

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD FIMMEL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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LOS ALTOS HILL, CALIFORNIA

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Matthew Lawrence: This begins an interview with Richard Fimmel on August 21, 2007, in Los Altos Hill, California, with Matt Lawrence and ...

Jessica Thomson Illingworth: ... Jessica Illingworth.

ML: Mr. Fimmel, I just want to thank you for being here. It is a pleasure to be able to interview you. Where and when were you born?

Richard Fimmel: I was born in Somerville, New Jersey, on the 29th of November, 1924.

ML: I want to ask you a little bit about your parents and where they came from. Can we start with your father?

RF: My father comes from Germany and my mother comes from Poland and Germany, a combination.

ML: What did your father do?

RF: My father was an entrepreneur most of his life. He started out at farming, and then, developed several businesses, a restaurant business, a gas station business, did some building.

ML: What about your mother?

RF: My mother was, basically, a homemaker.

ML: Do you know how your parents met?

RF: Yes, as a matter-of-fact. My mother came to the United States from Poland at the age of sixteen and was working for a family in New York City. The husband played cello at the Metropolitan Opera, and this introduced her to opera at that time and she was an opera lover all her life. She was riding the subway in New York City, as was my father, and he happened to see she was reading a German newspaper and he summoned the courage to speak up and talk to her and this is how they met.

ML: When were they married?

RF: My parents were married on the 28th of April 1918, in Somerville, New Jersey.

ML: Did they settle in New Jersey when they came over?

RF: My father had settled in New Jersey and, of course, upon marriage, my mother joined him there.

JJ: Did they ever talk about their boat ride over to the US or why they emigrated?

RF: No, not that I recall.

ML: Where did you grow up? Did you grow up in Somerville?

RF: Just outside of Somerville, New Jersey, on a farm.

ML: Could you tell us a little bit about that, working on the farm?

RF: Well, ... I enjoyed life on the farm. We had a few hundred acres and it was a typical family farm, where you raised crops and you had cows, pigs and horses and did the things that needed to be done to tend [to] the animals, get the crops in and take care of the place. My mother kept quite a flock of chickens. She had about a thousand of them, [laughter] and, at that point, eggs, sold in the local stores in Somerville, was a cash crop, along with milk delivered to the local creamery.

JJ: What chores did you have on the farm?

RF: Oh, bring in the cows, [laughter] swim through the flooded meadow, if necessary, behind them, to get them home, help with the milking, help with the chickens. My least favorite chore was cleaning the chicken roost of you-know-what. [laughter]

JJ: Your father was primarily a farmer at this time.

RF: Yes, at that time, he was primarily a farmer.

JJ: Okay.

RF: And, somewhere along the line, somebody got into the barn, apparently, fell asleep smoking and everything burned down. We lost the animals and the equipment, and so forth. ... At that time, my father needed to do something to save the farm. Since he had learned from his father about brewing, he made applejack and would sell this. This, I believe, was during the Prohibition time. [laughter]

JJ: I was just going to ask.

RF: And this made the farm a very popular place for all the relatives, from New York and Connecticut, and so forth. They'd come out on weekends and have a gay old time, [laughter] but his goal, which I admire him for, was simply to replace his loss, the barn, so [that] he could continue. ... When he had that accomplished, he decided to destroy the still and stop doing what he wasn't supposed to be doing. As the things were on a pile, burning, the Alcohol Beverage Commission showed up and said, "Mr. Fimmel, you're a lucky man." [laughter]

JJ: How old were you when he was brewing?

RF: Well, if it was in the '30s, during Prohibition, I must have been eight, something like that.

JJ: Old enough to know, then.

RF: Old enough to remember a little bit of it.

ML: Where did you go to elementary school? Do you remember that at all?

RF: Yes, I do. I went to a one-room schoolhouse called Cedar Grove School.

ML: Where was that?

RF: Well, that's out in the country. We were three miles from Somerville and this was maybe another mile further away, out in the countryside. We had just the one schoolroom, one teacher and eight rows of desks for kindergarten and first grade through eighth grade. Some rows were empty. Some years, there'd be no third grade, and so forth. I went there until 1936, at which time the state started a centralized school system in New Jersey. We were then transferred to a central school, and we got bus transportation. Prior to that, we had to walk to school, about a mile, which was probably very good for us, exercise-wise. [laughter] The new school was called Green Knoll School. That's where I went through sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

ML: Do you remember your teachers?

RF: Well, I remember the teacher in the Cedar Grove School, the first school, a Mrs. Eakley, E-A-K-L-E-Y. I don't know that I can remember any details about her, except that we all liked her, and she had quite a chore on her hands. [laughter] We'd come in in the morning, in the winter, and the first thing, the whole school would gather in the furnace room while she stoked the fire, to warm it up, and then, when the upstairs got warm enough, we went back upstairs into the large schoolroom.

JJ: When you were at Cedar Grove, how many students were in your grade?

RF: ... Probably three or four. That's about all there was in any grade at one time. [laughter]

JJ: When you moved to the second school, for sixth, seventh and eighth, was that a lot bigger?

RF: That was a lot larger. There, you had anywhere from twenty to forty per class.

JJ: Do you remember that being a big change for you?

RF: Yes, but it didn't disturb me in any way. [laughter] I found it interesting. In fact, that is where I first [took up piano]. A lady came to the school, a Miss Colt, offering piano lessons, and I wanted piano [lessons]. I wanted to study piano so badly that I arranged to take lessons. I had no piano at home, but we had cousins living across the road from us and they had a piano. I had arranged with them to practice on their piano, after I got my lessons. The day I came home from my first lesson, there, in the living room, was a shiny [Horace] Waters Grand Upright Piano that my parents had bought for me.

JJ: Very nice. Did you have a lot of family living near you?

RF: We had cousins all over the place. [laughter] Yes, that's something I actually miss out here, the large extended family, which we don't have here. I've got a couple of cousins out here and that's it.

JJ: Did you have brothers and sisters growing up?

RF: My mother had four boys. ... When I was one, my brother was three and the others were five and six. The two oldest tried to start a fire in the kitchen stove. Apparently, had seen my dad use kerosene to light a fire, but they used gasoline. They died that day, as a result of burns.

JJ: Both of your older brothers?

RF: Both of the older brothers, yes, and my mother often spoke of it, and I sometimes wonder how she got through it, because she said Eugene, the oldest one, told her not to cry, "You still have the other two," which was very insightful for a child that young.

ML: Yes.

JJ: Right, for a six-year-old.

RF: So, it was just my older brother, Gustav Adolf, and me, that I remember, because I don't remember them at all.

ML: Growing up, what did you do for fun?

RF: For fun?

ML: How did you pass the time?

RF: Well, we'd play baseball, we'd go swimming, we'd go bike riding, we'd go jump out of a haymow into a wagon of hay, [laughter] things like that, ... things that, typically, youngsters do on a farm with what's available to them.

ML: Did you hang out a lot with the other kids in the neighborhood?

RF: There weren't that many to hang out with, but there were a few friends, that the closest house was probably almost a half a mile away. [laughter]

JJ: Did you work outside the farm at all?

RF: No.

ML: Do you have any recollections of any hardships you faced during the Great Depression?

RF: No. Fortunately, living on a farm, there was always enough to eat and, as far as the financial hardship might be, I think I was too young to be aware of that, or certainly wasn't made aware of it.

ML: Did you hear stories of people in town losing their houses?

RF: You heard stories of people losing their homes. It's difficult to say if I specifically remember or if I remember being told about them, during the Great Depression, in 1929, where, in New York City, there were reports of people jumping from high story windows to end it all, which is probably well documented.

ML: Did people ever come to your farm asking for food? Do you remember any of that?

RF: Occasionally, there would be some, I don't know if you'd call them "vagrants," at that point, they called them "hobos," come along and ... they'd ask for a chance to work for a day or two, to have some food, and my parents were fairly generous that way and would give them some work to do and gave them something to eat.

ML: Where did you go to high school?

RF: Somerville High School, Somerville, New Jersey, from 1938 to 1942.

ML: What do you remember about high school? Did you play baseball in high school?

RF: No. ... Since we lived a few miles outside of town, that limited your extramural activities, ... because we were bused to and from school. I was in the school band. That was basically the school activity that I was able to participate in, to play in the school band. I would also play piano for assemblies, for some school songs, that type of thing.

ML: What instrument did you play in the band?

RF: Baritone horn. [laughter] It's a pretty big thing.

ML: Was it mostly for football games and things like that?

RF: In the band, we would play at football games and, at certain assemblies the band would play some music, preliminary or so, as the group gathered in school. ... Otherwise, musically, my major activity was practicing piano. I recall, my mother would, on the weekends, sometimes, scold that I should stop practicing and go outside and get some sunshine, because I would sit at the piano six, seven hours a day, if I weren't chased out. [laughter]

ML: You had a real love of music early on.

RF: Yes.

ML: Okay.

RF: That's what I find so disturbing about my present, sudden, hearing loss in my right ear.  
[laughter]

ML: Was your father a Republican or Democrat? Did he ever talk about Roosevelt and his opinions?

RF: I believe they were supporters of Roosevelt, yes.

ML: Okay.

RF: There wasn't much political talk in the house.

ML: Were you aware of the events in Europe during high school? Were there ever talks about the war?

RF: Well, that was a little earlier. ... You're talking the '20s, early '30s?

ML: Yes.

RF: Yes, as we approached World War II, because it was very obvious, and my parents, my mother, in particular, kept correspondence with her sisters. She had four sisters and a brother, yet, over there, and various cousins, and was aware of what was going on.

JJ: Were they in Poland or in Germany?

RF: Both.

JJ: Okay.

RF: She comes from the part of Poland that was once Germany, then again Poland, ... where the border switched back and forth. Hence, when she was raised, she learned Russian, Polish and German and, when she came here, she learned English. So, she was fairly conversant in the four languages.

ML: Your father was of German descent. Did he ever talk about his opinions on World War I and who he supported then?

RF: No. I don't recall any discussions about World War I.

ML: Okay. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, were you still in high school?

RF: That was 19--

ML: 1941.

RF: '41. I graduated high school in '42, yes.

ML: Do you remember that day?

RF: I remember it, but I don't remember specifically where I was when I got the news. I know a lot of people do, but I don't. I probably got the news at home, on the farm. Where else would I have been? either in school or at home.

JJ: Do you remember your reaction?

RF: Oh, I thought it was terrible. People were very disturbed by this and said all kinds of nasty things about the Japanese who were attacking us.

ML: Did you know, at that time, that you would be involved in the conflict?

RF: Well, I graduated high school in '42 and saw that it was probably inevitable that I would be drafted. My high school physics teacher, a Mr. Greiner, contacted me in college, at Rutgers University, to come see him. ... He said that, for his better students, since I was a straight "A" student through most of high school, there are some programs he would like to recommend, if we're willing to volunteer, because we would get into a branch of the service that we wanted to get into, plus, get some extra training. ... He was very persuasive and I decided to drop out of school and enlist in the military, to get into the pre-meteorology training program in the Army Air Corps. The Army, being typical Army, when I finished all that training, what did they do? They transferred me to the infantry. [laughter]

ML: Was the teacher who contacted you in the military?

RF: No. He was a civilian.

ML: He was just trying to give you some advice.

RF: He was trying to do something for his students that he thought was worthwhile doing.

ML: Did you have a favorite subject in high school, physics, perhaps?

RF: I liked all the science and math programs.

ML: Did you have a favorite teacher?

RF: Probably Mr. Greiner and George Shay, Miss Gertrude Flynn. These are the three that stand out the most.

JJ: Did your parents go to college?

RF: No.

JJ: What about your older brother?

RF: Yes, he did. He went to Newark College of Engineering and graduated from there, with a degree in civil engineering.

JJ: Were your parents very supportive of you and your brother going to college?

RF: Oh, yes, yes, my mother in particular. [For her], education was important. There was no question that we were going to go to college.

JJ: What made you decide to go to Rutgers?

RF: Well, number one, I got a scholarship, what they called the Sears Roebuck Scholarship at that time, with full tuition for four years, and I started, but, then, I dropped out to enlist in the Army Air Corps. When I returned, after almost four years in the military, we had the GI Bill and Rutgers asked me if I would be willing to relinquish that scholarship, so [that] it might be available for someone else, and seeing no advantage to it, except that I have the record that I had a scholarship, [laughter] I did.

JJ: How did you get the Sears Roebuck Scholarship?

RF: I'm not sure. I think it was on the recommendation of one of my high school teachers. [I am] almost certain that's what it was.

ML: You entered Rutgers in the fall of 1942.

RF: Yes, and left in the beginning of '43. So, I wasn't there very long. [laughter]

JJ: That was just about one semester then.

RF: Not quite. It was in February [that] I was out already.

ML: What do you remember about your first days at Rutgers?

RF: Well, I started out living at Hertzog Hall, [then part of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary]. There was a group of college students that were not seminary students that had an upper floor there that they dubbed "Hell's Kitchen." [laughter] That was just those first few months that I was at Rutgers. I enjoyed it there, found it very interesting. However, when I returned, I was married. ... My parents offered us the opportunity to live at home until I finished college, since they had lots of room in the farmhouse. I commuted to Rutgers, so, there ended my campus life again. [laughter] I became a "commute" student, which doesn't allow you the time to participate in all the extracurricular activities that one does at college. You also don't develop the friendships that you can when you live on campus, which is a shame, but that's the way it was.

ML: Did you join any clubs or anything?

RF: I was with the Glee Club for a short time.

ML: Did you enjoy that?

RF: Oh, yes, enjoyed that a lot.

ML: Would you travel with them? Did they go to different concert halls?

RF: They did, but not during the short period that I was with them. I know that [F. Austin] "Soup" Walter, as they called him, was leader at that time, he was very ambitious for them and took them all over, but, when I returned from the military, I didn't rejoin, because, again, it wasn't feasible as a commute student.

JJ: You mentioned earlier that your mother was very pro-education. When you decided to leave Rutgers, how did she take that?

RF: Well, she didn't take it very kindly, because I was going into the military and she didn't want her son to go into the military, if she could help it, as most mothers felt at that time, but she didn't try to stop me; she tried to discourage me, but didn't try to stop me.

JJ: What about your father?

RF: The same. They pretty much agreed on these things.

ML: Do you remember where you initially enlisted and the day you signed up?

RF: I reported to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and then, wound up in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. From there, as part of this pre-meteorology cadet program, ... I went to Hamilton College, in New York State, for one year. I completed that program, and, from there, wound up back in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, again, or for the first time; ... I don't recall if the first time was there, and wound up with the combat engineers, 287th Combat Engineers, and went overseas with them. ... We were in England for awhile, this was after D-Day, and, on Christmas Eve of 1944, I remember crossing the English Channel to France. I wanted very much to be with some of my high school buddies on a ship and was in line to board and they cut the line off just before we reached the gangplank. I had to wait for another ship, which was, again, an interesting circumstance, because the ship I wasn't able to board went down with all hands onboard. It was from a U-boat attack. [Editor's Note: Mr. Fimmel may be referring to the sinking of the *Leopoldville*.] In France, ... I was in Saint-Nazaire, where we were in a holding position. We had a group of Germans in Saint-Nazaire, but our instructions from General [George S.] Patton, we were Patton's Third Army, was to hold them, not to attack or try to drive them out. They're not hurting anyone, why have an excess loss of lives? If this one battalion can hold them, that's fine. We would allow one little, we called it the Fieseler Storch, a Fieseler Fi 156 Storch, like a Piper Cub, a day to go into Saint-Nazaire without harassing it, but, anything other than that, they would shoot at. So, they just had their one communication flight a day. Another interesting anecdote is that, one day, some of our artillery people got a little overly ambitious and shelled

the town of Saint-Nazaire and, the next day, the commandant sent us a message saying that, "That wasn't really very nice, because that was their only entertainment," we blew up the theater, "and wouldn't we lend them some of our American movies?" and we did. [laughter]

JJ: That is funny.

RF: ... From there, after being in that, with all those hedgerows and living in a foxhole for so long, we were moved on towards the Belgian front, the Belgian "Bulge," but, by the time we reached there, the worst fighting was over, and we were on [the move]. Patton was already on the march entering into Germany and, shortly after that, the war ended, in Europe. At that point, I was asked, "Do you want to go to the Pacific and fight the Japanese or would you like to go to Austria and be in military government?" because I spoke German and I had some college behind me. The military were looking for someone that might be useful for the adjutant general's department. This, of course, was a no-brainer for me. I opted for going into military government and wound up in upper Austria, first, down around Linz, Austria, then, moved up to the town of Schärding, which is on the border, on the Inn River, on the border of Bavaria and Austria. ... There happened to be a friend of mine that had been with the military, serving with that same group in Schärding, Austria. There, I took over the position of public safety officer at that military government [installation], which put me in charge of the police, the borders, gasoline rationing, passports, passes, and prisons, at the ripe old age of twenty and twenty-one. ... The military is known for doing things like that, turning awesome responsibility over to people who are barely ready for it. I took my position very seriously. Then, one day, just before lunchtime, my interpreter, whose German was much worse than mine, because I was fluent in German, raised bilingual, [laughter] but it was handy to have an interpreter, to interface with the public, ... asked if I would see one more person, that she so much wanted [to see me], because she'd been waiting in line all morning. ... In came this adorable, cute, little blonde and I spoke to her through an interpreter. She wanted a pass to go to one of the next towns. This was necessary, because, military government, we had issued an edict that the DPs (the displaced persons from Germany that had fled to Austria, they were fleeing the Russian Front) were required to get a pass, because they would say, "Oh, there's someone from my hometown here and there," and so forth, and they'd tie up all the bus seats and everything, traveling around, trying to locate acquaintances. This is why that edict had been issued, and I gave her a pass, and then, a few days later, I said to my interpreter and the staff that we had there, "Remember that blonde that was in the other day? Did she leave an address? I'd like to find her," and [they] looked and looked; no, couldn't find her. The girls that I had keeping files there didn't have the remotest idea of how to organize a file system. [laughter] They couldn't find anything. One day, I was driving around town, in my jeep, and there was a sign that said, "Vehicles Forbidden," in German, but that didn't bother me, since I was in charge of the police. I drove down the slope and, there, sitting on a bench, in her bathing suit, was the cute, little blonde. [laughter] I got out of my jeep and started talking to her in German, trying to arrange a date, which really bothered her a lot, since she didn't like the idea that I had pretended not to speak German when she was in my office, [laughter] and you've just met her. That's Judy. We got married the following year, in Linz, Austria.

JJ: You mentioned that you originally planned to study meteorology, or that you had studied meteorology when you were in New York. Do you remember anything about that training?

RF: It was, basically, a lot of mathematics and physics and meteorology, as it was done at that time. Nowadays, with satellites, it's a lot more precise. [laughter] I do recall there that something that impressed me was, ... [on] the world map, there were a few coastal areas with a little bit of green, a deep shade of green, which were considered the prime living areas in the world, and prime amongst those was the coast of California. [laughter] When I returned from the military, where I'd been in a marine, West Coast climate in Europe, the heat and the humidity [of New Jersey], ... in the summer, was just so oppressive that I, both [of us], determined, if we could, to move out to California some day. When the opportunity presented itself, we did. I know that Judy found the heat almost unbearable, sometimes, in the summer. If you live in New Jersey, you know what I'm talking about, ninety percent humidity and temperature, and the classic remark she made one day was, she says, "You know, if I had known that the climate here is so bad, I'm not sure I would have married you." [laughter] That clinched it; I figured it was time to leave New Jersey.

ML: I want to ask you about your basic training. You said it was in Mississippi.

RF: No, I'm going to change that. My basic training was actually in New Jersey, out of Camp Kilmer or another camp, and what we did is, they took us down to Atlantic City. We did our basic training on the beach in Atlantic City.

ML: Can you describe some of the exercises you had to do there?

RF: Just lots of calisthenics and exercise, and so forth. We didn't have any of the rifle or weapons training. We got that later, at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, but that was just, basically, your preliminary basic training and conditioning, to toughen you up a little bit from the soft civilian condition. [laughter]

ML: In Camp Kilmer, was it mostly people from New Jersey, or was it people from all over?

RF: I really don't know.

ML: Okay.

RF: I know there were many from New Jersey, but whether it was only New Jersey, I don't know.

ML: Then, you went to meteorology training. It was at a college, right?

RF: Hamilton College, in Clinton, New York, outside of Clinton.

ML: Did they still have civilians there as well, at the college?

RF: Yes.

ML: Did you ever interact with them?

RF: Not very much, because we were kept very busy, with our studies, and then, with the few things that the military required us to do. While there, I formed a band for our battalion and was the director of the band, marching in front of the band. I don't know how well we played, but we had fun doing it anyway. [laughter]

ML: Were your teachers civilians?

RF: Yes, teachers were civilian.

ML: Were your studies rigorous?

RF: Oh, yes, it was a concentrated program. ...

ML: Did a lot of people get washed out? Do you remember any of that?

RF: Some got washed out, but not a whole lot. I believe they were fairly selective [in] who they took there.

ML: Okay. How long were you in the pre-meteorology program?

RF: That was a one-year program at Hamilton College.

ML: When did you know that you would be transferred back into the infantry?

RF: Well, we spent a couple of days in New York, at City College, dorms, and, next thing we knew, we were on our way to Mississippi. The military didn't spend a lot of time telling you what they were going to do. They just told you, "Get your things together. You're moving." [laughter]

ML: Did they transfer your whole class back into the infantry?

RF: They were dispersed to different places. They didn't all go into the infantry. I don't know where they went. We didn't all come to City College. ... They probably went back to areas near their home areas and were dispersed from there, because I really only remember two or three coming along back to New York and New Jersey.

ML: Once you got to Mississippi, what was that like?

RF: Well, that was basic infantry training, where you got your rifle and all your military training along those lines. What's to say? I mean, you learned to shoot, you learned about grenades, you learned that you'd better dig a foxhole and to keep low, "you do this," and so on.

ML: In the basic infantry training, was that made up of people from all over the country?

RF: Yes.

ML: Was it your first experience meeting people from the South, the Midwest or the West Coast? Do you have any impression of that?

RF: I don't have any particular impression that I was impressed by differences of people coming from different parts of the United States.

ML: Did you notice segregation at all?

RF: No, I didn't notice it, but, come to think of it, I don't recall that we had any blacks in our group, which is what you were probably leading up to. I don't think so.

ML: How long were you in training there?

RF: Probably, I'm trying to backtrack from when we went to England, probably just a few months and then on to England, where we were for awhile before we crossed the Channel and got over to France.

ML: Could you describe your trip over to England?

RF: No, I don't recall, specifically, except that it was a troopship and it wasn't too comfortable, [laughter] and I didn't get seasick, thank goodness, and that's about it. My recollection of that, I don't know whether I've blocked it out, [laughter] but my recollection is not very good.

ML: Where did you stay in England? What do you remember about your time in England?

RF: It was short and I remember very little. I know that we were not far from London, somewhat north of London. I don't recall the specific locale, and I recall, a couple of times, getting into London before we shipped out and moved out over to France. If I'm correct, I doubt that we spent more than six or eight weeks there before they moved us on.

ML: Do you remember crossing the Channel?

RF: Yes, indeed. I remember all the torpedo explosions, and so forth, all night long, as we crossed on Christmas Eve of 1944.

ML: Was there a generally tense mood on the ship?

RF: I guess I have to answer yes to that. We certainly weren't relaxed under those circumstances. I don't recall any panic or people showing great fear, or something like that. I don't recall that at all. Fortunately, when you're young like that, your mind thinks you're immortal and you don't think of the catastrophic events that might happen.

ML: Were you excited about going over?

RF: Well, we were excited. Now, if you mean, "Were we enthusiastic?" I don't think there was any great enthusiasm, but we did what we needed to do. I don't recall anybody saying they don't want to go.

ML: After you landed in France, could you take us through the first few days?

RF: Well, we landed on Christmas Day morning and got off the ship and were immediately transported, by two-and-a-half-ton trucks, to where we were put into this holding position there, with no time wasted, no Christmas holiday that day.

ML: In the holding position, was that your first taste of combat?

RF: Yes. That was the first instance of getting shot at, and so forth. I recall that I was working, at that time, with communications; I went out to check one of our telephone lines back to battalion headquarters and I'd gotten through the hedgerow and was going down this field, following the line, when somebody called out to me, "Hey, Fimmel, get the hell out of there. You're in the middle of a minefield," [laughter] and, as I was heading back, one of the German gunners kept lobbing some shells to the left and to the right of me as I was dashing back to get behind the hedgerow. That will raise your adrenalin level a little bit.

ML: How long were you holding your position outside of that town?

RF: It seemed forever, but, if I am realistic, it was probably only a matter of weeks, a few weeks, because things were going so well for Patton that they wanted more troops coming up. Patton ordered everybody we could up to join the main force.

ML: While you were outside of this town, in a typical day, were you just on duty?

RF: You were on duty all the time. There was no leave. There was no place to go. You stayed out in the field, behind the hedgerow, got your food and ate and slept and did what you needed to do from day to day.

ML: You worked in communications.

RF: Yes, at communications within the battalion, yes.

ML: What were your responsibilities?

RF: To keep the equipment running and the lines functional. That was about it, just very basic field communications.

ML: How was the food? Did you have enough supplies? Was it short?

RF: I don't recall going hungry.

ML: Was the food good?

RF: It was a lot of military rations, prepared rations. Once in awhile, you'd get some warm food.

JJ: Did you have any contact with the English people while you were over there?

RF: With the civilians? no, none whatsoever. We were out in the field in France.

ML: When you moved, where did you go to?

RF: Well, from there, we went on towards the front, where Patton's Third Army was getting ready to enter into Germany.

ML: Did you ever meet Patton?

RF: No. I saw him drive by in his jeep a few times, but I never met Patton. [laughter]

ML: In your battalion, were there replacements coming up constantly or were you with the same amount of people the entire time?

RF: We didn't have many replacements, because, after we left Saint-Nazaire and headed towards Belgium and Germany, there wasn't intensive active combat going on anymore. The war was just, really, spiraling down to a very rapid end. So, there were not a lot of fatalities. In fact, I don't recall any in our organization.

ML: Did you get close to the other members of your group?

RF: Just a couple of them, a few of them.

ML: Was that common or did people mostly keep to themselves?

RF: Usually, you kept in close touch with people within your platoon or your company, and there was not an opportunity for a lot of socializing. You were too busy.

JJ: At that time, did you write letters back home? Were you able to receive any?

RF: Yes. I would write letters home to my parents.

ML: Did you see the censor bars? Did you get your letters censored?

RF: My mother had saved some of the letters and you could see where certain things, if you mentioned where you were, for example, that would be blacked out.

JJ: Was anything they sent to you ever censored?

RF: I didn't notice any censoring there; also, I received no letters, until the mail caught up with us, in Germany after war's end.

ML: Once you moved up, you said the action had spiraled down.

RF: Yes, the war ended, very abruptly.

ML: What do you remember about that?

RF: Well, I remember, we crossed into Germany and wound up in the town of Prüm and this is where, as I mentioned earlier, I was asked, "Do you want to go to the Pacific or do you want to go into military government?" From there, I was moved down into Austria and [made] public safety officer of the military government detachment in the town of Schärding. An interesting anecdote here is, ... the local prison was getting terribly crowded, because the Germans and the Austrians, they follow their rules, you know. [If] they catch some German trying to cross the border, to get back home to Germany, "arrest him, put him in jail," *vice versa*, for Austrians coming in. They caught them, arrest them, put them in jail. I had a prison which was meant to hold maybe eighty to a hundred people with over two hundred people in it. Now what to do about the crowding? ... I got no help, when I requested it, from [General] Mark Clark in Vienna, or other guidance. So, one day, I just decided to use some American initiative. I ordered a few two-and-a-half-ton trucks, I said, "I want you to," with prison guards, "load up all these prisoners and we're going to move them," and when they saw us putting them into the truck, with submachine guns facing them, I think they expected the worst. I took them out in the woods by the border to Germany and I said, told them, "Okay, now, you Germans, go that way, and you Austrians, go that way and get lost. [laughter] I don't have room for you in prison," and they were very happy and took off, and I never got any further inquiries from Vienna. I just sent a report to Vienna that the prison crowding problem had been resolved and was never asked how. [laughter] I couldn't see the usefulness of arresting [and] keeping people in jail who were just trying to get home when the war was over.

ML: Most of these people were in prison because ...

RF: The ones that I released were, virtually all of them, there simply because they were illegal border crossers. There may have been a few others. I didn't worry about that, either. No, the others, any criminals, had been transferred to a more secure prison in one of the neighboring towns, so that these were strictly border crossers caught crossing without permits.

ML: Very petty crimes.

RF: Yes. Well, petty; ridiculous, in my mind. It's, like, you get arrested because you crossed from California into Nevada or from New Jersey into New York or ... Pennsylvania. That's what it amounted to.

JJ: How were the DPs, the displaced persons, treated as a whole by the occupying government after the war?

RF: Well, Judy was in a town in Upper Silesia, [now Czech Silesia], which was right on the border of Poland, and I could tell you a little bit about her story, which will perhaps answer that question. ... They were being shelled by the Russians. They knew the Russians were coming in and she recalls running from doorway to doorway as the shells were coming down, trying to get back home. ... She got there just in time and one of the people in their apartment block who was a driver for the fire department was about to leave with his truck and some of the residents. He was a White Russian and, as a White Russian, he didn't want to stay there, because the Russians would have probably executed him, because he was working for the Germans. ... She got a ride on the hook and ladder, in either the beginning of January or February of '45, hanging on the side, with her grandmother, her mother and her younger brother. They fled the area on the hook and ladder truck, got out of there, and, eventually, got into a train, it's a long story, if you want that, you'd have to talk to her. She wound up in the town of Schärding, Austria. ... When they arrived, they were, by local edict, dispersed to different families, that had room for them to stay. Upon arrival, they were met with a band playing music, welcoming them. They were welcomed by the Austrians as they arrived fleeing from the Russians, which was a welcome sight for them, after what they'd left behind, and so, I would say that the Austrians treated the DPs, as they called them, very generously. They housed them and fed them, and took care of them until the war ended, which was shortly after.

ML: How long did you serve as the public safety officer?

RF: Probably from May or June of '45 until, March or April of 1946, when we closed up that detachment and moved our headquarters to Linz, a larger city in Austria. I found that was a very interesting time. I had the authority and was able to make decisions on my own to do something useful, other than hide out in foxholes.

JJ: You enjoyed that a lot more than your time in the infantry.

RF: ... Oh, yes. That was a very interesting time and you felt you were doing something constructive. ... The war was over and you were accomplishing something, trying to do something to bring life back to normal, as best you could, and, of course, it was during that time that ... I met and was courting Judy. [laughter]

JJ: Do you remember how you courted her?

RF: Well, how do you court her? Well, I didn't have a great number of options. My transportation was a jeep. There wasn't much in the way of local movies, although there was a movie theater. ... There wasn't a lot of going out to restaurants or things like that. We would meet and we would take rides in the countryside. She didn't want to ride with me in a jeep, because, [if] the Austrian boys see a girl fraternizing with the Americans, they had what they called their haircutting *commandantura*. They'd catch these girls, if they could, and shear their hair off, because they didn't want the girls fraternizing with the occupying troops. ... So, whenever I brought Judy back, I would always wait until she entered the door and the door was closed, of the place where she was living, so [that] there's no one lurking to cut her hair. ... We would meet at the edge of town and get in the jeep. She wouldn't ride in the jeep in town, didn't want to be seen, [laughter] and take walks along the river, that type of thing. There wasn't a

great deal of diversion available. There were very strange things going on. I know that, ... well, there were reports in the *Stars and Stripes* of warning young girls not to be taken in by strangers, because there was a group of, I don't know if it was Russians or what it was, who would take these girls and they would butcher them and sell them for meat, and she almost got caught in one of those traps. She was very lucky that she got out of it. At first, we thought it was her imagination, but I went there with the police the next day and we saw the meat hooks and everything. So, there were terrible things like that happening, even after the war.

ML: Did you see similar things at Schärding?

RF: ... No, no, this was after we'd moved to Linz, Austria, and Judy and I were already engaged at that time and waiting for permission to get married. That permission had to come from General Mark Clark in Vienna and took forever. ... We had to go to Salzburg and she had to go through physical examinations, to make sure she ... didn't have any terrible diseases, and so forth. We finally got permission to get married and got married in Linz, Austria, on the 11th and the 15th of May, 1946; I say, two days? In Austria, as in many European countries, you have to first have a civil ceremony before you can have a church ceremony. After the civil ceremony, we went to church and Chaplain Woods, the military chaplain, wasn't there, and so, what [could we do]? We had a honeymoon planned in St. Wolfgang, which is a lovely town in Austria. We went on our honeymoon and we came back the 14th. On the 15th, I looked up Chaplain Woods. I said, "Where were you on Saturday? You were supposed to marry us. You'd agreed," and he says, "Oh, my gosh, I forgot. I went to Italy on a trip. [laughter] We'd better get you married right away. Where were you?" and I told him. He said, "Do you know you've been living in sin for these three days?" [laughter] We proceeded very quickly to have a wedding ceremony. It was not an elaborate affair, with just a few witnesses with us.

JJ: What was getting permission like? Was there literally a form that you had to fill out?

RF: Oh, yes, it was a whole procedure, and we credited it to Eleanor Roosevelt, who didn't want the American boys marrying foreign girls. She wanted them to come home single, which was understandable. I don't criticize her for it; I did at the time. [laughter] So, impediments were put in your way. Also so that they were convinced that this was serious, not just a whim that someone had, and, in that sense, it was probably a good idea.

JJ: Was your wife living with family?

RF: Yes, her mother and her grandmother and her brother.

JJ: Were they supportive of her marrying an American?

RF: Well, yes, I presume so. Of course, in the meantime, before we got married, Judy and her family were required to repatriate to Germany. We were separated for awhile. She had to go to Northern Germany, where they finally located her father, who had been working with the Red Cross in Berlin. ... When they located him, they went there. We corresponded regularly even though there was no mail across the border from Austria to Germany. Fortunately, Schärding is right on the border. The Inn River is the border, and I would go over to the town of Neuhaus and

drop my letters off and pick up her mail. Then, at one point, ... I got some time free and tried to drive up to Northern Germany, to see her, but the jeep broke down. ... I would turn it in at a motor pool and get another jeep, because I had orders with me that I was in pursuit of some criminal element, but, naturally, a stranger comes in, they don't give you their best jeep, they give you one that barely runs. I finally had to give up and return to Schärding, and I wrote her a letter telling her I couldn't make it. This was in November of '45 and, one day, as I came to the post office to get my mail, there was Judy, sitting on the bench, waiting for me to come get my mail. [laughter] ... Being in charge of the border crossing, and borderguards, I just took her across into Austria, and then, from there, we proceeded [in] getting our permission to get married, which took awhile.

ML: Do you remember hearing about when the atomic bomb was dropped?

RF: Yes, but, let's see, that was when again? ... What was the date?

ML: August of 1945.

RF: August of '45. ... Yes, I do remember. I was still in Austria. After we got married, soon thereafter, I requested military orders to send Judy home to New Jersey, to be with my parents until I could come home, the reason being, in Linz, we were having trouble with the Russians. The Danube was the border between the Russian and the American Zone, and the Russians kept coming over and we had to push them back with tanks, and everyone figured that Patton's going to get his wish to fight the Russians, which is what he wanted. He said, "Let's go get them. Let's finish this now," and I didn't want her there if a war was going to break out, and it looked like it might. She was already in New Jersey, with my parents, and I was there, finishing up my commitment, that I had signed a three-month waiver, and so on and on, until I knew she was there. Then, I stopped signing waivers and waited for my commitment to end, so that I could come home, and the atomic bomb was pretty exciting. We didn't really have an appreciation for what it meant to the people in Japan until much later.

ML: Was there a celebration?

RF: Well, people were happy about it, yes, it's true. ... Everybody was glad to see the war ending. I don't recall that they did any celebrating over in Austria. In the United States, they probably did, yes.

JJ: Being of German descent, was there any prejudice in the service against you?

RF: No, didn't notice it at all.

ML: When did you finally come home?

RF: November 1946.

ML: Do you remember your trip back?

RF: Do I remember?

ML: Your trip back home.

RF: A troopship, nothing except crowding and waiting for the trip to end. I don't even remember how many days it was long, it seemed like forever, [laughter] and happy when I arrived.

ML: Where did you come in?

RF: Staten Island.

ML: Were you discharged immediately?

RF: No, I was sent to Camp Kilmer and discharged from there.

ML: How long did you have to wait before you were discharged?

RF: It took about five days, which seemed like much too long. [laughter]

JJ: You went back to your parents' house after that.

RF: Yes, and, at that point, after discussing it with my parents, they, again, very generously, offered, it's all right for us to live there, ... room and board free, while I finished college. ... At that point, of course, we had a big allotment from the Veterans Administration, seventy-five dollars a month. That was all the cash we had. [laughter] So, free room and board made it possible, yes.

JJ: How old were you at that time?

RF: Well, if we're talking November of '46 and I was born in '24, that makes it twenty-one, doesn't it? I would turn twenty-two that year, only a week or so after my return.

ML: Then, you came back to Rutgers.

RF: Yes.

ML: Was that immediate? Did you want to get back to school right away?

RF: I got in, got back as fast as I could. I think right after the Christmas holidays, I was back at Rutgers.

ML: What did you study?

RF: Engineering, electrical engineering.

JJ: You mentioned earlier that your experience in going back to Rutgers was very different.

RF: Yes. It was as a commute student, which is not the campus life. So, I missed out on that. I had that for one year, at Hamilton College, and that was very nice, but, under the military constraints, it wasn't quite as nice as it would be as a civilian.

JJ: Did you take classes five days a week?

RF: ... Yes.

JJ: How did you commute?

RF: ... All during my military service, I sent home my allotment, that I could, of money to my mother, my parents, and, of course, it was intended for them, but my parents, being who they were, they banked it for me. When I came home, I had enough money to buy a new car. So, we bought a car when we came home and I had my own vehicle.

ML: What was it?

RF: It was a Hudson Commodore, nice car. They don't make them anymore. [laughter] ... At that time, while I was going to Rutgers, ... I decided that it would be very helpful for Judy to integrate into our society more if she could spend some time at high school. I undertook the chore of convincing ... the school administration to allow this married war bride to come to school with the kids there in school. Well, she looked younger than most of the girls that were there, [laughter] and they finally concurred, as long as we paid a few dollars tuition. That's how they got around the rules, and she would take my dad's car every day, morning, and go to high school there, and, basically, she took English, American History and "Problems of American Democracy," which were the type of things she didn't have in her education in Germany during the war. I was going to Rutgers, so we'd study together at home. [laughter]

ML: She went to Somerville.

RF: Yes.

ML: Were your electrical engineering classes rigorous?

RF: Oh, yes, they kept you busy. ... I doubt I slept more than six hours a night the whole years while I was getting my engineering degree. I recall, many times, that I would ask Judy to lie down on the sofa in the little room I had for my study in my parents' home, just to keep me company, because I'd be studying until one or two in the morning, and then, I'd have to get up at six again to go to school. I found it quite strenuous, and then, I also took a summer program, to fill in on the type of courses that your engineering training didn't offer at that time. I don't know if it does yet. In other words, you never got any of the ... classical courses that you might want, and I would take a summer class. I remember, one summer, I took a class in German, which was interesting. I wanted to learn the grammar better, because I could speak it, and so forth, and [I] enrolled in the second semester of first-year ... German. ... When the professor asked me,

"Have you ever had German before?" "No." "Did you have the first part?" "No." "And you want to enter this class?" "Yes." The students were guffawing at this dummy who thinks he's going to handle the second term. Of course, what they didn't know is that I was already fluent in German. [laughter]

ML: You were able to handle the class then.

RF: Oh, yes, that worked out well, and I learned something about German grammar. [laughter]

ML: When did you graduate from Rutgers?

RF: '54, when I finally finished with my master's degree. Remember, ... now, [if] you asked me when I got my bachelor's [degree], ... it had to be '49, I believe, yes.

ML: Did you have any favorite teachers while you were at Rutgers?

RF: Not particularly. Again, ... you didn't have a chance to develop as close [a relationship], as you were there in class, class, class, [then], off you went.

JJ: Did you find college more difficult than high school?

RF: Quite a bit more difficult, yes. I was used to getting all top grades and I had to accept a few [lower grades], a "C" here and there at college; that hurt. [laughter]

ML: You continued your master's work at Rutgers.

RF: I did that while I was working for the US Army Signal Corps in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. ... Rutgers offered classes there and, if you took courses for an advanced degree, you were excused an hour or so earlier from duty and could attend class, which then continued for an hour or so after normal duty time, and that's how I finished there.

ML: How did you get into the Signal Corps?

RF: Well, when I finished at Rutgers, I first started out as a research associate in the Physics Department at Rutgers and started my Masters Studies. From there, took an interview with the United States Army Research and Development Laboratories at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and got a job offer. I took that, and then, we moved there. That also was a busy time, working for a master's degree while I held a full-time job, raising a son and daughter, and studying at night.

JJ: Were you still living with your parents then?

RF: ... No. We were living on the New Jersey Shore, near Belmar.

ML: What job did you have with the Signal Corps?

RF: I can't recall the job title, but it was basically working on servomechanism development and design.

ML: Did you stay with that after you completed your master's?

RF: Yes, until we moved to California.

ML: When did you move?

RF: 1960. I remember, we moved into this house the day before Thanksgiving 1960, and the person who lured us to California [laughter] invited us to Thanksgiving dinner, the next day, which was very nice. I came to accept the job with Ampex International at that time. Ampex was big in the development of the tape drives for computers at that time. They were the leader in that technology and I took a position in international marketing with them.

ML: How long did you stay with them?

RF: I stayed three years. We, I, did a lot of traveling, to Italy and Sweden and Germany and France and England, for Ampex.

ML: Was the person who lured you out to California your future employer at Ampex?

RF: Yes, he was my boss at Ampex. Right now, he's my chess partner. We play chess on the Internet, even though he lives only a few miles away. We make a move every hour or so, when we get back near the computer. [laughter]

ML: After Ampex, where did you go?

RF: Well, at that time, my neighbor across the street and I would play handball at the Moffett Field military facility. He was executive officer for the Navy base at Moffett Field. One day, when we finished our handball game, he said, "You know, this is the Navy, but this is also NASA." I said, "NASA?" I didn't even know NASA was there. This was on a weekend. On Monday, I was at NASA, applying for a job, [laughter] because I had decided not to stay with Ampex, for business reasons. I could see the company was going downhill. They weren't developing new products at that time, and history later proved me to be right. I applied there and got a job offer with the Pioneer Mission Program, a NASA program. I don't know if you've heard of the *Pioneer* spacecraft series; particularly, *Pioneer 10* and *11* have been in the news a lot, lasted about twenty-seven years before it finally got so far away that we could no longer receive its radio signal. All of my time at NASA was on the Pioneer missions, with *Pioneer 6* through *Pioneer 13*, which we launched and managed. I started out as the project science chief, and then, the last twelve years that I was there with NASA, I was the project manager. *Pioneer* was the first spacecraft ever to travel beyond the asteroid belt and beyond Jupiter and beyond Saturn. We got the first close images of Jupiter and Saturn. If you walk around the house, you'll see some of them on the wall, [laughter] of Jupiter and Saturn, from the *Pioneer* spacecraft. That was an exciting time, doing things for the very first time ever. I have written books about our

missions. I enjoyed the time at NASA very much and stayed with NASA until 1993, when I retired.

ML: Your first title was?

RF: Science chief.

ML: What were you working on as science chief?

RF: I was responsible for the science aspects of the mission, namely the instruments. First, I was responsible for working with the scientists at the universities that NASA had contracted with to develop instruments to measure magnetic fields, or particles and fields, or ultraviolet, as we went through the atmosphere of Jupiter, and so forth, to see that they kept on schedule, that they got built and flight ready. Then, once the spacecraft, well, the various spacecrafts, were launched and flying, [I] was responsible for seeing that we got the data back, the telemetry from the spacecraft, got the data to the scientists, and, further, responsible to see that the scientists processed that data and published it. The idea that NASA was adhering to was these data [results] belong to the public and, "You, professor at this university," like Dr. [James?] Van Allen and others, John Simpson at Chicago, "are not privileged to harbor this data and get everything you can out of it before you release it to your colleagues. You have just this much time and it must be released." That was a busy time. It was also an exciting time, working with some of the best minds in the world. Then, when Charles Hall, the project manager at that time, retired, the director at the NASA Ames Research Center spoke with the science group, the scientists, ... saying, "Well, we don't have a project manager now. Do you have someone you'd prefer that we name as project manager?" and they all at once said, "Richard Fimmel," [laughter] as I was told later. I wasn't present, but I felt flattered by that. I took over then, until I retired, and we kept track of the spacecraft and saw to it that we gathered what data we could, and saw to it that it would be released to the public domain for scientists all over to use.

ML: Was it exciting, seeing the *Pioneer* launched for the first time?

RF: No, because I had to be at Ames and take control of the instruments when it was launched and I was never privileged to go and be present at a launch. I didn't get to see a single one launched, because I was chained [laughter] to my computers at NASA Ames, here in California. My brother lived in Florida, close to where the launches were. He told me how spectacular they were, but I never saw them myself. [laughter]

ML: You had to monitor the *Pioneer*.

RF: Well, first of all, when the spacecraft is launched and the telemetry starts coming in, one of the first things you want to know is, "Did the instruments survive the shock and vibration of launch? ... Can you turn them on? Are they returning data?" and we had to send those commands. That was my responsibility. I recall times like when we did our first Jupiter flyby. There is an intense radiation belt around Jupiter, and we were concerned about what would happen to the instruments from being subjected to this intense radiation, and, indeed, it caused some bits to flip in some of the instruments and changed the operating mode. I saw the telemetry

come in and said, "My gosh, the instrument mode is changed and isn't configured properly to receive data. We've got to get a command up," and at the speed of light it was a fifteen-minute roundtrip time. "We don't have time to waste." We had many people there, wanting to view the data. I recall rushing my way through the hall, pushing people out of the way to get to the control room, to send the commands to reconfigure the instruments. [laughter]

ML: Were you eventually able to reconfigure it?

RF: Oh, yes. We succeeded in doing it, yes. It's just that I remember the urgency of it, because you weren't in that radiation belt for very long and wanted to make sure we got that data or it was lost forever. You couldn't get the spacecraft back there.

ML: All right.

RF: We were told by NASA headquarters not to go on to Saturn, because they wanted *Voyager* to be the first spacecraft to go to Saturn, but our project manager and I decided that we're going to make a little mistake and target it so that, from the swing by Jupiter, it would automatically go to Saturn, and it did. [laughter] "Oops, sorry about that." [laughter] So, we were the first to get to Saturn also.

ML: Was it a competition then?

RF: It seemed to me like that was a political decision and didn't make any sense to us, and that's why we chose to make an error in targeting, a very calculated error. [laughter]

ML: How many children do you have?

RF: Two. I have a son and a daughter.

ML: Did your son serve at all?

RF: He served in the Coast Guard.

ML: How long?

RF: Oh, I don't know, a couple of years. He was a lieutenant in the Coast Guard.

ML: Were you in favor of that? Were you proud of his decision?

RF: Oh, yes. I was glad to see him do that, rather than get involved in another branch of the service. [laughter] That kept him close to home. [To his wife] You want to join us?

Edeltraud (Judy) Fimmel: No, I was just listening about the Coast Guard. Rick was in the Reserve for five years.

RF: Oh, five years in the Reserves, after his active duty. Your memory is better than mine.  
[laughter]

JJ: Was it exciting for your children, growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, having their dad working at NASA?

RF: Well, I know that they liked it. ... My son would be there when we had an encounter, and participate in the excitement, yes.

JJ: You would take him with you at times.

RF: Yes, he was standing in the hallway. [laughter] I remember pushing him out of the way when I was charging to the control room. The *Pioneer* program was very successful and headquarters was generous with giving out rewards. I was awarded two Exceptional Service Medals for my work on the missions.

JJ: Is there anything that we missed or that you think you would like to talk about a little more? It seems like you have given back so much.

RF: Well, there's probably a lot of things we missed that I could ramble on about, but my time at Rutgers, I think, we've covered, my school times we've covered, childhood, in broad brushstrokes. There weren't great, big specifics to speak about there. We did cover the military. I did get to see the inside of three concentration camps during my military time over there, which was a pretty gruesome experience.

JJ: Would you mind speaking about that?

RF: Not very much, but I do recall one instance where we came in and saw a pile of bodies about five feet high and twenty feet across, which is a pretty awesome thing to experience. Aside from that, my time in the military over in Europe was, more or less, except for the time in France, on the very pleasant side and interesting. ... In high school, going back to music, I became our church organist. There were a number of churches in town, when their organist had a vacation, they would schedule their service time to be an hour after ours, so that I could leave from our church and go and play the organ at that church, which I enjoyed a lot. I got big pay; I got five dollars a Sunday when I did that. [laughter] Well, take five dollars back in the '40s, it's quite different than five dollars now. You have to multiply it probably by ten or twenty, wouldn't you? for the value of it. The time at NASA here was all, really, Pioneer-related. I did a fair amount of traveling. NASA had deep space stations in three locations around the world, South Africa, Goldstone, California, in the desert, and out in Australia, outside of Canberra, Woomera. In this way the spacecraft was in view of an antenna, as the Earth revolved, at all times. As the missions progressed, my project manager and I felt that the people who are working so hard at these stations, to keep these stations up and gathering data, deserve to hear about what we've been learning. I made several trips to each of the sites, to give reports and talks on what was happening and what we were learning, to encourage them, as part of the team so that they don't feel just out in left field, doing their thing, and not have any idea what their efforts were accomplishing. That, of course, was very gratifying, to get to Australia a couple of

times, and Madrid. ... Fortunately, on some of these trips, I was able to take Judy along, at my expense, and she got to see a bit of that also.

JJ: What do you think about NASA now, with its funding struggles? Do you have any opinions about that?

RF: Well, NASA has had a funding struggle ever since the Apollo missions ended. [laughter] Being involved in unmanned space, in instrumented space, I saw what we could accomplish there, and I saw what NASA accomplished with manned space. When I was with NASA, I wasn't free to talk about this, but I felt that the return for sending man in space did not warrant the horrendous expense. We could get so much more [with unmanned flights]. We flew seven Pioneer missions for twenty-seven-some years for a few hundred million dollars. One shuttle launch costs four hundred million dollars. You can't convince me that the data return on shuttle missions, for example, even compares with what you get from scientific instruments over the years of time that they're gathering data, and I still feel that way. I believe that man, in his nature, wants to know what's beyond, and it's in us to want to explore and I applaud that. I think that's right. I also feel that NASA should have a manned space program. However, I think it should be paced so that we get as much as we can for the minimum expenditure and not do it for political or publicity reasons, and, thereby, rush and expend a lot of money unnecessarily. I don't see the merits of our present administration, the administration of George W. Bush, wanting to send a man to the moon again. We've been there, we know what there is and isn't to do there, unless we want to set up a space station there, and there's no talk of that, really. If you plan to set up a space station there as a starting point for a further launch, that's something else. I think that the emphasis in space exploration should still be something like eighty percent unmanned and twenty percent manned space. To me, that seems like a proper balance.

JJ: At NASA, did you see many decisions being made for political reasons?

RF: Well, yes. When Kennedy said, "We will put a man on the moon," that was a political decision. [laughter] That was a political decision, to show the Russians what we could do, and, at that point, that political decision made sense, because the Cold War was still active. At the present time, I don't think we need to impress people that we're able to do it. We know we're able to do it, the world knows we're able to do it. Sure, some are doing things that we aren't doing; that's okay. It's a world market in science, but I think that space exploration, and the type of thing that Carl Sagan did in popularizing science, is very important, because, in order to survive as a technological society, to stay at our peak, we need to have more people interested in science and math and physics, in general. We need more students studying the hardcore sciences, instead of, what I think, a lot of them say, "Oh, that's too hard. I'll take something else." If we don't, we're going to fall further and further behind, and I would not like to see that happen. Science and exploration of space helps to stimulate some people to want to participate and, in order to participate, they have to study science, and that's good. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

EF: ... Edeltraud.

Jl: Edeltraud?

EF: Edeltraud means, "The genuine one." An Edelstein is, "A gemstone." ... I wish my mother had called me Erika, because that was her first choice, and my aunt talked her out of it.

Jl: You go by Judy instead.

EF: My brother-in-law decided [to call me Judy]; if your name is Edeltraud, they call you "Trudy," Trudy for short, and I never liked Trudy. My brother-in-law called me "Judy" and it stuck.

Jl: This continues our interview. Mrs. Fimmel has stepped in and will now tell us a little bit about her experiences.

ML: Mrs. Fimmel, you grew up in Germany.

EF: I was born in Germany and I grew up in Germany, and, as the war was coming to an end, we could clearly see that Hitler is not going to be around much longer. ... My father was working in Berlin, as I think my husband mentioned.

RF: Red Cross, yes.

EF: ... For the Red Cross, and ... he wanted us to come and join him there and we wanted to spend Christmas at home yet. We stayed over the holidays and, right after New Year's, it started to get very bad. People were just fleeing and the streets were full of cars and carts and everybody was moving. When we did decide it was time we got going, we packed our suitcases and we had train tickets to travel. We went to the railroad station and were told, "There are no trains moving away, into Germany." All the trains were coming from there, to where we were, and, of course, the troop trains had priority, with nothing but soldiers being moved around. We were waiting for a train to come, so [that] we could board the train. In the meantime, the Russians decided ... to strafe the railroad station. That scared us. After three days, my mother said, "We're going home," and she said, "I don't care what happens; we just can't leave." We went home, ... but we hadn't unpacked [our] suitcases. We just put our luggage away and, next day, my mother was very uneasy. She said [that] I should go into the city; we lived in the suburbs. I should go back to the station and make sure there isn't anything coming. So, I did go. ... We had streetcars that would travel back and forth. I managed to hop on a streetcar to go to the railroad station and, while I was there, there was another attack by the Russian planes. I was running home. I was running a stretch ... when it was safe. My father always told me, "When you hear the whistle of the projectile over your head, [Mrs. Fimmel imitates its screech], and it comes over you, it can't hit you. It's already gone," he would tell me. So, I would listen for that. ... If anything went over my head, I felt I was safe and, when I heard them shooting and I couldn't hear that whistling, I ducked in the doorways and I was hiding and I waited and, after that, I started running again. It was quite a distance. I think it took me, just running, and I was a good runner, I was on the track team, [laughter] so, I think it must have taken me more than twenty minutes, twenty-five minutes. ... In the meantime, our neighbor, who was the commander for the White Russians, who were working for the Germans, was there with his hook

and ladder, [and he] had all those Russians on the truck, and my mother begged him to take us with him. She says, "You don't have to take us very far; just take us to a place where we can get on a train." So, everybody was milling around. They all wanted to go with him. So, he told us okay; he's going to take us. ... My mother was on pins and needles, because she was ready to get on the truck and I wasn't home yet, and there was so much commotion in the neighborhood, and I didn't know what was going on. ... My mother said, "Thank goodness you're here, and we are leaving; come on," and I had gotten a new coat for Christmas. ... I had saved my coupons to buy this coat and the coat was in the house in the closet. I said, "I have to get my new coat," and our neighbor said, "Back, back." He said, "We'll leave you behind," and he screamed at me. I just forgot about everything and I hopped on the [truck] and we left. We traveled on this thing. ... That was about eleven o'clock when we started and we traveled on the hook and ladder, until, ... I guess, yes, the sun started to go down. In the meantime, we saw, in the distance, all the flames and the bombs from the Russian attack, and the cows and the chickens and the animals were just running all over the countryside, ... from when they were open. They were really getting close to us, we had to get off the hook and ladder and we hid in trenches. Now, ... there were lots of trenches in Germany, because Hitler had us dig trenches all through the war. So, we would hide in trenches and, when the planes were gone, we all came out and went back on the vehicle. ... It was always awfully cold. We were out in the open. It was January and the roads were icy and frozen and we came around a corner and in front of us were, oh, about a dozen horses and German soldiers. They were trying to get hold of the horses. I guess they must have gotten away from them. All the soldiers were running after the horses and they blocked the road completely. As we're coming around the corner and it was all iced up and the hook and ladder started to slip. ... It's just amazing. We must have been over twenty people on this hook and ladder, and our neighbor's children were sitting by the pedals, on the floor, and, as we started to slide, we slipped down on the left side into the big ditch, but, luckily, I guess we had a little guardian angel, we were all sitting on the right side. When we came to a halt, everyone, the Russians, the White Russians, they all jumped off from the hook and ladder. They jumped off, and we were so stiff and frozen, we couldn't have jumped off if we wanted to, but we were sitting on top, you see. We were sitting on top and we were in one piece. My mother had a big bump on her head, but, otherwise, we were fine. One man was killed, because he didn't jump in time and he was crushed by the vehicle. He was crushed. So, there we were, in the evening, with no place to go, and we heard that the houses were mostly empty in that little village. People had already left, gone to relatives. There were lots of apartments that were not occupied. A woman came; she had three daughters and her husband was drafted for the *Volkssturm*. What would you call the *Volkssturm*?

RF: "The People's Army," they called it.

EF: At the end of the war, they took fourteen-year-old boys and men sixty years old and older. Her husband was drafted into the *Volkssturm*, and she says, "In my house, there's an empty apartment." So, we went there and we spent, ... oh, a number of days there, and the Russians were coming closer and closer and closer. First, we got away from them, and then, they were following us. We could hear the heavy tanks at night, when everything was quiet. So, we decided we can't stay there and we went to the border, where the Germans were holed up, and they said, "Don't worry. We are going to win. ... You don't have to be afraid." Well, we packed our stuff again and the woman, with her three daughters, she had a very big sled, big sled. They

put all their luggage on the sled. We didn't have a sled and we couldn't carry this stuff. My brother, how old was he then?

RF: Twelve?

EF: He must have been twelve. He fashioned a sled for us from scrap lumber in the backyard and he found some runners and he put it together. So, we could pull the sled on the highway on the snow. ... I don't know how many hours we walked and the woman had a friend in town, where we could probably wait until we could get a train, in that city. So, we walked until late at night and we came to the house, and, of course, my grandmother was with us.

Jl: Who was with you from your family?

EF: My grandmother, my mother, my brother and I, and then, the woman with her three daughters; that's our group. When we got to the house, well, the women couldn't walk anymore. They stopped and the oldest daughter and I were sent ahead to find out if the woman was home. We went to the house and we were throwing pebbles at the window, but there was nobody home. There was no answer. In the meantime, a car was traveling through the city, proclaiming, "There are two trains in the railroad station and you don't even need a ticket. You should come and leave, because ... the Russians were getting closer." Oh, we were so glad to hear that, and we got back to the others and my mother said, "Did you hear that, too?" and I said, "Yes. We heard the loudspeakers." So, we just took, you know, our last strength and we walked to the station. When we arrived the one train was already full and that train was going to Germany, in the vicinity where my father was, but we couldn't get on that train anymore. My mother argued with the conductor and she says, "Yes, but my husband is there and we have to go there," and he said, "I'm sorry, I'm not taking one more person." So, the train pulled out and we boarded the empty train. It's completely empty. We had a lot of choices where we wanted to sit, you know. So, we went through the train and we picked out a compartment, and I can't forget the picture of my brother, ... the contraption of a sled that he built, he gave it a kick [laughter] and he threw it [away], and he took our luggage and went on the train. ... On the train, we were [traveling for] seven days, stop and go, because the German [Army], troops had priority. And we were switched to side tracks.

RF: Sidetracked.

EF: Well, yes, we were just sitting there, but ... it was cold. It was terribly cold. We got some blankets and they would feed us bread and salami, at least we had something, until we landed in Austria. ... Have you been to Austria?

Jl: No.

EF: Austria is so pretty, and Switzerland; the whole area is just beautiful. So, we arrived, with the music and the Hitler Youth and, you know, all the fanfare, and they brought us into the one big hotel in the town, a small town, and we were sent to different families. ... People who had an empty room had to take some refugees in, because they didn't know what to do with us, and so, that's what happened.

JJ: That was how you met your husband.

EF: Yes, and I just loved Austria, and especially that little town. It was winter, it looked like a picture postcard. These beautiful, little houses and all that wood carved and things. It was just so pretty. When we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary, we went back there. Yes, we went back to celebrate there, with all our old friends.

JJ: Can you also talk about coming to America for the first time and living with your in-laws?

EF: Well, ... I was very fortunate, because they all spoke German and we corresponded, even before I met them. I felt very secure that I would be accepted. So, that helped a lot.

JJ: Did your mother worry about you traveling so far?

EF: My mother was very confident that everything's going to turn out okay.

RF: How about your impression when you arrived at Staten Island, seeing all that traffic and the Statue of Liberty?

EF: Oh, my goodness, that was very exciting. I came on a troopship, and just about a dozen war brides, and the rest were soldiers and WAVES and WACs and all the women personnel. ... We hit a hurricane on the ocean. ... Everybody was seasick. I didn't want to go into the cabin. I was fine and I stayed outdoors as long I could and I looked down and the ship was actually standing like this in the water.

ML: Almost vertical.

EF: I looked right down into the ocean, and somebody saw me there and said, "What are you doing here? Get downstairs." So, that was the end of my fresh air, [laughter] but it was a pretty rough ride. I never experienced a hurricane before, but, on the ocean, it was delightful. It was very pleasant, like California weather. It was cool and breezy, and, when we arrived in New York, we were late, because of the hurricane, and my in-laws came in from New Jersey to welcome me. ... Since we didn't arrive on time they went back home again, and then, had to come [the] next day. They were worn out, too, and it was hot. It was hot and humid. Well, it was July, and I wanted to make a good impression. I put on my best suit and everything was fine onboard ship and, once I hit the air, when I came out, all my makeup, was gone. [laughter] ... You know, it was just like a steam room, it was so hot. My mother-in-law and my father-in-law decorated the upstairs of the house, new wallpaper, new paint and new bed, it was so pretty. It was all in blue and white, and I couldn't sleep there, because it was so hot. There was this big, open, screened-in porch and a; what do you call these beds?

RF: Sofa bed.

EF: Sofa bed. They opened it up and I camped there until the heat was gone. I would run upstairs and get my things and shower and get dressed and I would come right back down again.

This was an experience. ... The cars were not air conditioned, you know, oh, gosh, and my father-in-law wanted to take me along everywhere he went. ... He wanted to buy a new tractor. We went to Belle Mead and he said to me, "I won't be long. I will just go in to ask a question." He left me there, around the car, and there wasn't a tree in sight and no shade. ... When we got back, your mother scolded him. Oh, she gave him what for. [laughter] ... When we approached the shore and I saw the Statue of Liberty and I looked in the distance, there was all ...

RF: You saw a few cars.

EF: ... There was no end to the line of traffic, and the cars looked so big, you know, just like toys, and I kept looking, looking, "This can't be possible, that they're all cars. I've never seen so many cars." ... Especially during the war, if anyone had a car in our neighborhood, there was a big excitement. Kids would come and investigate and look at all the parts and, my gosh, and, here, they were just every[where] and I've never seen so many cars. That was a different experience for me, but I was glad your parents lived in the country, where it was nice. I remember waking up and I heard the cow, "Moo." I thought, "Oh, isn't that delightful?" because I was raised in the city. I was so pleased to have some of the country life, and, of course, all the chickens.

JJ: The thousand chickens.

EF: Many chickens. ... Our friends and our children tell us, tell me, I should write it down, I should write a book, and I have not done it. I have procrastinated.

RF: Well, you'll get a copy now.

EF: Especially the years during the war, you know, and how hard times were, very hard.

JJ: What was your father doing for the Red Cross during the war?

EF: Well, because of all the attacks on Berlin and the vicinity ...

RF: What was he doing, search-and-rescue?

EF: He was doing that, and he was in charge of the units that were sent out to rescue the people. ... We were still living in our old home when he came home and had some time off, and he said to us, when we were squabbling about something, "You should be happy that you are here. You have no idea what's going on during the air raids. People are just losing everything. Houses are demolished. You see nothing but bodies and injured." I saw my share of dead Russians and dead people when we were traveling. After we had the accident and we were staying in the village in the house, we were running out of food. So, the two girls and I went to the next village, to the bakery. Since they were from that area they knew their way around. The three of us went to the bakery, to find out if there was some bread to be had. I bought two loaves of bread, and they bought three. We were coming back with the bread when six Russians approached us. They were prisoners who had probably gotten away because of all the chaos. We noticed that the prisoners had no shoes. Their feet were wrapped in rags and, oh, they just

looked like zombies on the road, and we were frightened. We said to ourselves, "What are we going to do if they attack us?"

RF: You were, what, about seventeen or sixteen at the time?

EF: I was sixteen at the time, and we said, "Well, if they get close to us, we will drop the bread, let them have the bread, they're probably hungry, and we will run." As we approached closer, we went all the way to the right side of the road and kept our eyes on them as we're marching by, and they looked and we looked. They didn't make a move, they kept right on going, and, boy, my heart was pounding, I'll tell you. We were so glad that we had passed them. Then, we went a little faster, [laughter] and we still had our bread. That was so important. ... While we were traveling with the hook and ladder, we ran out of gasoline. We would stop where cars had turned over in the ditches, with people still inside. The dead were in the cars. We would siphon the gasoline. ... You know, it's amazing, all you think about is your family and your life, when you see a picture unfold like this in front of you. You just think of your family. Of course, you're shocked and you can't help, they're already dead, but you are so grateful that you can still move and that you have hope; ... you're going to get out of this situation. No wonder I had nightmares, and my legs were frozen up to my knees and I had all these blue ...

RF: Frostbite.

EF: Frostbites on my [legs]. That lasted for over a year, until I went [to the United States]. I didn't do anything about it. I didn't even go to a doctor. What could he do? So, slowly, my legs got healed.

Jl: Do you know why your father was never drafted?

EF: My father was too old to be drafted. I mean, he was already working ... for the war effort, you see. He was already working in this. ... There were so many fires and my father was also a trained fireman; he was a volunteer fireman. He was an insurance agent before the [war]. During the war, everybody had to help; you just had no choice. I had to study at night and work all day. I worked in a big company. It was a ...

RF: It was a steel plant, wasn't it?

EF: It was a steel plant, a big steel plant. I worked in the office. ... I was a trainee and I went through the different departments, when I was in the loan department, my boss and I would go into the plant to pay the workers.

Jl: Did your mother end up staying in Austria?

EF: No. We had to leave Austria. We went back to the part of Germany where my father was, but it wasn't Austria; it wasn't pretty. I didn't like it. It was just so drab, and, of course, it was right after the war and people had nothing to eat. In Austria, we would help the farmers, go out in the field, and we would pick turnips and whatever they had planted there. We would help pick and we got potatoes and vegetables in return, which we'd take home and cook.

JJ: Were you reunited with your father then?

EF: Yes. When we went back to Germany, we were reunited with my father. He was so glad we were coming and he had gotten an apartment and had prepared it for us. So, that's that part of my life. Richard and I have been married sixty-one years, which is over seventy-five percent of my life.

JJ: Congratulations.

EF: Yes. It's been a wonderful life.

JJ: What are your children's names?

EF: Our son is Richard, like his father, and our daughter is Sandra.

JJ: [To Mr. Fimmel] Did your brother serve in the military?

EF: No.

RF: No. He had very bad eyesight and was 4-F.

JJ: He stayed home and helped on the farm during the war.

EF: No.

RF: No. He was working. Well, he was studying.

EF: ... Yes. He was city engineer of Coco Beach, [Florida]. That's during ... the time when Cape Canaveral was being built up and all these houses and many scientists were moving down there. He laid out everything.

RF: He laid out the streets, and so forth.

EF: He was a very smart man.

JJ: Thank you so much for your time. This concludes our interview with Judy and Richard Fimmel, and Jessica Thomson Illingworth and ...

ML: Matt Lawrence. Thank you both again.

JJ: Thank you.

EF: You're welcome.

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Reviewed by Peter Iodaci 10/18/08  
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/10/08  
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 11/11/08  
Reviewed by Richard Fimmel 2/23/09