RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT H. ZELIFF

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Jared Kosch: This begins an interview with Robert H. Zeliff, Class of 1943, on May 17, 2003. Mr. Zeliff, I would like to thank you for partaking in this interview. I will begin by asking if you can tell me a little bit about your father.

Robert Zeliff: Yes. My father never went to college and, of course, during his age, not too many people did. He was a 1908 graduate of Hackensack High School, and then, he was, though a small man in stature, … probably as fine an athlete for somebody his size that I think I've ever seen, … with baseball being his primary sport, though he participated in several others, and every one that he did, he did well. He was the catcher on the Hackensack High School team and went on to play what amounts to, today, [what] you would call semi-pro baseball, but this was in the day before Major League Baseball had farm teams. … He was almost good enough to make it to the big leagues, but, because of his size, he wasn't a good enough hitter, but he enjoyed it and played for several years after high school. … As a career, he was a title searcher, real estate title searcher, all his life, and that was pretty much his life. He was very dedicated to his work and a fine, understated man.

JK: Did your father ever talk to you about his participation in World War I?

RZ: He was in World War I, I think, for all of three or four months. … They were married in 1917 and, of course, [since] he was married, they weren't taking married people right away, but, finally, … I think in June or July of 1918, he was finally conscripted and spent four months down in Fort Dix, as a company clerk, and then, the war ended and that was it. [laughter] That was the extent of his military career.

JK: He was never in Europe. He never saw any action.

RZ: No, no. As I said, he never left Fort Dix, New Jersey.

JK: Okay. I would like to know a little bit about yourself, your younger years, where you grew up and your schooling prior to Rutgers University.

RZ: Yes. Well, I'm also a 1939 graduate of Hackensack High School, and very happy and proud of that fact, because I think Hackensack High School, certainly in those days, was, academically, one of the preeminent schools in the state. Physically, we didn't have too great a plant, but we made it up with the excellence of the academic program, and I feel very happy and honored to have had a chance to go to a public school system that was as good as Hackensack was in those days, and I entered the college preparatory course. … In just talking to my wife a few minutes ago, [I noted] that, in those days, the school was sort of split between those who … had ideas of going to college or the other ones that didn't, … so that we had a college prep and a commercial course and it was like having two different schools under one roof. You had no association out of those two groups. So, there's a lot of people in my high school class, and it turned out to be [true as well] here in Rutgers, that I had no association with either, because they were in a set of curricula that was not common with me. … Of course, we never took any of the same courses and, unless you were maybe on some special outside event [together], you never had any contact with these people. … So, when I see these names now, I think, "I have no idea who they were," [laughter] because I had very little idea who they were when we were in school, and that applied

a lot to Rutgers, too, being an engineering student down here. The engineers sort of led a life by themselves from a lot of the other [students], and I imagine that might be the same today, too.

JK: Had your father's military service affected you in any way? Did you have a drive to be in the military?

RZ: No, no. As I said, his military service was so incidental and is almost non-existent. [laughter]

JK: I would like to move on a little bit into your experience at Rutgers University, beginning with your fondest memories or maybe a professor you remember?

RZ: Yes. Well, [I recall] a lot of them; we had a small group. There were only six of us that were electrical engineers, and I think one of them never even graduated. I think it was only five of us that graduated. In addition to electrical engineering, at that time, there was mechanical engineering and civil engineering and I would say about at least two-thirds of all the engineering students were mechanical engineers, the next was civil and just a small group of us were electrical. Then, Professor [James L.] Potter, who was the head of the Electrical Department of the School of Engineering in those days, was, I think, everybody's favorite professor, and certainly was mine. I came here and the question is, "How did you come to Rutgers?" Well, it was very simple. I got a State Scholarship, because this is in the days when the Depression was in full swing and, without the benefit of that State Scholarship, which is a full four-year tuition scholarship, I wouldn't have gone to any college, let alone Rutgers.

JK: Had the Depression hit your family hard?

RZ: Oh, yes, yes. It hit everybody [hard], but we're able to keep together and we led a very simple life, but a very happy life. I think [if] you talk to anybody that was part of our generation, and though they had very little material, I think very few people said that … they felt they had led an underprivileged life, but, when you look back at it against today's background and the economic life that we've had, particularly since World War II, it's hard to relate between the two of them, but I said that I think that, if anything, it was a benefit, I think. … I think you'll find all of us in that category, too, having gone through the experience of the financial Depression years, and then, followed up by World War II, which really was, in those days, could've been, a war of survival, though it didn't turn out to be that way. … I think that shaped us into, as [television journalist and author of *The Greatest Generation*] Tom Brokaw said, "A very special generation." I agree with that and that's because of the times that we lived in.

JK: I think you brought up an interesting point. Instead of maybe focusing on the negative aspects of the Depression, can you remember some fond memories of the good things that the Depression brought out in people, or in yourself or in your family?

RZ: Well, that, you said "family," that's the key word. There were very little material things that you had to you, to backstop you. There was nothing like television. Radio was our medium in those days and, … as I said, there were few other diversions. So, you depended very much on your family life and I just had myself and my brother, but, as I said, we lived a very simple, but, I

think, a very fulfilling life. … I almost feel sorry for some people in your generation, … not having the opportunity to have that experience, because, as I said before, it created a character background that you just can't get unless you live it.

JK: Moving ahead a little bit, let us go into how you entered the military during World War II, because it is a little different than many other accounts that I have heard of.

RZ: Yes, that's right. … During the early days of the war in particular, the military, both the Army and the Navy, were trying to build up their fledging radar programs. So, they were heavily recruiting, all across the country, electrical engineering students to come into their respective programs and I ended up joining the one that the [Army initiated], the Army program. As a result of this, I think all the engineering students went through an accelerated senior year. We did the first semester in the Summer of '42, second semester in the fall, so that we all graduated, the engineering [students], not all students, but … certainly the ones who went through the accelerated program, graduated in January of '43, and, also, we had to take certain prescribed courses to qualify for this program. … As a result of this and a successful, you know, completion of a degree, we in this program were awarded direct commissions in the Army Signal Corps as second lieutenants. So, on St. Patrick's Day in 1943, I reported for active duty at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and went through about a two-month period of just fundamental training, officer training, and then, after that, went through radar training up in Harvard and MIT in Boston, down at Camp Murphy in Florida, and, finally, specific training on the radar that I came to be associated with for the rest of the war in Fort Monroe, Virginia. … At that time, after the training was over, they activated, and this was, again, in several different areas of the country, what has been called signal radar maintenance units. … That was the unit that was prescribed to be attached to outfits that operated radar sets, to provide maintenance for them, technical maintenance to keep these sets running and stuff like that, and it [was] comprised of one officer, and all the [officers], initially, they were all second lieutenants, one second lieutenant and three enlisted men. So, in, I guess it was May of '44, I was activated, [with] the 302nd Signal Radar Maintenance Unit, and I was the CO [commanding officer] and the only "O" [laughter] and, within less than two months, we were on our way overseas. We left on [June 6, 1944]; Normandy, D-Day, was sort of our "D-Day," because we left Fort Monroe for heading toward the San Francisco Port of Embarkation. … Within a few days later, we were on a ship, hitting what eventually ended up to be in New Guinea, in Finschhafen, New Guinea, but, as I stated in the [Rutgers Oral History Archives pre-interview] survey, it's typical of the Army, we ended up, essentially, just having too many of these signal radar maintenance units to have assignments for them all, because there weren't that many using radars around … that required this. So, I would say I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there were any more than about half of the SRMUs [that] ended up being assigned to the job that they were supposed to be, and the rest of us ended up doing some form of signal depot work, and that's what I did. I did end up, specifically, in my particular case, doing a lot of, what [it] amounts to is instruction, on two radars in particular, the SCR-682, which was the one I trained on at Fort Monroe, which was a radar that was used to track surface ships. … Of course, the idea was to set up in someplace where, you know, our fleet might be in danger … by some enemy attack, to be able to, you know, catch enemy ships on the way in, but, by the time we got overseas, in the Southwest Pacific Theater in particular, except for an occasional Japanese submarine, we had complete control of the seas around that area. So, even the ones that were deployed weren't deployed in

the type of activity that they had anticipated that they would be, because just due to lack of enemy action. … I did go to the Admiralty Islands, which was about three hundred miles north of New Guinea, which was a big staging area for the Philippine landings several months later, and there was the 54th Coast Artillery Surface Warning Battery there. … They are the ones that operated [the SCR]-682, but, as I said, there was no enemy shipping, but they did work with the port director in there and [were] spotting any ships coming in, letting them know that, you know, the ships were about to come in and, also, it turned out, … this radar could be used for a little weather reporting, because it was an early ten-centimeter radar, [a more accurate radar system that did not require as large of an antenna], that did a fairly good job of picking up rain clouds. So, if there's any weather problems, … they had, also, a connection with the airstrip there, to let them know if there's any weather fronts [that] were coming in. [laughter] So, that wasn't exactly what they had in mind for the radar, but that's typical of adjustments you have to make according to conditions. There's one slight, little story that I get a kick out of telling. When I was in Finschhafen, as I said, this was pretty much of a rear area. It was, again, also a staging area for some of the [landings], … but this was in the northeast section of New Guinea, which is now part of Papua New Guinea. The western half of New Guinea and all to the west of it was, in those days, part of the Dutch East Indies. It is now Indonesia. … That sort of set the stage a little bit, but, one day, our bivouac [temporary camp] area was right at the entrance to the main harbor in Finschhafen. … One day, at night, it was before we went out to supper, I can remember very vividly, then, a good-sized ocean liner came in and, of course, there's no real reason for [why] that should be there. Well, it turned out, the next day, we found out what it was. … In that period, if you went to Hawaii before the war, the Matson Line was the way you got there, by ship, and there were two ocean liners, the *Matsonia* and the *Lurline*, that were the two ships that carried passengers through, like the airlines do now, carry passengers to Hawaii, and they were both converted into troopships during the war. [Editor's Note: There were four passenger liners, the SS *Matsonia*, the SS *Lurline*, the SS *Mariposa* and the SS *Monterey*.] … It turns out that the one that we saw come in was the *Matsonia*, [the USAT *Etolin* during the war], and the reason why it came in was that they had one of the early Navy radars onboard. … I think it was the SO-8 and, on this particular ship, the radar had broken down and the Captain, who was, … incidentally, the civilian captain before the war, most of the ones in that category either had absolute faith in radar or they wouldn't trust it worth a nickel, because it was so new, but this was one of the captains who had faith in radar, … particularly due to the [fact that the] charts that he had of those waters were very sketchy and, you know, … weren't very dependable. So, … his radar broke down and he just headed for the nearest port that he was [near] and he happened to be right outside of our area, [laughter] and he told the authorities there that he wasn't going to move that ship another six inches until somebody fixed his radar for him. So, they cast around and they found out that we had this little radar sub-depot there. So, we got on there and we fixed this. To make a long story longer, we fixed his radar for him. Well, the grapevine worked and the next thing we knew, the word was out, "If you're anywheres near Finschhafen, the Army's got somebody that can fix your radar." [laughter] So, we had several other activities of fixing various types [of radars] of LSTs [landing ship, tanks], coastal freighters. They were the sorts of things that would show up and we took advantage of it, because we were then [in] a rear, rear area and, when you get in a situation like that, you sort of become the almost forgotten people. So, we weren't living … too high on the hog, as far as food was concerned, but any Navy ship, even the smallest ones, had refrigerators. So, they would have fresh eggs and fresh milk and stuff like [that]. So, when we got a call to go down to work on a ship, at first, it was [the case

that] everybody wanted to do it. So, we had to take [draw] lots to get up a repair crew, and the first thing we'd do [was], when we'd get on the ship and we'd sort of case the situation, try to, you know, figure out, … to begin with, "Could we fix it or not?" Most times, we could, but, then, we'd sort of stall, so [that] we could get at least one or maybe two meals out it. [laughter] That's why the job was so attractive; we could get some fresh food for the first time [that] we've had in, sometimes, … almost a year's time. So, that's about [it]. I was not in any type of active combat. I was in a combat zone on Morotai Island for two days, but that was a quick in-and-out, but, so, I was not [in] any experience as some of the other fellows that were in the infantry [were], and I just had so many recollections of so many of our class that [died], particularly all the fellows that were in the Advanced ROTC. They all went in [as] second lieutenants in the infantry and I would venture to say at least three-quarters of them never left France, one of my dear fraternity brothers, Emil Potzer, [Jr.], being one of them. So, I'd like to dedicate a little bit of this to his memory. Incidentally, … here, I was a "Teke," TKE [Tau Kappa Epsilon] in Rutgers.

JK: Could you tell me a little more about your fraternity days at Rutgers?

RZ: Well, I was sort of a legacy, I guess. I had a … cousin that graduated. He graduated, as he was leaving Rutgers, I came in, and he was a TKE. So, I had sort of an introduction to them and it was a group that seemed to be rather compatible. So, that's how I got hooked up with them. I lived in Hegeman Hall, in the Quad, and the Quad, in those days, incidentally, was only three-quarters built. The last building, what I guess is Demarest, is it now? Is that the [building]? Yes, that wasn't there.

JK: It was not, yes.

RZ: [laughter] So, there was an opening in the [Quad]. The Quad was all like a three-quarters of a quad, but I lived in Hegeman. Then, the remaining … time, I lived in the Teke House, and I was active in the fraternity. … My senior year, I was the vice-president. That'd be Epiprytanis, they call it, in that fraternity, but, interestingly enough, before the war, Teke was one of the smaller fraternities in the country. I don't think there were over about thirty chapters, but, after the war, when they [restarted]; you know, then, they all shut down during the war, almost universally, but, when they reactivated, somebody got going and they went completely ape. … I don't know where it stands now, but, within fifteen years after the war, I think they … had the greatest number of undergraduate chapters in the country, [laughter] and they activated chapters in every [laughter] type of school that you can think of. … I've got a feeling that maybe not all of them have survived over the years, but, again, … I was active in the Alumni Control Board for a few years after the war, but, since then, I've lost pretty much all contact with the [fraternity], with not only this chapter, but the national fraternity as well.

JK: Could you tell me a little bit about, maybe, a fond memory of a fraternity event? Whenever we look at this period, it seems that Rutgers was very socially active in that period.

RZ: Yes. Well, yes, my fond recollections are with this young lady over here. [laughter] … By that time, we were going together pretty steadily. … The dances, the Soph Hop and the Junior Prom and the Military Ball were the three big dances during the year, and, of course, that would

be on a Saturday night. … Usually, almost all on the Friday nights before, I don't know whether they do that anymore or not, [laughter] but the fraternity used to have your fraternity dances, too, in their houses. So, most of the girls would come down, … and a lot of them, my wife included, had some friends that lived over in Douglass, which was, in those days, was NJC [New Jersey College for Women, now Rutgers University's Douglass Residential College]. I don't know, do you still call it the "Coop?" [laughter]

JK: I do not know that, sir. It might be. [laughter]

RZ: Well, it was known as the "Coop" in those days, and so, she would come down and stay over there with, you know, some friends for the weekend and that came in rather convenient. … That's a very fond memory. So, I have, you know, fond memories. Our house was not one of the more affluent houses, as far as financial underpinnings are concerned, but we had a few interesting scholars in our class. In fact, one fellow, I guess nobody knows about him now, but he went on to be, for about, I would say, a good ten, fifteen years after World War II, one of the most recognized science fiction authors.

JK: What was his name?

RZ: James Blish [(1921-1975), Rutgers College Class of 1942, a prominent author of science fiction novels], and I don't know, if you're a science fiction aficionado, you might still find some of his work or novels in the libraries or in print. … He, as I said, became one of the [big names]. He was doing that in college. He was making a little bit of money on that and sold some of the stuff, just enough to get his foot in the door, but he made it big time. In fact, he ended up, his life and his career, over in London. … We had a few other people that were good scholars, but I don't think [they] attained any national stature, that I'm aware of, but, as I said, … I think Emil Potzer was probably the only one in our group that was in the Advanced ROTC. … I was just talking with somebody today, that they said that they heard that he was killed either the first or the second day after he landed in France and never got by two or three days, and, of course, we had [many classmates killed in the war]; one of many, many young fine men [lost] then. [Editor's Note: Emil Potzer, Jr., was killed-in-action in Normandy on June 15, 1944.] The fellow that was the [ROTC] cadet colonel, you know, Mal [Malcolm A.] Schweiker, [Jr.], was one of them, yes.

JK: Staying with this period of time that we are talking about right now, can you give me a little bit of an idea of the thoughts and feelings in the pre-Pearl Harbor Rutgers community? What was the feeling like about the war around here? How did the people react to what was going on in Europe?

RZ: Well, I think everybody here, and I think which was sort of the mood of the country, to a degree, [is] that we just sort of hoped that we weren't going to get involved, all right, and, of course, overnight, that changed, and, of course, as we know now, in getting some of the background, FDR had other thoughts in mind. One way or another, he was going to get us involved in that war and, of course, we were. One of the major things [was], we had this lend-lease program, … before the war started, where we provided a lot of significant help to Britain, but, of course, there were a lot of active pacifists. [Charles A.] Lindbergh, essentially, is a

classic example of those, but a lot of other people who weren't, you know, active, and the common citizenry just sort of hoped that it wasn't going to happen, you know, but, as I said, … just like somebody turned on a switch, we had Pearl Harbor and that, you know, that was it. Oh, yes, yes, I have to tell you this story, yes. When I was in radar training up in Boston, in the Harvard and MIT [program], we had just gotten married and we had a little apartment just off the law school campus, which [was] where we did our radar training and is now back as the law school campus at Harvard. One Friday night, I came back to our apartment. I told her, I said, "Well, they told us this afternoon there's going to be a special formation the next morning," Saturday morning, which was not normally the case, and that we had to show up at the Harvard Yard, in front of the chapel in the Harvard Yard.

JK: This is in 1943.

RZ: This is in '44.

JK: 1944?

RZ: No, '43, '43, yes, [laughter] [I have] to think myself, … yes, '43, and, at night, we're listening to the news and the news program said that Winston Churchill was going to receive an honorary degree at an eastern university. Of course, in those days, you didn't divulge where anybody went. Well, it wasn't hard to put two-and-two together, you know, that that's [Harvard]; [laughter] guess where he's going to be? So, while we were there, I told her, you know, "Try to get over in the area," as close as she could. Well, she couldn't get in the Yard, but she could get right outside of the Yard. In fact, she went out on the sidewalk where there was a small gate entrance into the back of the chapel, Harvard Chapel, and I guess I have to tell this story, but she ought to do it. While she was waiting there, a car pulls up, stops right next to her and out gets Winston Churchill, and I guess; yes, he did. [To his wife, Marjorie Zeliff] What?

Marjorie Zeliff: … The window was right up to my …

RZ: Yes, but he had to get out. He got out and walked into the yard. [Editor's Note: Marjorie Zeliff explains that Prime Minister Churchill did not get out of the car. The audio was inaudible.] Beg your pardon, but she was right next to him, and then, she …

JK: He was just in the car. The story is the same. He did not get out.

RZ: Yes. She said if he [had] rolled the window down, she could have taken the derby off his head. [laughter] So, that was an interesting experience during the war that we sort of both could share. Of course, then, … he addressed the assembled troops a little later, from the steps of the Harvard Chapel, and gave one of his typical rousing speeches that he was famous for.

JK: Going back to another topic that came up, I would just like to know about your feelings in general towards FDR. We touched on the Depression earlier, then, World War II; did you have a set opinion? Did your opinion change with time?

RZ: Well, that's somewhat interesting, because my family was pretty much a rock-ribbed Republican family and when he, I guess it was for his third, oh, no, I guess his last term, … after the election, when was that, '42? [Editor's Note: President Roosevelt was elected for his third term in 1940 and his fourth and final term in 1944.] Well, in any event, the war had started, of course, in those days and I, you know, reported to my family and friends that I had voted for him, and I remember, [laughter] my friends and family friends almost kicked me out of the family. "You voted for him?" … though my inclinations were basically Republican, too, but I said, "Under the circumstances, I could not see changing leaders of the country right in the middle of a war for survival," and I think, again, he did a lot of things that no Republican would have had the guts to do, and I think in a time when radicalism had to be the case to save the country, because we just couldn't go on continuing down the same road. Lord knows how we would've come out of it. Of course, there's a lot of people [who] claim that the war had a lot to do with the end of the Depression, and it did, because, [as] soon as you started pumping money into the war industry, everybody, you know, got a [job], had a job, which they didn't have before, and so, that sort of very quickly ended the Depression, too. … It just shows you what you can do when you start playing macro economical, [laughter] … but, as I said, no, I have, generally, pretty good feelings about him, because I think he provided the tone and the leadership that we needed. Now, whether or not his making sure that we got involved in the war [was good], I really don't know how that would have played out if it hadn't been for him. I think, eventually, we would've had it. Well, certainly, [we] would have had it if [Pearl Harbor was attacked], you know, what the Japanese did, but I think even without that, I think that, sooner or later, we might have gotten into it, but, if it had been much later, it might have been too late, as far as the War in Europe was concerned, because England could not have, you know, lasted without our help. … Nobody questions that, and they didn't have much longer to go, I think, if we didn't step in, and the job that this country did in arming itself, and you take a look at some of the statistics, at the number of airplanes, the number of tanks, … [laughter] it just boggles the mind, you know, and they're almost, like, from scratch, you know. They did it within a year's time. They had the war effort geared up, both militarily and the civilian thing, and a tremendous organizational job, in addition to the actual just physical accomplishments. You just have to think about it a little bit to realize that, "How in the world did we do it so quickly?" [laughter]

JK: Prior to the war, during the Great Depression, what were your feelings towards FDR and New Deal policies?

RZ: Oh, well, see, most of the time, I was a teenager, you know, and then, teenagers didn't have too much, really.

JK: No New Deal policies really affected you.

RZ: Well, it affected me, but secondarily, you know. … Sure, it had [an impact]; it developed a certain level of economy, but, though, it wasn't much. It might have not even have been that good. So, you know, as a byproduct of it, we were impacted, but, again, you know, like during the [Roosevelt Administration], when he came into office, I was ten years old, 1932, and, of course, as I said, things, you were more interested in, you know, seeing what you're going to do for your [next meal], family's going to do for your next meal, and one thing or another. Like, for instance, my father owned a house, but they had a mortgage and he wouldn't have been able to

keep the house if [not for] the fact that the mortgage holder, the man who ran the company, was an old high school friend of his and he allowed him to just pay the interest on the mortgage, without having to pay any of the principal, and, because of that, we were able to stay in our house. So, you know, things like that, you know, it got to be pretty basic.

JK: You felt positive about some aspects of it and negative about others.

RZ: Well, positive about some aspects, but leery about; not so much [laughter] negative, as leery and somewhat worrisome, as to, you know, what was going to happen, and I guess that, and, again, that, I think that's very typical. There's nothing unusual about that. You could hear that story all across the country.

JK: One topic that we have not really touched on is December 7, 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor. Could you give me an idea of where you were and the thoughts that went through your head at that time?

RZ: Oh, I know exactly where I was. I was sitting in my, not my room, in our room, but the room next to us, where a fellow had a radio; we didn't have one in our room. We listened to the New York Giants football game and they, in the middle of the game, … came on [with] the announcement that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. [Editor's Note: The New York Giants played the Brooklyn Dodgers football team on December 7, 1941.] … Of course, I don't know, because we were all in some state of shock, and "shock-and-awe," you might say, but another incident, … a little sidelight of that. We had convocations in those days, [I do not know] whether that still goes on or not, but where I think about twice a year, we would have some speaker of note [who] would come down, and the old [College Avenue] Gym was where they [held it], you know. We'd get [in there] and they'd, you know, give a talk of some interest and I believe it was [that] we had one, you know, scheduled, long in advance, of course, and this one, I think, was for December 12th and we had as the speaker, H. V. Kaltenborn, a name that is unknown to this generation, but, from my generation, we remember him very well. He was a very prominent news commentator. There's a man that had a clipped British accent, but, … when you saw him physically, he was the very personification of what his name sounded like. He had a German name, he was an immense man and looked very much like he might be a German, but he had a very high-pitched but very recognizable voice, and he was, as I said, one of the most respected news commentators of that age. Well, he came down and that convocation, which was just five days after Pearl Harbor, and he gave, the contents of which I can't do, but it was such a rousing speech that I've always claimed that if the Armed Forces had recruiting out in the lobby of the gymnasium, they could have signed up the entire student body in one fell swoop, [laughter] but, yes, so, that's [it]. Oh, everybody had little stories like that.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JK: What were your feelings on being involved in radar in its early days and its use in World War II? Can you give me a little background as to how radar came into being in this time and its significance, possibly, in the attack on Pearl Harbor, as well as its significance generally throughout the war?

RZ: No, I'm hardly an expert on that, but the radar really, in its practical infancy, was developed in England, and all of our people that got into radar, in their early training, had to go to England to get it, because that's where the knowledge was. So, what we picked up to get our radar program starting just grew out of the development that was really going on in England. … To my knowledge, the first two radars that were developed that were put into, you know, mass use by our forces were the SCR-268 and the SCR-270. SCR, incidentally, it was "Signal Corps Radio;" they didn't even have a name for it, and so, … they had numbers, just like a radio did, but it was [radar]. … The 268 was a searchlight-control radar, because that was the first application, was to try to help to steer searchlights, and the SCR-270 was the first long-range search radar and that was the one that was employed in Oahu at the time of Pearl Harbor, but, again, this was such a new device that the "old guard" officer corps had no real confidence in it at all and they just thought it was a new toy that they were playing with, I think. I think that's pretty much the story. I'm not, of course, conversant on anything first-hand, but … there's no question about it, that the radar was active that morning and did pick up the Japanese flight coming in, but, essentially, what it amounts to is, they couldn't get anybody to believe that, you know, what it could possibly have been, and, again, I guess, because nobody had really understood, you know, the tactical significance of this new toy. Of course, the things quickly changed and, like everything else, the radar program blossomed very quickly after, after World War II [developed] and special radars were developed for the Navy, which were different than the ones that developed for the Army. I'd mentioned the SCR-584, which is the other one I was trained on and did some instructing [on]. Now, that was a radar that was used for gun laying, for directing fire of antiaircraft artillery. … 584 was used extensively during the war and was used for, I've seen them in the field in other countries, because we gave some of them, I think, to the Russians and, somehow or another, some of them got in Chinese hands, and I think I've seen them used, like, thirty, forty years after the war was over. It was a very successful radar. It was ten-centimeter radar, shortwave radar, that had a long life, yes, and, as I say, radar today, I would hesitate even to talk about it, because it has advanced way beyond any experience I had with it. So, it's not the same animal, but a derivative from the same technology. I mean, you can see that, you know, if you follow the development of radar, how it was an evolutionary process and started out from one common base. Interesting little story about this; the English developed [a system that] had their radars where the operator would sit on the pedestal that the antenna was on. So, if it was an antenna that was a rotating antenna, … to track aircraft, the operating hood, that would rotate around with the antenna. … When we first started to develop our rotating ones, we had, we called it "slip rings," where we could make electrical contact with the radar, but with the operator staying fixed. … Again, the English were one of the first ones that developed automatic tracking radars, where you could lock on to a target and, without the operator doing anything, … you could get it to follow the radar, I mean, the radar to follow, track, the target, but, in the early ones they developed over there, and, of course, they had the same business where they would go around with the antenna; … they started off, they put one of their first prototypes in Hyde Park in London. …

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RZ: When they first picked up a flight of incoming [aircraft], a German flight, they'd be about a hundred miles out and, at that distance, a group of planes just looked like one target, but, as they got closer, then, you could start to see the individual airplanes would start to show up on the

screen. … Of course, this device, attempting to lock on a target, couldn't figure out which one, when they start [breaking up], one started to become many, which one to lock on. So, these [radar], this antenna would bounce around [laughter] and the operators in it would be bouncing around, they'd be flying off the walls, until they figured out, … for that, they had to figure out a little different way [of] how to handle that problem. I think that probably [is] what got the development of the slip rings going, I guess, [laughter] when they started bouncing operators off the wall … on these automatic tracking radars, but, oh, I would venture to say there are probably a thousand stories, you know, semi-comical, … in the early days of many inventions, as that one always, always made me laugh.

JK: Radar developed quite a bit during the war, that would be fair to say.

RZ: Oh, yes. Well, you know, wartime engenders technology like crazy. I mean, the same thing happened in all the wars. Vietnam is a classical situation. They developed a lot of things and, you know, particularly the use of the helicopter was, you know, almost a Vietnam development, at least the effective use of it, and what got started with the First Gulf War and what showed up in spades … in the recent one [Operation: IRAQI FREEDOM, beginning in 2003] is another indication of how quickly things get going when … a crying need shows up.

JK: I would like to shift gears a little bit. You said earlier that you really started to get going around the same time as the D-Day landings. Could you talk about the kind of thoughts you had at that time, when the war was really getting into full swing, if you were apprehensive about going to the Pacific?

RZ: Well, I'll tell you a little story about that. As I said, we left Fort Monroe, Virginia, and we got up that morning, we're packing up to get on the train to head out to San Francisco, and we had the radio on and got the news of the Normandy landings. We said, "Well, we've got our long, little, private type of situation like that," [laughter] but, one, two days later, when we left San Francisco on the ship, from the Oakland Army Base, [we] sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge, a morning that was so foggy that you couldn't see the bridge. … Of course, we said, "Well, when are we going to come home?" and, of course, … the slogan at those days, you know, this was in 1944, it was, "You are [will be back] at the Golden Gate in '48." It turns out it wasn't '48, came back in '46, anyway, but that, you know, [indicated we] had no idea of, you know, what we're headed for and how long it was going to last and, of course, that was the nature of things. Even the big planners had no idea [laughter] how things were going to go, how well, how quickly or not so quickly, but, in that regard, I have a great admiration for my theater commander, who was [US Army General Douglas] MacArthur, in the way he fought that campaign where he'd attack one base, occupy it, then, skip over three or four others and go hundreds of miles on. … In fact, I flew over one of the bases, this Wewak-Aitape, and a couple times, [at] about six thousand feet, in a C-47 [Skytrain, a military transport aircraft], and you could see the Japanese on the ground underneath. They were completely militarily ineffective. They were living off the ground. They were … cut off from all supplies, but they were able to, you know, live off the ground and they would just sit there. There was thousands of them and just doing nothing. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

RZ: Yes, one little thought comes to mind, on my way overseas. We got into San Francisco Port of Embarkation and we had a little trouble, train trouble, getting across the country. So, we were already a day late from when we were supposed to be there and they were looking for us. [laughter] They had a delegation, met the train when we came in, to see whether we were on it or not, because, the next day, we were on alert, which meant you were within two days before [shipping out], and then, … as a result of that, you were cut off from the outside world. [We were] within two days of, you know, getting on the ship and going, but I received a telegram, right after I got there, that our first daughter was born, back in Hackensack. So, I had to go down to base office and practically get on my hands and knees to get them to allow me to send a telegram back in response, to let them know that at least I had heard about it, you know, and so, it was almost two years later before I finally saw her, … but that was a little personal sidelight.

JK: How was that homecoming? Was it amazing?

RZ: Oh, yes. Well, it was somewhat amazing. … I was essentially discharged from active duty down at Fort Dix and got the train, picked up the train in Trenton, up to Newark, where my wife and my mother and father met me on the train. … My wife was living with her father at the time, in Teaneck, and with our daughter. So, we got home, I don't know, at around eleven o'clock at night or something like that, [got] back in, and we woke our daughter up. … My wife told her to go over and give Daddy a kiss, and she went over and kissed my photograph, because that's who Daddy was to her. Now, that's, I'll never forget that.

JK: At the time, especially when you were in the Pacific, how did you see your personal role in the war? What was your feeling about it?

RZ: I thought of my personal role then, and even now, looking back on it, [laughter] as about as insignificant as it could possibly be, and, you know, I was, as I said, … a rear area soldier for almost all the time and you wonder, you know, what the heck you were doing back there. So, you weren't exactly in the mainstream of things, but you made do. So, no, I don't have any heroic war stories to tell, I'm afraid. [laughter]

JK: Everybody does their job.

RZ: Yes, yes, well, that's it. You have to assume that, somehow or another, but you begin to wonder about the worth of it, sometimes, when you saw the rather insignificant things you were doing at the time, compared to what other people were experiencing.

JK: I think that concludes the interview. Is there anything else you would like to say, anything that comes to mind?

RZ: No, just that, after the war, I worked for one company, ITT [International Telephone & Telegraph], for thirty-seven years, until I retired, and, again, ending up in the division of ITT that was in military electronics. … Fundamentally, our company was involved in airborne electronic countermeasures equipment, and so, I still had a second-hand association with the military, for at least the last half of my career anyhow, because of having either the Air Force or the Navy or,

also, of course, we had some equipment on those Army helicopters, too, as well, … but our work was just for the military. So, I ended up sort of having a military connection even in my civilian job.

JK: I would just like to thank you for a very informative interview.

RZ: [laughter] I hope it was. Thank you, Jared.

JK: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Maria Juliano 2/3/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 2/13/10
Reviewed by Robert Zeliff 2/26/10