaganda.

KP: So, in other words, did all the men comply and take their Atabrine?

RW: As far as I know, they always took their Atabrine.

KP: You didn't have any problems?

RW: No. No, I don't remember [any problems]. The only thing, I probably put what happened, you know, these GIs, they're clever. They are very clever. They're very humorous. And, they're smart. And, again, it's self-preservation. They didn't like maneuvers, Louisiana mud and all. And, they would come into our health facility, and they'd have a fever. And, we couldn't find out what in the hell's going on here. And, there were quite a few of them. And, I tell you, they're smart, but not smarter than our Colonel Ferguson. Ferguson came around, and he said, "What's going on here?" I said, "We have no idea." He said, "You got any here now?" I said, "Yeah, we have some here." "Now, let me take a look at them." He looked under their armpits. Red. Fiery red. What were these GIs doing? They were taking that brown soap and were just putting it there, holding it down there, and it becomes an irritant. Before you know it, they would develop a fever, enough to get them out of their mud and their unit, up to us. Maybe, we'd evacuate them back home again. [laughter] So, Ferguson stopped that in a hurry. Yeah. I tell you, they're very clever. They got a great sense of humor, believe me, which you need. In the service, you need a sense of humor, otherwise, you can go nuts. Yeah. That's why I said this Jimmy Butera was very handy. He had a patsy. We gave a lot of injections, and when it came to injections, we had fifteen hundred men. Chaffin's line, and my line, and we worked in the same line, out of the fifteen hundred, we'd have maybe twelve hundred of them. Why? These guys are smart. The other two lines, those with Captain Theusen, even Butera, they were pushers. Now, we were throwers. We just took that arm and, zing. A matter-of-fact, just before we left Australia, we got about thirty recruits that had been in the service, maybe, seven weeks, I don't know, then they shipped them right over. They needed their shots. And, as they were walking down, one by one, you could see them getting paler and paler, because, here we were, we were throwing these things. But, as they would walk past us, never felt a thing. Yeah. Never felt a thing. So, they were the pushers, and they got only a couple hundred guys. ... Most of the men came on our line.

CG: You mentioned being on a destroyer.

RW: Yeah. One of these that does this at the same time, pitches and yaws, at the same time. Yeah. Again, the Navy personnel were very solicitous, because they knew what we were getting into. They're saying, "We have a nice, dry bed here. We know where you're going. You're going in the mud and whatever. You're gonna get … all shot up." But they said, "Okay, you can have our bunks for the night. Our pastry chef is baking a big cake." Baked a big cake for us. Took good care of us. They were really fine. I don't know whether I told you about the medical officer that was on that ship, on the destroyer? We had, Simms, some of these names keep coming back, who was a second lieutenant from Georgia, who married a girl from New Jersey. I said, "Simms, how in the hell can you marry a Northerner?" "She comes from South Jersey, not North Jersey." So, Simms would ...

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

RW: Simms... . He's sitting at the war table, looking at one of these maps that he was just given, and he's turning green.

KP: So, you had just been called.

RW: Just ... like that.

KP: You had been watching a movie.

RW: We were watching a movie. We were alerted, "Go and ... put your things together, we're shipping out."

KP: This was in New Guinea that you were alerted?

RW: Yeah. This was in New Guinea, yeah. Of course, then we were going up to the Admiralties. And, Simms is sitting at the war table of this destroyer, getting greener and greener by the second. And a medical officer said, ... "Simms, why don't you go up on board deck and get some fresh air and you'll feel better?" Which he did. So, ... then, I turned to the medical officer, and I said, "What is the worst case of seasickness you ever saw?" He smiled and he said, "Me." I said, "How come?" He said, "How come? I got out of medical school. I got my orders to go to Newport News. Here, I figure, I'm going down to Newport News, I'm gonna get my Navy whites, I'm gonna have myself a time like you wouldn't believe." And, I said, "What happened?" He said, "I get to Newport News, next day I'm on ..." And, I can't remember the name of this particular combat ship. It's very tall. Now, it holds about two hundred men, very unstable. ... I've been on it, but, I can not think of the name of this one, and I've been questioning some of the other men, and they have not been able to come up with it either. But, this is a very unstable ship. He said, " I was never on ... the sea before." He said, "But, the day I got on that ship, for eighteen solid months, ... I was seasick every single day." He said, "It ... got to a point ... if we got near shore, they would not let me anywhere near shore, because they knew I wouldn't come back . They had a guard on me twenty-four hours a day." I said, "How you

doing now?" He says, "Fine. I have no ... problem, now." But, he said, "I'm the worst case that ... [I've] ever seen."

CG: You had mentioned something about diving off a ship.

RW: That one, that particular ship, that's very high. Yeah. We ... dove off there. That ... kind of a ship, it ... approaches ... a landing area, but, just before it gets [there], it drops ... two anchors behind it, which are on winches. And then, the ship hits the ... sandy soil and gets embedded there. And, it's not gonna get back out on its own power, so, these two anchors that are back on winches, ... they winch themselves back off shore. So, we [were] back in deep water, and I was just diving off this ... crazy ship. Yeah. I can remember that. I can't think of the name of that particular ... no, it's not an LCV. ... I just can't remember that ... troop ship, the name. But, he went through, ... down through the Atlantic, through the Canal, across the Pacific, seasick, twenty-four hours a day. It was terrible. But, ... he got over it, finally. Yeah. Strange things.

KP: You landed shortly in the Admiralties on Manus Island. Was that your first?

RW: Yeah.

KP: You went to shore forty-eight hours after the beach was secured.

RW: Yeah. That's right.

KP: How secure was it and how far did that secured beach extend?

RW: ... The secured beach was about a hundred feet. [laughs] Not ... much more.

KP: Were there any dead bodies on the beach?

RW: Not on the beach, but, we found them up in trees, we found them in ... bushes. That particular area was where ... the Japs had built revetments for their airplanes. They were three-sided. They were about, ... I would say, about twenty-feet high. And, the first night, we put our boys up on top, ... well-concealed ... well-entrenched, with cases of grenades. And as soon as these Japs started coming after them, they would just pull the pins and roll the grenades down. By morning, the Japs were stacked three-high. We had two Hispanic privates [that] went around with pliers pulling all the gold teeth out of these dead Japs. Later, I found out, after I had left the 342nd to go to the Seventh, these two Hispanics, they got a brilliant idea. They were gonna shoot each other in the leg, and then, get evacuated out of there. Unfortunately, one of them hit the bone pretty hard and ... I heard he lost his leg after it. But, ... this ... was one of their ways of getting out of combat. But, they were out. I think Menendez was one of them, I can't remember the other name. But, they were there, with a pliers, pulling ... all the gold. And they had a ... quart bottle full of ... gold and gold teeth that they were pulling out of the Japs. But, what you learned there is that, the fact that they were stacked one on top of the other, that they ... just kept coming, until there were no more to come. They had no fear for themselves. They just were

following orders. And, they would have bullhorns and, all night long, they would be ... and they would even get on our telephone. They would tap into our telephone wires. So, we would ask them questions. "Who is Babe Ruth? Who is Aaron?" ... And, if they gave us the wrong answer, we knew it wasn't our people. We also had some native Indians with us. Now, if you're gonna talk on radio, you have to talk in code. So, in order to ... decipher into code, and then, decipher out of code, it took forever. So, we put the native Indians on, in their language, and the Japs couldn't figure that one out.

KP: Were they Navajo?

RW: I don't know whether they were Navajo, or which sect they belonged to. But they spoke their own language, one on ... each end, and clear. So, there was no problem there. ... That was a smart move.

KP: I'm curious, where you were deployed on any given day when you were in Manus Islands? What were average days like?

RW: Well, ... a lot of the time, we were out on patrol.

KP: Now, you would be on patrol?

RW: I would be on patrol constantly. Colonel would come along, "We're going on patrol. You're coming with me." I'd say, "Okay. We'll come with you." But, we were constantly on patrol. That's where I finally ran into my dysentery. I don't know from what. On one patrol, we were, oh, three miles or so away from camp and I couldn't walk. They had to carry me. And I felt so sorry for the litter bearers. But, that was a good three miles out. ... The Lorengau River ... looked pristine, but, it was not. It was full of fungus. I had ear trouble for years afterwards. A lot of guys did, too. It [looked] just as clean as could be. You dove in there just to clean off. We had a waterfalls, we went to clean off. Anything in the jungle, that ... hot weather. The hottest weather I've ever been in was not the jungle. It was in Mississippi at, what base? We had stopped on the way to El Paso at an air force base there, because I ... had a cousin there. I stopped to see him. Biloxi. It was in Biloxi. And, I signed him out, and ... I said, "We'll go to … New Orleans, for a day or so." And, I signed him out on the way out. Biloxi was the hottest place on this earth that I have ever been and I have been to a lot of hot places. That was the worst. That was the given, the worst, there. And, by the time we got to New Orleans, it was late at night and, I think, we found the last place to sleep. And, about four o'clock in the morning, I said to my wife, "This is not gonna work. Let's get out of here." So, I woke up my cousin, I said, "Can you find your way back?" He says, "No problem." And, we ... hit the road to San Antonio, and on to ... El Paso. But, I just couldn't stand it, it was just ... but, that was the hottest place. They say the jungle is hot. It's hot, but not like that. [laughter] Not ... like that. That ... was brutal.

KP: When you went on patrol, what kind of cases would you encounter, and how many men got wounded?

RW: We, fortunately, in all our patrolling, ... see, what was happening, the Japs that were left were retreating. Once we had the ... initial contact with them, they knew the firepower that we were having was just much too much for them and they just kept retreating. And, we would take our ... bearers along with us. We would come to a fork in the road, and we would say, "Where'd they go?" "That way." "How do you know?" "I can smell them." "You sure?" "Yeah." ... He said, "I can smell you." "Who, me?" "Yeah. Americans have a special smell. Japanese have a special smell." So, the Japs kept ... retreating, until, ... not my group, but another group, finally caught up to about ... sixty of them. ... They were an elite group, and they ... captured them. One of the sad parts was ... what had happened, this was on Manus Island. Our ... third night out, we had moved from the beach, we were moving inland, to another sector. And you could smell the sweet, ... have you ever smelt ... a dead person [that's] been dead for several days? It's sickly sweet. They tied themselves up in the top of coconut trees, and that's what they would ... fire from. The guys would see them and, of course, they would ... take care of them. But, the ... odor was just sickly sweet, nauseatingly. So, we were bivouacked overnight. Matter-of-fact, there was a journalist with us, and I don't ... remember his name, or who he was with, but he was there covering this. And, the next morning, out of the dense forest, come a bunch of men ... waving a ... white flag. And, unfortunately, our trigger happy GIs, who weren't that experienced, ... they got trigger happy and they shot a couple of them, until they realized these were not Japs. It turns out they were Sikhs, who had been captured by the Japs in India somewhere, wherever, and brought as slaves, slave labor. And, when they retreated, they left them on their own, and they came out of there. Then, we ... sent them off to a hospital, took good care of them there, but it was a shame that our boys weren't that sophisticated.

KP: Did you ever take any Japanese prisoners? Were there any Japanese prisoners taken at all?

RW: Well, you see, the ... table of organization that we have, we're the Seventh Cavalry, true, and we have our own table of organization, but, we're broken down into companies, and you're broken down into squads. And, if a company is told to go here, it's only a little company, and one of us has to go along with them, one medical personnel. So that, whether it was fortunate or not, I don't know, but the groups that I was ever with never actually made contact, so ... we didn't have any casualties on ... either side, except the ... one that ... was ready to throw the grenade at us. So, outside of that, we were pretty clean.

KP: So, that was one of your few direct contacts with enemy fire?

RW: Yeah. ...

KP: And, you ended up being the one that had to …

RW: Yeah, because I was on the end of the line.

KP: You, in fact, wrote and talked quite a bit about the problems you experienced, health-wise, such as dysentery, fungal infections. As a corpsmen and medical officer, what type of medical

treatment did you provide to other soldiers? What types of problems did they face, and how were you trying to deal with them? One of them was, clearly, Atabrine. What else would you try to do?

RW: Well, at that time, ... for the first time, we were issued Sulfanilamide. So, any ... sores, or any wounds, or anything like that, we would dust immediately with the Sulfanilamide. We also had morphine, to take care of some of the dysentery. That ... was a help. But, basically, what would happen, we would try to ... get anybody as comfortable as possible, in a few minutes, and then, get him back from the collecting company, back to the clearing company, with the medical detachment. So, they were never be that long in our care that we had to do anything drastic. It was just minimal. Bind up any ... injuries, whatever, and ... use our Sulfanilamide, our morphine, and then, ship them back out. So, we ... never had too much of that concentrated, or long term, care of anybody.

CG: I was wondering, how well were you able to keep in touch with your wife?

RW: V-mail was very sporadic and was heavily censored. So, that was the only ... way you could [communicate]. ... She would send packages every once in a while, some golf balls, some cigars, ... [which] I gave to Chaffin. ... My wife's father, ... you know, cigars were not that plentiful, but her father was able to get some. She would send some cigars. I gave those to Chaffin, he was a cigar smoker. And, some golf balls, ... toilet tissue. Of course, Australian toilet tissue was like butcher paper. It was awful. [laughter] So, she ... sent a couple. So, we'd get a package, every once in a while. Other than that, it was just V-mail ... until I hit Fort Hamilton, on the way home.

KP: You mentioned how great it was, when you were evacuated, to get real food. But what was the food like both on New Guinea and on Manus Island?

RW: Most of that was either K-rations, or ten-in-one rations. The ten-in-one rations were ... much better. Butter, you know, you're in ... jungle, hot area, the butter's like grease. And, ... any butter ... it wouldn't last at all. It would be rancid before you could get to it. ... I got so sick of chili con carne, like you wouldn't believe. ... I haven't touched it since then. [laughter] So, it was whatever could be dehydrated, and sustained some, while in a hot area. That was in the biscuits, and things of that nature, Spam, you know. You could survive on it. You can't live on it, but you can survive on it.

KP: No trading with Navy ships?

RW: Oh, yeah. We ... did landing exercises from Navy ships.

KP: I have often been told of some great trades that Navy crews made with GIs.

RW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. ... They would ... like swords. They would like flags. They'd trade anything for those things. The pith helmet, I traded that for the Navy guy. I think, it was a Navy

guy. But, they ... would trade, yeah. But, they appreciated the fact that they had it a lot easier than we did. Yeah.

KP: How many men were, in fact, put out of action because of disease? You were ultimately put out of action because of disease.

RW: Yeah.

KP: How common was that? You even mentioned your close friend who died. What was the rate of people who had to be evacuated?

RW: Well, you see, I did not hit the Philippines, but, from what I was told later on, ... even my medical detachment took heavy, almost a hundred percent, casualties. They really got beat up. But, we might have been ... more fortunate, in that the original defensive forces, we just blasted. They just fired, and fired, and fired, ... five or six thousand shells in areas, yeah. So, ... those that weren't killed, they just retreated and didn't put up much resistance after that. But, whenever they were told that they had to defend something, they would ... stay in there no matter what, or attack something. But, we, fortunately, after the ... first night on the revetments, we didn't run into ... in my experience, anyway. But, all I do remember, when ... we hit Manus Island, I had a cold, the worst cold I've ever had in my life. And, we dug holes to ... burrow into. They were wet, cold, and nasty. Two days later, the damn cold was gone. You lived like an animal and the cold disappeared. [laughter] Yeah. Things that you wouldn't expect to happen happened.

KP: You did, in fact, get evacuated, and you flew by air.

RW: Yeah, from 35th General Hospital, yeah.

KP: So, what was the evacuation pattern?

RW: Oh, ... a four-engine plane just took us right into Hawaii.

KP: And then, from Hawaii?

RW: Hawaii, we took a DC-10 into California, Hamilton.. We landed there, and we took a look. I said, "What's the matter with these people? They look so ill and pasty faced. They're so pale." All of a sudden, we realized [that] Atabrine had turned our skin, gradually had turned our skin, yellow. So, we look at these people. "These are sickly people. No wonder they didn't go overseas, they're so sick." [laughs] Yeah.

CG: What was your homecoming like?

RW: Well, I was, eventually, evacuated to a hospital in Virginia, near Stanton, at general hospital there. And, my father and mother drove up with my wife. The next day they ... came in. ... That was ... good, really. ... I had two other brothers in service. They were in the European

Theater. So, there were three of us. The fourth brother, the engineer, he was doing work with Rickover ... on submarines. Of course, he was an expert on ... boilers. So, all ... the stuff Foster Wheeler was putting up for submarines, and other naval vessels, he was in charge of a lot of the boiler work. So, he was not expendable as a soldier. So, ... my other two brothers, one was ... in the 44th Infantry, and my younger brother was with the Signal Corps. My brother, with the 44th, was at Buchenwald the second day after it was liberated and he never forgot that.

KP: What did he tell you about that?

RW: He said it was absolutely horrendous. It was just unbelievable. Just unbelievable. The sight there was, you just can't imagine it. Many pictures you see is one thing, but ... to see it first hand ... it's just too awful.

KP: Did your brother often talk about the experience?

RW: No, no. Of course, we ... always knew what was going on with each other. Of course, we were all in the same boat. The only worry they had is, that armistice over there was before armistice in ... the South Pacific, and then, my brother's outfit already had orders to proceed to the South [Pacific], and it was canceled ... in August, when the Japanese surrendered. But, none of them over in Europe were very, very anxious to get over to the South Pacific. None of them.

KP: You talked about Tokyo Rose.

RW: Oh, yeah. She was ... a card.

KP: It sounds like you listened to her regularly.

RW: Yeah. We had a radio going on with her and she was a riot. "We knocked down 99 American planes. We lost one. We knocked down 200 American planes. We lost none." They were always knocking ... that's ... the reverse of what our generals were telling us about Vietnam, just the opposite. And, "You GIs, if you want to become impotent, you keep taking Atabrine. I'm warning you. Stop taking Atabrine or, otherwise, you're going to get impotent." So, I think I put in there, about the fact that the Whitakers had been childless. They had been married eight years when they were in El Paso, and we had been married a little bit longer, and then. when I got home, my wife became pregnant. So, I wrote back immediately, "Bob, double your Atabrine." So, sure enough, when he got back home, they had two children. [laughter] Yeah. I don't, if you blame the Atabrine, or what, but they [had] two delightful children.

KP: How much news did you get when you were in New Guinea and Manus Island?

RW: Well, they had, what was the name of the military newspaper, *Guinea Gold*? *Guinea Gold*, maybe that was the name, that ... was printed, periodically, with some ... information. Other than that, you'd get some over the radio. But, pretty much in the dark about what's going on, except in your little enclave, in your little cocoon, so to speak, you know. Incidentally, I had a meeting,

fluoridation meeting, in Kansas City in 1986, '87, something like that. So, I said to my wife, "Call Bert Whitaker, see if she'll come." She lived in Missouri. "See if she'll come join us in Kansas City while we're there." So, my wife said, "It's been forty years. I know ... we've been talking to Bert every ... Christmas. What are we gonna have to talk about?" I said, "I don't know, but ... call her anyway." It was a terrific reunion. Those two women, in four days, never shut their mouths. Never shut their [mouths]. They talked, and talked, and talked for four days. Yeah, they loved it. So, after ... forty years, we got together and talked to ... Bert Whitaker. But, we recognized her right away at the airport. But, when we called her, she said, "I'll come right up. No problem. I'd love it." Yeah. So, it was ... great. It was nice. She died about a year after that. She had a cardiac problem. Didn't know about it until maybe eight, nine months later. Her daughter didn't call us. She should have called us, didn't. I was surprised about that, because her daughter knew who we were, what our relationship was. But, Bob, her husband died early. He had a crazy thing, he had developed a cancer of the pulmonary artery, going from the lung to the heart. I never heard of it. Yeah. It didn't take long for him to die. So, ... I say, you make these contacts, and friendships, [it's] very traumatic when they end so abruptly, you know. Chaffin was such a disaster, for anybody like that to, he was what, thirty-six, something like that. Unbelievable guy. A waste, what a waste it was.

KP: You returned to Fort Bliss.

RW: Yeah. On the way back, yeah.

KP: And, how long were you actually at Fort Bliss?

RW: Just ... overnight. Just overnight, ... just to refuel. Refuel our plane, refuel our guts with steak and milk. I put on so much weight. Believe, I put on about thirty pounds, or ... more. I was up to a hundred and sixty pounds in no time at all. I said, "Oh, this won't do." So, I knocked it down again. A bunch of fresh steak, ice cream, oh, fresh bread, no ... dehydrated potatoes. [laughter]

KP: You, in fact, recuperated in Waynesboro.

RW: Virginia. Yeah.

KP: At the general hospital there?

RW: Right.

KP: How long were you in the general hospital?

RW: That one there, ... well, crazy things happened. I was there not too long, maybe two, three weeks and I was transferred to where? Fort Dix? I think I was transferred to Dix. I was there for a while, and met ... the review board, and they ... cashiered me out. I got home, bought a car, … piece of junk. I was home no more than about ten days. I got a telegram sending me back to

duty. They never explained why, but I was back to duty. That's when I went back to Saint Paul, Fort Leavenworth, yeah. [I went] back to Colorado Springs, where I had been. Yeah, ... one of the medical officers, on the review board, said, "So, your hands are terrible?" "Yeah," I said, "They are." "You ever think you'll practice again?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I don't think you will. Think you'll be able to drive a car?" I said, "Probably." "Well, maybe you should think about doing some taxi driving, or something like that for a living." I thought that was so mean and so vicious. I thought that was awful. I think, what he was telling me, "Hey you're getting out. I'm still here." Probably, that's what he was saying.

KP: Did you want to get out?

RW: I was serving no purpose in the service. I couldn't do any work. There was no way. I don't know why they sent me. When I got back to Fort Leavenworth, I said, "I don't know why I'm here. I can't do you any good here."

KP: What did they have you do in Saint Paul?

RW: Just nothing. Just sat around and did nothing. Just did absolutely nothing.

KP: How long were you at both places?

RW: Saint Paul, I was there only about three weeks, I guess. That's where I ran into a problem which I, eventually, found out was from DDT. ... We had rented an apartment in ... Kansas City, recently painted, and terrific furnished, and all that, in the daytime. Then, we went out to do some shopping, came back at night, and, boy, the roaches were running around like crazy. I mean, they ... took over the place. So, I went out and got some DDT bombs, which we had gotten in New Guinea, the first time they sent it, because flies, ... no matter where you went, there's flies, flies, flies. So, we would hang strings in our ... bunk, and ... soak it with DDT, and the flies would stick to it, and then, they would just die up in there. So, I remembered what it did to the flies, so, I said, "Well, let me get some DDT spray." So, I sprayed ... the whole ... place there. The next day and, as a-matter-[of]-fact, then, I said, "Well, ... we'd better get out of here." So, we went out to a park for hours. And, I'm out in the park for several hours, and I had my identification bracelet. You couldn't see it anymore. Everything had swelled around it. Just everything was swelled. My shoes were too tight. ... Just swelling. My breathing started to become shallow. What the hell's going on? I had no idea. I got back to the apartment, I had called the father of somebody I knew in the service, who was a dermatologist, or something, in Kansas City, but he refused to see me. He says, "I'm retired. I'm not gonna do anything." He didn't even see me. So, back at the ... camp up at Leavenworth, nobody knew what in the hell was going on, and they shipped me. Well, ... first ... they sent me to, they had a hospital forty miles away. Where the hell was that? Well, whatever, they didn't know what it was either. So, they decided to send me to a colder climate, which would be Colorado. So, I went back to Colorado Springs. Fortunately, I ran into a good dermatologist there, took good care of me, and I got discharged from there, finally. And, I did nothing from the time of the first discharge to the second one. I was of no use to anybody, so there was no sense. I was not doing anything, any

useful function, whatsoever. So, what was I doing in the service? So, it didn't bother me getting out. But, again, it's like leaving home now and moving to California. I'm leaving my friends. I've been with friends through thick and thin, through such terrible, terrible things. And, getting to know each other, and getting to like each other, and leaving that. ... Just getting out of the service was not the part, leaving ... friends, that was the part, and then, finding that they died afterwards, that was ... a little tough to take.

KP: Did you want to stay in the reserves?

RW: No. Again, ... in the first place, they wouldn't let me.

KP: They wouldn't let you?

RW: No, I had a medical discharge. So, they ... wouldn't let me stay in there. I probably would have stayed.

KP: Were you upset that you would not qualify for a pension?

RW: Well, I know my brother did that. Yeah, my brother did that, which came in ... handy, and then, it didn't come in handy. Well, it's a long story, too. But, some people, I understand that, yeah. No, that didn't bother me. I didn't think they owed me anything.

KP: You had been in, quite a bit, with the reserves.

RW: Oh, yeah. …

KP: You were almost at twenty years.

RW: Yeah, it was about fourteen years, altogether. Yeah. It wouldn't have taken much longer. Yeah, you're right. But, ... they said, "No, don't want you."

CG: You mentioned that your doctor, during that period was in the service. Did he ever tell you any stories?

RW: I never questioned him on that, no. The only thing is, he ... is a great dermatologist. What do you think they did with him? They put him on the troop train as troop doctor, which was ridiculous. This guy was an expert. He ... practically saved my life. He was so damned good, and they put him on the troop train, that's ridiculous. I saw him again at Fort Hamilton, in New York, when I ran into something, and he was a nice guy. I liked him. I haven't heard from him since. It's a long time. I'm outliving them all. [laughter]

CG: During your service, you mentioned you became a major.

RW: Yeah. I got discharged as major. Yeah.

CG: Oh, okay.

RW: Yeah. It was tossing the dog a bone. [laughter]

KP: Did you use the GI Bill at all?

RW: No.

KP: You did not consider using it for graduate school?

RW: No. No, I didn't use it, whatsoever. No.

KP: And, you already had a house.

RW: Yeah. We had already bought a house a year before I ... got inducted.

KP: So, the GI Bill mortgage did not affect you?

RW: No, that didn't help. My wife took care of that. She paid it off.

KP: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

RW: The VFW, I belonged to them. Not actively, but, I belonged to them, yeah. They're a good group. That's ... about the only one. Yeah.

KP: You mentioned that you were sort of surprised that more people did not ask you about the war.

RW: Yeah. That was, ... yeah, I couldn't understand that. I really couldn't. As if to say, "Okay, you did your job. We're not interested anymore. Forget it." And, it was a hurt, and I'm ... sure a lot of others felt the same way, because we went through brutal stuff. ... It's like ... somebody said, " Would you do anything like this over again?" I said, "For money? No way. No way would I do this for money. The fact that I volunteered to do this, yes, but for money, no way." Matter-of-fact, my wife wrote back, and I was describing the islands I'd been to. [She] said, "Well, maybe after the war, you'll take a vacation and go back there." And, I said, "No way are we gonna do that again. Not back here. Forget it." So, I couldn't understand that they showed no interest. I was told that they were alerted, ... it would be too traumatic. I ... don't think so. What was traumatic, on the first Forth of July I was home, ... they started shooting off cannon, I dove for under the bed, just as a reflex. I was ... there, I was gone.

KP: When you got back, there was still a war going on.

RW: The war would still be on. I got out in ... May of '46. Yeah, it was still on. Japan is August, so it was still several ... [months].

KP: So, you got out in May of '45?

RW: '46.

KP: Oh, okay.

RW: '46.

KP: So, it took a while for you to get out.

RW: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it took quite a while. It took quite a while. It was a waste. It was really a waste. If they gave me a medical discharge right off the bat, I could have taken care of myself, maybe just as well, maybe better, without all the running all over the country for no purpose at all. That was a waste.

CG: I read that the Army's dental officers had fashioned a plastic eye to replace the glass eyes.

RW: A lot of them did cosmetic surgery. Yeah, they did, because a lot of them were very prestigious with their fingers, and coloring, and things. Yeah, they did a lot of that, it's true. True.

CG: What about shortages with equipment and facilities during your service?

RW: You mean, what I had to work with? No, they had fashioned what we called a chest number sixty. Everything was in the chest. The chest was about like this [makes gesture with hands]. Everything you needed was in there, the foot drill, everything you wanted was in that one chest. That ... was well-constructed, well-done. So, there wasn't anything there was lacking, no. That was well-done. I don't know who the ... architect on that was, but, he did a good job. But, … what the war left me with, … it left me hard on the outside, mushy on the inside, very much. That was something that I never expected, but that's what occurred. I haven't gotten over it yet.

KP: Really, because you were there from before the war.

RW: Oh, yeah. My wife says, "You'd never say things like that, or do things like that before the war." I said, "Toughened in one way, made … sentimental in other ways." Maybe because I lost so many friends. I don't know.

KP: It sounds like you still really miss them a lot.

RW: Yeah. Correct. That's very true, very true. But, I don't regret any of it, really, because it served a purpose. That's the main thing. It served a very good purpose, because, without myself

and millions like me—I was at a bar mitzvah in Atlanta last weekend, … the rabbi was talking about something and one thing he mentioned, he says, "We have to be very thankful for the millions who went to war for us." I think that's true. That's true, don't regret it at all. What I do regret, I have a distaste for anything Japanese. I just hate them. I have a distaste for them, because they were so mean in so many respects. They took four years or more out of my life for no good reason whatsoever and I wouldn't buy anything Japanese if my life depended on it.

KP: So, you never bought a Japanese car?

RW: No, no, never would. No, no.

KP: Have you ever been back to the South Pacific or Australia?

RW: No, I haven't gone to any of those. Reminds me, one day, [when] Johnson was president, Lady Bird Johnson had a "Beautifying America" program, I'm driving home from the office in my car and I've got the radio on. There's a journalist interviewing a woman at, I think it was, Kennedy Airport. "Where you going?" "Going to Jordan, beautiful Jordan. That's where I'm going." "Don't you know about Lady Bird Johnson's 'See America First'?" And, this stupid woman's answer was, … "Once you see New York City, you've seen it all." I said to myself, "You idiot, you've seen nothing, because this is a beautiful country we got here." We have been to, I think, forty-eight states. We have been in forty-eight states and I love this country. … Just the forty year celebration over … in Belgium, that I went to, that I enjoyed. I went to Israel twice, once with the fraternity and once, that's a long story, too. … I went once with a roommate of mine who had relatives there. Long story, but nice story.

KP: Was your fraternity in medical school segregated by religion, was it a Jewish fraternity?

RW: When I was there, it was. Now, it isn't. It's got minorities, it's got females, … it's got all religions. No, it's true, at the time … strictly Hebrew, yeah.

KP: I'm curious about your attitudes toward both Korea and Vietnam.

RW: Well, I know there were a lot of people trying to get out of the Vietnam War. For a while, I couldn't understand that, because then, probably, I related to my own involvement where I didn't have to go and did, and here's where people who wanted to go pulled all kinds of strings that they wouldn't go. They went to Canada. … I couldn't understand the unpatriotic [feeling], I thought it was an unpatriotic thing. But, in later life, I find out that Vietnam was not patriotic or unpatriotic, it was a disaster. … People made a bad mistake to start with and they stuck with it … when they shouldn't have, and the end result was really a complete disaster. I was old enough to go into World War II, I wasn't thinking about Vietnam or South Korea. [laughter] … You know, we've been at this a long time, haven't we? [laughter] My God.

KP: Even though you had a practice to come back to, because of your hands, you had a great deal of difficulty.

RW: Well, I would have to wear rubber gloves

KP: That is ironic, because I remember, from my experiences in going to the dentist, in that era, it was unusual for dentists to wear gloves.

RW: No.

KP: Then, because of AIDS …

RW: Because it's mandatory. That's a problem that cost billions of dollars for a stupid reason. The dentist, Dr. Acer, down in Florida, who is the one whose … patients got AIDS, never been replicated, never been replicated. … I think I know why it's happened down there. He said to himself, "If society did this to me, I'm going to do it to society." And, how did he do it? If he used an anesthetic, he … mixed his own blood in that anesthetic and injected it into these patients. The only way it could happen, the only way. It has never happened since. So, because of that, we got into all this OSHA nonsense, and it's cost billions of dollars … hasn't proven a thing. … Just cost people an awful lot of money, for no reason. That's the only way it could have happened, because, to this day, CDC has not figured it out, but there's no other way it could happen. They've hinted that this is what happened.

KP: What have they hinted?

RW: … They just don't have that proof. Theoretically, there's no other way it could have happened. Unfortunate, but it was awful.

KP: There seems to be a lot of pressure on doctors and dentists today to do clinical, pro bono work.

RW: That's interesting, because, when I was in Carteret, several years prior to that, there had been a drive to build a hospital, and several thousands of dollars were still in that fund, and no hospital. … What we had in mind, what I had in mind, was to establish a dental clinic, a free dental clinic, with this money. That would have been pro bono. A lot of work is still done pro bono, but not most private practice, I don't think. Maybe public health … people, yes, but private practice, not that [frequently].

KP: There is a great deal of talk about this expectation for pro bono work, for general practitioners. I was wondering if dentists are held to the same standard.

RW: It is happening more. I was at a … graduation of the lawyers at Penn, where the new dean had come in and it was mandatory that you put in X number of hours, pro bono, in the city. My grand-daughter's out in Tucson now. She's got to put in certain number of hours to do some work in the community. So, that is expanding, but it would be very difficult, prior to Medicare, Medicaid, because Medicare is not involved in it, I have done some of that work. I have done

that for free … otherwise, today, it's Medicaid. Medicaid pays for it. So, the opportunity to do pro bono work, in that aspect, really doesn't exist. I don't think it exists in the medical profession anymore, either, because you don't … have wards anymore, where poor people are.

KP: In fact, they talk about the end of that. I was wondering if the dental associations pressured dentists to do pro bono work.

RW: Yeah. No, not really, we're just required to take care of everybody, AIDS or no …

[Tape is paused for an unknown amount of time.]

KP: I think Carmen has a few more questions.

CG: I was wondering about your use of anesthesia, how you were using it at a time when most dentists did not. How much of that has changed?

RW: Well, you have to consider the fact that the mechanical equipment that we have today, with the no vibration and the speed, that under certain circumstances, the extent of discomfort or pain has been shrunken, tremendously. So, you might say to yourself, this will only take maybe three seconds, two seconds, then it doesn't pay to have an anesthetic that lasts for two or three hours, uncomfortably. Yeah.

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

RW: … Air abrasive, not drill, air abrasive, supposed to do this, supposed to do that, it was supposed to be great, didn't work. … There were lots of reasons why it didn't work, and I'm talking about air abrasives, again, never learning from history. It doesn't removed decay, for one thing. What they are saying today … talking about today's plastic type of filling material that we're using, that are being used, which is hardened by an ultraviolet light, you don't need, what we call, preparation, precise preparation to hold a filling, because it's going to be held by adhesives. So, you can have a scooped out cavity, and put a filling in there that will hold. Previously, if you put that in, it wouldn't last two days. So, it had to be meticulous … you had to have more anesthesia. Now, if you just do this, it's not going to take that much … time element to do the procedure. And you say, "So, well, a few seconds might be uncomfortable, it might not be worth it," and the patient will usually agree. So, it's a question of the modern techniques versus the older technique, and the demands on either one.

CG: I've heard that lasers might replace drills.

RW: No, I think that's nonsense, I think it's nonsense. They can't see that. I can't see that at all. What the laser's being used for … now, when teeth erupt … with all kinds of fissures and grooves, the laser's being used to melt alongside those grooves and seal them, which we've been using sealants to do, successfully. But, if the laser will do it, it will be more permanent. So,

that's the only thing I can see a laser for … can't see it for anything else. It's dangerous, it's still too dangerous.

CG: My dentist, you might know her, she is from Pennsylvania, Dr. Amsterdam?

RW: Toby Amsterdam? Dr. Amsterdam? Morton Amsterdam, yes, I've met him.

CG: I think he was one of my doctor's professors.

RW: Oh, really. Yeah, he and D. Walter Cohen were partners at one time. They just opened a D. Walter Cohen Learning Center and Medical School in Israel. Brilliant, yeah, that was quite a team, Walter Cohen and Amsterdam, Morton Amsterdam, both great. … Good teachers, too, periodontics, mostly. And, Amsterdam was rehabilitation, yeah, good man. … Oh, yeah, I knew them both.

KP: How did it feel to retire?

RW: I haven't retired. [laughter] I'm so damn busy doing things that it's unbelievable.

KP: What kind of things do you do? You were active with your class and you are active with Rutgers, but what else?

RW: I've become very inactive with dentistry, very inactive there, but there's always something coming up. For instance, now I'm getting ready to sell my house. I'm a rat packer. I never throw anything away. But I've been throwing things away like you wouldn't believe, now. So, we're getting the house ready to be sold. I'm at the computer. I do all my finances on the computer, I do my daughter's, I do my family ... circle work on my computer. I take care of our cemetery and I take care … there's always something going on. … Right now, I'm getting ready to … jar my sauerkraut that I just put up. I put up green tomatoes, I pickle. My wife will not eat a red tomato, but she eats me out of house and home when I pickle them. [laughter] … There's always something that I find I can do. …

CG: I was really interested in how you got into computing.

KP: Yes. We have found, through working on this project, that your generation is more computer resistant, while ours are not.

RW: … Of course, no. I was at the dedication on the fourth floor, up at the library, … two weeks ago. … Oh, what a place that is, talk about computers.

KP: When did you start using a computer?

RW: I took a course in Montclair State, with a teacher, and I wasn't happy with it. This goes back, I still use an Apple IIe, which, to me, is an ultra-machine, … ten years ago, at least. Then, I

said to him, … "Steve, I'm not getting much [better] at this, can you tutor me at home?" He said, "Sure." … He was the teacher, so, for an hour, once a week, he'd come over. I think I took about twenty lessons from him, and I learned so much about that, I can do anything … with that Apple IIe, I can do anything I want. [laughter] Anything. I just inventoried all my records, I inventoried all my books, I got that on a disk, I got that all ready to go. I'm getting labels to tell people, "Please stop sending mail here. I'm moving," because, we get mail like you wouldn't believe, such junk. I wanted to stop all that, so I got that. I [am] constantly on my computer. My finances, I take care of my daughter's, my granddaughter's, all of them. I also spend an hour a day exercising my knee. I haven't stopped that yet, after a year … my surgeon says, "Keep it up." … I'm doing fine. So, the days go by and I say, "What the hell, it's night time already. How did that happen?" [laughter] I do all the shopping. My wife doesn't drive because … her eyes are … she doesn't have any depth perception any more. So, I do all that, banking, whatever. … I haven't retired. …

KP: Is there anything we have forgotten to ask?

RW: [laughter] I doubt it very much.

CG: Actually, you mentioned your 65th reunion.

RW: Yeah.

CG: Did Carl Heyer come?

RW: Carl Heyer, who was in the … Class of … [25], asked us, "Look," he says, "There's only two of us left, we can't run a separate dinner. Can we come with you?" I said, "Our pleasure." As a matter-of-fact, when we sat down, I said, "Look at these two guys, they're five years older than we are. … If they can do it, we can do it, so, see you all on the 70th." [laughter] Carl's quite a guy. He's quite a guy. …

KP: Have you ever taken the famous Mount Holly tour with him?

RW: No, I haven't. I heard about it. [laughter] …

KP: Well, thank you very much.

RW: If there's anything else you need …

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/24/99
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/4/99
Reviewed by P. Richard Wexler 6/21/99