

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLA P. RUSSO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH  
and  
SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK  
and  
JOHN CHAMBERS

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY  
MAY 31, 2006

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Nichola Pasquale Russo on May 31, 2006, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... Sandra Stewart Holyoak ...

John W. Chambers, II: ... John Chambers.

SH: Mr. Russo, thank you so much for coming in this morning. It is a long drive down from Massachusetts and we appreciate your being here with us. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

NR: I was born in Clinton, Mass., on Willow Street, in the room upstairs. [laughter] In that time, in those days, they did it all at home, and that was it, Clinton, Massachusetts.

SH: Can you tell us briefly about your father, what you remember about him?

NR: Okay. I never knew my father. He divorced my mother as soon as I was born, okay, and so, I didn't have a father. I had a stepfather when I was five years old. My mother married a Mr. Savesi. ... That was a very tough time in my life, because ... he did not like me and I did not like him, [laughter] as you might well expect, and he was a very, very mean kind of guy. He had two sons. ... One was my stepbrother, Dom [Dominick]. He was older than I. He was four years older than I was and his younger brother was Patsy and they were both good kids. ... Dom, I got along very well with him, because we did all the chores together, you know, killing the chickens and taking care of the chickens and taking care of the garden and we had a paper route at one time. ... We worked together pretty well. So, we got along well. Well, my stepfather was a very mean [man] and he was not a very nice guy and I never really liked him, and I still don't. [laughter] ... Patsy was the pet.

SH: History has not changed.

NR: No.

SH: Can you tell us a bit about your mother and her family background? You have some wonderful photographs that you shared with us.

NR: Right, right, so that my mother was a Trapasso. Actually, she was born out of wedlock, and then, ... a Mr. Marino came along and he ... wanted to marry my grandmother, ... even though she had my mother out of wedlock, and he was crazy about her. ... He loved her and they had seventeen more children.

SH: Wow.

NR: But, there were twins, a lot of twins in there, and the twins all seemed to disappear. They died, you know. ... There was a lot of that, so that, actually, twelve survived and I still have six uncles and aunts, yet. [laughter]

SH: Fantastic.

NR: Out of that group.

SH: Was your mother born in this country?

NR: She was born in this country, right. The picture you saw there, of course, ... I think my grandmother was only nine or eleven, was born in Calabria, Italy

JC: In the picture?

NR: Yes.

SH: She would have been the oldest of the Marino Family.

NR: That's right.

SH: Was she then adopted and became a Marino?

NR: Well, she just used the name. There was no formal adoption or anything. ... He didn't care whether she had ten kids. He just was crazy about her. [laughter] ...

SH: That must have been very rough for your mother, up until she remarried, to have to raise a young boy by herself.

NR: Yes.

SH: Can you tell us how she managed? Did the Marino Family help?

NR: ... No, the Marino Family didn't help, no, no, but I used to go down there in the summer and work on the [farm]. They were truck farmers, at that point, and we used to work ... in the fields that they had rented, cabbages and corn, whatever it was, [laughter] planting, and then, harvesting. So, I was down there the whole summer. ... You know, my uncle and I chummed together. ... He was only five months older than I was, Eugene Marino. We had great fun. I learned to swim down there. We were out in the field all the time. ... My grandfather, he was the one that ran the whole thing. He never worked. He never really worked. I mean, this man never really worked. He sat under the sun. [laughter] He's down there, he's standing under the hedgerow, in the shade, drink his hooch, and say, "Get busy." [laughter]

SH: Every crew needs a foreman.

NR: Every crew needs a foreman, but he had a good heart.

JC: This is outside of Worcester, Mass. This is West Boylston.

NR: Yes, outside of Worcester. This was in Clinton and surrounding towns, Boylston and all those small [towns]. He rented land all around those towns, wherever he could. ...

SH: Did your mother work outside of the home?

NR: My mother worked outside of the home. She was a seamstress, so, ... she worked most of her life as a seamstress, "Zip, zip, zip." [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates sewing.] She used to come home sometimes when a needle went through her fingernail.

SH: Did she always work for the same company?

NR: No, she changed companies when they didn't have enough work. ...

SH: That was what she did when she was raising you as a single mom.

NR: Yes, and then, when she got married, then, she just continued on her seamstress work.

SH: Who took care of you as a young boy, before you were five?

NR: My mother.

SH: During the day?

NR: Well, my grandmother. That's why I love my grandmother so much. [laughter]

SH: There was that family connection.

NR: Oh, yes, yes. So, I had kind of a loving beginning, and I had a lot of meanness when my mother married there, and then, I joined the Navy.

SH: Were you able, during that time, to still go to your grandparents' farm and work?

NR: Yes, yes.

SH: He allowed you to do that.

NR: Oh, yes, yes. He was glad to get rid of me. [laughter]

SH: How far was where you were living and going to school from this farm? Was it far?

NR: Yes. It was about two towns over, ten to fifteen miles away from West Boylston. It was probably a good half-hour, three-quarter hour, drive.

SH: Did you go by bus?

NR: No, no. They'd come and pick me up with the truck.

SH: Tell us about going to school. You were in West Boylston. (There is also another town called Boylston.)

NR: West Boylston, in West Boylston, and we were on the city line. We were on the Worcester line. We were living in West Boylston, we're on the city line and they called it, "The City Line." [laughter] It was all Italians. ... They actually lived in suburbia and they owned their own homes, ... two-deckers, and they had businesses out there and everything else. So, it was kind of an Italian [neighborhood] and we used to have [the] Woodland Street School. We went to [the] Woodland Street School, which was up on a little hill, and the hill's still there. It's smaller than I can remember, [laughter] but, anyway, yes. ... It was a four-room schoolhouse and they taught from the first grade to the sixth grade, and then, [for] the seventh and eighth, you went down to Goodale Street School, which was down in the center of town, but this little four-room ... schoolhouse, that, I remember. I can remember Mrs. Geberth teaching us English. I mean, she would teach us. She rammed English into us. "There's eight parts of speech," you know, all that. She really rammed it home, you know. ... One of the things that I always remembered was, ... they had a music program. The music program was [that] this teacher went around the schools and sang. So, she came around with her music and her name was Mrs. Whittlesee, with pince-nez glasses, [laughter] and she had this little, tiny harmonica, about that long, tiny, with three notes on it, and she would get it at the right pitch. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo whistles like the instrument.] [laughter] ... Well, she'd pass out the music and, of course, some of it was kind of safety songs. You know, they were safety songs, like, one was, "Remember your name and address, and telephone number, too. So, if, someday, you lose your way, you cannot find your street, walk up to that kind policeman, the very first one you meet, and simply say, 'I've lost my way. I cannot find my street,' and he'll be kind and help you find, the dear ones who wait for you." [laughter]

JC: Wow, bravo. After all these years, you never forgot it.

NR: I never forgot it.

JC: What are we talking about, first, second, third grade, something like that?

NR: The other thing that she did, she would pass out all this music and she had Italian songs, '*O Sole Mio*, *Santa Lucia*, etc., and we used to sing it in both Italian and in English.

JC: Bilingual.

NR: Now, we were not allowed to [speak Italian]. The family did not [want that]. Most of the families there did not want their children to speak Italian. ... They wouldn't teach us Italian. So, we only knew a few words, swear words and things like that, [laughter] but we did not learn the Italian language, but, you know, '*O Sole Mio*, I know the song. I won't sing it for you, but, anyway, yes. [laughter] Isn't that beautiful?

JC: Yes.

SH: That was the only way that you could keep your heritage.

NR: ... I mean, they were so thoughtful about that. Now, the schoolhouse is no longer there and, about five or six years ago, I went by it. ... The town used the land for recreation and I went by then. There was a lot of construction going on and we had a big rock in the yard that we used to play king-of-the-hill on and try to put as many kids on as we could. So, I went back and here is this rock. It's out there and the construction guys are out there to put in tennis courts. I said, "What are you doing with the rock?" He says, "We can't touch that rock." He says, "We cannot touch that rock. We can do anything we want up here, but we cannot touch that rock. That's got to stay, by order of the town fathers." [laughter] Can you imagine that? So many kids remembered; the kids always remembered that rock and I suppose there's people still in town there saying, "Don't touch that rock." [laughter] That's it.

JC: A symbol of the school.

NR: Kind of a symbol. The school is no longer there, but the rock is still there, surviving. Isn't that something?

SH: Fantastic. I was going to ask if you spoke Italian at home. The answer, obviously, is no.

NR: No. A lot of them would say, "Speak *Americana*. You speak *Americana*." [laughter]

SH: When they wanted to speak to each other, did they speak in Italian, so that you would not understand?

NR: Absolutely. That was a good thing. That was strategy, right. [laughter]

SH: I assume that you have an opinion about the bilingual language programs in America now, related to speaking Spanish.

NR: Spanish, yes. Well, they should learn English, right, absolutely. Any immigrant who wants to come over here and he wants to live in America, he should be an American. You know, he should try to be American. I mean, what is our heritage? You can question what heritage is. ... I went back to Italy, you know. You guys [his children and in-laws] sent me on my, what was it, seventieth birthday, right? ... It was great going there, seeing everything, ... but I couldn't relate to it, if you know what I mean. I could not say, "Well, this is mine." There's nothing there. There's nothing really there, except that it's nice, it's history and you appreciate all that and appreciate where you came from, but there's no ties. There's no emotional tie, for some reason.

JC: Worcester, Massachusetts, is made up of a lot of different ethnic groups, and was at that time, too.

NR: Right, right.

JC: Did you interact with any other groups, the Swedes, for example?

NR: Oh, yes, well, Clifford Peterson lived up on the hill. We had a family of blacks on the city line, as well, and other languages.

JC: His friend, in the school.

NR: ... Yes. So, there was a lot of them around there. We all played together and they were not the enemy.

JC: Not much friction?

NR: No friction, no, never. Then, when we went down to the center schools, down in the center of the town, to [the] Goodale Street Junior High School and Major Edwards High School, there was no clash.

JC: What groups were there?

NR: They were all, you know, the white WASPs [laughter]. We called them the WASPs; they called us the WOPs. They called us the WOPs, we called them the WASPs, but there was no animosity.

JC: No fights, no gang fights.

NR: Never, never.

SH: You never felt that there was any prejudicial treatment towards one group or the other.

NR: No. ... Obviously, the town fathers and everything else, they took such good care of us up there, ... you know, the four-room schoolhouse, that we just didn't feel any animosity towards us. I mean, we were being treated pretty well.

JC: You say they called you WOPs. How did you take that term?

NR: [laughter] Without papers.

JC: Yes, we know the derivation of it, but I meant, did you object to that term? Did it make you feel bad?

NR: Yes, sometimes. It depends upon [the situation]. You know, it's how you say it.

JC: Okay.

NR: It's how you say it, in a mean, disrespectful way.

SH: Okay. Did anyone ever use it against you? Was it ever spoken in anger?

NR: ... Not as kids, I don't think, unless you remember something.

JC: No, but I think you should tell the story about the lieutenant on the *South Dakota* [(BB-57)].

NR: Oh, the *South Dakota*, yes, yes, but I hope you don't use the name. ...

JC: You can cross it out when you edit it.

NR: Yes, yes. When I got hired into the "R" Division, okay, I was hired by a Lieutenant Lambert. That's how I got in the "R" Division, because I had welding experience. ... He was a great guy. You know, I got along great with him. I went from [seaman], then, he got me to second class and he got me to first class seaman, and then, I wanted to go on beyond, but he had had to leave the ship.

JC: He was an officer, a lieutenant.

NR: He was an officer. ... He was in charge of it, and so, then, ... I go to this other lieutenant. I said, you know, "I want to go the next step, you know. I need the material, you know. I want to go [on]," and he says, "Look, you guinea," he says, "you ain't going anywhere as long as I'm in here." ...

SH: Where was he from?

NR: He was from ... Wisconsin. That's right, he was from Wisconsin. ... Those are the Swedish groups, I guess. I think he was a Swede, I think.

JC: How did it make you feel? Were you hurt?

NR: And that was the end of the Navy for me, [laughter] I mean, as far as being a career, I was going to do my job, I was going to do this, I went there for that purpose anyway but I knew I was going to go out. I was not going to be politically [viable], you know what I mean? It was kind of a ...

JC: Kind of a what?

NR: [laughter] Political. You know, he was insulting to the [men], to me, anyway. I didn't like it and I went down, I told ... the chief who was in charge of me, down in the shop. He says, "Well, don't worry about it. ... I'll give you a couple of jobs a day and don't worry about it, you know." You know, [I had said], "I'd like to get out of this." [laughter]

SH: He said that for no other reason than the fact that your last name was Russo.

NR: That's right. He didn't like Italians.

SH: It was not based on your performance or anything.

NR: No, because I was going [up], you know.



JC: He was working hard.

NR: Yes, I was working hard. I was doing everything.

JC: You wanted to make it.

NR: Advance and do the good job.

JC: He really broke your ambition.

NR: ... For the Navy, yes, for the Navy, in there, but I didn't hate the Navy. The Navy was good. Most of the officers were very, very good to us and they kept us informed about the strategy and all of that. ... I'd say all of them were good, except him, like, you knew he was just an [exception]. He just didn't like me.

JC: We were talking here about anti-Italianism in America.

NR: Yes, right, right. ...

JC: Was this the only experience or did you have other experiences, again, between the time you were in school or in the Navy?

NR: No, no, the rest was pretty good.

SH: How important was the church? How involved were you, as a family, in the church?

NR: Well, I got my first Communion, and then, there's another step.

JC: Confirmation.

NR: Confirmation, yes. I got confirmed and that was it. My mother always wanted us to go to church. Oh, I remember, when I was a little kid, I was a little four-year-old, before she re-married, she used to bring me to church. ... I'd go in there, and this is a big one in Clinton, Mass., and it's a huge thing and it was real dark in there. In those days, they had no electricity or anything like that. You went in there saying, "God is in here," [laughter] but, then, the other thing was, ... this one Sunday, she says, "I'm going to be along. Why don't you start walking down and go?" you know, because we were right on the street there. All I had to do is go down to the church and go in there. She said, ... "I'll come and pick you up," you know, ... whatever she had to do. So, I walked down the street and out comes a dog. ... He looks at me and I look at him and I turn around [laughter] and I go home.

JC: You were four years old.

NR: Four years old, I go home. [laughter] Then, she says, "What are you doing back here?" I said, "There was a dog." She said, "Oh, all right, that's all right." She said, "I'll take you down."

[laughter] So, that was my memory of church. ... Of course, when we lived in West Boylston, at Oakdale [a historic village], [they] had a Catholic church and that's where we made our Confirmation and first Communions and stuff like that. We used to have to go down there and take the lessons from the priests and stuff like that, and so, it was done. We just did it. You know, it was just automatic.

JC: Do you remember whether these were Irish priests or Italian priests?

NR: I have no idea. No, they all spoke Latin in those days. ... You didn't read the Bible and the service was in Latin, and that's when I thought I couldn't understand. [laughter]

SH: No one recruited you to become an altar boy.

NR: No, no. I would imagine, in the neighborhood down there, they probably had them, because we lived, like, one town away. Oakdale was, like, another little town, or, actually, a village. ...

SH: Were there feast days that you participated in?

NR: No. We did no religious rites or parades or anything like that.

JC: Surely, they had them down in Worcester, *San Gennaro* Day and the others.

NR: Probably had them on Shrewsbury Street, down in Worcester. They probably did have them.

JC: However, you did not go down there.

NR: No, no.

SH: What was your favorite subject as a young man? You talked about having a paper route and odd jobs, but, in school, was there a certain subject you enjoyed, even before high school?

NR: I liked English. I thought I liked English. I did like English. See, English was a big thing, you know, with most of the Italians, being good in English was important. [laughter] So, that's probably [my favorite], and I was pretty good in math. So, that comes to the engineering part of my career.

SH: In high school, was there anyone who took you under their wing and became a mentor?

NR: No. I had no mentor. [laughter]

SH: Were you a good student?

NR: Yes, yes. I did what I was supposed to do.

SH: Had you graduated?

NR: No. I didn't graduate from high school, not at that time. ... I left, and then, I took this course in welding and I was going to be a welder. Of course, I wanted to get out of the house and I wanted to get away from my stepfather. That was it. You can't go away, leave home, unless you're self-sufficient, and that's what I was working towards. ... Of course, the war came along, and this was another thing, so, I said, "Well, maybe I'll join the Navy, or maybe I won't." So, I quit the school and took the welding job, and then, a year later, here comes the war, as it unfolds things. ... Then, I said, "I'll do that; I'll join."

SH: This is in 1940.

NR: ... It was 1941 or '42, somewhere in there, yes.

SH: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor?

NR: Yes.

JC: Can we go back to the 1930s a little bit more? What did your stepfather do for a living?

NR: Well, he actually was in World War I. ... He had joined the Army, because, he said, they said you could get citizenship. He couldn't speak a word [of English]. He couldn't speak English too well and he couldn't write at all, and he couldn't even write in Italian, so that he was really very ignorant. ... Anyway, he joined the Army, and then, he got out of the Army, after the war was over, and he never went out of the country, because he was in a cavalry unit. ... When he came back, he had odd jobs. He worked as a WPA [a Works Progress Administration worker] and all of that in the '30s, ... when I knew him, okay, and then, finally, he got a job with the state, taking care of the state land, which was the reservoirs, the Wachusett Reservoir and all of that, and that's what he worked on.

JC: He became a US citizen because of his service in the Army in World War I.

NR: Yes. Automatically, he became a citizen, so, he didn't have to study, he didn't have to do anything. [laughter]

JC: The other part of your family came to the United States from Italy to be stonemasons, right?

NR: Yes, ... right.

JC: They went to work on the reservoirs. They were stonecutters, skilled labor.

NR: They were stonecutters. Trapasso means, "To pass away," and we think they carved tombstones [laughter] and built tombs.

JC: They were stonecutters with the gravestones.

NR: Yes, yes. [laughter] So, Trapasso comes from that.

JC: They were brought over, or encouraged to come over, to work on the stone reservoirs.

NR: That's right, on the reservoirs, and especially on the dams. There was a Clinton Dam, in the town of Clinton, where they lived, and I was born there.

SH: They had come over before your stepfather began to work on the reservoirs, right?

JC: This is your mother's family, right?

NR: This is my mother's family. ...

SH: They came in the 1800s.

NR: 1896, right. ... Trapasso is that family that you see there [in a photograph], they came over and they were first in Peekskill, New York, and then, ... they heard about the Clinton Dam being built, and then, they moved into Clinton and that's how they got up there.

JC: Is this the water supply for Worcester or for Boston?

NR: Yes, for Boston.

JC: For Boston, okay.

NR: ... Let's see, my grandmother, the one that's in the picture there, my great-grandmother, she and Salvatore came home. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo checks the photograph.] ... Salvatore was the one that came back. He was the one that came over after all of these came in. ...

SH: The first one to come was your great-grandfather.

NR: ... Then, all the rest, except Salvatore, came in, including Allisndrina, that would be her, my grandmother, ... they all came over. Angelina wanted to go back, so, she went back and Salvatore then came over, and then, they took this picture.

SH: They were all apprenticed as stonecutters.

NR: No, Francisco was the stonecutter. His children sought other careers.

JC: Francesco?

NR: Francesco, my great-grandfather, and the rest were his children. They were eventually searching for themselves. ... Both of these boys, Philip and Salvatore, ended up working on the docks in Boston and both lived in Lynn, Mass.

JC: Do you want to talk about the 1930s at all, the Great Depression?

SH: How did you and your family personally experience the Great Depression? What are your memories of that period?

NR: Well, I remember my mother going downtown, down to the center of town ...

JC: Worcester.

NR: No, in West Boylston.

JC: West Boylston.

NR: And getting bags of flour or cornmeal or whatever they had. There was a lot of that passing out [of food]. You'd have to go down there and you'd have to stand in line and get it and walk the two or three miles home.

JC: This is the government providing you with food.

NR: The government was the supplier, providing what they could. Of course, ... my stepfather worked on the WPA, and then, that kind of petered out, and then, they were in the CCCs [Civilian Conservation Corps camps and/or projects]. ... In the CCCs, they took you and they took you away from your home and brought you out somewhere and you did some work in the forest somewhere, whatever, in their parks.

SH: Do you know where he was sent?

NR: He was sent to New Hampshire. I know that he was sent to [New Hampshire]. ... My brother, Dom, he was just about sixteen or so and they sent him to New Hampshire, also, and he came home within a week. He didn't like that, [laughter] and the old man came home after a couple of months.

JC: This is Dominick.

NR: That's Dominick, yes, yes.

SI: Do you remember any of the projects he worked on for the WPA? Was he building roads?

NR: It was roads. It was mostly roads, the new macadam roads that ... they came up with.

JC: They were taking the old dirt roads and putting in macadam.

NR: Right, right, a lot of them, yes.

JC: Or gravel.

NR: Yes, the gravel was laid down and hot tar was coated over the gravel. That was called macadam. Later, the gravel was crushed, mixed with tar, that you see today.

SI: Growing up, you had this group of friends who were Italians, Swedes and others. Did your social life focus on just playing with them, sandlot baseball, that sort of thing, or did you have a youth group that you belonged to, or anything like the Boy Scouts?

NR: No, no, no youth groups, nothing organized, no. I mean, we organized all our games, all our stuff. [laughter]

SH: Did you?

NR: Yes, yes, we did.

JC: Tell us about the games.

SH: How did you do that? Was it this group against this group? Did you have teams?

NR: Well, ... in the village there, the Italian village, there were two groups. One was close to the city line and we were a little bit further back, but it was just informal, really. It was not a real [league]. ...

JC: Are we talking about baseball? What are we talking about?

NR: No, no baseball, no, no, no.

SH: What did you play?

NR: We got in trouble, [laughter] most of the time.

SH: What were you doing?

JC: Come on, spit it out.

NR: [laughter] Yes, well, ... one of the things that we especially did was save tires. We used to have to save tires. We used to get tires, rubber tires, ... around Halloween time, you know, there in the fall, after the summer, usually, we were working, doing something, you know. I mean, we weren't playing, but this was something we had to do. So, we collected these tires, and then, we would set them on fire with kerosene, and they were hard to put out. ... The fire truck would come up and they'd have a heck of a job putting it out, and we'd do it right in the middle of the road. [laughter]

SH: Was this to delay school?

NR: No. This was just Halloween, having fun, you know what I mean? and we'd be standing there, watching them. We'd be standing there watching them putting out this fire. [laughter]

SH: Were any of your classmates' fathers firemen?

JC: Nobody ever got arrested, or they never found out who did it.

NR: [laughter] Never got arrested, never got arrested, and they never found out who did it.

JC: You mentioned the different groups in the geography of the village. Were they also coming from different villages back in Italy? Were these different groups organized that way, too?

NR: Yes, they were, yes, a lot of them were.

JC: Different regions.

NR: Yes. There was [the] Naples region, Rome, Calabria, Sicily, etc.

JC: They all lived together.

NR: ... The one they used to call Napoleana, you know, and we were ... from Calabria.

SH: I saw on the manifest that it said, "Rome," that was the point of departure, but your family was from Calabria.

NR: Yes, and most of them, ... they came from Calabria and traveled to any seaport where ships were departing to the USA.

JC: In the neighborhood, around even their small area in West Boylston, the Italians replicated the villages or the regions that they came from in Italy.

NR: Right, right, kind of. ...

JC: Was there competition?

NR: There was no competition. No, we just played together. ... We didn't recognize that. See, we weren't from Italy, so, we didn't. We were born here. We don't have any of that. We were all Americans.

SH: There was no pecking order.

NR: No pecking order, no, no. Yes, yes, so, that's [it].

SI: Were there any other pranks that you and your friends played, that you remember?

NR: Oh, yes. [laughter]

JC: The students are going to love this, Nick. Just give it to them.

NR: [laughter] Yes. ... Let me get this straight; we did a lot of playing, but we also did some work, mixed in. What we used to do was, ... we had a little pond in the woods that was actually an icehouse in the old days. I mean, that probably was years and years ago, but all that was left was the wall and it was dammed up, and so, it was a great place to swim, in the nude. That's where we went nude swimming, and the girls would be in the trees, peeking around to see. [laughter] "We see you!" but it was on the way to the golf club and we used to, sometimes, go to the golf club and be a caddy. We did some caddying, yes. So, that was something else. It was kind of half play, work, and then, coming back home, after putting [in] eighteen holes of lugging somebody's big, hundred-pound bag of clubs, [laughter] you needed a swim. So, we'd go swimming, and then, go home, ... but that was something that we did quite a bit. That was a good source of money, too. So, we'd bring home our money. So, the thing was that we were supposed to bring home the money. We didn't bring home the tip.

JC: You kept the tip.

NR: We kept the tip.

JC: The rest, you turned over to the parents.

NR: Give to [the] parents.

SH: Did they know that you were doing that?

NR: Sure. They didn't know how much, but ... [laughter]

SH: At this club where you caddied, did you have any use of the facilities there?

NR: No, no. It was about a half-a-mile from where the swimming hole was and, up there, it was really high-class. ... From a standpoint of class, I mean, they were the upper-class. ... We came in and we just took our money and went home. That was it.

SH: How did you get to be a caddy? Did you have to register?

NR: Well, we would register with the club, and then, the club would send us to caddy school. We used to go to the YMCA, downtown, and so, that was part of the deal. ... We could go downtown, ... if we could get the bus fare to go downtown, [laughter] into the City of Worcester. So, we'd get the bus fare from my mother, and she'd say, "Okay." Now, that's why we had to give her the proceeds. We've got to split the proceeds. So, it was kind of an agreement that we would keep the tip and they would get the fee that we charged for the [caddying].

JC: Was it a nickel bus ride in those days?

NR: Yes, oh, yes, a nickel bus ride then.



JC: You would go down to the Worcester YMCA. What were you learning down there at the YMCA, just caddying?

NR: ... Caddying, yes, all the ... manners, that you had to have good manners on the field; you had to stand in certain places; you had to hold the flag a certain way; you had to lay it down, so [that] it wouldn't wave and distract the guy when he's putting and stuff like that. It was very informative. ...

SH: You went with your brothers.

NR: No, no.

SH: This was just your other friends.

NR: Yes. This was my other friends, because ... my oldest brother was four years older than I. We got along very well, as far as chores around the house and whatever we had to do, but, outside of that, I'd play with my friends and he went off with his friends. He was older, you know, naturally.

JC: We are talking about the 1930s now, in the Depression.

NR: Right.

JC: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like in the house? Did you have any telephones? What kind of stove did you have? What was the daily routine?

NR: We didn't have a telephone. We had a black stove, the black stove with the ... shelves on it.

JC: Cast-iron.

NR: Cast-iron. They had shelves where the dishes were stacked and kept warm.

JC: A wood-burning stove or coal?

NR: Wood. We chopped wood, and did, at times, have coal to bank for the night.

JC: Where did you get the wood?

NR: ... They would bring the wood to us.

JC: A wood salesman.

NR: ... Yes. My father, my stepfather, would get the guy to bring cords of wood. Sometimes, it would be this way, [large pieces], and then, we'd have to saw it up a bit in lengths, and then, we'd have to chop it up. It was a lot of work, and then, heaven came, heaven came, oil. Oil came. Oil

burners came, oh, and they fitted the stove with oil burners. "Hurray," we got out of all that work, all that wood.

JC: What kind of oil, kerosene or gasoline?

NR: Kerosene, yes, yes. ...

JC: Kerosene stoves, okay. What kind of lighting did you have? Did you have electricity?

NR: Electricity, yes. We had electricity.

JC: However, you did not have phones.

NR: No phones.

JC: Did anybody in the neighborhood have phones in the 1930s?

NR: No. The only one [was] down in the store. If you wanted to, you could have went down to the store and ... he'd let you use the phone.

JC: What kind of store?

NR: It was a grocery store. It was just a small grocery store. His name was (Amello?). ... He was very fat and he used to sit behind the counter, most of the time. "Go get it over there." [laughter] ...

JC: Was this a pay phone? Did you put coins in the phone?

NR: No, no pay phone.

JC: He let you ...

NR: He let you use the phone.

JC: Then, you paid him.

NR: Yes.

SH: It was a pay phone.

NR: It's a pay phone. [laughter]

JC: A different kind of pay phone, right? He was charging you.

SI: Were there any radios in the neighborhood?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. The radio was the thing. That was a big thing. You're absolutely right. We sat there, we listened to radio, in the dark. That was great, especially *I Love a Mystery* and all of these other ones. I don't know if you remember those. [laughter]

JC: Why were you listening in the dark?

NR: Your imagination runs away. ...

SH: Did this cooking stove also heat your water?

NR: Yes. It was water and that's it. But we had no furnace downstairs, no hot water heater. [laughter] The hot water was on the stove, yes.

SH: You talked about going to your grandfather's home and working on the truck farm. Did you bring a lot of the vegetables home? Did your mother can?

NR: No, we didn't bring any [home]. I couldn't bring anything home, really. All I did [was], ... in the fall, when we were done all the harvesting and my grandmother ... had made all my school clothes. She'd have them all made up, a pair of shoes and the socks, everything. I'd go home and that was my pay, yes. [laughter]

JC: You did not take any money home.

NR: No, took home clothes, my school clothes for the year.

JC: However, no food, no canned food.

NR: Nothing. That was it.

SI: You mentioned that you had chickens and vegetables. Did that supplement your diet?

NR: ... Yes. The garden was out there and we took care of the chickens, okay, ... but we didn't do too much garden work. The old man wanted to do that. I don't know why. ... I think it was his memory or something, you know. I think it was somewhere in his memory [that] he thought that he should do that. I don't know why. ...

JC: We did not mention, again, in the house, a refrigerator; did you have an icebox?

NR: Icebox.

JC: The man would bring the ice.

NR: "*Ice-a-box*." They used to call it the "*Ice-a-box*." [laughter]

JC: "*Ice-a-box*," okay; the Italian version always ends in a vowel.

NR: [laughter] Yes.

JC: The iceman would come, you would watch him come, with the blocks of ice.

NR: Yes, yes, or, sometimes, we'd go out and get it, too. You can go out, and then, sometimes, they'd come by with the truck, and you'd go out there and he'd bring it in, you know. But he'd come by with a truck, the iceman. The iceman came by with a truck full of ice.

JC: Did they ever get an electric refrigerator?

NR: Yes, later on.

JC: After the war, you mean?

NR: I think it was just a little before the war. They were starting. They had these big things on top of the refrigerator.

JC: The coils up on top.

NR: Coils on top of the refrigerator, and I remember one of those in the house. ... I wasn't paying too much attention to that at the time, yes, but I know that they were doing something in that area.

JC: One last point about the 1930s, you talked about automobiles being a big deal.

NR: Yes, yes.

JC: Tell us about that.

NR: Yes, in the early '30s, you could hear an automobile coming, and we'd all run out [in] the street to watch them go by. [laughter]

JC: You heard it "putt-putt," you heard the engine.

NR: "Putt-putt, putt-putt, putt-putt." "Oh, another car!" [laughter] We watch the car go, "Hey, that was a pretty nice one," an old Tin Lizzie, Tin Lizzies. [Editor's Note: The slang term "Tin Lizzie" could refer to a Model-T Ford, specifically, or an old, rundown car, in general.]

JC: There were not many cars.

NR: No, there weren't many cars, ... not in the town that we lived [in]. Now, maybe in the city and places, there was a lot more, but not there.

JC: How did people get around then?

NR: Bus, busses, mostly, or trains for long distances.

JC: By bus, or walk.

NR: ... Yes, a lot of walking. ...

JC: Bicycles?

NR: They had a lot of horse-and-wagons and stuff. ... There were still a few horse-and-wagons around, yes, yes. In the '30s was kind of a rough time, because you've got to remember, too, there was no money around. I mean, yes, there was no work. Nobody was earning money. ...

JC: There was a lot of barter then. Were you bartering?

NR: Yes. Well, I don't remember too much of that. I mean, if you had food, you ate it. [laughter] ...

SI: Did you do any hunting or fishing back then?

NR: Hunting or fishing? No, we didn't do any hunting. We tried fishing, but it was never [allowed]. ... There was a brook that ran through, but it was for the reservoir down below. So, we weren't really allowed in there. But we used to go in there and we used to catch fish in there, just the same. We weren't allowed to go into those places, into ... the streams they made [that] were feeding the reservoir, the big reservoir, so [that] Boston could get water.

JC: These are enormous stone dams that they have up there. Did any of your relatives ever take you down and say, "This is what we did; we cut this stone?"

NR: No. All that we knew was, in Clinton, when we'd go to Clinton and you'd see the dam, you go to the Clinton Dam, was you knew that ... your great-grandfather did work on that dam, you know. That's about all.

JC: It was a sense of pride.

NR: It was a sense of pride, it was, yes, yes. We'd say, "Yes, that's right, ... the Trapassos worked on that, yes."

SH: Did anybody make wine at home?

NR: No. Oh, the people across the street, I'm sorry, ... the Morazzinis, they had wine in the cellar, okay. ... They were kind of ... rare in the group. There was, maybe, four or five, out of, you know, all these families, that would make wine.

SH: Really?

NR: Yes.

JC: I am surprised.

NR: Yes, it wasn't a lot. It wasn't a lot.

JC: Why would that be? Were the grapes scarce?

NR: You are right, the grapes [were] scarce and [there was] the logistics of going [and] getting it and bringing it home and all of that. ... I know the Morazzinis, who lived across the street from us, they had it. Marino Morazzini, I'm still in touch with him, by the way. ... His father made wine, down in the cellar, and they drank wine at their meals and everything else. I mean, this was "Italian" Italian. Even the kids ... drank the wine, [laughter] and they were little.

SH: Was your family teetotalers?

NR: [laughter] No, we weren't teetotalers. The old man was a drinker. He was a drinker.

JC: What did he drink?

NR: He drank ... beer, wine, anything he could get going.

JC: He bought it.

NR: He bought it, yes, yes. ... Every weekend, he'd come in with the gallon of wine, the case of beer and anything else that he could get, and he'd bring it in.

JC: Did the neighbors sell that wine or just consume it themselves?

NR: No, they consumed it themselves, but, yes, that's true.

SH: Did you have supper with friends at their house, and then, they would come to your house?

NR: No, no, none of that. ... I don't ever remember.

SH: Did you have a bicycle?

NR: No. My brother had a bicycle, the older brother. ... When he got the bicycle, he says, "We're going to get a paper route." "Yes, okay," so, we got a paper route, so that he could [make money]. [laughter] So, I'd sit on the handlebars and he'd put me [here]. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates peddling.] We'd have the papers, "start throwing them." "Here we go!" [laughter]

JC: You were throwing and he was pedaling. Is this *The Worcester* ...

NR: That was in West Boylston. It was in West Boylston.

JC: I meant which newspaper; was it *The Worcester Telegram and Gazette*?

NR: *The Worcester Telegram and Gazette*.

SI: Were there any other jobs that you remember, besides the caddying, working on the farm and this paper route, any odd jobs?

NR: No, that was about it. We just got in trouble. That's all. [laughter]

SH: There were no after school jobs, like selling magazines, anything like that.

NR: No, no, no.

SH: How much of your family was still in Italy before World War II? Were there still family members that your family corresponded with?

NR: No, we didn't know any, no, no. As a matter-of-fact, it seems like they came over and they just cut ties. I imagine they did know [some family members still in Italy]. I imagine they did write or something, but ... that would be it, you know.

SH: Towards the end of the 1930s, Mussolini had been in power for awhile, were there any discussions in the community about him and what people thought of him?

NR: Oh, yes. ... My stepfather thought he was the greatest guy and he always bragged about him. ... As a matter-of-fact, we had a dog named Mussolini, because he had a black nose on [him], the black shirts [of Mussolini's Fascist Party], and we called him Mussolini. [laughter]

JC: Your stepfather named him.

NR: ... Oh, yes. "This is Mussolini." "Hey, Musso!" [laughter]

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

JC: You were saying that your stepfather admired Mussolini.

NR: Oh, yes.

JC: He named the dog after him, with good intentions.

NR: Right.

JC: Tell us about what happened during the war. You were in the Navy, you went away to join the Navy, and your stepfather is still talking about how great Mussolini is.

NR: Right, and the guys down at ... they used to hang around (Amello's?) store, which is the store where you'd go down, get bread and milk and all of that, but he had a backroom and he

used to sell the liquor in the backroom. So, they used to play cards back there and he used to play.

JC: These were all Italian men.

NR: All Italian guys, playing, all the grown-ups, ... and so, we weren't allowed in back there. ... Anyway, he would brag about Mussolini and the guy says, "You better keep your mouth shut. Something's going to happen to you [if] you keep that up." ...

JC: You said earlier that he said, "You have a son fighting in the war."

NR: Oh, yes. ...

JC: Go ahead, it is your story.

NR: Yes. That's what they told him, "You've got a son, you know, fighting in the war and you should keep your mouth shut." That's really, in a sense, what they said to him.

JC: The way you are telling the story now seems to emphasize that they were afraid he would get in trouble. When you told it to me earlier, the implication was that they did not like him talking about Mussolini when we were fighting the Fascists.

NR: That's right, that's right. That's all part of it. ...

JC: Where did you hear this story? Did you hear it from your stepfather? Did he say, "They told me to shut up?" Where did the story come from?

NR: ... That story, I don't know how I heard it.

JC: You heard it from somebody, not your stepfather.

NR: ... No, not from him.

JC: It must have been from people who were ...

NR: Right, were back there in the store.

SH: In the community.

JC: As you said earlier, about the term "WOP," it all depends on how this is said. What is your understanding about what they were saying? Were they just trying to prevent him from getting in trouble with the police or were they saying something else?

NR: No, they were threatening him. I think they were threatening him. I think that's what [happened], they were threatening him. ... "Keep your mouth shut," you know, "you're going to get hurt." ...



JC: They were anti-Mussolini and anti-Axis.

NR: Right, right.

JC: "Your son is fighting the Axis."

NR: Right, right.

SH: Do you know of any investigations of people who were pro-Axis? We have heard of people who were feeding information to the Germans.

NR: Yes, I know. No, we didn't. No, he wasn't that smart. He couldn't read, write or ...  
[laughter]

JC: A few Italian nationals ...

NR: Yes, a lot of them couldn't read or write. A lot of them were not that smart. We couldn't detect anybody.

JC: A few Italian nationals were actually incarcerated. Of course, all of the Japanese-Americans were incarcerated, but few Italian nationals, that is, those who were still Italian citizens living in the United States when we were fighting the Fascists, were arrested.

NR: Oh, yes, were they?

JC: Not many, but some. I think Sandra is asking about those taken by the FBI, then taken down to interment camps.

NR: No, I never heard of anybody being taken, yes.

JC: Did you find the Italian community in West Boylston to be very patriotic, very supportive? Were a lot of people going into the service?

NR: Well, in this case, they were. In this case, they would say, "You are an American."

JC: Were there any other cases you heard about? I mean, a lot of the young men were going into the service, right?

NR: Yes, all the guys. Yes, guys were going into the service. Yes, even I went in.

JC: American flags?

NR: American flag, yes, they were patriotic; they went in for patriotic reasons, I would say so.

SI: Before you left school to go to Eastern to become a welder, what was your dream for what your life would be? Did you think about going to college? Did you just think you were going to get out and get a working-class job?

NR: Yes, that's [it], more or less. I wanted to get out of the house, too. I mean, you know, my thing was to get out of the house, somehow. I didn't want to live ... with him.

JC: Did you see yourself being a blue-collar worker or did you see yourself becoming a white-collar worker?

NR: No, I had no idea. [laughter]

JC: At seventeen, no idea.

NR: I've got to tell you, I had no idea. I was just going along with the [flow]. Now, the war was there and that was facing you and you knew you were going to have to go in eventually. At eighteen, you knew they would draft you in, and I was sixteen.

SH: Was your older brother part of the peacetime draft? Was he drafted into the war?

NR: I think he joined. I think he joined, because he got in the Navy, too.

SH: He was in the Navy as well.

NR: Yes, so, he joined. If you joined, you could pick ... which one to join, Army, Navy or Marines.

SH: Was this something that you talked about as young men, what you were going to do?

NR: Sure, sure, that's right.

SH: If my math is correct, you would have been about fifteen when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

NR: Right, right; sixteen.

JC: Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

NR: ... Yes, we remember.

SH: Where were you? What do you remember about the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941?

NR: 1941, I was, perhaps, ... just quitting school. ... I think I was still in school, but I was going to quit, okay. That's, ... I think, about where I was and it was devastating to hear that, that we were attacked at Pearl Harbor and we heard it, I remember.

SH: How did you hear about it? Were you listening on the radio, listening to football?

NR: Radio, mostly the radio. That's what we had, the radio. That's all we had, really, with the outside world, really, is the radio. We didn't have TV.

SH: Do you remember your reaction, personally, or within the community?

NR: Yes. In the community, it was devastating, yes, definitely, and we knew it meant war. ... The threat of war was there anyway, with all that was going on in Europe and Roosevelt wanting to get into the fray, and, finally, he had to get into the fray. So, that was it.

SH: Let us back up; what did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal?

NR: They liked it. Yes, they were Democrats. I would say they were Democrats and they wanted jobs, you know. ... They wanted to work and he promised them work and all of that, and then, he started the CCCs and the "ABCs" and all the rest of those. [laughter] ... The experience with my family was, I know ... Dominick, my oldest brother, he went to New Hampshire with the CCCs and my father went up there, too, for the CCCs, in another place, and they both came back. I mean, they didn't like it. I mean, ... they came back and they took their chances looking for a job, you know, and the only thing that saved my stepfather was that he had been in the Army in World War I. ... The state needed people to work on the reservoirs and stuff like that and he applied for that and he got it. Some guy helped him out, says, "Hey, you can get in as a veteran."

JC: Oh, I see, a state job rather than a federal job.

NR: It was a state job. ... That's what happened to him. So, he was saved, so-to-speak, from the rest of the '30s.

JC: You are emphasizing, and accurately so, that your family was focused on the domestic policies of Roosevelt that were getting them jobs.

NR: Yes. [laughter]

JC: I believe Sandra is also asking about internationally, with international crises, the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, the rise of the Fascists and Mussolini in Italy, and then, the Japanese. In Roosevelt's foreign policies, he was condemnatory of the rise of Fascism in Italy, Germany and Japan.

NR: Yes, right, right.

JC: Did you have any discussions or debates in the family about Roosevelt's more aggressive foreign policy?

NR: Nothing. They weren't talking about that, no.

SH: You said that some of the family was working on the docks. What about the lend-lease program, when they were shipping material overseas? [Editor's Note: Through the lend-lease program, the United States sent war material to Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, France, and other Allied countries prior to and following its entry into World War II.]

NR: Well, we didn't know that part of the family, okay. When the Trapassos [moved] up there, then, we didn't know anything, hardly anything, about even the Marino Family in Clinton, Mass. We lived in West Boylston; there was Clinton. I used to go to the farm and work on the farm, and then, there was these Trapassos, ... these two boys that were in there. Actually, one got shot while on the docks. I don't know how he got shot on the docks. The oldest one got shot.

JC: You never went to Boston.

NR: No, no, we wouldn't, no. It was too far away.

SH: You did not do any traveling.

NR: No, stayed home. The only place I went was, in the summer, [I would] go down to my grandmother's and grandfather's house.

SH: What was the name of the store?

JC: The grocery store in West Boylston.

SH: The grocery store where everybody came together.

NR: (Amello's?).

SH: Was there any discussion there about whether Roosevelt should get in the war, or whether we should stay out of the war and let them fight?

NR: See, the guys were drinking in the backroom and they would talk back there. We couldn't hear that. [laughter]

SH: You were not listening in.

NR: We couldn't listen in. [laughter] The old man [Mr. (Amello?)] would say, "Get out of there." He'd be sitting there in his [chair]. He was like this, "Get out of there. Go on, okay, okay," but you know what? As kids, we used to go borrow money from him, yes. [laughter]

JC: You mean in the backroom?

NR: Yes; no, no, (Amello?), he'd be sitting behind the counter in the store. He's the owner, okay. No, no, the backroom is over there. If they wanted the beer, he'd tell them where the beer was. "Pay for the empty bottle, here," right? [laughter]

JC: He would lend money to the young people.

NR: ... Yes, he'd lend money to us.

JC: At interest?

NR: No, no. ... We'd say, "Hey, (Amello?), what do you say? I need a buck." "Okay," give you the buck, "I remember." [laughter] "I remember."

JC: You paid him back?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. You would never renege on payback.

SH: His interest was actually less than your mother's.

NR: Yes, yes. [laughter] That's right, but he was a good guy. He was a nice guy.

JC: The kids liked him.

NR: Yes, we all liked him. ... We respected him.

SH: The peacetime draft started in 1940. Did you notice young men in your community then either enlisting or being drafted?

NR: Yes, well, that was the point. That was the point then, "Do I enlist or do I get drafted?"

JC: No, this was before Pearl Harbor, the peacetime draft.

NR: Right, right.

SH: About a year-and-a-half.

NR: ... Peacetime draft is the same as the wartime draft, you know. If you join, if you go in and join, you can choose ... whichever branch of the service you want. If you get drafted, they rule the roost. They tell you.

JC: Some of the young men from the community began to enlist then, when they started the peacetime draft.

NR: Yes, yes, I know it. That was how we learned about it, you know. We said, "Ah, this is how you do this," you know. It was also a way of getting a job.

JC: This is how you beat the draft.

NR: Yes, this is how you beat the draft.

JC: You enlist.

SH: Was there any discussion about the draft board and its make-up?

JC: Was there any discussion about the draft board, the men, this group of civilians sitting downtown on the draft board?

NR: They never questioned it. You never questioned it.

SH: Nobody said ...

NR: No, nobody questioned it.

JC: ... there were no Italians on it.

SI: In the earlier interview, you mentioned that seeing these World War I movies had a big impact on you. [Editor's Note: On November 17, 2000, Mr. Russo was interviewed by his cousin, Eugene Marino, Jr., the son of the uncle he served with onboard the USS *South Dakota*. A transcript of that interview was made available to the interviewers prior to this session.]

NR: Oh, yes.

SI: Can you describe which movies you saw and what you saw in them that influenced you later on?

NR: Well, you know, the movies that we saw was; what was the name of the one you ...

SH: *All Quiet on the Western Front*?

NR: *All Quiet on the Western Front*. [laughter] That was the great one, yes.

JC: You remember seeing that.

NR: Yes, yes. Well, it had to be, you know. That was it.

JC: That was the big one.

NR: That was the big one. ...

JC: Were there any movies in West Boylston?

NR: No movies in West Boylston. We went down to Worcester. It would cost you a quarter to go to the movies in those days.

JC: A quarter to get in?

NR: ... You take a bus ride down. It'd cost you a nickel one way and a nickel back. That's a dime, right, and you had a dime for the movie and a nickel for candy or whatever else you wanted.

JC: A dime for the movie. Maybe we ought to know how much you were getting paid for caddying then.

NR: [laughter] It was a buck-and-a-half.

JC: Oh, you got a buck-and-a-half for eighteen holes.

NR: Eighteen holes.

JC: Wow, that is a pretty good amount of money.

NR: Buck-and-a-half, and, a lot of times, you made two bucks, because they'd give you a tip.

JC: That was a lot of money, if the movies are only a dime.

SH: Going back to this caddying, did you have certain clients that would request Nichola Russo?

NR: No, very few, very few. I remember, we had Anthony; what the heck was his name? Anyway, Tony had a guy that we used to call the "Iron Horse." They called him the "Iron Horse," because he ran around the [course], and he played by himself, [laughter] believe this, and he would run and the kid, Tony, had to keep up with him. [laughter]

JC: My God, he really worked him.

NR: Yes, he did. They called him the "Iron Horse," [laughter] but that was the only one that really had a special guy, because, most of the time, you went there and you took what you got and they took what they got. ...

JC: Let me just ask you a question, because Sandra said, "Did anybody ask for Nick Russo?" When did they start calling you Pat Russo, rather than Nick?

NR: I was Pat Russo from the very beginning.

JC: Okay. Nobody calls him Nick. I mean, people who knew him did not call him Nick. They called him Pat.

SH: Okay.

NR: They called me Pat, right. I was Patrick Russo, and I went to school as Patrick Russo, so, my name is Patrick Russo.

JC: Patrick, not Pasquale.

NR: Patrick; oh, hey, English, not Italian, no Italian. They didn't want [that]. [laughter] My mother didn't want Italian. She was born here. She says, "No, you're [not] going to be Italian, you're going to be English." So, it was Patrick Russo, because she didn't like Nicholas, Nicola. [laughter] It's Nicola, N-I-C-O-L-A, and, when I went into the service, they put an "H" in front of it, and so, [it became] N-I-C-H-O-L-A, and I didn't know about that until it was too late. ... [laughter]

JC: Your whole service record is misspelled.

NR: Yes. It was misspelled, right from the beginning. [laughter]

SH: Never mind the ID card that you carried around the world.

NR: [laughter] It wasn't mine. I had no identity. I could get lost anywhere, they'd say, "Who the hell was that guy?"

JC: Okay, so, Pat Russo.

SH: It was Pat Russo, okay.

NR: So, it was Pat Russo, right, at home and in school. When one got into military service, you were called, always, by your last name--mine being, "Russo!"

SH: Everyone called you Pat Russo.

NR: Pat, at home, and, "Russo," in the Navy.

SH: How often did you go to the movies?

NR: ... Well, what we did was, in the summertime, when we did this caddying and all of this, we gave my mother the money. She says, "You give us the money, you keep the tip," but, then, she would finance us, ... during all the winter, to go to the movies ... every week.

JC: Okay, because you had spent your tip by the time winter came around.

NR: Oh, absolutely. [laughter]

JC: You were broke.

NR: Absolutely. [laughter] So, she financed us, and, besides that, she would finance us [to] go to caddy school, because we always had to take a couple of classes, caddying and all of that, and she would pay for that. So, it was pretty good. It was a pretty good, worked-out deal, you know.

JC: Yes, smart woman.



SI: Did you get to interact with the people you were caddying for?

NR: No.

SI: Did they treat you as though you were just furniture?

NR: Yes, yes, because you're not with them all the time. They say, "Give me my five iron." You give him his five iron, and then, they were trying to teach us, ... seeing the lie of the ball and everything else, you're supposed to hand him the correct club.

JC: Oh, my God, before he asks for it.

NR: Yes. [laughter] I wasn't very good at that.

SH: Did you ever take up golf afterwards?

NR: Yes, ... after I was working for Barry Wright [Corporation], playing golf, okay. ...

JC: When you were an engineer.

NR: When I was an engineer. So, anyway, we'd all go out there ... and I'd say, "Gee, I've got, let's see, one, two, three, four. Gee, I'm going to sink it in five or six," [laughter] and here's these guys, they always come out, "one, two, three." How did they do this? ... They used to cheat, you know. I mean, oh, they were awful. These leagues were awful and I said, "What the heck? I'm not going to do that anymore." [laughter] I'm frustrated, you know, here, I'm reporting five; they'd say, "Oh, I got a three." "What do you mean you got a three? [laughter] I saw you hit it four times already. What are you talking about?" [laughter]

SH: Did you ever see any illegal activities going on as a result of the backroom action or anything else like that? Was there any ...

JC: Bootlegging?

NR: No, there was none. ... You mean as far as in the neighborhood and all of that? No, there was nothing going on, nothing that we could ever detect. ... Yes, they liked to drink and they liked to play cards. They weren't planning anything.

JC: Prohibition is over, right.

NR: Prohibition is over.

JC: We are talking about the 1930s, and this is much too small for the *mafia* to be involved, a little town like this.

NR: Oh, yes, a little town, yes, because ... we were not in a big city somewhere, where [it was] probably a little rougher, you know.

JC: No organized crime.

SH: Pearl Harbor happened on a Sunday and you said, evidently, that you heard it on the radio. Do you have any memories of sitting down yourself to listen to the radio and hearing the news? Do you remember that day?

NR: You mean of the war? Yes, no, we listened to the radio for the news of the war and that. Yes, we would listen to that. We got all the news and entertainment on the radio.

SH: You do not remember the specific day. When you went to school the next day, what was the reaction in school?

NR: In school?

SH: Did the principal call everybody together to talk to you?

NR: No, no, they didn't do that.

SH: You just went on as usual.

NR: No, no, they didn't. All I know is, let's see, December 7, 1941, right?

SH: Yes.

NR: ... Was I in school?

SH: Had you already left school, perhaps, to go take the welding course?

NR: Probably. I think, yes, yes, something like that. Let's see, I joined in ...

SI: June of 1943.

NR: '43, right? June of '43; ... '41, we heard it, so, I was just either ... in school or out. ... At that time, I was moving out of school, I think, and I took the welding course. I took a welding course for quite a while, and so, that was it. ... I can't remember.

SH: That is all right. I was just curious.

JC: You were about fifteen years old.

NR: Fifteen, sixteen years old, yes.

SH: Sometimes, people say there was shock and horror, while others were very stoic and just said, "Continue on with what you are doing." There are a variety of reactions to that attack.

NR: Absolutely, absolutely.

SH: You went to this welding school more to get out of the home, rather than to be employable in the military.

NR: Yes, right, right, because I used to take the bus to Worcester to go to work. ... This guy used to get on the bus and ... he sat beside me one day, he had to sit beside me, ... and he was an older man. He was the welder; he was the welder-teacher. He was the teacher, yes. So, he asked me what I was doing and all that. He questioned [me], and he says, "Hey, how would you like to learn welding?" I said, "Yes," so, I went to work for him.

JC: Was he an Italian-American?

NR: No, no. I can't remember. I really can't remember what his name was or anything.

JC: He was not from that community. He just sat next to you on the bus and offered you the opportunity. He was looking for a welder.

NR: ... He asked me what I was doing and I told him what I was doing. He says, "Do you want to become a welder?" I said, "Yes, yes, that sounds pretty good." He says, "Yes, you'd make more money," ... and I went to work for that, for him, yes.

SH: Did you go to a technical school to learn this? Was that where you went?

NR: Well, he had a welding school in the shop. He had a welding school there and that's what he was doing and he was also doing work for certain people ... that needed welding done, actually. I went to work for Eastern Bridge and that was it. ...

JC: Did you have to pay to go to his school?

NR: No, not really.

JC: Not really.

NR: Yes, not really, [laughter] because ... we were doing stuff that he was [working on]. We were welding bridge components he was selling. This was a time when wooden covered bridges were being replaced all over the country. We were sending all the components that they would assemble at the site.

JC: He was essentially giving you a free education while you were working for him.

NR: Right, right.

SH: Like an apprentice-type of deal?

NR: Yes, right, like an apprentice kind of job, yes.

JC: This is not union. This was all outside the union.

NR: No union, nothing, yes, yes.

SI: Was this school in any way connected to one of the New Deal programs?

NR: No.

SI: I know they ran some welding schools.

NR: No, entirely private. He was a private guy, yes, and he taught me well. I was surprised. He taught me well, because when I got in the service, when I went in the Navy, ... they liked my welding.

JC: Tell us a couple of things about welding. What did you learn?

SI: Which types of welding did you learn?

NR: Well, you learn, [laughter] you've got overhead welding, which is the hardest, because it drops on you. When it melts, when you heat that up, that spark, as soon as you spark, it heats up and you're supposed to feed that thing, really, so that it'll stick as you go along.

JC: This is the solder.

NR: ... Yes, the welding rod. The welding rod is electrically arced as you strike the metal and melts as you're going along and you're trying to stick it there, you know what I mean? ... The faster you go, the better it sticks, sometimes. [laughter]

SH: Right.

NR: Otherwise, you've got big holes in there, and then, you've got to go back over it. ...

JC: You say it drops on your head.

NR: Drops on the head.

JC: Wearing that big ...

NR: When you weld, you did wear the big thing.

JC: The mask?

NR: You did wear the big mask, so, you could get it dropping on you, yes. That's what happened with the glasses then, they'd say, "Stay to one side. Don't get under it, because you'll spoil the glass. We've got to replace the glass." [laughter]

JC: Okay, stay over at an angle.

NR: Yes, yes. So, you learned how to do all that.

JC: These are, what do they call them, acetylene torches?

NR: No, it's a welding [rod], welding rods. You've actually got a rod out there and you're melting that rod. An acetylene torch uses a gas (oxygen, etc.) for its flame to melt the metal rod, to weld the metals together.

JC: Yes. You are melting it with the, what do they call it?

NR: It's a welding rod. ...

JC: The welding rod is the solder, is it not? Then, you have something with the flame on it; what is that?

NR: No, the flame is an electric arc, and the rod is, in effect, the "solder."

JC: The arc.

NR: It's electric arc welding, not gas welding.

JC: Arc welding.

NR: So, when you come here with that welding stick, it sparks, makes an electric arc with the base, it sparks, and it melts the rod and you stick it on the metal pieces you are joining.

JC: What are the techniques? Do you have to learn how to make it adhere to different types of material or is it all the same?

NR: Pretty much the same, pretty much the same, types of steel, except that you're going to put two things together here and you want to weld those two together, so, you've got to hit both sides, right. ... You get it right in the middle and you strike the electric arc and it melts it right down. Everything melts and cools together.

JC: The skill is in what? Tell me the skill.

NR: ... The skill is in holding the arc. Here you are, you've got this welding arc, and this is going to melt. This rod is going to all melt and you're going to ... actually lay that all down ... and you're going down like this, "Bzzzzzz."

JC: Okay, as he rolls it along. It is uniformity and the right plot.

NR: Yes, and you might do this a little slow or fast--your judgment.

JC: A little up and down, a little bit fancy.

NR: And it's all sparking and melting. ... This is melting down and the rod is getting shorter and shorter.

JC: What can go wrong?

NR: If you hold it too far apart, and then, all the hot metal drops. ...

JC: Is it hot work?

NR: No, it's not really hot work.

SH: How many people were working in the shop? Was it just you and the gentleman?

NR: No, there were quite a few other guys in there, doing all kinds of stuff. We were doing all kinds of stuff. ... You know, they wanted two things welded together. Anything that came in the door, they would weld.

SH: Was your mother glad that you went on to do this or was she sad that you left school?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. ... Actually, she kind of encouraged it, I think, because that would be the only way I could get out of the house, because I was going to kill that guy if I stayed in ... the house any longer. [laughter]

JC: Did you bring the money home from the welding, too?

NR: Oh, yes. Well, I ... paid my rent, yes.

JC: At home?

SH: How much was your rent?

NR: I can't remember. I know I didn't give him all of it and, again, my mother knew. She says, "You can't give all of it," you know.

JC: The money went to him, not to her.

NR: Yes, see, so she says, "Just give him what you think you can get away with," you know. [laughter]

SI: You said earlier that it was not hot work, but, in terms of what you had to wear while you worked, you had the hood, the heavy clothes.

NR: Yes. I never thought of it as uncomfortable. I don't know why.

SH: How soon after you started in the welding school did you start looking at enlisting in the Navy?

NR: Well, as soon as Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was the thing that flipped that with a lot of people.

SH: Obviously, you were in welding school before Pearl Harbor.

NR: Yes, yes.

JC: However, he was still young.

NR: 1941, yes.

SH: You were all of maybe fifteen, if our math is right, when you would have started learning how to do the welding.

NR: ... Yes, right, yes, sixteen, seventeen?

JC: Before you enlisted, there were still a couple of years that you were doing the welding.

NR: Yes, this one year, about a whole one year. There was a little training in there. The training was in the beginning, and then, I'd say about a year, I guess, or so.

JC: Probably, for most of 1942, you were welding.

NR: Yes, yes. ...

SH: You said you told your mother at sixteen that you were going to join the Navy.

NR: Right, right.

SH: What did she say?

NR: Oh, no, no, she did not want it. ... I said, "Oh, you're going to have to sign for me, you know. [laughter] You're going to have to sign for me, Ma," you know. So, that's why [I have] that picture of me, that you'll see in there, [a collection of photographs Mr. Russo gave to the interviewers]. ... She says, "You're going to go down, take a picture. We've got to go down. I want you to take a picture. I can't believe you're going to go."

JC: She wanted to have a picture of you in the house to remember you by.

NR: Yes, she did. [laughter] I says, "Ma, I'll be back." [laughter] "What? I'm going to be back."

SH: What about Dominick, the older stepbrother? Was he already assigned to a ship? Was he already in the military at that point?

NR: No, I don't think he was. ... I'm trying to remember just when he joined, but I know he joined before I did. He got out of the house. You know, everybody wanted to get out of the house, [laughter] except Patsy. He was the pet.

SH: Did you have friends in the community, part of your gang, who had already joined up?

NR: Yes, a lot of people were talking, you know. There was a lot of talk and you'd go down to (Amello's?) store and hang around down there and they were going to do this and they were going to do that. Everybody's doing something and I says, "Oh." ... I was out of the loop, because ... I was working. Once you start working, I mean, you've got a different set of times and hours and everything else and you can't be with those fellows.

JC: That is a good point. Were there other young men down at the welding jobs?

NR: Oh, yes.

JC: You were talking to them.

NR: Right, right.

JC: Were there a variety of different ethnic groups there?

NR: Yes, yes. You know, [if] you're working for a company, you're going to [have diversity].

JC: These guys are making money. You are making money now. Unlike the kids who are in school, you are making money.

NR: Yes, and I've got a trade.

JC: What kind of talk was going on? Are you or family talking about, "Enlist and we will lose the money?" What kind of debate was going on? You wanted to get out of the house. You were out of the house by that time, were you not?

NR: No, no. I wasn't quite out, still was paying the rent, and I says, "This is a good way to go. It's the good way to go. I want to go." [laughter]

SH: Eastern Bridge was the company.

NR: Yes.



SH: Were you subcontracting through the man that had trained you or were you literally working for the company?

NR: He was not only a teacher, but he was part owner, I think, of that outfit, the Eastern Bridge [Company]. ... What they were doing, what Eastern Bridge was doing, was replacing all the wooden bridges down South.

JC: Down south of where?

NR: The South in the country.

JC: Oh, where were you? Give us some states.

NR: ... All the states, most of the states had wooden bridges. Wherever there was a river, there was a wooden bridge.

JC: Were you in Virginia, North Carolina?

NR: No, I didn't go there, no. ... We built it up here, in sections, and we shipped it off on the train. You had a thing; it was all in sections. You go down there and all they had to do was assemble it.

SH: Okay. You took us for a ride. [laughter]

JC: You were working in Worcester and the bridges were being sent south by train.

SH: You were making sections of the bridge, which could be shipped.

NR: Yes. We made them in sections, then, put the whole thing together. You could put the whole thing together, and then, they used to have the whole thing together and say, "Okay." It was just bolted, like, loosely, just to see, make sure everything was set, then, they would dismantle the whole thing. All those sections that were welded were all done there, and so, you learned overhead [welding], all kinds, you know.

JC: You really were a pretty well-trained welder by the time you went into the Navy.

NR: Right, right.

JC: With a year or more of experience in the school.

NR: Yes, yes.

JC: Can we come back to this idea: these young men are working, they are making, probably, pretty good money as welders, and, yet, there is a war on; they are confronted with the draft?

NR: War on, yes, right, right.

JC: What was the discussion?

NR: And that was a good thing for me. I wanted to get out of the house anyway and I said, "This is a good way to go."

JC: Okay, but what were some of these other guys in the group saying?

SH: Were they all going in the Navy, too?

NR: Yes, a lot of people were talking about it, but, then, ... a lot of the people didn't want us to leave the company, because they wanted [a skilled workforce]. You know, the wartime work was coming, really, and ... it was already here.

JC: New contracts.

NR: Contracts were [coming in], and, boy, you knew you were going to be valuable if you had a trade for the war, for war building, yes.

SH: Were they trying to get you an exemption?

NR: They wanted [us to] get an exemption and I didn't want that. I wanted to go. [laughter] It's up to you, really, you know, it's not up to them, to decide what you're going to do.

JC: Was this the case for a number of the other guys, or did many of the other guys stay?

NR: A lot of guys stayed. You know, this is just like everything else, some guys do and some guys don't.

JC: I was just wondering if there was any pressure from women expecting young guys to go in the service. Did you hear any of that?

SI: Did they say, "Why are you not in uniform?"

NR: No, no, ... not at that early stage. You've got to remember, it's '41, December 7, '41, that the war started. ...

SH: Your enlistment date is ...

NR: Is in '43.

SI: June of 1943, I think.

JC: June of 1943.

NR: June of '43.

JC: This is when you are seventeen.

NR: Seventeen.

SI: June 8, 1943.

JC: June 8th, thank you.

JC: You were seventeen at that point.

NR: Yes, yes.

SI: In late 1942 and early 1943, did you see the other men that you worked with being replaced by women, older workers, or African-Americans?

NR: ... I wasn't really aware of what was going on then. I was looking at my future somewhere. [laughter] Yes, I was kind of worrying about what was taking place. ... I don't remember that. ... It wasn't important, yes.

SH: You mentioned keeping track of the war by radio. Was that only at home or did you listen to the radio when you were working in the shop? Obviously, you cannot hear.

NR: Well, sometimes. Well, you wouldn't be in the shop. They wouldn't have anything like that in the shop. ... You wouldn't have a radio in the shop or anything like that. You're going to go there, you're going to go to work, [laughter] but you go home, yes, yes. You'd hear it at home and [in reading] the newspapers, too.

SH: Did you read more newspapers than you listened to radio?

NR: No, I listened to the radio more, I would think, in those days, yes.

SH: What kind of social activities were you involved in as a young man of fifteen or so years old, holding down a job? I would assume it was a longer than eight-hour day.

NR: [Yes].

SH: Did you date?

NR: Oh, yes, yes, there were dates. [laughter]

JC: You have money. You are working eight hours a day; you have money.

NR: Yes, but, you know, a lot of it is work. I mean, you've got to get up in the morning and you can't go running, carousing around. It's hard to get [anywhere]. We are getting bused around or busing around. That's all you could do. ...

JC: You had no car.

NR: I had no car. It was kind of tough getting around. ...

JC: What about the weekends?

NR: ... On the weekends, yes, the weekends. I remember, Cliff ...

JC: Peterson.

NR: Peterson, he and I used to chum together. ... We chummed together there for a while. I used to go out with Janet Fisher, and what was the other gal's name?

JC: These were schoolmates. They went to school together. You found women. Where did you find these girls, in school?

NR: Well, in church. [laughter]

JC: Oh, from the church.

NR: Where else are you going to go?

JC: Okay. Cliff Peterson is a Swedish Lutheran and you are an Italian Catholic; which church did you find them in?

NR: Right, in the Swedes' [church]. [laughter]

JC: You found them up in the Lutheran church, okay.

NR: You look where they are, where the girls are, right. [laughter]

SH: Church socials, right.

NR: Yes. [laughter]

JC: Is that where you met, church socials?

NR: Yes, yes. So, we had a lot of fun, yes.

JC: Would they have dances? What are you talking about? How do you find them?

NR: Well, no, Janet Fisher was going to church. ...

JC: Oh, you went to the church service and found them, okay.

NR: We went to the church. Oh, sure, where else you going to go? [laughter] You go where the girls are, right. [laughter]

JC: Would you talk to them as they came out?

NR: No, no. Well, actually, Cliff knew, what was his girl's name? Mine was Janet Fisher and his was (Margaret Foster?), that's right. I can remember. So, we had a couple of favorites there, you know, and we'd go on dates. We'd go to movies, stuff like that.

JC: Take the bus to the movies.

NR: Take the bus to the movies, do whatever we had to do, or go to the lake and rent canoes.

SH: Ice cream, dancing?

NR: Ice cream, yes. No, they weren't dancers. They weren't dancers, no.

SH: You were not dancers.

NR: We weren't dancers then. [laughter] [When] we got in the Navy, I was a dancer, because that was the only place we could go, the USOs [United Service Organizations clubs].

SH: How did you finally talk your mother into signing so that you could go into the Navy?

NR: Well, I told her I would go anyway. I would say ... "They lost my [birth certificate], where I was." I was going to go in as an orphan, or something, you know what I mean? You could. You could get in without a ...

SH: Papers.

NR: Without papers.

JC: Were there people in the neighborhood that you knew that lied about their age and claimed that they did not have any parents to sign?

NR: No, no.

SH: It was just the rumor.

NR: Right, right.

JC: Is that what you are saying?

NR: Well, a lot of them didn't, you know. A lot of the servicemen didn't.

JC: Did not what?

NR: Didn't have papers, didn't have any birth certificate, nothing, but they got in.

JC: They got in. This was not an idle threat.

NR: ... Right, right. Well, this is what (Wally Pabst?) did.

JC: Okay, so, you did know somebody.

NR: Yes. (Wally Pabst?) was one of the guys that I met just when we were boarding ship, you know. ... We got out of boot camp. ... We went home on leave. ... By the way, they shortened our boot camp up. They said, "Oh, you guys have done very well." They needed sailors down there. [laughter] "Oh, you guys did very well. ... You're going out early. You're graduating early." So, we graduated early. We go home on leave and we go down to Norfolk, Virginia, to board ship, to find we're in a big, big field and we're all there waiting to board ship, some ship. ... They would call out names, such as, "For the *South Dakota*, Nichola Russo," but, ... at first, they didn't call me. ... My uncle was in the crowd down there, in the whole bunch. ... He had joined. I didn't even know he had joined the Navy, and I hear, "Eugene Marino for the USS *South Dakota*." Oh, I go and I said, "That's my uncle. There can only be one Eugene Marino in the United States." [laughter] I went looking for him and I found him, and (Wally Pabst?) was there and this was the (Wally Pabst?). ... He joined at sixteen.

JC: He lied.

NR: He lied about his age, yes, and he got in without a birth certificate or anything else. So, you could get in.

JC: Perhaps this is a good time for him to tell us about recognizing his uncle and running across the field. You ran across the field.

NR: Well, ... the field was full of people, and so, I had to go in the direction where I thought I heard him answer. When they said, "Eugene Marino, USS *South Dakota*," and he goes, "Here," you know, "Oh, man, I know that guy." I picked up my duffle bag and ran out to see if I could find him. I found him, a miracle. [laughter] ...

JC: Yes, tell us what happened.

NR: ... So, he was wrestling somebody. He was wrestling this (Wally Pabst?). They were wrestling.

JC: On the ground?

NR: On the ground, yes, and so, I went over and I picked him up, said, "Hey!" He said, "What the hell are you doing here?!" [laughter] "Hey, Eugene!" So, that was how I met Eugene. [laughter]

JC: No, keep going. You grabbed him, you hugged him, and then ...

NR: Yes, yes, and so, that was it. ... Wait a minute, what else do you remember?

JC: Last night, you said that you were making this big fuss about, here you are, uncle, nephew, you are hugging and everything, and the guys around you ...

NR: Oh, yes, and then, the guys around say, "Keep quiet, keep quiet," because of the Sullivan Brothers.

JC: Okay, remember the five Sullivan brothers? [Editor's Note: The Sullivan brothers, George Thomas, Francis Henry, Joseph Eugene, Madison Abel, and Albert Leo, all served in the Navy on the USS *Juneau* and lost their lives when the ship was sunk in the Pacific.]

NR: The Sullivan Brothers, five Sullivan brothers, were on the same ship, so, they were splitting up anybody that was related, ... because I got called after I heard him. He got called and I'm with him and, all of a sudden, they announce, "Nichola Russo for [the] USS *South Dakota*." ... Boy, he and I say, "Hey, we're together," and the guys say, "Keep quiet." [laughter]

JC: These were old enlisted men near you.

NR: Yes, right, "Keep quiet."

JC: What did they say? "Keep quiet," but did they explain why?

NR: Well, because they would split us up, would definitely split us up, definitely, yes.

JC: You would not be able to serve together.

NR: We wouldn't be able to serve together, so, yes.

JC: You will annotate the five Sullivan brothers. [laughter]

SH: I want to back up to your mother signing the papers. Did you go to the recruiting center and get the papers and bring them back home?

NR: Oh, let's see, how did that work? No, all I had to have was my birth certificate; I think that was the thing. If I remember correct, if you had your birth certificate and signed by a parent, you got in.

JC: You were underage. You were only seventeen.

NR: Well, I was seventeen. ...

JC: You did not need your mother's signature?

NR: ... Wait a minute, ... I don't remember how that happened. ... I can't remember.

SH: I would guess that she either went with you to the induction center or you brought those papers back for her to sign.

NR: Probably, most likely brought them back.

SH: How much time elapsed between signing the papers and physically getting in the Navy? Did they give you bus fare to go to [Naval Training Station Sampson]?

NR: ... We joined in Springfield, Mass. We had to take a bus to Springfield, Mass., and, from there, they really inducted us, and then from there to Sampson, they bussed us.

JC: Can we take a break for a minute? You went to tape number two already.

SI: No, I was just getting it ready.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Now, we are rolling.

JC: Now, he goes by Nick, instead of Pat. [laughter] Nick, you were talking earlier about watching those World War I films and how that led you to decide, if there was another war, that you were not going to go into the Army. Can you tell us a little bit more about that? What did you see in the films? What do you remember from the films?

NR: Oh, yes. Well, [if] you remember the films, these guys were in the mud all the time. ... [laughter] I said, "Well, if I join the Navy, I'll certainly be clean when I die. If I'm going to die, I'm going to die clean. I'm not going to die in mud," and then, that's the way I just felt, that's all. As a kid, that's what you said, "Hey, you know, if I'm going to die, I'm going to die the way I want to die." That was really the issue, really. So, you didn't go in there with the idea that you were going to come out, you know. You went in there with the idea that ... you might be dead. [laughter] You're never going to come out.

JC: Oh, did you think about that?

NR: You do, you do. I don't know, as a young guy, I did, and I think everybody else did.

SH: Plus, the fact that your mother sent you down to get your photograph taken.

NR: And everything else, right.



SH: You said to her, "Don't worry, Mom. I'm coming back."

NR: "I'm coming back," yes, yes, but, in the back of your mind, that is a possibility. I mean, that's what you're doing. You're risking your life.

JC: At seventeen, you really did think about the possibility of getting killed.

NR: Yes, but, you know, it was better to do it in the Navy than in the Army, in the mud. [laughter] "If I'm going to die, I won't die in the mud," right. ...

SH: Were there other movies that you watched besides *All Quiet on the Western Front*, that you remember?

NR: I can't remember. ...

SH: Did your stepfather ever talk about his World War I experiences, even though he never left the country, as you said? Did he regale you with stories he had heard from other soldiers?

NR: I wouldn't have listened to him anyway, you know, even if he did. [laughter] I didn't listen to this guy. ... I didn't care for this man at all. I didn't listen to him, [laughter] you know what I mean? You know, you had a blind eye and ... a deaf ear to anything he said. You know, I just disliked him. He was a mean person.

JC: New England has a tradition of young men going to the sea, of course, but they also get soldiers and Marines from New England as well. Not everybody goes to the Navy, but I wondered ...

SI: A lot of your peers went into the Navy, too; his friends went in the Navy, too.

JC: That is what I am saying. Do you think that more people you knew went into the Navy or the Army?

NR: Not really, not really. I just had my mind made up, I guess.

JC: It looks like most of your relatives, however, went into the Navy, at least the ones you have mentioned so far.

NR: Yes, right, but the one that's in that picture there, Patsy Marino, my uncle, ... he was in the Army.

JC: There was one in the Army.

NR: Some people went that way.

JC: Okay, but a lot of them went in the Navy. You mentioned a clean death, not in the mud.

NR: Right, right.

JC: You also told me once that many of the sailors never learned how to swim.

NR: Well, that was in the old Navy. The old Navy, they never learned how to swim.

JC: You mean the regulars, the professionals from before the war?

NR: The old Navy, the old Navy on sailing ships, the ones on the sailing [ships].

JC: The really old Navy.

NR: That's the real old Navy, the sailing ships, yes. They did not want to learn how to swim, because it would take a long time to die. They didn't want to take a long time to die. ... You're out in the middle of the ocean. ... Nobody's going to save you. Who was going to come and pluck you out of there? You're going to die. [laughter] If that ship went down and you were out there and you were in no boat, you're going to die, so, it's better not to be able to swim, just go.

JC: How did you learn this fact? It is an interesting fact. How did you learn it?

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

SI: This continues an interview with Mr. Nichola Russo in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on May 31, 2006, with Shaun Illingworth ...

SH: ... Sandra Stewart Holyoak ...

JC: ... John Chambers ...

NR: ... Nick Russo.

JC: This is tape number two. You just said that, in the old sailing ship Navy, sailors did not learn to swim, because, if they were going to sink out in the ocean, they would rather die quickly than become exhausted swimming, since nobody was going to save them.

NR: Right, right.

JC: I asked how you learned this fact.

NR: [laughter] I really don't know.

JC: You said that you knew it before you went into the Navy.

NR: ... Right. I felt that.

JC: You did not hear it from the "old salts," [older sailors].

NR: No, no, absolutely, yes.

JC: You must have read it before you went in.

NR: I must have read it somewhere, yes.

JC: Okay, but you had it in your mind.

NR: That's right.

JC: You knew how to swim, because you went skinny dipping.

NR: Yes, I know. Yes, we knew how to swim. That's right.

SH: Can you tell us about your induction, the physical and so on? What was that like for a young man of seventeen?

NR: Well, there was not much you could do, once you joined, you were in there and nothing's going to change. [laughter] I mean, you're not going to change anything, so, you're going to go along with what's going on. I mean, you know, they tell you to strip, you strip; you walk around in your skivvies for half the day, being physically examined.

JC: You remember that.

NR: ... Yes, and then, they prod you and look you over and make sure you're healthy and all that sort of thing. So, that's really what induction is, is to make sure you're what you say you are as a person.

SH: You did not have any physical problems, eye problems or anything like that, that you thought might keep you out.

NR: No.

SH: Had this uncle that joined the Navy gone in prior to you?

NR: He had gone in prior to me. He was in Boston for a while and he was in ... New York City for a while, in the induction centers. He was working in [them] or something like that. He joined early, and so, then, when I met him, he was going to be assigned to a ship. ...

SH: Please tell us about Sampson. What were the facilities like at Sampson?

JC: Where is Sampson?

NR: Sampson is on Lake Seneca.

JC: Lake Seneca, okay.

NR: New York.

SH: What time of year was it? We know you went in in June of 1943.

NR: Yes, yes, so, it was the summertime, yes.

SH: Summertime.

NR: Right, right. ...

SH: Hot, cold, wet?

NR: It was warm, but, you know, as a young kid, I don't remember, except it was a different kind of experience, and it was all right. It was fine.

SH: Was it physical training or was it technical training?

NR: It was physical. It was physical training, more physical, marching and running. [laughter] They had you go over obstacle courses and stuff like that, and then, of course, ... you had classes where they'd tell you all about the Navy and what's expected for you if you go aboard ship, blah, blah, blah, you know, all this. ... It was quite a nice [time]. It wasn't a bad time, really.

SH: Did you take a lot of tests?

NR: No, no.

SH: Like aptitude tests; had you already done that?

NR: Well, we went through that, but that was before, at induction, I think. There was some of that before induction, but not much, just to make sure that you could read and write and how bad off you were, you know. [laughter]

SH: Were they aware of your training as an apprentice welder and work as a welder?

NR: Not yet, no, not yet, nothing, no.

SH: There was nothing that followed you in.

NR: No, no.

JC: You mentioned in one of your interviews that, at Sampson, you remember marching, marching, marching. Is that true?

NR: Marching, marching, marching, yes, a lot of marching. Yes, yes, you know, it's physical, a lot of physical stuff.

JC: However, this was marching, in contrast to jogging or running over obstacles. You were not in the Army, so, why all this marching for the Navy?

NR: ... I have no idea.

JC: You were marching as a unit in formation.

NR: In formation, right, right.

JC: It must be for the discipline of following orders.

NR: This is discipline, yes, and following orders, right, I think so, and I suppose [what] they wanted to see was a good group that was in unison with each other, because, when you march, you're marching with other people. I mean, you're not taking long strides. Everybody's taking the same step. Actually, it's a funny thing, I don't know how this happens, but you know, because some people are taller, right, they would take a longer step, you know, and then, they'd walk out of you, right out of the group, but they're not, everybody is in step. ... I think that's what it, more or less, is, is to get you in step with everybody else.

JC: Were these chiefs, petty officers, who were marching you around?

NR: Oh, yes.

JC: Not commissioned officers, I imagine.

NR: I don't think it was.

SH: Marines?

JC: Did you say Marines?

SH: Were there any Marines?

JC: Marines?

NR: No, no, not that I know of.

JC: This is boot camp.

NR: This is boot camp for the US Navy. [laughter]

SH: How short was your boot camp?

NR: Well, it was supposed to be eight weeks and it ended up to be six weeks.

SH: Okay.

NR: It was six weeks, because they needed people down in [Norfolk]. They say, "We need people onboard ships," and then, so, we knew we were going to go onboard a ship, and we were happy about that. I was happy. [laughter] Hey, you joined the Navy to be onboard ship. That's where they got good [experience]. ...

JC: Did you want any particular kind of a ship?

NR: We didn't care. You know, we didn't know. We didn't even know that much about ships. We knew some things about ships, but [not much]. [laughter]

JC: I meant aircraft carriers, submarines.

NR: Yes.

SH: What was in your duffle bag when you left Sampson?

NR: Clothes, all your clothes, all your clothes and bedding.

JC: Bedding?

NR: Bedding.

JC: What do you mean bedding?

NR: Well, you got a ...

JC: Not a mattress.

NR: No, I'm saying you got sheets, and a blanket.

JC: Really, your own sheets in the duffle bag?

NR: Oh, yes, ... blanket, yes. Where else were you going to [store it]?

SH: Did you have any special mementoes or a good luck charm that you carried?

NR: Nothing.

SH: Did you have a medal, a religious medal, or anything that your mother gave you?

JC: St. Christopher's medal, a Bible?

NR: No, no.

SH: How were your orders given to you?

NR: In the service?

SH: Your travel orders, from Sampson.

NR: Oh, I see, yes.

SH: You were going home, but you have got to have orders to get there.

NR: Right, right. We had our train tickets to home, then, we had a train ticket to Norfolk. We had both of those. So, I had to go home, and then, I had to take the train. Everything was timed. We were supposed to be down there in two weeks. They had a two-week leave and, in two weeks, I was on the train going down there.

SH: What did you do during those two weeks?

NR: I can't remember. I really can't remember. Isn't this awful?

JC: Was this the first time you came home in uniform?

NR: Yes. ...

JC: In uniform.

NR: Right, right.

JC: You were coming home in your dress whites.

NR: Yes.

JC: It was summertime.

NR: ... It was summer, yes, yes, in the whites.

JC: Your dress whites.

SH: How did you do your hat? [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates how he wore his hat.]

JC: At a jaunty angle is the way he wore it.

NR: [laughter] Actually, I have a photo of me in the group, see, and they said, "Everybody straighten out your hats," and I went, "Crack;" I'm the only one with a crooked hat. You can spot me real quick. [laughter]

JC: You came home in your dress whites.

NR: Yes.

SH: What was the welcome like? What did your mother say?

NR: Well, you know, they all love you, you know. [laughter] They think you're great, you know. The old man stood on the side; didn't want anything to do with him. [laughter]

JC: He did not want anything to do with you.

NR: Yes. He knew I wouldn't have anything to do with him. I wouldn't even shake his hand, but that was a tough time, growing up. That was a tough time, growing up with him. I never liked him.

SH: Did you go down to the grocery store?

NR: Oh, yes. Everybody saw everybody, you know, and everybody's glad to see you. ...

SH: More and more people are in uniform at this point.

NR: I don't think anybody was home when I was home.

SH: You were ...

JC: Kind of alone, you know. I mean, that's the way guys came home, you know.

SH: Was there anybody special that you went to see before you left for Norfolk?

NR: I went to see Janet, Janet Fisher. ... Yes, I went to see Janet Fisher, yes. She was ... one of the gals we [went with].

SH: What about Mr. Peterson? Had he already left?

NR: He had not joined yet. He was still going out with Margaret Foster. So, when I came home on leave, we got together, you know. So, we did a few things together.

JC: You came home in your dress whites; you have your bell bottoms on, the bell bottom trousers; you have the white cap tilted at an angle. You went away a welder, you came back a sailor.

NR: A sailor.

JC: Did you really have a sense of yourself? Had your sense of identity changed? Did you swagger back and show off?



NR: No, I didn't, no.

JC: Did you show off for the girls with that uniform?

NR: No. I was kind of a subdued guy. I wasn't a big braggart or anything else. I mean, I just wanted to live in peace, if you know what I'm saying. I lived in a household that was really bad, you know, so, ... it kind of subdues you a little bit, you know. ... I always tried to get out of that, that mode.

SH: Did you stay home the full two weeks or did you leave early?

NR: Yes, I was home the two weeks, but I was out with Cliff and Janet and the rest, and Margaret Foster and the whole bunch.

SH: Had your grandmother passed away by this time?

NR: She died in 1939. My grandmother died. It was a sad time, yes. She died of cancer, yes.

JC: I just wanted to contrast the lack of swagger and rather solemn timidity when he comes back from the camp in uniform with what he is like in 1945, when he comes back and he has the biggest custom-made bells that he could have made.

NR: [laughter] Yes.

JC: It was beyond regulation. In 1945, you were swaggering.

NR: ... 1945, when I was swaggering, right. [laughter]

JC: We will come to that. That is a combat veteran.

NR: I had oversized bells. They were like this and, when you walked, they went, "Flop, flop, flop, flop, flop." [laughter]

JC: How did you get past the officer of the deck with those bells? I mean, they would grab you, stop you, right? "Those are non-regulation."

NR: Oh, yes, ... they'd always stop you and say, "Those are non-regulations." "Yes, I know." [laughter]

JC: He let you through anyhow.

NR: They'd let you through. They weren't going to take them. They were good guys.

JC: It was the end of the war.

NR: ... Most of the officers were pretty good guys.

SH: Where did you have these made?

NR: I didn't have them made. I bought them off another guy. [laughter]

JC: To put it differently, how did sailors get these non-regulation pants? Did they go to a tailor?

NR: They have them tailored. They have a tailor do it, yes, and it cost them a lot of money, and I got mine real cheap. He was tight for money, and so, I held off for a while and [waited him out]. [laughter]

JC: Really big bells. The idea is that you are different from the other sailors. Is that the idea?

NR: Yes, yes, but he was the same size I was. ...

JC: Tight around the waist, nothing like a sailor.

NR: Oh, yes, yes, thirteen buttons, thirteen buttons for the thirteen states.

JC: No zippers, right.

NR: Thirteen, for the states, right. That's a big fly. [laughter]

SH: The rolled tie.

NR: ... Yes, the rolled tie.

JC: What do they call it, the kerchief?

NR: The kerchief, yes, yes.

SH: Necktie.

SI: Going back to your induction, they had psychological interviews in which they tried to weed people out. You mentioned that you were very subdued and I have read that a lot of people were shocked by the questions they were asked. Do you remember those interviews at all?

NR: No, I don't think so.

SI: Did they ask you if you liked girls, that sort of thing?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. Well, that was when the psychiatrists ... got a hold of you, you know.

SI: Do you remember those interviews?

NR: Yes, I remember, but ... you knew what to answer, you know. You're not going to say, "Yes, I love ... boys," you know. [laughter] I mean, how ridiculous can you get? [laughter]

JC: You figured out what the right answers were.

NR: You figured it out. Figured it out? "Jesus, you mean I'm queer or something?" [laughter]

SH: I just wondered if there was anybody, at that stage, who decided, maybe, they had made the wrong choice and tried to get out. Do you think anybody tried to leave?

NR: ... I never saw it happen, but I can imagine it may and I can see where it may, where a guy may do that if he was drafted and wanted out, but I never saw it happen.

SH: When you traveled by train, from Sampson back to Massachusetts, and then, down to Norfolk, did you find yourself traveling coach, standing room only? How was the traveling?

NR: It was by coach, in a chair, you know, a seat. ... Let's see, it wasn't overnight [to Massachusetts]. I think it was overnight from Massachusetts down. I think it was an overnight.

SH: Did you have a Pullman car?

NR: We had a Pullman, yes.

JC: Oh, you had a bunk.

NR: Bunk, yes, "Clickity, clickity, clickity, click." ... This is what you're doing, "Clickity, clickity, clickity, click," and it puts you right to sleep, honest to God. [laughter]

SH: What kind of food did they have for you on the train?

NR: I don't remember. I don't remember, really.

SH: Coming from a very Italian neighborhood, what did you think of the Navy chow?

NR: You know, when you grow up in the Depression, you eat anything. [laughter] Everything tastes good, yes, so long as its food. I was not a fussy eater, either, you know. So, I enjoyed all the food. The first time I saw a grapefruit, you know, was when I went into the service.

SH: What did you think it was?

NR: ... Well, we heard, they said, "They're going to have grapefruit." I said, "Oh, gee, it must be grapes, you know. It must look like grapes. I like grapes," [laughter] you know, and then, you see the big orange ball. "That's the grapefruit." "Holy mackerel!" ... Then, they cut it in half for you, you know, and I tasted it and [thought], "Oh, man, that tasted awful." [laughter]

JC: It was sour.

NR: It was sour. So, then, they said, "You've got to put sugar on it." "Okay, I'll put sugar on it; it tastes pretty good." It was all right, you know. [laughter]

SH: Were most of the people in your company in Sampson from the Northeast, predominantly?

NR: They [were from] all over the East, not North or South. It was all around, you know. ... It was a circle around there, and Sampson, New York, I would imagine it was mostly New England and Pennsylvania and, you know, all the way around.

JC: New York.

NR: Yes, yes.

JC: Did guys cluster together, and did they cluster by region or ethnic group?

NR: No. ... The way I felt, anyway, everybody was a person in themselves. You were not a joiner and, if you did begin conversations with guys or you had conversations with guys, you'd still remain separate. ... There was not that buddy-buddy thing, at that point, because you knew you were all going to split up anyway and this is kind of a transition thing. ... That's the way I felt, you know. These guys are all going to go somewhere and I'm going another way, and so, we'll just get along until we do, you know, and there was ... never any altercations, nobody insulted anybody, you know. Like, ... especially in the service, the kid that was eating flies, you know.

JC: Was this at Sampson?

NR: Sampson, yes.

JC: Tell them the story about this character.

NR: Yes. Well, this character here, he would catch flies. He could catch a fly anywhere.

JC: With his hand.

NR: With his hand, with his hand, in the air, whatever. He'd put it in a little matchbox, you know the little matchbox, with the little drawer in it? and he'd ... take one wing off and put it in there. ... Then, when he got it full, he would eat them. He would eat them. [laughter] I remember, he's sitting out there, ... outside of the building there, and he's eating them. ... One guy says, "Hey, it's all protein, you know. That's okay." [laughter] Nobody really made fun of him. Nobody said anything. It was just a fact.

JC: He was from?

NR: I think he was from Tennessee.

JC: The mountains.

NR: The mountains. ...

SH: He was not doing this to try to get out of the Navy.

NR: No, no. ... He really ate them and ... he put it in his mouth and he says, "I let it walk around a little bit." [laughter]

JC: Oh, Jesus. This was his routine back in Tennessee.

NR: [laughter] This is his routine back in Tennessee.

JC: He said he was doing it for the food.

SH: Okay.

JC: You meet all kinds, obviously. [laughter]

SH: In boot camp, there is always competition between the companies. Do you remember which company you were assigned to? Did you come out on top?

NR: We weren't in competition, I don't think. I don't think so, only in the movies.

SH: Really?

NR: Yes, we had no competition.

SH: Where you had to be spit-and-polished?

NR: We were. We had to be, yes. That was it, and then, we had to go running down the street and do the calisthenics and all that other stuff. We ... physically did.

SH: Were you divided into groups of twenty, thirty or forty?

NR: I think we had almost seventy or eighty in our group. It was one [of] these buildings that they put up, ... two-story buildings, okay.

JC: Barracks.

NR: Barracks, and ... one unit on one floor, the other unit on the other, top floor, and then, they had these buildings all over.

SH: There was no competition between these units ...

NR: None, none.

SH: ... to get the flag and be the leading group.

NR: No.

SH: Okay.

NR: No, no, and then, they say, "You guys have done so good, so well, ... you've done very well, we're going to discharge you early. You're going to join the [fleet]." [laughter] They needed people down in Norfolk to man the ships.

SH: This incident with the guy from Tennessee and the flies is very unique. Were there other incidents where you had to help one of your colleagues, shall we say, adjust?

NR: ... [laughter] Right, yes. We had the guy that couldn't take a bath, i.e., shower. He stunk.

SH: He did not know how to take a bath.

NR: Yes. Well, I don't know whether he didn't know, but he just wouldn't. He stunk, ... and so, then, they decided that they were going to scrub him down and that's what we did. We scrubbed him down, with a brush. ...

SH: You all participated in that.

NR: ... Yes. The way the barracks is set up is, ... in the front of the barracks, as you come in to the unit, and, of course, there's a back door, too, but, in the front door, there's the officer who was in charge of you on one side, and his bunk and his quarters, which is enclosed. We don't see him, all we see is that, and then, of course, there's the showers and everything else on the other side. We wash up and do all your toiletry and all that. So, then, the rest of the barracks is a line of bunks, all the way down on both sides, and there's quite a few in there. I can't tell you the number of people that are there, but, anyway, ... that consists of a troop of us, you know what I mean? Then, there's the upstairs, that's another troop, another officer up there in charge, and so, this guy, he stunk, you know. ... He really smelled and guys were getting mad, you know, and so, they decided they were going to scrub him down in the washroom. ... They dragged him down to the washroom and got the scrub brush and scrubbed him down, amidst a lot of yelling and screaming and everything else. [laughter]

SH: The officer was deaf.

NR: The officer was deaf in his office. [He did not] want to hear about it. [laughter] In other words, "You take care of it yourself." I think somebody complained to him and he said, "You take care of it yourself." ... Then, in later years, it's a funny thing, I had an employee who was the same way and the people were complaining about him. I said, "Take care of it yourself." [laughter] I learned. ...

SH: Did you find that there were people who were not going to make it through training or did you think everybody would?

NR: Everybody was a pretty good spirit. ...

SH: Nobody washed out.

NR: Nobody washed out, nobody, no, no. You know, growing up in the '30s, ... it defeats a lot of that, you know what I mean? A lot of people were hungry; ... now, they've got good food. You know, it's a lot different. Actually, you know, Roosevelt never did solve the Depression. It was the war that saved [the country from] the Depression, at least that's the way I always felt, in retrospect, I always say.

SI: I grew up listening to stories from my grandfather, who is about your age and also served in the Navy. He would tell me how you were all very young, very serious, grew up in the Great Depression, there was a war on, but, also, there was a lot of horsing around, pranks and stuff. Do you remember any of that from your training, guys being guys, that sort of thing?

NR: No, we didn't have that. ... You know, we're only together for, what, six weeks? not the eight weeks that we're supposed to [have been]. We're together for six weeks and ... you don't know people that well. You have to get to know people well before you can start playing around with their mind, you know what I mean? and we just never did. I never did.

SH: What do you recall about the sense of patriotism within the country, within your community, then, at Sampson? There has been a lot of discussion about how people felt much more patriotic then than they do now.

NR: You know, I always kind of looked at it as kind of saving your life, you know what I mean? You're saving your own life, too, ... if you're going to let those guys across the water there invade you and defeat you, you know. ... You're saving your own life, really. That's the way I always looked at it. Our freedoms were at stake.

SI: Many of the Italian-Americans I have interviewed have said that, at some point, they were asked, "Would you have any problem fighting against the Italians?" Were you ever asked that?

NR: No, no, we never ...

SI: They never asked you if you would have any problem fighting against the Italians.

NR: We wouldn't have, no. ... Well, most of us were young. We didn't relate to Italy, *per se*. This was [the] USA; this was our country. "Hey, if you guys [the Italians] got bad, we're going to come after you," I would think, [laughter] you know what I mean? So, it never really came up.

SI: Okay, but they never even asked.

NR: Never even asked, never, no.

SH: You said that some of the family would say, "Speak *Americana*."

NR: "*Americana*," yes. [laughter]

SH: I thought perhaps they were also pretty *gung ho*, patriotically, as well.

NR: Right, right, yes. Mostly, that's true. That's very true.

SH: Take us from the field to being assigned to the *South Dakota*. How did you physically get from that field onto the *South Dakota*? Did you know what the *South Dakota* was then?

NR: No, didn't even know nothing about it. All we knew was [the name] *South Dakota*. You know, we knew nothing about it and we got down there in the big field. This is where we ended up, after I got off the train and everything else, we were pushed on this big, big field and it was just loaded with guys. That's it. ... You know [the] big, big system, sound system, up there?

SI: Loudspeakers?

NR: All the loudspeakers, and they were calling out names and a ship. They call out your name and the ship you're going on. That was it.

SH: Then, you just stayed in the field.

NR: You stayed in the field, and then, they would say, "Okay," and then, somebody would take charge of all those for the *South Dakota*. ... So, there was a splitting up and, the first thing you know, everybody was being channeled towards the docks.

SH: Where did they take you from the field? Did they take you by bus?

NR: No, we just walked over. ... We were right down on the docks. ... We were near the docks. We were near the places where they were and we marched over, as far as I remember.

SH: The *South Dakota* was actually tied up at the dock.

NR: Right.

SH: How did they put you on, single file?

NR: Yes, yes, you go up the gangplank. You go up the plank, ... and then, you go in, onboard ship, and you salute the officer of the deck and he salutes you. "Welcome aboard," he'd say.

SH: Where did you report to?



NR: "Permission to come aboard, sir," that's right. "Permission to come aboard, sir," you would [ask] and he'd say, "Come aboard. Permission granted," on you come. [laughter]

SH: Where do you go next? Do you know, at that point?

NR: No. ... You stay aboard, and then, you just start. You form a line there, and then, they tell you what division you are in and how to get there and blah, blah, blah. ...

SH: What was your first impression of the *South Dakota*? You have obviously walked past other ships, because the cruiser would be at the end of the dock.

NR: Yes. ... This was a big battleship. It was a big ship, ... and we knew what that was, you know. It was a battleship. It was the biggest ship you could be on.

SH: Was there any discussion, as you were walking, about what you were getting into?

NR: No, no, very little. You know, I don't remember too much. The thing is we just wanted to get onboard and that was great, you know. ...

SH: Was it bigger or smaller than you had imagined? What was your impression of it?

NR: It was big. It was big. Of course, we had nothing to judge it by, really, in a sense. The aircraft carriers were real big, you know what I mean. Those were giant things, you know. ... You know, it's awful hard to [picture], and the cruiser, you've got to remember, a cruiser is almost as big as a battleship, not quite, but almost, ... but the battleship is big. It's a big sucker. It's got a big punch, too, [laughter] sixteen-inch [guns]; you see the shells on the [deck].

SH: Was there a sense of pride in being assigned to the USS *South Dakota*, as opposed to another ship?

NR: We didn't know how famous she was, at that point.

SH: That was what I wondered. Did you know?

NR: We didn't know, just went aboard and that was it and got assigned to ... where we were supposed to go and that sort of thing.

SH: Did you, at any point, request any kind of duty?

NR: No, you just followed orders, period. [laughter]

SH: No dream sheets.

NR: No dream sheets, yes, yes. I had a dream sheet. "Take that," [laughter] you know what I mean? You're in the Navy now. You do what the Navy wants you to do. [laughter]

SH: Okay. Then, where were you assigned?

NR: I was assigned to a deck, or numbered, one, two, three, etc., division, and then, I got into a letter division of skilled men, which was the ship fitters, where I could do my welding. I had a welding certificate, so, that was really something. So, that helped me get out of the deck division of unskilled men, which was swabbing decks, chipping paint, painting, and that sort of thing. All such divisions were also referred to as departments, and all the departments were divided into three divisions, one third to man the ship at all times.

SH: How long did it take you to get from the deck division to the "R" Division?

NR: ... When we stood out, to go to sea, from Norfolk, which is where we boarded, we boarded her in Norfolk, Virginia, and, on the way out, that's when I got assigned to that division.

SH: How much time had elapsed from the time that you reported to the *South Dakota*?

NR: It was a couple of weeks, until we were moving out.

SH: Did you have any leaves? Were you on the ship the whole time?

NR: No, onboard ship all the time, working out, yes, doing whatever.

SH: Why was the *South Dakota* in port at that point?

NR: It was out in the North Atlantic. ... It came back from the Pacific, where it got into ... two big battles down there, and it got damaged quite a bit, came back to the navy yard where it was built and they refitted her again, in New Jersey, you know.

SH: Was it in Camden?

NR: Camden, New Jersey. So, then, from there, they went into the North Atlantic and they were in the North Atlantic for a while, and then, they came down to Norfolk. It was going back out to the Pacific, because the war was getting heavy out there and they needed the ships. ... That's when I boarded her, after those two big, hard battles. I boarded her after that, and then, we had quite a few battles (eleven) after that.

SI: Were you being brought on as replacements for guys that had been killed in the earlier battles or were they just augmenting the crew for the next tour?

NR: Yes, and the other thing is, ... on the smaller guns, ... especially on the twenty-millimeters and the forty-millimeters, they were trying to put in more, because they needed more anti-aircraft, because the things that we had to do [were], we had to protect the carriers and they needed more firepower protecting those carriers. The carriers are easy to hit. I mean, if a guy wants to dive into them, he can dive into them, and that's what they were doing. So, we had to have more firepower to protect those carriers, and that was the reason we went out there. ... We were loaded, refitting guns and stuff like that, more guns, more twenty-millimeters, especially twenty-

millimeters. ... I can't remember, on the forty-millimeters, what they did with those, but we had more firepower to go out there, and antiaircraft fire.

SH: In those two weeks, did you ever go to sea for a trial?

NR: No, no.

SH: They had already done the shakedown, when she was commissioned.

NR: That was all done, yes. That was all done. They were just adding on and they were outfitting and getting everybody aboard and that was it.

SH: When you started down towards the Canal, did you travel in convoy? How did you travel?

NR: Yes. You travel with, usually, some destroyers, maybe another cruiser or something like that. When you're going, you're not trying to engage the enemy. There's no enemy down there, anyway, ... but we're always, usually, escorted with a couple of destroyers or something like that, and maybe, sometimes, a cruiser, if it's on its way. So, a lot of the ships were on their way out to the Pacific. The war in Europe was pretty much predicted at that point, so, they were putting whatever they could out in the Pacific to wind that up, hopefully wind that up. That was promising to be a long war, really.

SH: What did you do for those two weeks? You were in the deck division. You were swabbing the deck. Is that all you did?

NR: [laughter] That's about it. You just worked, you know what I mean? whatever they wanted you to do, until I got in the "R" Division, which was near the end, at the end of that period. ... I got in the "R" Division, which was the welding and ship fitting and damage control, firefighting, and all that sort of thing. ...

SI: Now that you are onboard the ship, can you describe your living conditions, your bunk, that sort of thing?

NR: Yes. Well, your bunks are usually, oh, let's see, one, two, three, four, I think it's seven high, seven high bunks. ... They could be in a row like this, on each side, that high. [laughter] Anyplace where they had room, they would put these bunks and, of course, during wartime, it's more, more bunks in there, and that's where we sleep at. In the galley, they had hammocks in the galley, but that was for in case something happened to the bunks or something, but we used to go down there anyway. [laughter] We used to sleep in the hammocks once in a while. We'd go down there, sleep in the hammock. Yes, we figured it was kind of neat, you know, sleeping in a hammock, even if we had a bunk, [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the swaying of the ship], [laughter] you know, rocking, swaying back and forth. Yes, that was fun, yes. ...

SH: Did your quarters change once you changed divisions?

NR: Yes, and my quarters would change with whatever job I had. It would change, because, remember, we've got to save the ship from fire and damage. We're damage control, we're everything, ... but I was usually in the sump pumps. ... The sump pump's way down below. To operate the sump pumps, that was my battle station, and then, I had another battle station [that] was on the flood boards. ... If the ship gets hit on this side and the tank is empty, it fills up with water and the ship is going to list, right. So, you've got to put water on this side, so [that] the ship would straighten out. Otherwise, you can't shoot straight, [laughter] if you want to shoot straight. So, that's what the flood boards were. ... They would call down. They'd say, "We need flood board such-and-such. We need tank so-and-so filled up," you know, get the list back again, but ... I only did that a few times. Actually, it wasn't that many times that we had to correct the list on the ship.

SH: Really?

NR: Yes, and we didn't get hit at the water line. If you got hit on one side, then, ... you might need to flood a tank on the other side.

SH: When you went from Norfolk down through the Panama Canal, did you get to come up on deck at all and see what it was like to go through?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. You see, if I wasn't on watch, I could go anywhere on the ship.

SH: Can you?

NR: Yes, I can go anywhere on the ship, and you watch it a bit.

SH: I do not know how long it took you to get from Norfolk to the Canal, but can you talk about the adjustment during that period? Did your training come into play at any point before you got to the Panama Canal?

NR: Not really. To get to [the] Panama Canal, it was just a ride down. It was, more or less, a ride. Of course, you know, onboard ship, there are three divisions and each division, so, a third of the ship, is in command [at a time]. ... This is before you man battle stations, fore and aft, and, when you man battle stations, that means all three go to battle stations, but, if no battles stations are [called], then, there's one division on duty at all times, ... first, second, third. That's the way it goes, around the clock, year in and year out. It goes on forever, okay, as long as that ship is sailing. When the ship is docked or at anchor, then, two-thirds of the ship is to remain onboard as one division may go ashore for leave.

JC: Was this four hours on, eight hours off?

NR: ... Yes, it can be that, yes, but that's the way it is. Each division has their turn, okay, and so, that's mainly how the ship is really run.

SH: Okay. When you were first onboard, which division were you in?

NR: I was in the third division.

SH: In the third division.

NR: That doesn't mean anything, really, except a number, or letter.

SH: I just wanted to know where you were in the allocation of duty stations.

NR: Right, right. So, the next time, they're in; the next time, they're in, right so, that's all there is, you know. ... So, that means you're on watch, okay; I'm on watch; if I'm not on watch and it's, say, during the day, I've got to report to work. [laughter] We have, actually, an eight-hour work day.

SH: Where was your watch?

NR: My watches were in the sump pumps, or on the flood boards, ... once I got into the "R" Division. ... The "R" Division is what they call the repair division or whatever you want, but it was damage control, that's the real name of it, and we had firefighters and all that sort of thing, fighting the fires. So, we took care of the ship and repaired it and put out the fires and did all that sort of thing. So, that was the "R" Division that I was in and, of course, I was a welder, so, that was [my job].

SH: You said that in those first two weeks was when they determined that you had the certificate and were a welder. Then, you quickly went into that.

NR: ... Right. I found out, by myself, who the officer was who was in charge of the "R" Division, because ... I wanted to get off of the deck division. The deck division is just the swabbies or unskilled men. ...

JC: They swab the deck.

NR: Swab the deck, that's [all].

SH: Who told you that you could use your welding certificate to move to a different division?

NR: It was a guy named (Pallela?) and he was an old-timer and he used to sit around and hold court, [that] kind of thing, [laughter] you know what I mean? We'd go down there and we'd pick his brains, you know, and find out about this, and that was one of the questions. He asks, "What kind of skill you got?" I said, "A welder." "You can go in the 'R' Division." He said, "Oh, go see ... the officer in the 'R' Division." I ask, "Who's the officer?" So, he helped me find out [laughter] and that's how I got there.

JC: Can we hear a little bit more about this man? You say he was an old-timer. How long had he been in the Navy, do you think?

NR: Twenty, thirty years. ... He was a real old-timer, yes. I never saw him work. [laughter]

JC: He really knew the Navy.

NR: He really knew how to get by. I mean, this guy here, I still don't know what he did. Nobody knew what he did, but he'd sit there, hold court, you know, and he'd tell you, "Ask any question you want," brag about this and brag about that.

JC: Give us some examples.

NR: ... He talked about going, you know, in Asia, you know. He said, "That's the best place," he says, you know, "and don't hear any stories about, you know, women in Asia." He says, "They're just as normal as you and I," you know. [laughter] I don't know if you understand that, but ... [laughter]

SH: Dehumanization of the enemy.

NR: Yes, yes. He was one of those guys that [was] just no nonsense. He'd tell you like it was and that was it. ...

JC: He was talking about the China Service [US Navy forces in China] at Shanghai.

NR: Shanghai.

JC: Not going up the Yangtze River. He was a deepwater sailor, not a river sailor.

NR: I don't think so. I don't think so.

SH: How long had he been on the *South Dakota*?

NR: I guess he was onboard since it sailed, yes. He was onboard.

JC: In the 1930s? No, it was in the 1940s.

NR: ... '39, '40, yes, yes, whenever it was ...

SH: Commissioned?

NR: Commissioned, yes, because it was built in the '30s.

SI: He was a plankman on the *South Dakota*.

NR: Yes, yes, but he had all the stories, you know.

SI: What did he tell you about the battles at Santa Cruz and Guadalcanal?

NR: He never talked much about it, and it's a funny thing. He never talked much about the battles you know. We were trying to dig the battles out of him, but we found out a lot of stuff anyway. We knew what went on aboard ships. ...

SH: How did you find out?

NR: People would talk. I mean, some guys would say, "Hey, ... I was here and I was there," and that sort of thing. ... We were always eager for this knowledge. We'd pick anybody's brain if we could, but it was hard to pick their brain, because they didn't like to talk about bad times.

JC: Why was that?

NR: I don't know. Maybe it's bad memories; I don't know. Yes, everybody's frightened, you know, that's not an easy thing to be in, I think you may know what I'm saying, if you're really in a battle, that you're fighting for your life, or the life of the ship, which is what it was.

SH: Did they talk about what some of the conditions were like for them, personally?

JC: Are you talking about the Battle of Santa Cruz?

NR: The Battle of Santa Cruz? No, ... they wouldn't talk about themselves, no, because everybody's scared and you hate to tell everybody, "I'm scared," you know. [laughter]

JC: Did they admit to you that they were scared?

NR: We didn't push them. I don't know. We had a sense that you couldn't push them, you know what I mean? You couldn't push them to answer questions like that. You wouldn't ... ask them a question like that, "Were you scared?" *You* know, that's [not a thing to ask]. You wouldn't ask them.

JC: Sometimes, they actually tell you, "Anybody who is not scared is lying."

NR: Lying in their teeth, right. You knew damn well they were. "So, ... why are you asking me that for?" you know.

SH: Did anybody ever say to you, "When this happens, be sure you do this, because I learned the hard way," or, "Forget what the manual says; you have got to do it this way if you want to survive?"

NR: No, no, not much of that, no, because, you've got to remember, you took your orders from somebody [else]. You took orders from this guy above you. [laughter] You don't listen to the other guy. You're not going to do what this guy tells you, so, you might as well listen to what your superior wants.

SH: How much experience did your superiors have? How long had they been on the battleship?

NR: Well, they didn't, but they were just like us, too, you know what I'm saying? We could understand, in certain ways, they were just like us. A lot of these guys had come off the street, just like we did, and ended up with [commissions] because they had a college education, but they were just as scared as we were. They weren't [special]. We never talked about things like that. We never did. We just let them be. ... We had a damage control [station] that was a wheelhouse. That was a wheel down below the ship that was the same as the wheel up there that steers the ship, and the wheel down here, ... if that top got shot off, it would operate down in this section and the damage control was right next to it. We were damage control, in a sense, and repair, ... "R" Division, repair/damage control. ... That was the ... nub of the whole thing. We were damage control. ... That's what we did. We hoped it would never come to that.

SH: How many people were you with? When you stood a watch, how many were in your area on your watch that you could talk to?

NR: Me. I was in one area, right, but I could talk with the damage control center. I had phones.

JC: Headset ...

NR: Headset.

JC: ... and mouthpiece.

NC: Mouthpiece. Press the mouthpiece and talk.

SH: What was your duty when you were on watch?

NR: ... That was a flood board. I could flood any tank on this side of the ship, and then, there was a flood board on the other side. The other guy could flood any tank on that side of the ship. So, we had two big, massive flood boards and I used to have one of them, and then, there was the sump pumps, way down. ... You needed somebody down there in case anything went wrong with the sump pump. I was alone on watch there. ...

JC: Is that the lowest level of the ship?

NR: The lowest level of the ship, [laughter] for the sump pumps, but, on the flood boards, under the second deck, under the armored deck, which was sixteen-inches thick steel.

JC: Okay, there is the bilge, and then, the board is the next lowest.

NR: No, no, it's higher.

JC: Much higher.

NR: I'm sorry, it's much higher. It's just below the armored deck.

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



JC: I was going to get him to explain what he does with that board. If they get torpedoed on the one side, then, he has got to put the water on the other side, to straighten it. You want that here or later?

SH: He talked about that.

JC: Oh, he talked about that already.

SH: Not in too much detail, but we will get back to that. During the drills, what did you do? Please, tell us about the drills, and then, how you became very skilled and knowledgeable about what your duty station was. Did you have to qualify to be able to stand that watch?

NR: No, this is all a bunch of little push buttons and everything else. They'd say, "Tank #47, go to Tank #47. Empty or fill it." [laughter] ... All you had to do is press a button. ... That's about all you had to do. That was it. There was no big, complex thing.

SH: Nobody trained you.

NR: Nobody had to train you. Golly, you [only] had to look at the board, you know. They told you, "Go to that board. Press that one there and that one there," and that's it. "Go to Tank #20," or whatever it is, and so, you went to Tank #20, fill it, empty it. That would balance the ship, so that ... if the torpedo hit this side and flooded those tanks and you were on a list, that means the guns couldn't shoot, especially the big guns, sixteen-inch and five-inch. The little guns are different, but the big guns, you couldn't shoot. So, it means you're going to level that ship, and the only way to level the ship is to pump, fill one of these tanks over here with water, like this [the opposite tank] is over here. That leveled it off. Then, you're ready to go again.

SH: What would be some of the damage control that you would have to do? What were some of the typical, everyday kind of repairs?

NR: Oh, you know, we went through storms a lot. We went through a lot of storms and, a lot of times, the ammunition boxes on the deck would get knocked off, ... get loose, because the welds would not hold. I mean, after awhile, that water ... really, it hits. It hits hard, especially on a big ship that's traveling, at thirty knots. [laughter]

JC: It broke a weld on these ammunition boxes.

NR: It'll break a weld, yes, oh, yes. Those waves'll break welds. They'll do anything. You never can tell. They might even break a twenty-millimeter gun, sometimes. ...

JC: Break off a gun barrel?

NR: Well, ... they'd loosen up the mount of a twenty-millimeter, ... but that was rare.

JC: They were swept out to sea.

NR: They would scatter around on deck, [laughter] yes, yes, but there were spare ones around, but, most of the time, ... we weld them back on. So, there's always some welding to do. The whole ship is steel. ... The only wood onboard the ship is the decking, the top deck. ... The base is all metal, then, they put wood on there, just because they don't want to get away from the wooden ship. [laughter] Somehow, they have a love for it, ... but that was it.

SH: Did you have to develop sea legs? Did you ever suffer seasickness?

NR: I never suffered seasickness, never did. From the day I got on there until the day I left, I never got seasick.

JC: Did a lot of other guys?

NR: A lot of guys got seasick, oh, yes. I couldn't understand it, but ... to each his own, you know. "I feel sorry for you." ... Guys would go over to the guys that are over the side, [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the vomiting sailors], say, "Hey, how would you like a nice, greasy pork chop?" [laughter] "Oh!" That's the truth. That's exactly true.

JC: Would they only get this seasickness at the beginning of the cruise, and then, get over it?

NR: Yes, more at the beginning, yes, and, after awhile, they get used to it. They get their sea legs, [laughter] but we used to love to pick them up, when these new ones come onboard. [laughter]

SH: When you left Norfolk, how far did you get in a typical day?

NR: ... Those ships were traveling, probably, twenty-five knots an hour, something like that, on a regular cruise. The ship could go over thirty knots, well over thirty knots, and that's a mile plus a little bit more. So, that was a normal cruise. They saved the big spurts for battles.

JC: You were not traveling alone, were you? There were destroyer escorts, cruisers.

NR: No, there were destroyers, destroyer escorts, maybe, a couple of destroyers, and maybe another ship, ... maybe it's a cruiser, or something like that, would be ... also in the group, but we went pretty much alone. We went pretty much alone. I remember, I think, in going to Panama, the first [trip] going through ... the Panama Canal, there was us and I think there was a cruiser and I think it was three destroyers and I think there was a small ship. ... I can't remember what it was, but there was another smaller ship than a destroyer, and that was it.

SH: Did you go through the Canal first, then, the destroyers?

NR: I can't remember the order. I don't remember the order. ...

SH: How long does it take?

NR: It takes eight hours.

JC: Is that all, from one ocean to the other?

NR: [laughter] Yes, because it's not a very long canal.

SI: Can you describe your mindset as you were headed out towards the Pacific? You mentioned that you were kind of pumping the old-timers for information about battles. Did you want to get into combat? Were you eager to fight?

NR: No. Nobody's eager to fight. [laughter] No one's eager to fight. They hope it's a, you know ...

SI: Uneventful?

NR: ... Uneventful trip, that's what you really want. ... You want to live, first, and that's what it really means. You know you're on a battleship, and, ... if a sixteen-inch shell hits you, from another battleship, yes, that's a lot of damage. I mean, it can kill anybody near it. ... Of course, I was down below, ... but you can drown down there, too. So, you think of all these things. That's all in your mind. It's all in your mind, really, and you just have to deal with it. You have to deal with it. You know you're in danger, but you have to deal with it.

SI: However, you were not discussing this with your buddies.

NR: No, no. ...

SH: Was anybody going to Mass?

JC: Mass, the religious services?

NR: Yes, a lot of them went to Mass, yes. I did not go to Mass.

JC: Did they have it on the fantail? Where did it take place?

NR: It could happen anywhere. ... They'd announce that there will be a service, ... well, maybe on the topside ... or sometimes inside, you know, in the galley. Maybe they'll have a short service in the galley or somewhere like that. ... Religion wasn't the heavy thing.

JC: Maybe the Army is different, but we have a lot of eighteen-year-olds who go to war and are eager to get into combat. They also think, of course, that they are not going to get killed, that it is going to happen to somebody else.

NR: Right.

JC: I wonder whether it is because, in these units I am talking about, these guys are all fresh. They are not seasoned with old veterans. I am wondering if what you are talking about is

modified by the fact that you have got these veterans on the ship, that they are conveying the idea that people do get killed and that this is dangerous.

NR: ... That's right, that's right. We were ... well aware, because a lot of kids, guys, got killed before we came aboard, aboard ship, over a hundred.

JC: At Santa Cruz?

NR: Yes, Santa Cruz, the Battle of Santa Cruz, there's a lot of people got killed.

SH: Who talked to you about that?

NR: Nobody talked to us. Guys would relate it, you know what I mean? ... There was not a lecture on it or anything like that, but there were guys that would mention something and you'd have to really listen, because ... most of them don't want to talk about it. When you go through something like that, you just don't want to talk about it.

JC: Was the damage to the ship completely repaired? Were there any scars left on the ship? It obviously took some big hits, including fourteen-inch shells, from the Japanese.

NR: Right, right.

JC: There was no evidence left.

NR: ... I think one of those fourteen-inch shells went right through the ship, [laughter] on the topside, it went right through. ... You've got the superstructure and it went right through it, ... because there was only two walls ... it had to go through, right through.

JC: There was no evidence of that left. They really fixed it up.

NR: ... Oh, yes, they fixed that. They just rip everything out and they just put her [all back in], all brand-new, yes. ...

SH: Who was your captain?

NR: We had Captain Lee [Rear Admiral Willis A. Lee, Jr.] when we went out there. I think it was Captain Lee, and then, we had Captain [Charles B.] Momsen. The Momsen Bell, I don't know if you're familiar with that. The Momsen Bell was a bell-shaped device that you could lower down into the ocean, on top of, say this is the submarine, and they would lower it right on top of it.

JC: On top of the hatch.

NR: On top of the hatch, open up the hatch, and people could get out.

SH: It was the escape apparatus.

NR: So, it was the Momsen Bell. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo is referring to the McCann Submarine Rescue Chamber, developed by Momsen and Lieutenant Commander Allan Rockwell McCann. Momsen also led the development of the Momsen Lung, a personal breathing apparatus used by sailors in escaping sunken submarines.]

JC: Had he been a submariner?

NR: He was a submariner.

JC: They put him in charge of a battleship.

NR: Yes, because, ... wait a minute, in order for him to become an admiral, he had to have battleship duty. He had to have one year.

JC: One year. He did get to be an admiral.

NR: [laughter] Otherwise, you don't get to be an admiral. ...

JC: Is that Willis "Ching" Lee, from the Battle of Santa Cruz?

NR: Yes. I didn't know that.

JC: He was the captain of the battleship USS *Washington* at Santa Cruz.

NR: ... No, I don't think it was that one. Maybe it's another Lee, no. Momsen, Captain Momsen, was the captain at that time. ... Lee went out. Yes, I thought it was a Captain Lee. I'm not sure, maybe not. [Editor's Note: Admiral Willis Lee served as Commander Battleships Pacific Fleet during this period. Mr. Russo may have been recalling his time on the USS *South Dakota* as a flag officer.]

SH: We can check that. How did you find this information out? That is one of the things that I am curious about. Was this something that you read about? Was there a newsletter that talked about this onboard the ship?

JC: Do you mean the Momsen Bell? What are you talking about?

SH: I am talking about the Battle of Santa Cruz.

JC: Okay.

NR: Oh, the Battle of Santa Cruz. We just heard it by word of mouth after, if a guy would talk. Most of them wouldn't talk about it. I mean, you know, I imagine they were pretty scared.

SH: Did they have a newsletter on the ship?

NR: Yes. We had sort of like a newsletter, yes, and I used to send them home.

SH: Did you?

NR: Yes.

SH: Did you ever contribute to them?

NR: No, no, never contributed to it, yes.

JC: I think the officers wrote them, right?

NR: Yes, yes, the officers wrote them, and they had to be cleared and all of that, and they would tell them what we'd been through and everything else. There was nothing about dates or times or where we were at for security reasons.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JC: We have a couple of copies of these newsletters that he has given to me. They are over at the [Rutgers University] archives and, also, the Rutgers Oral History Archives. You also sent them home to your mother and to your teacher, I think you said.

NR: Right, right. [laughter]

SH: Which teacher?

NR: I can't remember. I can't remember which teacher.

SH: Your favorite English teacher?

NR: No, she was our teacher in the lower grade, first to sixth, at the Woodland Street School. The higher grades were at Major Edwards High, at the center of the town, West Boylston.

SH: What did you do in your down time, when you were not working or standing watch?

NR: Sleeping, sleeping. [laughter] That's true. I mean, sleeping was a good time, because you were up for quite a bit.

SI: In an average night, how many hours of sleep were you able to get?

NR: Well, you never really got a full [night's sleep], if you're talking about eight on, four off. ... Within that eight on, [four] off, you've got a lot of time on watch, by the time you get through, ... and so, you've got to be awake. You can't be sleeping over there. [laughter] You can't go to sleep while on watch. [laughter] You would be putting the ship in danger.

SH: Was your bunk your bunk?

NR: My bunk used to change quite a bit, because they would change me from the sump pumps, ... as a battle station, then, they would change me to a battle station on the flood board. So, that was another [bunk]. So, in other words, as "R" Division people, we were all split apart, because we had different parts of the ship we had to take care of. So, we were spread around. We weren't all in one group. So, we were spread around and, as our battle station changed, we had to change to be close to it, not far from it. You had to get up and, boom, you had to be right there, almost.

JC: Did you have what they called "hot bunks," in other words, a bunk that you would sleep in for four hours, and then, somebody else would sleep in it?

NR: No.

JC: This was your own bunk that you were assigned to you.

NR: This was your bunk, yes, and then, when you had to go on, say, if I had to do the sump pump room, then, I'd have to go here to be over [near] the sump pump room. ...

JC: Different sleeping quarters.

NR: Different sleeping quarters, different bunk.

JC: How many were piled on top of each other? How many tiers?

NR: ... I think it's five tiers. ...

JC: How many inches between bunks?

NR: Twenty inches.

JC: Oh, jeez. Can you roll over? Can you roll over in twenty inches?

NR: Yes, you can roll over. We could. We were skinny then, you know. [laughter] We were skinny sailors.

JC: Were the guys all showering?

NR: Yes, all showering, usually with hot and pure water from the evaporators and, at times, the evaporators were down and they used saltwater from the sea.

JC: It was not so bad then.

NR: No, no. I'll tell you, everybody was clean. I mean, ... you learned that in boot camp. I think I mentioned it, about one of the guys.

JC: Did he mention it to you? [laughter]

SI: Since you were serving on a battleship, did you have more Annapolis men above you?

JC: No, we didn't know. ... I had hardly any knowledge of ... who they were, but most of them, you've got to remember, just like sailors below, these officers were just ... people like us that were just ...

SI: In for the war?

NR: In for the war. Many weren't career guys, and just as many of those as there were sailors. It is just [that] the more ships there were, the more [officers you needed]. Most haven't got the experience. It's spread pretty thin. We had 2,400 men aboard ship. Many officers of different ranks were in for the same reasons of war, patriotism, and just as scared as we were.

SH: You mentioned that a lot of the officers were college men. One of the terms used was "ninety-day wonders."

NR: Yes.

SH: They had gone through training in a very short period of time as well and had no experience on ships, either.

NR: Right.

SH: Did you notice them relying on the chiefs and the older first class petty officers?

NR: Not really, not really, but, of course, the point is, ... I can see, if you're an officer, I mean, you would look to see who you had below you and who could help you out the most, and that's who you would lean on, ... because I know that [from] when I was a manufacturing engineer. I knew ... you begin knowing nothing and you've got to learn it from those people that are below you.

JC: The non-commissioned officers in the Navy are the petty officers. The chief petty officers are on top.

NR: Yes.

JC: What percentage of these petty officers, do you think, were experienced, had been in the pre-war Navy?

NR: ... We were mostly inexperienced, really, when you come right down to it, ... for the training that you had when you went to boot camp, and you learned the discipline ... and all of that, you learned about the Navy. ... You know, you learned a lot of things, really, in that short time.



JC: This "old salt" that you mentioned who was holding court, was he a petty officer or a chief?

NR: No. [laughter]

JC: After all those years, okay.

NR: ... He's still down there, I'm sure.

JC: He was still just an able-bodied seaman, holy mackerel.

NR: ... But, he could sit back and tell you all the stories, you know. He was a storyteller, that's what he was. [laughter] ...

SH: What kind of alcohol was stashed away onboard?

NR: Percent.

JC: Five-percent beer?

NR: Beer, 3.2-percent beer.

SH: You got one a week.

NR: Well, you didn't get it unless you went ashore, ... no drinking onboard ship.

JC: Was it five percent or three percent?

NR: ... I think it's a five-percent beer; maybe it is three.

SH: I think it is 3.2.

JC: I think it is 3.2.

NR: Yes, right.

JC: It is very weak beer. Tell them about how that worked, out in the Pacific. What happens? The battleship comes up a couple hundred yards away from an island.

NR: Yes. Well, most of them were atolls ... and we'd pull in there, and then, ... there would be an island. One was Mog Mog, by the way, Mog Mog, yes, [laughter] and we'd go ashore there and they'd bring all the food out for a picnic-like [meal], ... with the three-point beer, ... which was never cold. It was warm, [laughter] and you got one.

SH: You got one. Did anybody try to make a deal for getting more than one? [laughter]

NR: Well, a lot of times, we'd let them have it.

JC: You said you did not drink it.

NR: I wouldn't drink it, because it wasn't cold, and you could sell it, sometimes, too, but I never sold mine, unless somebody asked me for it. ... I'd say, "Yes, you can have it," I didn't care, since I got it free.

JC: These were uninhabited atolls.

NR: Yes, they were. They were just, like, a coral reef. It's like the top of a volcano. You think of the top of a volcano that's below water and just comes up a little bit, [laughter] that's what it really is.

SH: They would send out a launch. How many did they send, just one division at a time?

NR: Yes, yes, one-third of the ship, yes, never more than that, yes, never more than that, maybe less, but not more. ...

JC: This, of course, is because alcohol is not allowed to be served in the US Navy, unlike the Royal Navy, onboard ship. They did not violate that. The officers did not have alcohol, right?

NR: I don't know, maybe they did. I don't know. [laughter] If you snuck it onboard, right, you could have it. ...

JC: They had medicinal alcohol down in sick bay. How about the doctor down there in sick bay?

NR: I'm sure he was drunk all the time. [laughter]

JC: I am just saying that the movies would have him supplying some medicinal scotch, when necessary, to the officers.

NR: Oh, yes, that's a lie. That's hoey.

JC: Did you have any relationship with the officers or were they totally separate, except for the lieutenant in charge of your unit? Did you have any interaction with officers at all?

NR: ... No, you don't, ... no, no.

SH: The damage control officer?

NR: ... All the damage control people, the officers, you knew and you spent watch on with them, especially if you did it in the [damage control center]. So, yes, we spent a watch ... in the sump pumps and on the flood boards, and then, you had [the] damage control center. You spent time in the center, too. You also had a watch in the center, which was five guys with the phones that had the connection with all the guys down below. So, those were the guys with the phones

with the connections with the guys that are on the sump pumps below. You were rotated in all battle stations, so that you could function in any emergency.

SH: You advanced fairly rapidly through the rates. Did your duties change at all? Did your watches change?

NR: ... The officer's name was Mr. Lambert.

JC: That was the good officer.

NR: That was the good officer, and then, he got transferred. Once he got transferred, we got another lieutenant and he didn't like me. He didn't like Italians. ... You know, I was after him. I wanted to take the next test. I was seaman, first class. I wanted to go the next step, you know, and he says, "Look, you guinea bastard, [laughter] you're not going anywhere." [laughter] He was racist, you know. He's just a racist guy, came from Wisconsin or someplace up there, where all the Swedish were. I think he was a Swedish, I don't know, but that was a sour note. ... After that, I went down, told my chief, you know, I told him what he did and what he said. He says, "Eh, don't worry about him." He says, "I'm assigning you the jobs, see, not him." So, he says, "I'll give you a few jobs and you get lost after you do the jobs, that's all. ... Come down every day, I'll give you a few jobs and take the rest of the day off."

JC: He was separating you from this lieutenant, so that you would not have to deal with him.

SI: Did you see other examples of bias, like anti-Semitism?

NR: That was the only officer I ever saw like that. Why did I have to get him? [laughter] I couldn't understand that. Everybody was nice. Everybody was good. Most of these officers were good. They were in the same boat we were, yes. They were subject to getting killed, just like we were.

SH: You were the only Italian onboard ship.

NR: ... No, I wasn't, maybe not onboard ship. No, I wouldn't say that, but I'd say in the department, in damage control, ... I may be. I don't know of any others, but ... that's the way he treated me.

JC: Oh, but there were lots of Italian-Americans on the ship.

NR: On the ship, there were a lot of them, yes, right. ...

JC: Marino was on the ship. The "old salt" you mentioned, he was Italian.

SI: Which section was your uncle in?

NR: He was in [the] radio shack.

SH: Did you get to see him often?

NR: Oh, yes, we got to see him, yes. We used to have times we'd get together. ... We had good times. We had good times.

SI: You mentioned earlier that you had to keep quiet about your relationship, or else they were going to separate you.

NR: Oh, yes.

SI: Did you have to keep quiet once aboard the ship?

NR: No. ... I mean, we didn't say anything. We didn't tell anybody. We just would meet and we'd spent time on topside, especially if we were in an atoll. ... They called these atolls, these round, circular islands, and he and I would be on topside. I remember, once, we were sitting on top of all of these cans of powder.

JC: Gunpowder?

NR: Gunpowder. We were sitting on top of these cans. I don't know, we're looking over the harbor, you know, this big atoll and everything else, and, all of a sudden, he says, "Hey, Pat, ... look at that plane coming," and there's a plane coming over, [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the noise], and then, he says, "Oh, it's a Jap plane. Let's get off of these cans." [laughter] It was a Jap plane and it came over and it went right into the next [ship]. The next ship over was the *Franklin*, a carrier, a small carrier, one of the small carriers, and they hit right into the fantail. He hit it right into the fantail and we were just going into the door, you know. We were going into the [ship]. We wanted to get away from all those powder cans. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo may be referring to the USS *Randolph* (CV-15), not the USS *Franklin* (CV-13). The USS *Randolph* was hit by a *kamikaze* while at anchor at Ulithi on March 11, 1945.]

SH: Was there any aircraft ...

NR: Chasing him? Nothing, no.

JC: No warning, just came out of nowhere.

NR: ... Just came out of nowhere. ... He was low on the horizon.

JC: Under the radar.

NR: Yes, under the radar, whatever it was. [laughter] ...

SI: You saw the *Franklin* get hit.

NR: In front of me.

SI: Was that when it burned nearly down to the waterline, or was that another incident?

NR: That was probably some other incident, I would imagine. All I know is, ... they did get hit good, but it was only one plane. It's a small plane, you know.

SH: Did you all go to battle stations at that point?

NR: ... I'm not sure. That's what I can remember, really, but I'm sure we did, but I don't think we pulled out or anything else. We did not pull out, but it was only one plane, somehow.

JC: I think, Shaun, you are talking about at Okinawa, where it really almost sinks.

SI: Yes. Was that at Okinawa, or was that in one of the raids off of Japan?

JC: I thought it was Okinawa. Do you remember the name of this atoll where you were?

NR: No, no.

JC: We can find it by looking up the *Franklin's* record.

NR: Yes. It might have been [the] Ulithi group or something.

JC: Ulithi, the big base.

NR: Ulithi was a big base, yes.

JC: Yes, a big base.

NR: So, anyway, ... it might have been that, but I can't remember it, but me and my uncle, we always talk about it. He's only about six months older than I am. ...

SH: Did you guys play cards, read books?

NR: No. I read a lot, though. I did read a lot. ... I even took a plastic course and I used to get courses [laughter] from plastic school. It was studying plastic. The fiberglass was coming in and stuff like that. ... I said, "That's the future. Maybe that's the future." [laughter] So, I got this course in plastics. [laughter]

JC: How did you take the course? Was it a correspondence course, by mail?

NR: Yes, yes. It actually worked.

JC: The Navy offered it.

NR: No, no. It was private.

SH: How did you find out about it?

NR: It was in a magazine. We had a lot of magazines aboard, all old magazines and everything else, and it was advertised in there. I said, "Gee, I can do that. That sounds interesting." [laughter] ... You had to have something to do, you know what I mean? Otherwise, you just [were bored]. ...

SH: Was there a library? I know carriers have libraries. Did the battleship have a library?

NR: Very limited library. This was a battleship and it was just a very limited library in there. ... There was a library, but it was a very limited one. ...

SH: What about when you took on fuel, when the oilers would come up? Did you have anything to do with that?

NR: Most of the time, it's just the people who were on watch, because, when we took on fuel, we weren't in the battle zone. We were back from the battle zone, and we had two identical task forces and they had two of our class battleship, two of our class battleships there, so, they looked identical. If you were to go like this, [look fast], "Oh, jeez, that's the same task force." Well, we'd go back and they'd go forward, and the Japs never knew that we did. [laughter] We did it at night.

SH: Really?

NR: Yes. So, that was the strategy of the task forces, of making them look alike, and so, they never knew which one it was.

JC: Tell us about why the *South Dakota* is called "Battleship X."

NR: X? [laughter]

JC: Sorry, did I spring one on you?

NR: No, no, I know.

JC: The battleship is BB-57, but, in its history, it is known as "Battleship X," because the X symbol was used in a number of the dispatches to deceive the Japanese. I am thinking it might be related to this.

NR: Right, right. What happened [was], ... in the Battle of Santa Cruz, it was the Battle of Santa Cruz where they thought they had [sunk the *South Dakota*]. The ship took a lot of hits. ... First, there was the aircraft. They fought the aircraft. Then, they came in closer to the islands and they encountered the ships, and so, it was ship-to-ship fighting, okay, and they thought they had sunk the *South Dakota*, because they had hit it so bad.

JC: They hit it with battleship shells, yes.

NR: Yes, and ... she took a lot of [hits].

JC: It was at night.

NR: It was a night battle, and so, she went back, and then, she had to go straight back to the States, because she was really puckerred with shells, shells all over the place. So, they had to go back, and so, they used to say, "Well, they thought they sunk it," and so, it was called the "Battleship X" after that. [laughter] When they came out there, they confused them a little bit. It was the confusion strategy. They were just confusing them a little bit.

SH: What about when you would rearm, when you would get all of your ammunition?

NR: Well, they had ammunition ships back there. They had oil tankers back there, to refuel you.

SH: Everything comes back with the task force.

NR: The task force would go back, out of the battle zone. You get out of the battle zone, and then, ... the other task force would go in and they'd think it was the same task force, because it looked like it was the [same ships]. If you'd take a picture, it would look the same. It was identical. ... The USS *South Dakota*-class had four ships, two in that task force, two in this task force, looked just alike. [laughter]

SH: How often would you have to refuel a ship like that, being underway and everything?

NR: Well, I don't know, but it was quite often out there, because you're always traveling, you know. You're never stopped, unless you get into an atoll or something like that.

JC: When you say quite often, do you mean once a week or every couple of weeks?

NR: No, no.

JC: Once a month?

NR: I would say, probably, once a month or something like that. Plus, it depends upon how much ammunition you use. So, we did a lot of bombarding, a lot of that, so, we'd have to go back and rearm. So, when you go back and rearm, you're going to refuel, and, if you're going to refuel, you're going to re-supply your food. That was the big thing we needed, food. [laughter]

JC: Once a month for food. We read about the sailor who kept the diary on the light cruiser, that they really got down low on food, very low, sometimes.

NR: Yes.

JC: Did you ever get way down on the food supply?

NR: No. We'd probably run out of oranges, bananas and stuff like that. [laughter]

SH: You always had fresh eggs.

NR: Not always, no, no, not always, but ... we ate good. We ate very good onboard ship. We ate very, very good.

JC: You said you sometimes transported soldiers from one island to another, two, three hundred soldiers.

NR: Oh, yes, we transported a platoon or whatever it is. They'd say, "Take this platoon over to this side of the island here." So, we'd get them onboard and we'd drive them over there. ... Oh, God, they thought ... they were in heaven when they went down [to] eat. "Oh, you guys eat like this all the time?" [laughter] "You bet your boots we do," [laughter] another good thing to be in the Navy.

SH: We touched briefly upon how weather affects a ship like this. What were some of the instances that you remember of weather being a problem, either underway or in a battle?

NR: Well, the weather, ... we were in the Philippine Sea, okay, when the Philippine engagement [The Battle of Leyte Gulf, happened], and we had to go through between China and the Philippines. We had to go up that slot and there was a big, big storm. I mean, the waves were a hundred feet high.

JC: This is the typhoon.

NR: The typhoon.

JC: Okay, the typhoon of 1944, I think.

NR: Yes, it was a big one, and so, you know, normally, you'd say, "You've got to go into the wave," you know. "You've got to sail into the wave." We didn't sail into the wave, couldn't sail into the wave. What we did was, ... the wave was like this; ... we would go on an angle, see. We went out on an angle of the wave.

JC: You kind of rolled into the wave.

NR: ... Because, if we went down that slot, straight into the wave, this is over, you know, a hundred feet high, but ... more than a hundred feet this way. I mean, you're going to come up and over the wave and you're going to go down *under* the next wave and you're never going to come up.

JC: It is going to push the bow right into the deep.



NR: You've got forty-five thousand tons coming down this slot. So, we had to go on an angle, a forty-five degree angle, and we were over forty-five degrees many times, [laughter] during the night and day.

SH: You could actually roll forty-five degrees and still right yourselves.

NR: ... Still right yourself, but you can't go over that. The bridge informed us what was going on and said they were up to forty-eight degrees at times.

JC: To describe this orally, he is describing a kind of half-corkscrew as he goes back and forth, diagonally, across the face of the wave.

NR: Right, but you're in danger [of] going over all the time. You're in danger of flipping right over, but, of course, you're in the top. ... You're cutting that top of the wave off, you know, but, if you went straight into the wave, you would have gone under tons of water.

JC: Straight into the wave.

NR: And you'd be down under the wave. ... You could never come up.

JC: Nick, if I am not mistaken, you were talking about the bow chugging, fighting its way back up. [laughter] Can you describe what happened?

NR: [laughter] Normally, in rough weather, ... you're still going into the waves, okay.

JC: Straight into the wave, yes.

NR: Straight into the waves. So, you go down *under* the wave. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates a shuddering noise.] The bow of the ship would shudder back and forth as it struggles to come out from under the wave, shuddering violently, that you would feel and hear. The saying was, "No soup today!"

JC: The bow works its way up.

NR: ... As it works its way up, yes, this ... [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates a shuddering noise.]

JC: The whole ship is shaking.

NR: The whole ship is shaking. The whole bow is, anyway. [laughter]

SH: What else happened in the typhoon? What other incidents?

JC: That you remember.

NR: Yes. Well, there's three destroyers [that] flipped over and we lost them. There was just a few people in the water that they picked up. They were covered with oil. That was it.

SH: Did your ship pick anybody up?

NR: No. There was somebody else [that] picked them up, yes.

SH: When did you find out that they were lost? When did you know?

NR: Oh, that was almost [immediately]. It was during the storm, we knew.

JC: The word spread through the ship.

NR: ... Oh, yes, you know, because the radioman is going to say something up there and everybody's going to talk about it, the whole bridge is, and that's going to be carried down below.  
...

SH: You had an uncle who was a radioman, too, so, maybe you knew more than the average damage control man.

NR: Yes, well, and he'd say, "Don't ever say anything that ... I tell you," but he says, "It's best if I don't tell you." So, I said, "Hey, don't tell me, you know. That's your job." [laughter] I'm not going to interfere with his job.

JC: This was not announced on the PA system, that the destroyers went down. That came down through word of mouth. Is that right?

NR: Yes, yes.

JC: Scuttlebutt could spread pretty fast.

NR: Yes, and then, ... it was official that they had lost two, I guess.

SH: Were there any injuries or fatalities onboard the *South Dakota* because of the storm?

NR: No. As a matter-of-fact, I went out on the upper deck. I went out on one of the upper decks and I came out and you could see that wave. It's way up there. I mean, it's higher than our ship and the wind is coming so hard, it's taking the top of the wave off, making a big sheet of water.

JC: Was there a sound to it?

NR: Oh, yes. You know, the wind is blowing, everything is howling out there. It's a howl. ... There were a couple of us. We stood out there, "Holy mackerel!" ... We weren't standing; we were hanging on, you know, "Ah!" [laughter] and we see ourselves going down the slot, you

know, and then, we go up and all we see is sky and we shout, "Shut the door!" [laughter] We don't want to fall off if this thing turns around. I don't know.

SH: Did you ever lose anybody? Was there ever a man overboard?

NR: No, no, not that I know of, no.

JC: Not in that typhoon, but people did disappear at other times.

NR: Oh, yes, yes. I think we lost a couple of guys, but we think they were suicides.

SH: Can you tell us more?

NR: Well, because they lost a lover or something at home. If ... she sent him a "Dear John" letter, "Dear John, I no longer love you," it was devastating, maybe. So, that's the kind [of problem].

JC: When you say that you thought they were suicides, had you heard that they had received a "Dear John" letter and the next thing you knew ...

NR: Well, that's what's assumed.

JC: The scuttlebutt. Was that what you heard?

NR: Scuttlebutt. Yes, it's the scuttlebutt. A lot of it is scuttlebutt, and so, you don't know whether it's true or whether it is not true, but you knew there's an element of truth somewhere in there, but you just can't pick it up.

SH: There were no burials at sea that you participated in, anything like that.

NR: Yes, we did.

SH: What happened?

NR: There's a picture. Is there a picture in there, of the burial? I think there's a picture in here of the burial at sea.

SH: There is.

NR: Yes.

JC: Do you want to tell us about it?

NR: Well, I mean, you stand at attention there and you'd stand and there's a prayer. ...

SH: Do you know what happened?

NR: Yes. We were in battle and they got [killed], a shell hit. A five-hundred-pound shell hit us once.

JC: A five-hundred-pound bomb.

SH: Where was this at?

NR: ... We'll have to [look].

JC: We are looking it up.

NR: Yes. Oh, here it is. ...

SI: The Battle of the Philippine Sea, where the bomb hit?

JC: Do you have it over there?

SI: It was June 19th, I think. I have it in your history.

JC: Tell us about it. You were down below decks, but you were in a battle.

NR: Yes.

JC: What do you know about it?

NR: Well, all I know is that we did have a burial. We had burials at sea, but this is it. Yes, see, they dropped a five-hundred-pound bomb, hit our main deck below the bridge, three hundred aircraft. ...

JC: Killing twenty-four, wounding twenty-seven. Oh, this is the "Marianas Turkey Shoot."

NR: Yes.

JC: You say a five-hundred-pound bomb hit right below the bridge. Did you go up and look at the damage afterwards?

NR: I wanted to be in that fire party, too. [laughter]

JC: Here is a story.

NR: I wanted to see some of the action. I said, "Oh, boy, you know, I'm stuck below here. I could go be in a fire party. It's in the "R" Division, could get in there."

JC: The fire control party.

NR: I talked to ... my boatswain's mate. I talked to him once about it and he says, "Well," he says, "I like you down there. You've got experience down there and you stay down there." It sucks, you know, and, later, the five-hundred-pound bomb hit on deck, under the bridge, the whole fire party was gone.

JC: It hit where they were stationed.

NR: [Yes], hit right under the bridge. That's where I wanted to be, under the bridge. I wanted to be up there with the Captain, right. [laughter]

JC: How many days after your request did this bomb hit?

NR: [laughter] I don't know. ... It was quite a while. I mean, it was quite a while. I'm not sure.

JC: Some months, something like that

NR: Yes.

JC: However, you could have been in that party.

NR: I could have been in that party, you know, Fire Party #1, so, I was lucky, right. It was luck. [laughter]

SH: Did you see *kamikaze* action? Were you ever in danger?

NR: Yes, in the Marianas, the Battle of the Marianas, yes. I was topside, went topside a couple of times, you know, and spent quite a bit of time on topside, looking, watching this fight go on. They were coming after us, ... but they were after the carriers. That's what they really came for. ... We're trying to close in tight, to the carriers, so [that] we can protect them. That's what we [were doing].

SH: You did not have to stay at your battle station when you were doing something like this.

NR: No. Yes, you had to stay at your battle station, but we could get relieved, okay. They would relieve us sometimes to go eat or ... go to the bathroom, whatever, and then, they'd say, "Well, take fifteen minutes, and then, come back." ...

JC: You rushed up topside.

NR: Oh, yes, I go right up topside.

JC: Imagine that our students are sitting here and paint them a picture of what you were seeing when you were going up topside. How close to the carriers are you, a couple of hundred yards?

NR: Well ...

JC: Quarter-mile?

NR: Yes, yes, probably.

JC: Something like that.

NR: Even if you're half-a-mile away, it's so close, you may fire into the carriers. If the twenty-millimeters are firing, the Jap is close and it is scary for the gunner to be sure.

JC: It is big. You are right near it.

NR: You're pretty near it, you're in the battle.

JC: You rush up topside and what do you see? Tell the students what you see.

NR: Well, you saw the planes that were coming in, the Jap planes, okay. These were Jap planes. There were our planes up there, trying to defend, in dogfights, and then, these Japs are coming down. ... Sometimes, they come over your ship to get to hit the carriers. They're trying to bomb or dive onto the carriers. That's really what they're there for. They want to kill our airpower. Sea power, they could care less.

JC: Back to the picture, not the strategy; what do you see up there? Is the sky blue?

NR: Yes, the sky's blue, but there's a lot of flak up there. ...

JC: What does that look like?

NR: Flak, the guns, shells burst from anti-aircraft guns on the carriers and all the ships in the task force all at once! They're firing and they're exploding all over the sky and you're in it.

JC: You see flak. You see flames?

NR: Black, black. You see an explosion, red, and then, it's all smoke, you know, and that's what you're seeing up there, ... and it's just going on. They're just [firing]. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the noises of battle.] From our ship, they were, "Bing, bing, bing, bing, bing," and, of course, the twenty-millimeters start firing ... when the plane is coming in low and close. Now, you've got the twenty-millimeters and the forty-millimeters. The five-inch don't help them that much. The five-inch is for height, forty-millimeters was the next height, and then, the twenty-millimeters was for close up. [laughter] You see what I'm saying?

SH: What was the noise like, because there were other ships firing as well?

NR: It's deafening, it's deafening. I mean, ... you're talking about a lot of guns going off, especially on the forty-millimeters. The real sharp one, ... really sharp on your ears, was the five-inch guns. Those are the anti-aircraft. They want to shoot somebody that's really high up, ten thousand feet high. ...

JC: Big explosion, sharp on your ears.

NR: Sharp on the ears, real sharp. It hurt your ears.

SI: Could you differentiate between those sounds during the battle? Could you say, "Oh, the twenty-millimeters are going off; we are really in trouble now," something like that?

NR: No. The thing is, as the plane is coming in, the first chance to hit them is with the five-inch, because they're far away and this is going to shoot quite a few miles. Then, the next is the forty-millimeter, which is, like, three-to-zero miles away, and then, your twenty-millimeters, which is really close up. [laughter] I mean, you've got to really be [accurate]; make sure you hit him then. If you don't, ... he's in your lap, you know.

JC: Could you hear those guns when you were below deck?

NR: Not always. The twenty-millimeters didn't have (any bite?), but, when the five-inch or the sixteen-inch was going off, you heard. You heard it, but, mostly, you could feel it. You knew you were in a battle.

JC: Again, in this battle we were talking about, was the sky full of planes? How many are we talking about?

NR: ... There was quite a few planes. There was, like, I can't remember how many hundred there were, but there was hundreds of planes.

JC: When you were looking out there at any one time, were you thinking it was five, six, three, four dozen? How many planes were coming at the group?

NR: ... What you see is a lot of gun bursts out there, because, as they shoot at planes, they burst out there, and they may or may not hit the plane they are shooting at.

JC: However, you are also looking for planes, right?

NR: Yes, you have to know where the planes are. You can see them easily enough, but the gunners have a judgment call--the distance when he can start shooting at the plane.

JC: I am trying to get a sense of how many planes you see coming at you.

NR: Yes. You could see quite a few planes. There were quite a few planes around. I can't give you a count, except, ... I think, in that battle, there was four, five hundred planes that they were throwing at us.

JC: Did you ever see any sailors break under the stress of being attacked?

NR: No, never saw it, no. ...

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

SI: This continues an interview with Nichola Russo on May 31, 2006, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth ...

SH: ... Sandra Stewart Holyoak ...

JC: ... John Chambers. This is tape number three, the beginning of tape number three.

SI: Once the *South Dakota* got out into the Pacific, you went first to Efate.

NR: Efate, right.

JC: In what chain was this?

NR: That was in the New Hebrides, and then, we had a little run into ...

SI: Fiji?

NR: Fiji. We went to the Fiji Islands. We spent two days there, ... three days there, and then, we got out of there and went back to Efate, and spent about three months in there, and then, we went to the first engagement, which was the Marshall Islands.

SI: Okay.

NR: Wait a minute. Let's see ...

SI: Were you involved in the Gilberts, Tarawa?

NR: ... I think it was the; ... what'd they call it?

JC: Tarawa is in the Gilberts, Tarawa. Here is a map, Nick. This is the Gilberts, Tarawa.

NR: Yes, the Gilberts. Yes, that's the first one, right.

JC: You do pronounce it Ta-rawa, not Tara-wa, right?

NR: Ta-rawa, right, and then, we went ...

JC: No, we are going to start with Tarawa, [laughter] which was, after Guadalcanal, the first big battle, and, actually, the first landing on a hostile shore. Do you want him to talk about Tarawa?

SI: Yes. First, just to clarify, what were you doing in Efate and Fiji? Was it just training?

NR: Nothing, training and going out, shooting at drones and stuff like that.



SI: Were there any practice landings in those areas?

NR: No.

SI: Okay.

NR: No, no. It was a battleship. We didn't have to get involved in that.

JC: Had you fired your sixteen-inch guns?

NR: No.

JC: You had not fired them yet.

NR: I don't think so, no.

SH: There was no firing training on the way to the Pacific.

NR: Well, they were already ... practiced in shooting, you know what I mean? They were ready. They were all ready to go. It's just a matter of pulling the trigger, you know, in a sense.

JC: You are saying that because this was already, mainly, a veteran crew.

NR: Right, it was a veteran crew.

JC: You new people were a minority.

NR: Right.

JC: Did we get him across the Equator?

SI: No. Did you take part in the King Neptune ...

SH: The Shellback Society?

NR: Oh, yes, yes. [laughter]

JC: What was it like?

NR: I can't remember, unless I go back to ...

JC: Do you just remember what it was like?

NR: What happened out there, okay, we came out of the New Hebrides in order to join in with ... the Gilbert Islands, right? This was the first, right?

JC: This is going to be ...

NR: ... The Gilberts. ...

JC: We need the dates, because it does not say Gilberts on here.

NR: This is the Marshall Islands here. This is the Gilbert Islands.

JC: Okay, here it is.

NR: November 19th, yes, November of '43.

JC: You crossed the Equator.

NR: ... We didn't do a lot of the ...

JC: Tarawa. You would have had to have gone across the Equator to get to Tarawa.

NR: Right, right, ... in order to get down to the New Hebrides Group. ...

JC: Yes. The question is, what happened when you crossed the Equator?

NR: They didn't do anything. They didn't do anything, until ...

SH: They did not cut your ties.

NR: No, that came later on. They did that later on, and I didn't even go topside for it. [laughter] ... I was always busy doing my own thing. [laughter] So, some of that was not as formal as it usually is, if you know what I'm saying. It was pretty loosely done.

JC: That is what we wanted to hear.

NR: Yes.

JC: They were not as demanding.

NR: No. They were more interested in fighting the war, you know. ... You know, we weren't doing that, but some did and some didn't. ... Then, there was one time that they did [it]. They just dressed this guy up like a girl, you know. [laughter] They had a hell of a time with him, but that was it, a lot of fun. He was the "Queen Neptune," and then, there's "King Neptune" and "Queen Neptune," and it was kind of funny, and some of the guys went through the thing, but I managed to stay out of it. [laughter] "I've got to go on watch. I can't do this right now," [laughter] ... but it was funny. ...

SH: Were there ever any press onboard?

NR: No press. We had Navy photographers. You have seen shipboard photos of divisions or department personnel groups and events, such as the surrender in Tokyo Bay.

SH: No reporters or journalists.

NR: I would imagine there was somebody up there writing about something, but I don't know ... whether the Captain had anything that was being historically [recorded]. I think the ship's log would show, really, what went on daily or on duty, that periods would be written in the log.

SI: When the *South Dakota* went into action at the Gilbert Islands, where was it positioned? Were you able to get up topside and see the islands?

NR: No. You know, like I told you, at first, ... when we went to the Gilberts and the Marshall Islands, those two, there was an action of bombarding and softening up the island that they were going to land on. ... The island they were going to land on had to have a good airfield and good facilities for airplanes to take off, because that's what they wanted. They wanted to get closer to Japan, so [that] they could fly to Japan and bomb them, and that's what they were doing. So, that's how we got to the first islands, it was just a matter of the ships going by them, bombarding them, the planes up above, raining stuff down on them, and just cutting off their supply line. ... It was easy to cut off their supply line, because they didn't have too many ships around, [laughter] and they would have got bombed ... before they got to us. ... Our bombardment sixteen-inch guns could target twenty miles. We could be out of sight; from our main deck would be out of sight, since the horizon is only seven miles.

JC: Did you go up top to see the bombardment of Tarawa and Kwajalein?

NR: No. At Saipan, we did, see. ... We were at the Battle of Saipan.

JC: That was when you saw it for the first time.

NR: That's when I see it for the first time. I go topside. We're able to see that.

JC: Tell us about Saipan.

NR: ... We just saw the flak. I mean, you see all the flak. ... I mean, it's just an array, and I have a picture of it at home. It's not a photo, but it's a painted picture, but that's just the way it looked. ... Everything was just [right]. ... We were at war. We were at war, really, and you could see it, topside. ... I spent some time, topside, just watching it. [laughter]

SH: You were interested in seeing what was going on, how your ship was performing, what it was doing.

NR: Yes, yes. It was quite a; what do you want?

JC: You have got those big sixteen-inch guns that we talked about and that enormous shell that comes from the sixteen-inch gun.

NR: Yes, but you can't be topside when those go off.

JC: Okay. That is one of the things I want you to tell us about. They were bombarding the shore and the fortifications.

NR: When they're bombarding the shore, that's fine, but, when the air battle started, in the Marianas, it was an air battle. It wasn't a ship-to-ship or a ship-to-shore.

JC: Okay. You would be below deck when the sixteen-inch guns were firing.

NR: ... Oh, yes. Nobody'd be topside. Not even the gunners are topside.

SH: Really?

NR: ... They would suck them right off the ship.

SH: It creates such a ...

NR: ... A vacuum, when it fires. When they fire the sixteen-inch guns, it creates a big vacuum and pulls anything that's loose on deck. Anything that's loose on deck goes. Now, they show, in the movie that we talked about, the kid, you know ...

JC: Yes. I will tell you about it in a minute. Go ahead.

NR: But, anyway, in that, he ends up on the deck while the sixteen-inch guns are going on and he has to hang on. [laughter]

JC: Was that for real? I mean, this is a real enactment, but would that really happen?

NR: I'm not sure about [that] movie.

JC: You have some suspicions about him being able to survive.

NR: I have some suspicions, because that would suck you right out.

JC: Did you hear about anyone ever being sucked off the deck?

NR: No.

JC: No one was stupid enough to go up on deck.

NR: Nobody was stupid enough. [laughter]

JC: The other thing that you told me about the sixteen-inch guns, and I want you to tell me again, relates to the recoil on the ship. What happens to the ship when the sixteen-inch guns fire?

NR: Oh, yes. ... If all nine'll go off; there's nine guns.

JC: If they are firing broadside.

NR: There's nine sixteen-inch guns, three guns on one turret. There's three turrets, two forward, one turret back, the rear of the ship, and when that fires, the ship will just roll with the recoil. When they all fire, it'll just roll, like this, and come right back up, yes. There's the, "Boom." Now, one, it'll do a little bit. It'll take the back end or, if you're doing the front, only one on the front, it'll do a little bit, but, when all three go off, "Boom." The ship tips over, I think, about twenty to twenty-five degrees?

JC: We are talking about forty thousand tons.

NR: Forty thousand tons moving, you know what I mean? from the recoil of ... the sixteen-inch guns.

SH: Does this affect what you have to do, as far as ballast in the tanks?

NR: No, not unless you get hit in the side and you blow a hole here. Then, you've got to do something on the other side to level it off.

SH: Okay. You never do any of that to help with the firing.

NR: No, except that everything has got to be level for it, and that's when it tries to shoot, is when it's leveled, "Boom."

JC: Were you ever in a heavy sea where you had to use ballast to get the guns level?

NR: ... Yes, I think they have a method whereby, down in the firing room below, to time the roll and its degree and calculate firing mode. The two seaplanes you see on the fantail of the ship, the planes are catapulted off the ship to spot the firing of the nine-inch guns in a bombardment. They, by radio to the firing room, help to correct the guns' aim.

JC: There is compensation. You were using the flood board to compensate for the roll, to keep the guns more level.

NR: That's what they had to do on the guns. To get those guns, they'd have to change the angle of the gun.

JC: Oh, change the angle of the guns. I see.

NR: It's nothing that we do. It's in the gunners' firing room they do this. The men in charge of the guns do all the calculations, because the ship levels itself quickly after firing.

SH: Experience helps with that. Being able to do that timing, I think, makes a lot of difference in how accurate they are.

NR: Yes, what they had in the firing center, one could say, foretells the computer we have today in many applications.

SI: During any of these invasions, were you either there at the time of the landings or close enough to see the troops going in?

NR: Not really, not unless they needed some support of some kind, but we'd get out of the way, because we're just nothing but in the way, and then, the smaller ships, the supply ships, the guys that are going to put these boats in the water, ... the ships for the Army, the Navy, Marines. Whoever's going in, then, those are the ones that you leave room for. You get back, because you're not needed anymore by then.

SH: Did you ever have to transfer personnel from ship-to-ship?

NR: Yes, all of that.

SH: How did you do that?

NR: Just take them aboard. They'd come aboard. ...

SH: From a launch?

NR: From a launch, whatever.

SH: Using a line?

NR: Whatever, ... whether it was a launch or whatever, if they said, ... "We have a troop that has to go on to that island over there." "Okay," all the boats would come alongside. We'd load them on our ship.

JC: Would they come up the nets?

NR: No, they would not. They would come right up the stairs. ...

JC: Oh, they would drop ...

NR: The stairway.

JC: The ladder?

NR: The ladder. The ladder, that's the proper term. [laughter] ...

JC: I knew it was not a stairway, not in the Navy. It was the ladder that went down the side where the Captain's launch would come up.

NR: Yes, yes, and they would take them on. You'd take them on the safest way, you know what I mean? If you had the wherewithal, you do it the safest way. If you're in a hurry or something like that, you throw the rope over and go, "Hey!"

JC: They would climb up the rope.

NR: Yes, climb up the rope, but that's if you're in a hurry. That's if you're in a wartime situation.

SH: Did the Admiral ever visit your ship?

NR: Oh, yes. We had Admiral [William F.] Halsey, [Jr.].

JC: The Admiral was on the ship.

NR: Admiral Halsey.

SH: Was he on the ship all the time?

NR: Not all the time, no, because he liked the carriers. He liked to go on a carrier now and then, you know. He'd like his flagship to be the carrier, and then, he used us as a flagship, yes, yes.

...

SH: He was rarely on the *South Dakota*.

NR: No, no, he was on there quite a few times, yes.

SH: At times?

NR: At times, right. He spent more time on the carriers, because he loved the carriers. You're absolutely correct.

JC: Can we pursue that, because you saw Halsey?

NR: Oh, yes, I saw him twice. Twice, I saw him.

SH: Can you tell us about that?

NR: Well, the one time, I was going up in the officers' area and I had the leads for the welding leads and everything else. I had to do a job up there and, all of a sudden, here comes Admiral Halsey and his two cohorts behind him, and so, I go like this, [saluted]. He says, "Carry on, sailor," [laughter] and he walked right by me. "Carry on, sailor." [laughter]

JC: He saluted you.

NR: No, he didn't salute. He didn't salute.

JC: You saluted him.

NR: I saluted him; he just walked right by. [laughter]

JC: He acknowledged you.

NR: He acknowledged me, that's it. ... Now, the other time I saw him was, one time, where we're sailing along and everything else ... and I'm up forward and I'm welding something. I don't know what I'm welding up there, but ... one of the guys says, "Hey, hey, Halsey's coming out on the deck." ... From the main deck, the second deck, he comes out on the second deck, which is the kind of place he'd come out, every now and then. There was a doorway there he'd come out and I look up and there's the two guards on the doors. I understand an admiral had two Marines that were on guard twenty-four hours every day.

JC: Marines.

NR: The Marines. They're on the door. He's coming over. He's coming right up to the edge of the deck, and we can see him up there and he takes out a cigarette and he lights it, and then, he goes [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates a sucking noise], halfway down, honest to God, halfway down, at least. He sucks that cigarette, you know, [laughter] because the guy says, "Watch, watch, watch that." He takes [another drag]. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the sucking noise again.] He finishes it off and he throws it in the toolbox. [laughter] He sucked that thing right down. Of course, they made the short ones. They didn't have the kings in those days, remember? I kind of remind people, there wasn't a king-size one. [laughter] He sucked that sucker right down, in two drags.

JC: The guy warned you that this was going to happen.

NR: Yes, yes, he's telling me.

JC: He was notorious for the way he would smoke the cigarettes, "Two-Puff" Halsey.

NR: "Two-Puff" Halsey.

JC: Did you have a nickname for him, one that is printable? Was the Admiral called anything by the sailors?

NR: No, no, they all admired him, really.

JC: The press called him "Bull" Halsey. Did you ever hear that term?



NR: Oh, "Bull" Halsey, yes. ...

JC: Was that used at all on the ship?

NR: Not really.

JC: You just said "Halsey" or "the Admiral."

NR: Just Halsey, Admiral Halsey, yes.

SH: "The Old Man?"

NR: No. ... He was an old man.

JC: Describe him.

NR: ... Well, he's a man, you know.

JC: That is a start.

NR: You know.

SH: Was he six-foot?

NR: No. He was not especially tall. He wasn't especially tall. He was average height. As a matter-of-fact, he went by me; I thought he was the same height as me.

JC: And you are?

NR: Five-feet-nine. ...

JC: Okay. Did he have gray hair?

NR: I can't remember. I don't think so.

JC: Anything else? Creased, lined face, smooth face, clean shaven?

NR: He was clean shaven. He was a nice guy. We all liked him.

JC: How was he dressed, khakis?

NR: Yes, usually in the khaki uniform. Onboard ship, he would be in the khaki.

JC: Tell us about the dress code on the *South Dakota* as contrasted with the dress code on the *Alabama* [(BB-60)].

NR: [laughter] We ran around in our skivvies, most of the time. It was hot. We were always on the Equator and it was hot, and so, he would come aboard and he'd say, "Carry on, as you were." That was it. ... That meant no regulations or anything else. ... He never demanded how we dressed or what. So, we were not really dressed. [laughter]

JC: You were really in your boxer shorts. Is that what you are telling me?

NR: We're really in our boxer shorts, running around. I mean, it was hot. I mean, we were hot out there, roasting, and here they are, on the other ship, on the *Alabama*, and they've got their blues on and their long sleeves on and everything else. ... They must be sweating away, you know. They never bothered us. They never bothered us about it. I think it was because of the action we were in before.

JC: Why did they make them dress that way on the *Alabama*?

NR: I don't know, I don't know, because that's regulation.

JC: What you told me earlier was that the captain determines how a ship is going to be dressed.

NR: Right, right, but they also had the idea that the *South Dakota* had been in those battles and they had earned the right to do what the hell they wanted, you know what I mean?

JC: That is new.

SH: Were you under Momsen at this point?

NR: Momsen?

JC: Captain Momsen was the initial captain, you said, after the refit. [Editor's Note: Captain Momsen commanded the USS *South Dakota* from December 1944 to July 1945.]

NR: Yes, yes. That's all I know. It didn't matter. ... No one ever told us what the dress was.

SH: You never had a general inspection where you had to be polished.

NR: ... No, only if we came into port somewhere and we all had to get into uniform and we'd line up, the way you see them line up, but we were never that way out in the Pacific, fighting, no. No, sir, never saw that, no. I wouldn't do it.

SH: Did anybody come onboard with Halsey, any other superior?

NR: Oh, yes. ... I think [Fleet Admiral Chester W.] Nimitz came onboard once.

SH: You did not have to dress for Nimitz.

NR: Well, I imagine we did. [laughter] ... You may be right.

JC: Commander-in-Chief, Pacific. [laughter]

NR: You may be right. [laughter] That would be a call for it. We would sweat a little bit for him, [laughter] but, I mean, it was kind of ... relaxed out there, and it wasn't relaxed. It was really serious stuff. You aren't going to make the guys uncomfortable and sweating. ... Going into battle, you're going to be exhausted, you know, with all this.

JC: What difference does it make?

NR: What difference does it make? Right.

SH: Were you ever called into the wardrooms to do any kind of repairs?

NR: No, but I was up in "officer country" once in a while, like I was when I met ... Halsey. He was all right. We all loved him, really.

JC: What was it like in "officers' country?"

SH: Was it totally different? How was it?

NR: Well, it was more private rooms. Like, you know, you went down a hall and there were private rooms for officers, especially for the big name guys, you know, but, of course, we had admiral's quarters onboard ship. There was, I mean, a whole series of [rooms]. So, we had a bigger superstructure that was expanded just a little bit for the admirals, for an admiral's ship.

SH: Would Halsey eat in the officers' mess?

NR: Oh, probably, yes. I'm not sure of that, but I'm sure he would eat in the wardroom, and probably have a special table in the wardroom, I would imagine. ...

SH: Did you ever see any of the stewards? Were they African-Americans or Filipinos?

NR: ... I think they did the serving. I think the Negroes did the serving. We had a contingent of Negroes aboard ship.

JC: Yes. You have talked about that in some of your earlier interviews. Tell them about the blacks on the ship.

SH: Were their quarters separate?

NR: There were separate quarters. There were separate quarters for the black men who serviced the officers. ...

SH: Did you ever meet them up on deck, smoke a cigarette with any of them?

NR: I never saw them. No, I never saw them.

SH: Really?

NR: Really. I never did, but they were aboard ship. They were, ... once in a while, up there, but I never really saw them hang out up there that much.

SH: Did they have battle stations?

NR: Yes, yes, and it was mostly in gunnery.

JC: With the twenty-millimeter, forty-millimeter?

NR: Yes. I think they were ammunition handlers for the forty-millimeter gun turrets.

SH: Interesting.

NR: Yes.

SI: I was just looking over the history of the *South Dakota*. During some of these bombardments in the Gilberts and the Marshalls, there were up to five battleships all firing at once. Were they stationed around you? Like you said, when all of your guns were going off, it was an enormous spectacle. I can only imagine five going off at once. Can you describe that scene, all of these ships firing at once and hitting these beaches?

SH: It is only so long

JC: Yes, a narrow beach.

SH: The beaches are only a mile long.

NR: Right, right, but ... some of them were a little bigger. Some of the islands were pretty big.

JC: Saipan was bigger. Did you see groups of battleships together?

NR: ... Yes. ... In the task force, if it was our task force that went in, there would be two battleships, there would be cruisers, there would be destroyers, you know, all going in a line and bombarding. ... I don't think they'd have two groups. So, it'd be one group, and then, ... when you expended so many shells, then, the other group would come in and they would expend so many shells, because you don't want to expend all the shells in one group, you know what I mean? ... I think that was the strategy of that, so that there was two different task forces, but they would do it separate, rather than together, lining them all up together, all the battleships up together. You know, that wouldn't be right at all, you know, from a safety standpoint and from a gunnery standpoint.

SH: What was the toughest thing that you had to do, in any of the battles, the typhoons, etc.?

NR: The toughest thing I had to do, in what way? ...

SH: Whether it was difficult or the circumstances were tough.

JC: The scariest.

SH: Is there any instance that really stands out in your mind when it was your responsibility to get it done and ready to go?

NR: Well, the only thing I can remember, one time, was that, ... of course, I had battle stations at the sump pumps, way down below the ship. Then, I had a battle station at the flood boards stage, and then, we'd also have to do a stint in the damage control office, the center of damage control. ... So, one time, I was in there and I saw there was the Captain or somebody complained about [something]. It was at night and it was really a storm, really bad. ... "There's something open out there, it's banging and everything, on the superstructure," you know, and they kind of isolated it and they said, "It's about there," you know. ... So, we had to take care of it. ... So, the officer of the watch says, "There's the officer there and there's four of us here with ...

JC: Microphones?

NR: Microphones, that we have to patch the ship." So, the officer looks at me, he says, "Hey, you want to go up and check that out?" [laughter] "Not really." He says, "Why don't you go up there and check it out and see if you can stop it, whatever it is?" because this was pounding away, you know. ... "All right." So, he says, "How about it?" and I said, "All right, I'll go." So, I went up and he told me about where it might be and all of that. So, I came out on the superstructure and it's storming out there. It's bad, [laughter] but ... that was one of the most dangerous things. I went up there to ... shut that thing [that] was banging up against the ship, like this. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the banging noise.] It was a vent cap that came loose. ... It had a swing on it, you know, and it was banging ... the ship to hell, and the radiomen couldn't hear. It was on the other side of the wall and all of that, you know. They had to get this done. So, all I did was shut it up and, bingo, and I was soaking wet. ...

JC: Did you have to climb a ladder up the ship's superstructure or something?

NR: No, no. There wasn't a ladder. ... It was right there. It was on the catwalk. Like, there was a small catwalk there and I could reach it. So long as I could reach it, I secured it, and then, I went back in and I was soaking wet. I was soaking wet, and so, I went back down to damage control and I said, "I'm soaking wet. I've got to change." He says, "Okay. Did you close it?" I said, "Yes, I closed it." He says, "Well, they don't hear it anymore, so, I guess you did," [laughter] but that's out in a storm, you know. It's a real, real bad storm out there, but I did it. ... That was the only thing I can remember that was kind of stupid to do, you know, but I did it. It was fun.

JC: Can I ask you to tell the story about the time when, apparently, word came through the PA system for everybody to get their life preservers? You had your life preserver, but you were going through the ship and you met some guy who was looking for his.

NR: Oh, I know what you're talking about.

JC: Yes, I know you do. Tell the story.

NR: What happened was, ... we went back to refuel and rearm and all of that, okay. So, what happened was, ... we went back and we're taking this ammunition on and, well, we're taking on sixteen-inch ... shells. These are big things, like that. That's just the tip of the thing. The rest is all bags of powder, you know, and, I mean, this is really big stuff. ... Now, these are powder canisters. These canisters are that high, five feet.

JC: Okay, we are talking about four feet high.

NR: Yes, at least that, yes, yes.

JC: A foot wide or something.

NR: Yes, about seventeen inches.

JC: Canvas sacks.

NR: ... They've got to be, oh, seventeen inches.

JC: Sixteen inches wide.

NR: Got to be over sixteen inches, you know, around about. ... So, evidently, they were taking these things onboard and static electricity built up on the line, and then, they dropped it down and three separate canisters went off, in and outside of the magazine, which was below the armored deck.

JC: Went off; exploded?

NR: Exploded, three exploded.

SH: Inside the magazine?

JC: That is dangerous.

NR: I don't know how that happened, and that was it. ... I think the sprinkler system went on and I think all of that stopped it, but a lot of guys got killed. There was quite a few guys who got killed at that time.

SH: Did they really?

NR: Yes, yes. I can't remember the number right now, but the number should be around ...

SI: Ten guys. You were taking on supplies from the USS *Wrangell* [(AE-12)].

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This incident happened on May 6, 1945. The *South Dakota* was taking powder off of the USS *Wrangell*, which is an AE. What is an AE ship?

NR: Ammunition.

SI: Okay, ammunition supply ship. Three men died instantly, eight more died of injuries later and twenty-four others were wounded.

NR: A lot, but the real thing that happened and the drama behind that was that ... they thought the whole magazine would go up. That's what they really thought, that the whole magazine would go up and that we were going to sink; I mean, we were going to blow the ship apart. ... I mean, I was in the shower and I was just dressed and I hear this, "All Hands, prepare to abandon ship! All fire parties, all 'R' Division, go forward." So, that means me. I've got to go forward to where this explosion took place. I could feel it. You could feel it in the ship and I get down there and ... it's just all burned. ... This top floor, this exploded up through the [deck]. You know, the magazines are down below and ... it got into where the bedding is and all of that. ...

JC: The flames?

NR: There were flames, but they had put them out. The explosion came right up and I got there and I said to the guy, "I'm 'R' Division." I said, "Where do you need me?" He says, "We don't need you right now." He says, "What is your name? What is your battle station?" I told him. He says, "Go to that," so, I was on my way to that and I meet this other guy. ... Oh, on the way up, I meet this other guy. ... I said, "Where are you going?" He says, "I can't find a life jacket," you know. "I don't have a life jacket," and he's carrying a pipe, or a dog wrench. He says, "I'm going to get ... one."

SH: Oh, my gosh.

NR: And, later on, after ... this was all over, and this thing was all over because ... there were three separate explosions, but it was contained, finally, with the water and all of that, and we were fine.

JC: But, later on, what?

NR: [laughter] ... I asked him, "What was that?" He says, "I know," he says, "I'm ashamed of myself." [laughter] "I'm ashamed of myself," he says, "I was going to hit somebody over the head and take his life jacket." [laughter] But that's how you think. It's a strange story.

JC: You knew this guy.

NR: I knew this guy, yes, but I wouldn't say anything. Would you say anything against the guy that told you that? No; ... he was sorry about it, he was honest. ...

SH: Did you have a lot of medical services onboard ship?

NR: Oh, yes. ...

SH: Did you have a mini-hospital?

NR: Yes, there was a mini-hospital, called "sick bay," right, absolutely, surgeons, nurses (men), and everything else.

SH: Did you ever have to go there?

NR: No, never had to go. Actually, ... the sump pump compartment was right below ... where the sickbay was and, of course, we used to cook down there. [laughter] ... The guys in the sickbay [used to say], "We smell food." [laughter] "We can smell bacon."

JC: Explain to them what you were cooking.

SH: I was going to say, what were you cooking there?

NR: We used to get the Vienna sausages, bacon, eggs.

JC: You would raid them.

NR: Well, no. ... If they were changing stores, sometimes, we'd get some. We'd take a package. [laughter] ...

JC: Right.

SH: What were you cooking them on?

NR: Oh, we had electrical stoves.

JC: Hot plates?

NR: Hot plates, oh, yes, yes, golly.

JC: It was legal to cook. No, it was not.

NR: No, it wasn't. [laughter]

JC: What were these electric hot plates for? Oh, they were for coffee.



NR: Yes, they used them for coffee, which was okay.

JC: I see. You were using the stolen supplies.

SH: Roasting hot dogs.

NR: [laughter] Roasting Vienna sausages, eggs and bacon. ... Well, sometimes, they'd be switching stuff around, and so, we'd get a couple of cans of pineapple, or something like that. Oh, that was great, [laughter] and we'd invite guys down, you know, and say, "Hey, if you get a chance, come on down. We've got this going," you know.

JC: The officers did not come down there.

NR: No, the officers never went down there to hang out.

SH: Down in the bottom, you were pretty safe.

NR: Yes, but ... an officer on watch would. We'd know, exactly, about when he's going to come anyway, what time he comes, [laughter] as the officer on watch.

SH: Did he ever ask you why it smelled so good? [laughter]

JC: Following up on Shaun's question about bombardments, while you were at Iwo Jima, did you get a chance to go on deck and see the flag flying on top of Mount Suribachi?

NR: No.

JC: You never saw it.

NR: No, we never saw that, no, no. We went in there and we softened them up when we bombarded them, but that was about it. ...

SI: You described how the ship was bombed on the first day of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, where a five-hundred-pound bomb wiped out the station you had requested. What was the aftermath of that attack like? How was the problem dealt with? Then, what happened when you came back to the United States?

NR: ... The five-hundred-pound bomb hit a little above the first deck, under the bridge. ... We felt lucky that we're still floating, you know, that's [obvious], but the five-hundred-pound bomb is not going to do much damage to a ship, and so, we felt pretty safe, as far as going back to Seattle. We went to Seattle to have the damage fixed, because it hit the Admiral's quarters and there was a ... big bubble in there. ... [laughter] In his quarters, there was a big bubble of the deck. [laughter] I mean, it exploded and it hit just above the first deck and knocked out the #1 fire party down there, the party that I had wanted to join. ...

SH: As part of damage control, did you have to do anything after the bomb hit?

NR: No. Firefighters had to go up, from other stations, and fight that fire and get it put out, and then, that was it. The rest was just destroyed. ... We lost a whole fire party in there.

SH: When you went into Seattle for your repairs, what would your duties then be, as somebody who was part of the repair party? What would you do? How long did those repairs take?

NR: Well, ... of course, they had better facilities ... at dock and, there, they had, really, the big welders and all the equipment. They could come in there and they could do it in no time at all and we just let them do it. We were not needed.

SH: Did you have to go into dry dock?

NR: ... I don't think so. I don't think we were in dry dock. I think we were in a dock, though, and they fixed it up, and then, we got right on to it.

SH: How long did that take?

NR: It wasn't long. It wasn't long. ... I think it was maybe four weeks, something like that. It was six weeks. All three divisions had a two-week leave to go home.

SH: What kind of leave did you get?

JC: Yes. Did they let you go across the country or did you have to stay in the area?

NR: Yes, we went across country. We dry-docked in Bremerton for six weeks. I think we were in a little longer than that, but we went across country on a two-week leave. That's when we came home. All three divisions had their turn to go on leave for two weeks.

JC: Tell us about the liberty. What was that like?

SH: Did you take the train across?

NR: Yes, took a train across the country. We went on liberty in Seattle, there was a place called (White City?). We used to go out there and there was all these girls that worked in the aircraft factories out there, Boeing, I think it was.

JC: Boeing, yes.

SH: Right.

NR: ... Oh, the place was loaded with girls, and they had a big skating rink there, and so, we used to go to the skating rink. [laughter] I had a lot of fun.

SH: Is that where you learned to dance?

NR: [laughter] Yes, a lot of other things, too, yes.

JC: Did you have your big bells by that time, or not yet?

NR: Oh, yes, I had my big bells. ... Then, we went across country, ... went home, and then, we came back, and it was as simple as that. ...

JC: I take it you were not in Pullman sleepers this time.

NR: No.

JC: You were probably sleeping sitting up in the seats.

NR: Yes.

JC: The trains would be much more crowded during the middle of the war, correct?

NR: Oh, yes, absolutely.

JC: Packed?

NR: We had sailors all over the place. The train would make stops, such as Butte or Billings, Montana, and the girls would be out there on the platforms. They'd want to travel with us. ... They wanted to come on the train. "Can we come with you? Can we come?" "Yes, come on, let's go." They'd get off at the next stop. [laughter] Had all kinds of fun.

SI: Did you notice people treating you differently, now that you were a returning combat veteran?

NR: Oh, yes. You know, they were all good to us, and that's what you're going to say. ... Everybody welcomed us. There was no question about it.

JC: Give us some examples.

SH: Did they invite you into their homes or bring something for you to the bases?

NR: Well, yes. ... Well, that was in San Francisco, but, no, actually, I came home and spent a week home, a week or two, I can't remember which now, and then, I don't really remember too much about that, except that my mother says, "You have to go back?" [laughter] because we're in the thick of fighting the Japs.

SH: Right.

NR: I said, "Yes, Ma, I've got to go back." She couldn't quite understand that sometimes.

SH: Did you find that you were able to save money?

NR: Oh, yes.

SH: How did you take care of that?

NR: I saved money. I didn't spend it when I was out to sea. See, if you spend your money when you're out to sea, you don't have anything when you get to shore, [laughter] and that was the rule that I had. I wouldn't have any money, because I know there's a couple of my friends, jeepers, Picarazzi especially, he'd spend his money. I don't know what the heck ... he's spending it on. [laughter] "Oh, I got money. I got money in the bank," and then, when he'd come on shore, he said, "Oh, gee, I ain't got any money." [laughter]

JC: Are you talking about cash money?

NR: Cash.

JC: Does the Navy actually carry cash on those battleships and pay you in cash?

NR: Right, absolutely, absolutely.

JC: The purser?

NR: The purser would let you draw out any amount of money and you could keep the rest in the purser's bank. You got a receipt and the balance in your account.

JC: Did those guys use it to gamble? What can you spend it on at sea?

NR: ... Now, the thing is, you don't have to go get your money.

SH: You can bank it, yes.

NR: Just bank it.

JC: What would you say the percentage was, on your ship, of men taking the money in cash while you were at sea and men like you, who did not?

NR: Yes, and a lot of them would [take the cash]. Now, I would, you know, ... take maybe five or ten dollars, or something like that, out, but that was it. I wouldn't go any higher than ten dollars.

JC: What were you getting paid a month? Are you talking about once a month?

NR: Yes, yes, but, even at that, ... I had nothing to spend the money on.

JC: What percentage, do you think, of the guys on the ship were taking the money and spending it?

NR: They were taking it. ... They were smoking cigarettes. They were doing all of this kind of stuff, buying someone's watch or jackknife, and they would go down to the store and they'd buy candy, pogeys, what they called pogeys.

JC: Gambling? You have not mentioned gambling.

NR: And gamble a little, gambling, yes.

JC: And losing?

NR: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, in the sump pumps, ... [laughter] I had a game going one time. [laughter] Yes, yes, we were playing cards and I found out I lost [money] and I say to myself, "I'm not going to lose anymore." So, the guys that came down, I said, "[If] you're going to come on down here, you're going to pay me out of the pot, if you want to play down here;" what a game! [laughter]

JC: Oh, my God, like Frank Sinatra in *Guys and Dolls*. You were actually running the game, rather than playing in the game.

NR: I ran the game.

SH: We hear a lot about that. [laughter]

JC: Anyhow, you really do not know what percentage of them are saving the money versus what percentage of them are spending it?

NR: No, no, because I wouldn't draw mine. I was very, very tight.

SH: Did you send money home?

NR: No, no.

JC: Is that because of the old man?

NR: No, I did not want the old man [to get it]. ...

SH: I just thought maybe you had a bank account.

NR: ... They weren't feeding me.

JC: However, you did not have a savings account.

NR: So, I had it all saved up in the purser's office. Really, ... I had five hundred bucks at that time. I had quite a few [bucks].

JC: What did you do with it? When you got out, you mean?

NR: When I got out of the Navy, yes. You could buy a car with that, you could buy a lot of things with that.

SH: Did you find it hard to leave Massachusetts and head back to the West Coast?

NR: No, I just had to do it. ... You didn't let that bother you. I mean, if you let every ... little thing bother you, you're not going to be in good shape going out there. "Oh, I have to come out there again."

JC: Were there many, or any, people who did not come back? In other words, we do have desertion in the Navy and the Army.

NR: Yes, but I didn't see any.

JC: Not in your unit.

NR: I didn't see any, yes. I didn't hear of any.

SH: Had anyone been lost from your circle of friends in Massachusetts, in any of the services? Had anyone been killed?

NR: Not really, not really. I can't remember anybody getting killed.

SH: What year was it that you went back to Bremerton and back out to the Pacific?

NR: It's '44, isn't it?

SI: Yes. July of 1944 is when you left Puget Sound.

NR: Puget Sound, yes, what a beautiful sound of many islands with evergreen trees all coming down to the water. I never forgot that.

SH: You still have almost another year.

NR: [laughter] We're getting there.

JC: Sandra was talking about burials at sea. Am I mistaken or did you say that, sometimes, troublemakers disappeared while the ship was at sea, that they would not be there in the morning? Someone ticked someone else off and that person would not be onboard in the morning.

NR: Well, who said that?

JC: I thought you did. In other words, they got pushed off the ship at night.

NR: I don't think so, no.

JC: That must have been somebody else.

NR: Must have been somebody else.

JC: Okay, if you did not say it, do not say it.

NR: I wasn't going to say it. [laughter]

JC: Did you ever hear anything about guys disappearing, not because of "Dear John" letters?

NR: Well, we had two guys [who] disappeared, the "Dear John" letters, yes, perhaps they were "Dear John" letters.

JC: Yes. I am not talking about that. I am talking about people getting bumped off.

NR: They had their "Dear John" letters. They got letters that their girlfriends ... were going to marry somebody else or [something].

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

SH: I just asked if there was a brig onboard ship.

NR: There was a brig.

SH: Did you ever find someone there or send someone there?

NR: No, never went near the brig. I never even saw it, didn't want to see it; [laughter] behave yourself.

JC: However, you knew about it.

NR: ... We knew about it. You knew there was a brig down there. ... The master-at-arms had charge of that. Masters-at-arms were the police onboard ship.

SH: Right.

SI: They were Marines.

NR: No, they were just master-at-arms with a chief in charge. The rest were just regular sailors that were policemen, our policemen, [laughter] making sure the ship was secure, nobody was

fighting, and stuff like that, but we didn't have any fights. ... We saw very little of that. ... Everybody left everybody to their own.

SH: Down in the bilge, where you were running your game, where you were this king of the castle, so-to-speak, [laughter] where were the guys from? Were they from all over the country?

NR: Oh, yes. ...

SH: We talked about some of the different characters that you met in boot camp, but what about onboard the ship? Were they from all stations of life?

NR: Yes, yes. There was nothing that was unique about anybody, that you would say. They're just ... guys that wanted to gamble. They liked to gamble.

SH: I just meant, were there people from the West Coast, Middle-America?

NR: I'd say from everywhere. You could say it with affirmative, because I know there was one that was from San Francisco, and then, ... I remember there was a Texan who used to brag about Texas all the time. ...

SH: Texans.

NR: Yes. ... They become friends and they really don't care where they come from, I mean, in a sense, because you're all out there for what? We're all fighting this war. This is what's taking your attention and you're going to pay attention if you want to stay alive.

SH: Did you get a lot of letters? Did you send a lot of letters home?

NR: Yes. I always wrote home. I always wrote, yes. ... As a matter-of-fact, I wrote to the classes at Major Edwards High School. Oh, yes, yes, they liked to get those letters. I valued those from Janet Fisher.

SH: Did the class write back? Did people in school write to you?

NR: No, not really, not really. My mother wrote. I mean, my mother would answer me and all of that, but this was kind of an information letter. I didn't expect anything back and I didn't get anything back.

JC: How often did you get mail, out at sea? Did they bring it out?

NR: Oh, yes. ... Sometimes, it was there and, sometimes, it wasn't. You know, I mean, it was not a regular thing.

JC: How far to the front would they bring it? They would not bring it in when you were in a battle, but would they bring it up right after the battle?



NR: Probably after, if you came back. Yes, ... it might be on a supply ship or something that's going to supply you.

SH: Did you ever request that they send you something from home, like a salami or something?

NR: No. I never asked for anything, no, no salami, no capicola. [laughter]

JC: No capicola, no provolone.

NR: Provolone, yes. That one, I like.

SI: I asked you earlier about horseplay and pranks with your buddies. You said that really did not happen until you formed a bond. After you were on the *South Dakota* for awhile, were there any pranks or playing around, anything like that?

NR: No, there wasn't. I never saw any. Maybe some guys did, I don't know, but, ... in our group, we didn't. ... You know, our group, as a group, was spread across the ship, and then, there was changing all the time. I mean, I might be at damage control, I might be in the sump pump, I might be on the flood boards. So, the thing is is that my demographic was changing all the time, when I was in different spots. So, I never really got close to anybody, except to Picarazzi or that one guy there that I was friends with, but that was only because it was near the end of the war. It was coming up near the end of the war, ... but that was it.

JC: No horseplay, right, no short-sheeting, anything like that?

NR: No, no. Nobody bothered anybody, no, that was not *kosher*, whatever.

JC: Sounds too juvenile, maybe.

NR: Yes. I think you kind of grow up when you get out there. It's serious business. It's not really [a joking matter].

JC: You mentioned that the brig was taken care of by the master-at-arms. The Marines, of course, guarded the Admiral. When the Admiral left, did the Marines leave or did they also stay onboard for the Captain?

NR: I think they left. I think his entourage left.

JC: Okay.

NR: He had an entourage with him of Marines and officers--planners, strategists, to serve the Admiral. In the end, he has to make the decision. ...

JC: Then, I have a question about the relationship between the sailors and Marines, either on the ship or, more importantly, on shore. As you said, you do not remember any fights on ship. You certainly remember fights on shore, which you have told me about, at night clubs and bars.

NR: Oh, yes. That's something else. [laughter]

JC: What was the relationship between the Navy, the sailors, and the Marines like?

NR: Somebody's going to pull your chain. You knew that. [laughter]

JC: Tell us about that. Do you remember any particularly big fights, big groups of servicemen?

NR: Yes. There was a big fight. ... Let me remember this; yes, ... this was in LA and this was after the war and we used to go to a place called the Rainbow Cafe [laughter] in; ... what's the name of that place now?

SH: San Diego?

NR: San Diego. ... No, no, we weren't in San Diego. We were in LA proper now, and then, we went to ... where the movie stars go. Where is it?

JC: Beverly Hills, Hollywood?

NR: Hollywood, yes. We went to Hollywood one night and we had a big dinner there and everything else, but I ended up sauntering on. After that, ... when we went ashore. We went ashore, and then, we went to this Rainbow Cafe, which was in LA. It wasn't in Hollywood, it was in LA, and then, we had a big fight there once. ... You know, we were going on leave ... and we were going on shore every third night. ... We were really hitting it up with the gals, and I hit it up with this one gal. ... She told me in the beginning, she [said], "I have a boyfriend, you know, but I like [you]," but, so, I don't care. "I don't care how many boyfriends you've got. Let's go have some fun." Anyway, we're having all this fun and everything else, and then, her boyfriend comes. So, that's all right, but my buddy, Picarazzi, okay, he says, "That's your girl." [laughter] I said, "I don't care," and he goes and he starts arguing with this guy and he starts a fight. ... The first thing you know, the whole place is fighting [laughter] and I walk out and they're all fighting over me. [laughter]

SH: You walk out. [laughter]

NR: I walk out. [laughter]

JC: Smart move.

NR: Smart move.

JC: Were these all sailors or were there Marines?

NR: All sailors, all sailors in there, oh, golly.

SH: Did the shore patrol come soon after that?

NR: I don't know. I got out. I wasn't going to stay there and get [beat up]. I started to and, all of a sudden, some guy hit me and he hit me on the shoulder. I said, "Hey, I'm not going to stay in here and get hit. [laughter] I'm going to get out of there." [laughter]

JC: Marines and sailors, were there any problems there, on shore?

NR: Not that I know of. ... We never really [fought]. Did I ever mention it?

JC: No. Now, you are really worried, after our last exchange. [laughter]

NR: [laughter] All right, but, anyway, that's it. However, there was competition between ships. In a task force, there are two battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers, minesweepers, etc. Most had boxing and baseball teams. The Navy encourages this, to let off steam.

SH: Is there anything else on the chronology that you wanted to follow?

JC: Yes, before we get to the surrender.

SI: It looks as though the *South Dakota* did similar operations, supporting landings.

NR: All the way through, right, all the way up.

SI: Do you remember anything about the raids that were close into the shore of Japan?

NR: Yes, Hokkaido and all the way there. ...

SI: Yes.

NR: Yes, yes. When we were just out there, we were bombarding, you know. We'd just go by and drop ... sixteen-inch shells, roll them out, "Zoom, zoom," and then, we'd disappear, [laughter] go out to sea, but there was no resistance. Like, we had no, really, battle resistance and the *Nagato* was disabled. It was in port. It was a disabled battleship. So, that wasn't going to do any harm, and where the heck was it? oh, yes, when we went into Tokyo Bay and ... the war was finally [over]. You know, they'd dropped the atomic bombs, which was just the biggest gift you could give a sailor, at that time. It was all right for any soldier or sailor. That was the greatest thing, and then, we went in there and ... I went ashore illegally. We went ashore illegally.

JC: Oh, tell us this. This is a story I have here. How do you want him to proceed?

SH: It is okay.

JC: Okay.

NR: ... After we dropped the atomic bombs and all of that, ... we go into Tokyo Bay and we anchor in Tokyo Bay and ... they're securing everything, okay, the Army and Navy and all of these people are there.

JC: The Marines?

NR: The Marines. They're securing this harbor, and at least knowing what they're doing, and they're in charge of a lot of the shore facilities. They've got complete charge of all of this. ... So, one night, ... a couple of guys and I, we're talking onboard ship. We're looking out over and one of the guys says, "You know," he says, "over there," he says, "they have guns over there." "Oh, yes," and I think it was five of us that said, "What do you say we go over there?" ... What the master-at-arms had done, and the people that had charge of the boats and everything else, they had taken a bunch of *sampans*. They had a fascination with the Japanese *sampans*, and so, they were all tied up along there. We said, "We could take one of those *sampans* and go over there, where the lights are. We could go over there and we could get the guns, maybe," you know, and we did, believe it or not. [laughter]

SH: You took the *sampan*.

JC: Wait, have him go through this. [laughter] You went down over the side of the ship at night, right? Tell it step-by-step.

NR: ... Yes. We actually went out on the yardarm, and then, we went down on the boat. ... There was oars there, and everything else, so, we oared. ...

JC: This is at night.

NR: Yes, yes, about ten PM.

JC: Nobody is hearing you.

NR: It's fine. Nobody's hearing us. We go on the shore. ... He says, "That's where the lights are. They said there's guns [there]."

JC: It was a warehouse.

NR: It was a warehouse, ... a warehouse of guns, okay. So, here, we're going there.

JC: Rowing, rowing.

NR: Rowing, rowing, and so, then, we come down ... and there's a line of ships there, small boats, small ships, very small ships. So, anyway, we went on one and we looked around, and then, ... the electrical was all missing. There was ... nothing in them. There was just a shell of a ship with nothing, no guts to it, you know what I mean? About the only thing, I suppose there was a motor down below, but we weren't about to look down there. So, we went to the next one to see if there's anything different there and this guy finds this outboard motor. So, [we said],

"Oh, gee, an outboard motor." [laughter] He says, "I want to take this home. I'm going to take this back to the States." ... "You crazy?" but, anyway, we didn't want to argue. We weren't going to get in a [fight]. "You want it? Bring it aboard." So, he brings it aboard, and so, we take off and we're approaching a dock. ... There's two people on the dock and they start shooting on each side of us.

JC: With rifles?

NR: With rifles, yes. ... They were firing, "Pop, pop, pop," on each side of the boat, into the water, forcing us in, ... and then, one of the guys says, "They're shooting at us. You know that?" I said, "Okay, okay, let's row in." We yell, "We're coming in! We're coming in!" [laughter]

JC: In English, right?

NR: "Coming in!" and they're yelling, "Come on in." ...

JC: The Marines waved you in.

NR: Yes, they waved us in, the Marines, and then, ... all they wanted [to know was], he says, "Well, what have you got? You got any pogeey bait?" Pogeey bait is candy, in naval terms. [laughter] So, anyway, we said, "No, we don't have any pogeey bait. Gee, if we knew, we'd have brought [some]." ... "What have you got on you?" We emptied out our pockets, all our money, all our cigarettes, anything we had. ... They said, "Okay." We said, "Where are the guns?" They said, "Well, we'll show you." [laughter] We knew they knew where the guns were, [laughter] and so, anyway, we go towards the back of the building. We went right, then right, and left to the guns.

JC: Through alleys?

NR: ... It's an alleyway.

JC: You were doing a series of right-hand turns through the alleys.

NR: Through the alley, and we get there and ... he says, "That's where they are." ... Boy, there were guns all over the place.

JC: Did you go in through a big door, into the warehouse?

NR: No, no door. It was outdoor. It was outdoor, with roofs on it.

JC: Open walls.

NR: Open walls.

JC: What is in there?

NR: Guns.

JC: Just stacks and stacks of rifles, machine guns?

NR: Stacks, yes, they're like shelves.

JC: Shelves, yes.

NR: And then, there's a shelf coming up here, the part of the shelf there, and then, they loaded them in there. They just loaded them in there.

JC: These are all Japanese weapons.

NR: Mostly Japanese weapons, some from Asian nations. The double-barreled guns had fox and hound scenes.

JC: They had been confiscated from the Japanese Army. This is exactly what you were after.

NR: Right, right, and so, I'm looking for the Japanese sniper rifles, and then, they had the fox and the hounds on it, [that] they took, ... probably, out of India, you know, the fox and the hounds scenes on there.

JC: What?

NR: ... There was a double-barrel with fox and hounds on it.

JC: Do you mean carved into the wood?

NR: Carved into the metal.

JC: Oh, these were high-priced weapons.

NR: They were beautiful. It was a beautiful thing. So, I got one of those and I got the others. ... About ten of us, we strapped together about ten rifles. You could get a ten by ten They said, "Ten buy?" ... "Okay, wrap it up," and so, we had about, well, there was five of us and there was at least ten big bundles of these things and the boat was just loaded right down. ... Anyway, here, we all get back there and one guy gets lost back there, see, because he had to come back [separately]. Yes, he got lost, and he's yelling. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates his yelling.] We could hear him back there, "Oh, Jesus," and the two Marines say, "The officer on watch is going to come. He's due to be here. He's supposed to be here. He's going to come any minute." [laughter] This guy's out there, yelling, "Hey, where am I?!" All of a sudden, he's quiet, trying to figure it out, and here comes the officer of the watch [laughter] and the officer of the watch comes by and he says, "How's everything out here?" ... We're laying down in the boat [laughter] and the officer on watch is there, talking to the two Marines. Then, he saunters on out of sight.

SH: Keep going. [laughter]

JC: You are on a roll. Keep going, Nick.

NR: ... Anyway, he [the Marine officer] goes through, and he goes on. ... All of a sudden, we see him [the sailor] come out and he says, "Hey, here I am!" [laughter] Would you [believe it]? Thank God, just missed him by [that much], [laughter] and so, ... he got onboard the boat. There we go, row back, row back, row back. ... We said, "Oh, gee, look, ... the ship is all lighted up." [laughter] We were coming towards the bow and the ships police are at the rear and began running down the deck, yelling, "They are going to come up the anchor chain!"

JC: Uh-oh.

NR: ... So, this one kid that was smarter than all of us, okay, he was kind of the one that led us here, he's kind of the one that's getting us out of this, ... he says, "They know one of these boats are missing." [laughter] ... So, we said, "Well, how are we going to [do this]?" [laughter] He says, "Well, we can go up the anchor chain, if you want." So, we row near the anchor chain, okay, and this one guy says, "Ah, I'm going to go." He [the leader] says, "I wouldn't advise it." ... This other guy says, "I'm going to go," and he jumps to get on the anchor chain. He slips. [laughter] He goes into the water, and then, he gets out of the water and he climbs up the anchor chain. He actually gets up and he climbs up there, through the hole.

SH: He actually did that.

NR: Yes. He gets right up there on deck and he walks to his bunk, and the master-at-arms followed his footprints down. [laughter]

JC: They got him.

NR: They got him.

JC: What happens next?

NR: So, what happens next, we go around the ship and the ship has two big turrets on the end, on the rear of the ship.

JC: The anti-aircraft guns.

NR: ... These are high. These are forty-millimeter anti-aircraft guns, six to eight feet high walls around the turret.

SH: Almost six feet.

NR: ... Yes, and it's really round there and the other one's on the other side. There's two, and so, ... when we were rowing over there, ... this one guy who was in charge, he seemed to be in charge of us, he says, "Well, ... I'll go up first." He says, "The rope locker hatch is right there, in-between these two big turrets." Now, these turrets would take him way around to the other

side, okay. He says, "Make sure you park the boat on that side, in the rear. We'll be closer to the hatch to shove these down. ... I'll go up first and I'll lower a rope and you guys mess around and ... stall those guys. Keep ... [their] attention over there." It was only two guys. We found out it was only two guys that had run back after us. So, if there were only two guys, we could fool those two guys. We couldn't fool four or five, because they'd be all over the place. So, that's how we got the guns [onboard]. ... He lowered the rope down to the boat. We tied the guns on it. He'd bring it up, and then, he opened up the hatch and he dropped the ten pack of guns in the locker, and there was a guy sleeping down there. [laughter]

JC: Down where? What is it going into?

NR: It's going into the rope locker.

JC: Oh, the rope locker.

NR: Okay, and he was hoping there was rope down there; there was no rope under the hatch [in] the locker, and it made a sound like [a crash], ... [laughter] hit that metal and went, "Boom!" and he shuts the hatch. [laughter] "Oh, jeez," he thought. These guys didn't hear anything. They were, more or less, paying attention to us, because we were arguing about who was going to go up the rope ladder first. "I don't want to go up first. You go up first." [laughter] ... We were stalling, you know. [laughter] So, we got one down there, okay, but the guy that was sleeping in the locker, he saw the guy. He saw the guns. He pulled over a big bunch of this netting, this rope net that you see on the side of the ship that you can climb up on. Well, he threw one of those under there and the other three came down, "Bing," and didn't make a sound at all. [laughter]

JC: Then, what happened?

NR: So, anyway, ... we came up. So, we had four or five of those bundles and there was about ten in a bundle. ... We actually had around forty-three guns, if I remember correct. They said, "Well, we actually ended up with forty-three guns." We could have ended up with, you know ...

JC: Fifty?

NR: Twenty guns apiece. [laughter]

JC: Did the master-at-arms arrest you at that point? Did they not see you coming up?

NR: Yes.

JC: I thought you were arguing with these guys. Who were you arguing with?

NR: The master-at-arms, but they were on the other side of the turret.

JC: No, I know he did not get the guns, but did he get you guys? Okay, we left you guys down in the boat at the bottom. What did you do next?



NR: ... Then, we came up and we signed in. We had to sign in, and so, that's how we got caught, you know, but we had the guns onboard. That's all we wanted to do, was get the guns onboard.

JC: You got caught. Was there a penalty?

NR: Well, I'll tell you the deal. I'll finish the story. So, anyway, ... we've got the guns. We've got the guns and we know, and we're all in it, and that was it. "Don't say a word to anybody." ... We didn't say a word to anybody, ... until we got this court-martial over. It was a deck court-martial.

JC: Just a minute. [laughter]

NR: Yes, there's going to be a deck court-martial. There was going to be a deck. We knew that.

JC: Because you were absent without leave; that was the charge.

NR: We're absent, yes, absent without leave (AWOL). They didn't want to mention the boat. We didn't steal a boat, because ... they were not supposed to have a non-regulation boat alongside the ship, and there were several tied up.

SH: Okay.

NR: Ah! So, they were in a little trouble. [laughter]

JC: It was just AWOL.

NR: ... That never even got on my record.

JC: The AWOL never got on your record.

NR: ... It was a deck court-martial and it usually doesn't get on your record, but, that day of the court-martial, the *sampan* was tied up on the yard arm, loaded with the rest of the guns. It looked great. A lot of the crew were marveling at this boat loaded with the guns. There was speculation that the Captain might have a lottery or something. But, right there, in front of everybody, the master-at-arms men, in their motorboat, detached the *sampan* from the yard arm and towed it out for everyone to see and they shot it full of holes and sunk it in Tokyo Bay.

SH: What did they fine you?

NR: ... They fined us. All right, so, we were in the harbor for two days. ... When the surrender was done, onboard ship, then, we were going to be there for three days, so that all three divisions could go ashore. Then, we were going to go back to the States, via Pearl Harbor.

JC: Did this episode happen before the surrender?

NR: No.

JC: Oh, this was after the surrender.

NR: After the surrender, because there was one, two, three days. So, I was going to go on the last one. I was going to go ashore. So, one of the guys that was in the group was on this one here. So, he'd already been ashore, so, he didn't care. So, what they did was, they restricted us to the ship until we reached Pearl Harbor, which is nothing. You're out to sea, [laughter] and all I did was, ... I lost my turn at going ashore, but I didn't care about that. I got a gun, more than anybody [else] was going to get. [laughter]

JC: Nick, these guys who went ashore, they also want souvenirs, the way you did.

NR: Sure.

JC: However, they did not get them.

NR: Oh, yes. We all got them. What we did was split the [rifles].

JC: Not your little group, but you were talking about the fact that they eventually let the entire ship's complement on shore, one division at a time.

NR: A division at a time, yes.

JC: Did they go and get souvenirs, too?

NR: Yes, but there was nothing to buy in Tokyo.

JC: The guns were gone by that time.

NR: No, ... they didn't get anywhere near the guns. ... They went into Tokyo.

JC: Oh, they went to see the city.

NR: They went into the city, but we were kings.

JC: I see. You had the souvenirs.

NR: We had the souvenirs. We had the quintessential souvenir. [laughter]

JC: Okay. Go on.

NR: The quintessential souvenir. Can you say that? [laughter]

JC: Go on, because, of course, the word leaks out.

NR: Okay, so, where was I?

JC: You had now been slapped on the wrist with a deck martial.

NR: Yes, right, with a deck martial, and the next thing was to distribute and do something with the guns, okay, ... and everybody at least wanted two guns. I wanted two guns because I had my uncle aboard. I wanted him to have one. So, I got a fox and hounds and I said, "I want a sniper rifle and a fox and hounds, see, okay." ... I told my uncle. I told him what we had in the kitty, you know what I mean? ... I actually got my guns and I had them taped up in the sump room, underneath the sump pump. [laughter]

JC: You took them out of the rope locker and you guys distributed them and hid them in different places.

NR: Right, but somebody had control ... and that was the guy that was our leader, so-to-speak. He was the one that led it and, every now and then, I'd get ten bucks here, five bucks there. [laughter] He sold them. He was selling what was left. All we wanted was a couple each. ... There was, like, forty-three guns or something like that and there was five of us that went ashore. So, five [guys], there's ten guns that we got, that we used up, each wanted two guns, right, and the rest was sold. [laughter] ... Every now and then, he came by and he'd say, "Here's your money. Here's the money," whenever he'd just sold another one, or something like that. [laughter]

JC: Okay. Eventually, you were out at sea and the Captain comes on and says, "I know there are guns hidden onboard." How did that work?

NR: No, no, what happened was, how that worked was that we went out to sea and we were distributing guns, of course, *via* stealth and all of this. Then, some guy fires a gun, goes topside and fires his gun. [laughter] Oh, all hell broke loose, all hell broke loose. [laughter] "How did they get those guns onboard?" you know what I mean? The big mystery was, "How did they get the guns onboard? They were in there, master-at-arms was guarding them, and how did they get them onboard?" and they couldn't figure it out. [laughter]

SH: What happened to the guy that fired the gun?

NR: Well, nothing, because ... they had nothing to go on. Where are they going to start? [laughter]

JC: Did they catch him and confiscate his gun?

NR: ... They announced that all these guns must be turned in. They finally found out. They figured it out that there were guns aboard, that, "Somehow, somebody stole the guns and, now, we want you to turn them in and we will guarantee you get them when you ... get to the States," and so, nothing happened. Nobody's turning in their gun. [laughter]

SH: I was just going to ask if anybody turned them in.

NR: Nobody turned in a gun, [laughter] and so, then, ... we weren't going to do anything. ... You know, as we talked to each other, they [said], "Don't do anything, don't do anything." Okay, so, we did nothing, and then, they come back on and said; oh, the second gun went off. Somebody else shot another gun. [laughter] Now, they're really excited, okay. So, then, I guess they kind of realized they'd have to guarantee something, okay. So, they says, "We, as the United States Navy, ... guarantee your gun will be returned to you when you reach the States, *via* mail to your home, so that you won't have to handle the gun at all from here on," and, of course, ... our leader says, "We want to make sure it's in writing," and we said, "Well, make sure." ... Sure enough, the announcement comes over, "It'll be in writing and the Captain will sign."

SH: He was negotiating.

NR: Yes, they were negotiating with us and it was negotiated that way and, I'll tell you, all the guns came in.

SH: You turned yours in.

NR: I turned mine in, ... and I gave one to my uncle. I had my uncle who's aboard, so, I gave him [one]. I had him choose the one he wanted and I was so worried that he would choose the ...

JC: The shotgun.

NR: No, the sniper rifle.

JC: Oh, you wanted the sniper rifle.

NR: I wanted the sniper rifle. I let him have the fox and hounds. I was hoping that would attract [his eye], and it did. He [said], "Oh, that's a beautiful gun." [laughter] ...

JC: You gave it to him, and then, he turned it in, just as you turned yours in.

NR: I turned mine in, right.

JC: They mailed it to your house.

NR: And mailed it to our house.

JC: They arrived there. When?

NR: When I got home, it was home. Can you imagine that? [laughter] ...

SH: No.

JC: When you told it to me before, I thought you said that the Captain personally guaranteed that you would get it.

NR: Well, that's right. ... The Executive Officer and the Captain had to sign their names. I had a lot of respect for the officers and I felt strongly that the Navy would keep its word. The war was over and everyone would leave with a good taste in their mouths.

JC: Signed their names and personally guaranteed that that weapon would be returned. Was there a threat, too, that if the guns were not turned in that something would happen?

NR: Oh, yes. Well, they'd confiscate them.

JC: Wow. Then, you would never get them.

NR: Then, you'd lose it. So, I say, "Rather than lose everything," and I told my uncle, "You might as well turn it in." He says, "Yes, you're right."

JC: That was great. That was the story I wanted to hear him tell.

NR: ... Yes, yes. That's quite a story. [laughter]

SH: What was your homecoming like? You came back into San Francisco.

JC: Or LA?

NR: Homecoming, we came back into San Francisco, first.

JC: The picture.

NR: Yes.

SH: Were there fireboats out there welcoming you?

NR: Oh, there was everything. The Golden Gate Bridge was just loaded with people, loaded with people. ... They were about that high and you saw their little arms going like this, [waving]. [laughter]

JC: Could you hear?

NR: And there was a roar. It was a roar, yes. It was really something. That was a real homecoming, really, and I have the photos here.

JC: Yes, yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NR: Oh, but this one here, my uncle got.

JC: Yes.

NR: This is the only one.

JC: Of all the veterans in the veterans' organization, Nick is the only one that has this.

NR: Has this.

JC: Wait, what is this?

NR: Gene Marino.

JC: Tuesday. See, it does not say what month.

NR: A woman.

JC: Oh, *The [San Francisco] Examiner*.

NR: *The Examiner*, a girl on *The Examiner*. ... He met a girl from *The Examiner* and she says, "I'll get you the photos." She said, "I want to get you some photos." She gave him all these photos.

SH: Wow.

JC: That is great.

NR: This one here, and there's two others. This one here; you see this one here? This one here, she got. Now, this is the only one that we had. We're not the only ones that have this, but these here, they have. [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo and the interviewers are discussing his collection of photographs.]

JC: They are widely distributed. We did not discuss the surrender ceremony. He also talks about the "*Mighty Mo'*," derisively. [laughter]

SH: Tell us about the surrender, what you remember, what you saw and where you were.

NR: Well, we were aboard the *South Dakota* and we were in Tokyo Bay, here, and this was before that little thing.

SH: The escapade?

NR: The escapade that we had ashore, and they announced that they were going to have the surrender aboard the *Missouri* [(BB-63)]. Now, she had just been out there a few months. She

had not been out there long. She was not through the whole war, and this, the *South Dakota*, was the most famous battleship there was. ... Of course, Truman, being from Missouri, wanted the *Missouri*, wanted it on the *Missouri*. So, that's what happened there. So, we didn't have it aboard our ship, but we were so depressed about this, and I guess the word got around, and so, they finally decided that they would move the *South Dakota* alongside the *Missouri* during the surrender. ... That's where all these photos that you'll see in there are taken from our ship, looking onto the surrender. So, the whole surrender is right there. That's the surrender you got.

JC: You mean that the official photographs that are so famous were not actually taken from the superstructure of the *Missouri*. They were taken from the *South Dakota*.

NR: Those are all taken from the *South Dakota*. ... They told us, "Don't take photos. ... We're going to take the photos," and I know why. They didn't want us to be [in the shots]. If you really look at the photos, you can't see the *South Dakota*.

JC: Anyhow, an official Navy photographer onboard would take the pictures and distribute them.

NR: Right, and that's where I got my set. I went right down and got my set. My uncle, he got his set and he lost his set on the way home. I don't know how you could lose a set, but he lost his set on the way home, [laughter] and so, I had to give him copies of this.

JC: The ceremony was going on, and this "old salt" says ...

NR: Huh? [laughter]

SH: What did the old sailor say?

JC: What did the "old salt" say? He was sitting on the *South Dakota* with you, looking down on the ceremony on the deck of the *Missouri*; at least that is what you told me. He said ...

NR: Go ahead. ... Give me a clue.

JC: [laughter] I guess I will have to. He said, "There's the *Mighty Mo'*."

NR: Oh, the "*Mighty Mo'*," yes. ...

JC: Did I make this up or did this really happen?

NR: No, no, you're [right]. ...

JC: Tell the story.

NR: ... This guy, ... he was kind of a philosopher, I guess, ... as soon as the *Missouri* came out, from the United States, ... and he's the one that dubbed the thing "*Mighty Mo'*," he says, "Here comes the '*Mighty Mo'*,'" and that went around the ship and it was kind of a joke, that they come

out so late in the war, you know. [laughter] ... Of course, on top of that, they got the glory of having the surrender aboard their ship. So, that was it. That was about it, but, yes, he was there.

JC: The "*Mighty Mo*" is still in existence, now in Pearl Harbor, and the *South Dakota* has been broken up for scrap, in Kearny, New Jersey. As you said earlier, pronunciation means everything, because before I heard you tell that story, when I see the "*Mighty Mo*" referred to as the "*Mighty Mo*," I thought of it explicitly as the "Mighty" *Missouri*.

SH: Complimentary.

JC: Yes, complimentary, but you are saying that at least this "old salt," the philosopher who designated it, was really deriding it in scorn.

NR: Yes, right. ...

JC: "*Mighty Mo*" indeed. Here they come, when the war is over." [laughter] Not only that, but the *South Dakota* had been Halsey's flagship for much of the war.

NR: Right, most of the war; all of the war.

JC: If not for the *Missouri*, the ceremony would have probably taken place on its deck.

SH: Why was the ceremony not done on a carrier?

JC: Yes, interesting.

NR: Truman was in charge. Truman wanted it aboard his state. He wanted his state mentioned. That's ego, you know.

JC: He is the Commander-in-Chief.

NR: The Commander-in-Chief. He wanted the glory. He wanted his state to have the glory. He wanted his to go down in history, blah, blah, blah, you know.

SH: After you pulled into San Francisco, how soon after did you head home again?

NR: Well, we came into San Francisco with this big hoopla and all of that you see there, you know, and that was grand, and we had a grand time, and then, we went down to San Pedro and we were at LA, in LA.

SH: That is where the fight took place.

NR: That was where the fight took place and all of that, and then, I left there by car, because I was going on leave. I went by car cross-country, ... with three other guys.

SH: One of their cars?



NR: No, no, two other guys. ... There was the driver. ... The driver says, "It'll only be three guys in the car," and then, we rented a car from the AAA, okay. This was through the auspices of the AAA, but these guys were drivers, you know. They would drive you anywhere in the country you wanted to go.

JC: This was not a sailor. This was a professional driver.

NR: ... A professional driver, yes. He was with the car, and we were to leave for Chicago and we were to go ... all the way to Chicago and, I think, we spent fifty bucks apiece and he was going to make a hundred-and-fifty bucks off of us, right. So, anyway, ... we've got to go to San Diego, and then, across, okay. So, we're heading down to San Diego. We're doing, you know, fifty miles an hour, whatever it is, and [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates a blown rod], you know, ... it blew a rod.

JC: Oh, jeez. [laughter]

NR: He says, "Well, we've got to go back." We say, "You're not going back. You're going to drive this thing into San Diego and you're going to the AAA there and we're going to get another car. Do you understand? You're not going to go back." [laughter] "Okay." So, he drove that thing, [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo imitates the blown rod], all the way to San Diego, and we got into San Diego and he gets another car, fine. So, we get in that car, but, while we're waiting around on the steps there, there's a girl there, you know. ... She says, "Hi. I would do anything to get to St. Louis." ... [laughter] We said, "Okay, let's see what we can do." [laughter] She said, "I've got no money, either." [laughter] We figured that. So, anyway, we take her onboard and ... we take her as far as St. Louis, [laughter] okay, and we'll go on from there, and then, we went to Chicago, yes. She was a very nice girl. She was a good girl. [laughter]

JC: Okay. You do not seem so upset. [laughter]

NR: Nice girl, real good for us. [laughter]

JC: Okay, Chicago.

NR: ... Then, from there, we went to Chicago. We got her to St. Louis and we went to Chicago.

SH: Did you take a train?

NR: ... From Chicago, we took a train to Massachusetts, and they split up, by the way. They didn't all go to the same place. So, that's why we chose Chicago, so [that] the other guys could go other places. ...

SH: What did you do then?

NR: And then, I was on leave for two weeks and I had to report to Philadelphia, because the ship went through the Panama Canal, came up the coast and parked in Philadelphia, and that's where I

was to meet her and that's where I met her, in Philadelphia. ... I wanted to get out of the service and I went down to the officer. The first thing I did, I go down to the officer and say, "Hey, you know, [I want my] discharge." He says, "You really want a discharge?" He says, "You know, the Navy is good," and he's trying. [laughter] He's going to talk me into staying, okay. He's going to smooth talk me into staying, and I listened to him and all the story. He says, "You know, you've always got three meals. You never have to worry about this thing, you never have to worry about that," and blah, blah, blah. You know, "We treat you good. Didn't we treat you good?" I said, "Oh, yes, yes. I've got to admit, you treat me good," and so, anyway, I say, "But, I still want to go home. [laughter] I still want to get out." I said, "I've got plans," you know. So, anyway, he says, "Okay." He says, "I'll get things ready for you." He says, "Come back in three days or four days," or whatever it was. So, I go back in four more days and I talk about it again. Here, we talk about it again, [laughter] "And why don't you stay in?" He says, "You know, it's a good place. It's a home. All your medical care is taken care of. You don't have to worry about a thing." [laughter] He's talking on. I said, "No. ... I've got to get out of here," and he says, "Okay." He says, "I've got a few more things I've got to do." He got me back three times to try to talk me into [staying], to go on, and so, then, the last time, I said, "Look, I've got to go," you know. He says, "All right." He says, "You come back in a week." [laughter] I figured, "If he starts that again, I'm going to scream, you know. I'm going to go to his boss or whoever," but ... he signed me out then and [I] finally got out and I left. ... I created a new life for myself, all by myself.

SH: What did you do? Did you go back to school? Did you use the GI Bill?

NR: Yes. I used the GI Bill. I went back.

SH: You went to a special class at your high school, right?

NR: No, no. ... My first thing was, I was interested in this plastic thing, you know. I had taken a plastic course while I was in the Navy, you know. ...

SH: Correspondent?

NR: Correspondent course, and so, I thought I'd give that a try. I was going to go into mold design and stuff like that, and I did part of it then, and then, I said, "No, I've got to go to Worchester Junior College and ... at least start getting a degree." So, I got a degree in engineering, which was, what do they call it? ... It's a different kind of a degree. It's not a ...

JC: Associate's?

NR: Associate degree. It was an associate degree that I got for that and, I'll tell you, that carried me through my whole life, really. That's the extent [of my education]. Oh, of course, I went to a lot of seminars and stuff like this, but they don't count, you know, as far as education, but that's the only education I had, but I did get it under the GI Bill. I got it free. [laughter] So, I got paid back, you know, and, I'll tell you, it took me far. I ... finally became plant manager and was an engineer all my life, you know.

SH: During a break, you told me that you and four or five of your classmates, including a Roger, needed to finish your high school degree, and so, you went to night school.

NR: Yes, it was.

SH: You got your high school degree when you first came back.

NR: Well, yes. We went with (Roger Hubble?) and those guys, yes. ... I had to finish high school first, and then, go for the degree.

SH: Right.

JC: Did you use the GI Bill to pay for your high school then?

NR: You know, ... a lot of schools, in those days, they would allow you to go to these classes. It was free.

JC: Without charge.

NR: Without charge, yes.

SH: They gave you credit for some of your service, in getting your high school diploma.

NR: Right, right, yes, absolutely, yes.

SH: I thought that was really good, that you would come back, after having gone through all of that.

JC: Great.

NR: Yes, yes, it was.

SH: Get your high school degree, and then, move on.

NR: Yes, yes. It was an interesting life.

SH: All right.

JC: Then, of course, he starts the "Baby Boom." He gets married.

NR: Married and had five kids. [laughter]

JC: That is where my wife comes in. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Russo is Dr. Chambers' father-in-law.]

NR: Five kids. [laughter]

JC: You got married in 1949.

NR: Yes, '49.

JC: 1949, yes. That is the Boomers.

SH: You have five daughters.

NR: Four daughters and one son. The son was in the middle.

SH: [laughter] Holding them up, right?

NR: Holding them up. [laughter] Yes, ... I had a great life. I'm still having a great life.

JC: That is right.

SH: Good for you. I hope you have a wonderful time at your reunion with the rest of the *South Dakota* crew.

NR: Yes, right. ... Yes, that's right, too. [laughter]

JC: He leaves tomorrow.

NR: Tomorrow, yes, yes, leave tomorrow.

JC: The reunion of the *South Dakota* Association.

NR: Yes.

SH: Is there anything else?

NR: No.

SH: Thank you.

JC: Thank you, Nick. That was great. Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Sabeenah Arshad 11/13/07

Reviewed by Amanda Vahabi 11/13/07

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 1/16/08

Reviewed by Sandra S. Holyoak 3/30/08

Reviewed by Nichola P. Russo 2/18/09