RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP SCHREIBER
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Sandra Stewart Holyoak:  This begins an interview on March 3, 2009, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Philip Schreiber, Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Matthew Mikiewicz.

Matthew Mikiewicz:  Matthew Mikiewicz.

SH:  First of all, thank you so much for coming here today and talking with us.  To begin, just for the record, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Philip Schreiber:  I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, January 20, 1925.

SH:  Let’s begin with a little bit of background as far as your family.  Please state for the record your father’s name and his family history, if you could.

PS:  Both my parents came from a small village Mihailen in Romania.  In Elizabeth, where we lived, my father was a tailor.  My mother was a dressmaker and homemaker.  Elizabeth was a city of immigrants.  It still is, as a matter of fact, and most of the kids of my generation were first generation Americans.

SH:  Did your father talk about his immigration story, how he came to want to come to this country and a little of that background, how he got here?

PS:  Yes.  As a matter of fact, in Romania the life economically was very poor and they were Jewish, as I am, and anti-Semitism was just a part of life, like malaria is in some countries.  It’s there, and so, they learned very rapidly that in America the streets, they said, were paved with gold and they came here.  [laughter]

SH:  Now, did your mother and father come together?  Were they already married when they came to this country?

PS:  No, they were teenagers.  They left separately, came separately, and they were fixed up once they came here.  Being a little village, all the families knew each other and my father was a young man, my mother was a teenager, and they said, "You’ve got to get married right away."

SSH:  Did any of your father’s family come?  Were they already here?

PS:  His older brother came.

SH:  At the same time that he did?

PS:  No, he preceded him.  What happened is one member of a family would come, earn enough money to buy a ticket over.  It cost twenty-five dollars to come from Bremerhaven, Germany or Hamburg to New York.

SH:  Really?
PS: Yes.

SH: That’s amazing. Now what time?

PS: 1911 to 1914.

SH: How many of his family did actually make the crossing and immigrated to this country?

PS: My father’s family, just his older brother.

SH: And he?

PS: And he. On my mother’s side, she had four sisters and one brother, all of whom came. They all preceded her. My mother was the youngest of six children.

SH: Before we talk about your mother, did your father already have--as a teenager, had he already done any apprentice work as a tailor?

PS: Yes, the apprenticeship started at the age of thirteen. He was sent from Mihailen to the big city, the capital Bucharest, where he did his apprenticeship. I have a postcard in my collection from Mihailen from my father to one of his aunts saying he’s immigrating to America and he posted a photograph on the card. It’s not in here, but it’s in another collection.

SH: Wonderful. Do you know what your grandfather’s profession was in Romania?

PS: On my mother’s side, they were innkeepers. … On my father’s side, millers; they owned a mill. On my mother’s side, [my grandfather was] an innkeeper.

SH: Now when your father came here did he come through Ellis Island?

PS: They both came through Ellis Island. [Editor's Note: Ellis Island was an immigrant inspection section for immigrants coming to the United States from across the Atlantic Ocean. It was established in 1894 and operated until 1954.]

SH: Did he talk at all about what his first impressions were or did he talk about the family?

PS: My father was a very quiet person and as you probably noted with me, I’m assertive and curious. So, I always had a lot of questions and both my parents were very pleased to answer, but they hated Romania. They were very happy to be here, very happy. In Romania, the homes they lived in were thatched roofed with dirt floors and in order to sustain themselves, they had to have livestock, no matter what their profession was and in the winter they brought the goats and sheep and chickens and cows into the house with them to keep warm and when they immigrated, they were on the lower eastside in a five
story walk up tenement [that] they thought was great. [laughter]

SH: No chickens, no goats, no cheese. Now when your mother came, did she come alone?

PS: Yes, they all came alone, one at a time.

SH: Now who had preceded your mother?

PS: Her older brother, my Uncle Charlie.

SH: Your mother, you said she was a dressmaker. Did she start that before she actually met your father or was it something that was part of his business?

PS: No, it was neither, but when I was a kid, a business was a family affair; everybody worked in it. So, my mother did very little dressmaking. She did repairing. A big part of tailoring then was hand me downs, either took in clothes or let them out or repaired them.

SH: Did she have a profession that she worked at prior to marrying your father?

PS: In Romania, the tradition was to teach a child a sustaining trade. She was taught dressmaking and my father took an apprenticeship in tailoring.

SH: With your mother’s older brother who came here prior to her coming, what was he doing? I assume she lived with him and his family?

PS: None of her siblings were married at the time. They came and my Uncle Charlie immediately got a job at an iron foundry in Brooklyn and there was a very good living. So, he could sustain himself and get up to twenty-five dollars to send for his kid sister, my mother. All six lived in a two-bedroom walk-up apartment. Some slept in the kitchen, some in the living room.

SH: Now your father, only his older brother came. What family did he leave behind in Romania?

PS: My father left four sisters in Romania, four of them. Their families became involved in the Holocaust. Some survived, some didn’t. On my mother’s side, the entire family came over.

SH: Good. They all came within just a few years of each other?

PS: Yes, very rapidly.

SH: I was going say for the tape, you were making hand gestures to indicate that that might have been the case.
PS: Yes.

SH: The mother and father came last?

PS: Both of them were the youngest siblings in their families. So, they were the last of their family to come.

SH: Did your mother’s mother and father come as well? Did they immigrate to the United States, the mother and father?

PS: That’s who I’m talking about, my mother and father.

SH: No, no. Did your mother’s mother and father come?

PS: No, I never knew any of my grandparents.

SH: I was curious about that.

PS: Just saw pictures of them.

SH: Did your mother ever talk about how difficult that was? Did she ever go back? You said they didn’t like Romania.

PS: The only one who ever returned was my father’s older brother. When their mother was in her last days, he wanted to see her one last time and he brought his only son with him who was about ten years old at that time, my cousin Sidney.

SH: And this was prior to World War II?

PS: Oh, yes. This was in the early 1930s.

SH: Did your father get a draft notice during World War I?

PS: I don’t know.

SSH: Either from Romania or this country? Did he ever talk about military service in any from?

PS: No.

SH: Did they talk about World War I and how they viewed it being here in this country?

PS: No, they never did. I asked them about it.

SH: Now do you have siblings? Did you have other family?
PS: I had three brothers.

SH: Older, younger?

PS: One younger, two older.

SH: You’re the middle.

PS: Yes.

SH: Now tell me if you could then please, what are your earliest memories of growing up? I assume the family lived in Elizabeth and you were born?

PS: Yes.

SH: Was it right after they married that they moved from the Lower Eastside to New Jersey?

PS: Yes. My uncle had a tailor [shop]. He was also a tailor; had a tailor shop and he knew the business in Elizabeth and he guided my father to a location he thought would be a good place and it was successful, so much so that he could buy a house.

SH: Now this was in Elizabeth. The tailor shop was in Elizabeth?

PS: Yes.

SH: Did the family live near the tailor shop or was the house also the tailor shop?

PS: A few blocks away. The tailor shop was in the business area and the house that he bought was in what would have been the suburbs, but it’s the outer edges of Elizabeth. He could walk to work.

SH: Did he talk about how he felt about being able to buy a house?

PS: No, he never mentioned it and we couldn’t appreciate it.

SH: Did your father ever talk about his schooling or his background?

PS: I asked him about it. He had four years of schooling. So, he was literate and knew arithmetic. The bulk of his education was as a tailor, as an apprentice, and religious training. In addition to regular schooling, they had religious training in a synagogue by a Rabbi. So, he learned to read Hebrew so he could pray in Hebrew, but not translate it.

SH: Did your mother talk about her education?

PS: Yes. Girls didn’t need it, so she was illiterate until she came here and the public
schools in Elizabeth had English for immigrants and they specifically ordered the students for those classes not to speak their native tongue at home anymore or else their kids will not learn English. So, my parents, by the time I was born, had no European accent at all.

SH: Wow. That is amazing.

PS: Among themselves, they only spoke English. Among the siblings, they only spoke English.

SH: So no one taught you any of their languages?

PS: Romanian, no, Jewish, yes. The elderly immigrants couldn’t handle English as a second language and couldn’t make it up, so they’d speak Jewish.

SH: Yiddish?

PS: Yiddish to them and I just picked it up. I was very good at languages. So, I just liked it. So, in Hebrew school, I learned Hebrew and in high school I had four years of French and two of Spanish.

SH: You talked about your father having had religious training. Was he active in the synagogue near Elizabeth?

PS: They lost a lot of that. They belonged to a synagogue. They went once a year, but they insisted that my three brothers and me go for training. That was every day for an hour after public school until we were thirteen, Bar Mitzvah.

SH: You were on your own.

PS: Yes.

SH: Did you have a question?

MM: Not for this part.

SH: One question that I have is what’s your first memory of growing up in Elizabeth?

PS: My first memory was when we bought the house. I was born down in Elizabethport area. It’s the old area. There were stores downstairs and apartments upstairs and we lived across the street from St. Anthony’s Church and Parochial School. Next door was the convent and I remember on summer nights when it was hot, everybody would sit outside on the stoops, the steps. The nuns who were next door all came from a place called Calabria in Italy; they called themselves Calabrese. They taught my mother, who they called a greenhorn or an Indian American, cooking. So, I grew up eating pasta. To this day, I love pasta fazool.
SH: Did your mother and your father both go to the public schools to get their English as a second language training?

PS: Night school, yes, after work. During the Depression, unemployed teachers were hired to go into the homes of the people who couldn’t get out at night. So, my mother used to have work to do at night for my father’s business and the teacher would come two or three times a night to teach her.

SH: Two or three times a week?

PS: A week, yes.

SH: Wonderful. I didn’t know there was a program like that. Now when the nuns were teaching your mother how to cook, was this just something that they just did or was it an organized class?

PS: Actually, they just sit and talk like neighbors, talk about everything. Women, a favorite topic is cooking.

SH: Recipes and all that.

PS: My mother was strictly kosher, my family was strictly kosher all their lives. The nuns understood this. They say, “Well, you leave the pork out. You don’t use lard.” 

SH: Now, your brothers are very close to you in age, are they not?

PS: Three years apart.

SH: Were they going to public school?

PS: All of them, yes. We all went to public school in Elizabeth.

SH: What was the first school that you attended?

PS: Abraham Lincoln School 14. [laughter]

SSH: Was that a coed school?

PS: Yes. A public school until senior high school, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth year was coed. Once it was senior, it was separate. However, they had a boy’s entrance and a girl’s entrance in the schools.

SH: Did they really? Was there anyone encouraging you or your brothers to think about going to college? Was education important?
PS: In my family, it was inconceivable. It was something that you didn’t have the money to do. My father’s older brother was just the opposite. He was an immigrant, but his wife was educated in England. She was born in Poland and as an infant brought to England and educated there. She had higher aspirations. She said her son is going to be a lawyer or a doctor.

SH: No ifs, ands or buts.

PS: And without the money, you’ll have to get a scholarship, that’s all, which he did. He ended up at Yale, graduated from law school at Yale.

SH: Your two older brothers--did everyone have chores around the house or did you work for your father?

PS: Yes. Did a little bit of everything. Houses were heated by coal furnaces, so we had to shovel coal into the furnace, we had to carry ashes out, at night we had to bank the furnace, which meant you opened the doors so the coal would burn more slowly and the heat would go down.

SH: How old were you when you moved into the house?

PS: I was about three or four years old.

SH: Now was this a single family home?

PS: Two-family, my father bought a two-family house.

SH: So he was renting the other section.

PS: Yes.

SH: Were there separate heating units for each of them?

PS: Yes.

SH: Do you remember the street that your home was on?

PS: Acme Street, adjoining a beautiful park called Warinanco Park. It’s still there. It’s still popular.

SH: Is it really?

PS: Yes, very large park.

SH: What street was your father’s business on?
PS: Elizabeth Avenue, a few doors down on the corner was the (Harmonia?) Bank and he opened an account for me. I still have the bankbook. It’s all in German because that was a German neighborhood where he was and everything the bank did was in German because they dealt with German immigrants.

SH: Interesting. Now you briefly touched on the Depression. What are your memories of the Depression?

PS: We lost the house, my father lost his business. There was no cash, no cash at all. So, they foreclosed on the mortgage and he had a friend who was an attorney who owned a building, downstairs stores, upstairs apartments, and this building was on the very edge of a segregated neighborhood. It was the last white building and the rest was black. He had evicted most of his tenants for non-payment of rent and he didn’t want the building unoccupied because of vandalism, so he rented it to my family on the idea that they’ll pay him when things get better. We subsided by barter. My father would go down to Matawan and Manalapan where there were farms and make deals with the farmers. He would fix their clothing or make them and my brothers and me and my mother would get us baskets and pick fruits and vegetables as a barter with the deal. They’d throw in some chickens and so we ate very well and we’d make these frequent trips to the farm areas.

SH: How did you get there? Were you driving?

PS: My father had a car. He needed a car to deliver things a Hudson touring car.

SH: Now in this building that he has been allowed to live in with you and your family

PS: It’s an apartment, yes.

SH: Did you also maintain a tailor shop in that?

PS: Couldn’t do that.

SH: Okay. Do you have any idea how he realized that he could make this kind of barter?

PS: He had been dealing with farmers who came to his shop. In those days, you didn’t have readymade clothing, you had them made. Many of the farmers were immigrants too. So, they come in to Elizabeth to have their clothing made until I was about fifteen, I only had tailor made clothing and these people--as a matter of fact, I was apprentice to my uncle through high school and after school I’d go to the shop. [laughter]

SH: You learned to tailor as well?

PS: Yes. I was a slow learner. I’ll tell you, I would never have made it. As a matter of fact, I was a very poor student too. Number one, I was hard of hearing without knowing I
was hard of hearing and number two, I was nearsighted without knowing it because we weren’t tested. So, as a child, I had an ear infection and they didn’t have antibiotics in those days and it left me hearing impaired and I tended to be bigger than most of my classmates. So, they sat me in the back of the room all the time where I couldn’t see and I couldn’t hear and as a result, I did poorly.

SH: Did both your older brothers and you continue into high school?

PS: All of us finished high school.

SH: Did you?

PS: Yes.

SH: So education was important for your father.

PS: Very, very important.

SH: Because many immigrants pulled their children out of school early to work and to contribute.

PS: No, we didn’t. College wasn’t important, but a profession was. This is different. When I was a kid, to be a lawyer, you didn’t need a college education. You read law in a lawyer’s office and when the lawyer said you’re ready to take the Bar, for the bar exam, and that was it. To be an accountant was the same thing. You used the old European apprenticeship sort of thing, so they thought we’d become lawyers or accountants or, actually, businessman. Most Jewish people, most immigrants as a matter of fact, were business people. The Italians tended to be the electricians and plumbers; the Jewish people opened these little grocery stores or became pharmacists. Pharmacy was the same thing; you just had to pass the test. You worked in the drugstore for so many years and studied on your own and you became a pharmacist.

SH: What did your brothers become?

PS: My oldest brother became a dealer in rare postage stamps. That’s how he turned me on to stamp collecting. [laughter] My older brother was interested in radios. He had an amateur radio station as a kid and in the service, after the war, they had the G.I. Bill which would pay for your college education. [Editor's Note: The G.I. Bill was formulated in 1944 and provides a range of benefits for servicemen and women.] He got a degree in electrical engineering from Johns Hopkins and he worked a few years for contractors, developed a number of patents and went out on his own as a consultant. My younger brother used the family tradition. He went into business. He opened up a business selling tires, the big expensive ones for construction equipment and trucks, that sort of thing, more money in it. [laughter]

SH: You talked about how your father and mother and the family really, survived the
Depression by being able to barter their skills for food. Did anyone ever bring any of that produce back to Elizabeth and sell it there or was this just for your own family’s consumption?

PS: It was just for our family and our immediate relatives and close neighbors and friends.

SH: This immediate family that you had, your mother's siblings …

PS: Older brothers, my uncles, aunts, cousins.

SH: Did they do as well during the Depression? Sadly, your father lost his business and his home.

PS: Yes, some did, some didn’t. One uncle had Parkinson’s disease and couldn’t work and my cousins’, their children, quit school and found jobs. Even during the Depression, there were jobs around, not everybody was unemployed. It’s amazing how many people were working as opposed to those who weren’t.

SH: What about politics? Was your family at all involved politically?

PS: Not one bit.

SH: What about the New Deal programs that Franklin Roosevelt put into place? Did your family take advantage of any of those like the CCC camps?

PS: Not at all.

SH: Or WPA projects?

PS: None of that. They didn’t need it.

SH: Alright, they were sustaining themselves. What about the draft which began in 1940? You would not have been old enough but your brothers would have been.

PS: One cousin, my cousin Dave, from the Bronx, hit the first number to come up, number 158. I got his card in my postcard collection of memorabilia. I kept all this garbage. He was a launderman. He worked for a laundry in Brooklyn and the Bronx where people didn’t have washing machines. He would come and pick it up. They had 2 prices, wet wash and dry wash. If you’re willing to hang it out on your line yourself, he brought it back wet so it was cheaper. He got into the Army and the Army’s way of thinking was to use your skills in the Army, and in those days, if you could, and the laundryman was needed in the Medical Corps because the hospitals have big laundries. So they sent him to this old World War I left over hospital in the Shenandoah Valley. He’d never been out of Brooklyn or Bronx and he thought he was in God’s country there, really, and when he arrived down there, they wanted to place him in the laundry, but they
didn’t have as many high school graduates then as they do now. Since he was a graduate, they felt that they’d rather use him in something more responsible and they trained him as an x-ray technician and he met the one Jewish girl who lived in the Shenandoah Valley, the daughter of the richest man there, an immigrant who had been going down there buying apples because it was an apple growing country and bringing them back to Brooklyn and because he gave the best prices, he almost had a monopoly on the apples. When my cousin Dave married his daughter who was also working in the hospital, he said to Dave, "What do you want," as a gift. Dave says, "I’d like a farm." Dave knew absolutely nothing about farming, but it was God’s country to him and when the war was over he bought him a farm. Dave's in his nineties. He’s still down there. He had to give up the farm eventually, but he wouldn’t leave that place unless he had to go to a funeral or a wedding. People who wanted to come to him, he did very well. From apples he went to, being Jewish, raising Black Angus cattle. [laughter] He’d bring people down. He had a nice house, an old farm house and I visited him, my wife did. [laughter]

SH: That would be a great story.

PS: He spent the entire war at that hospital as an x-ray technician.

SH: Now your brothers, older brothers, when did they join in the military?

PS: My immediate older brother, three years older than me, he was a radio amateur and in high school they had these clubs, one of which was a radio club. … Kids had their own radio station, W2MGL, a licensed station and I worked with him on it. The Navy utilized these people in something called the Naval Communications Reserves. This in the '30s when the navy began preparing for war. In 1939, they called up the Naval Communications Reserve, this is about a year before the draft started and he was a radio operator and they sent him down to a minesweeper in Panama Canal area, the USS Woodcock and he spent the entire war on the USS Woodcock in the Caribbean area in a minesweeper.

SH: What year did you graduate?

PS: '43.

SH: From high school.

PS: Yes.

SH: What’s your earliest memory--before I ask you that question let me go back. What were your activities and what were your interests in high school? Were you involved in any extra-curricular activities?

PS: I played soccer and being a European, what they call Eurocentric now, heavy Italian, Polish, Hungarian, the class plays were operas.
SH: Oh really?
PS: Right and I was in Faust and I loved it. I was in the chorus. I still remember the year, I still liked the opera, so I still go and I was in HMS Pinafore. I loved that, and as I said early on, because of my brother, I became a stamp collector and one of the teachers said, "Why don’t we start a stamp club," because I was always bringing them to show and tell and I was elected president of the stamp club and it was great because all the kids had relatives in some other country and they’d bring in the extra stamps and we’d exchange them and then the teacher found a way to get pen pals in foreign countries, English speaking ones, and I had a young girl from Angola whose parents were missionaries there. I got the best stamp now because nobody had any relatives. [laughter] So, I was involved in stamps, I played soccer, and I was on the cross country track team.

SH: You had said that going to college was just out of the question. You talked about a cousin whose family told him that he needed to get a scholarship. There were state scholarships available at that time. Was that something that you entertained at all?

PS: Didn’t know about it. In our circle, we didn’t know. As a matter of fact, to be a teacher was affordable. They had what they call normal schools for two years. You got a teaching certificate, but a teacher’s job was not what it is today. In Elizabeth, for a long time, you had to be single. If you got married you were out of a job. [laughter] I’m not kidding. [laughter]

SH: It’s true. What did kids do to entertain themselves? You talked about these wonderful clubs and things that you had at school but after school, maybe even before high school, what did the kids in the neighborhood do?

PS: Lots of kids then, lots of kids. We had four boys in my family. We all had athletic clubs. I lived on Pennington Street. We had the Pennington Pirates. During baseball season we played baseball, either in the street or in empty lots or in Warinanco Park. Football in football season, basketball anytime, and we’d play the other neighborhood. The other neighborhood was around the block, that’s all, so it was very active athletic things. Most kids also had part time jobs. They had a lot of small privately owned businesses and bakeries. There was a lot of cleaning to do, so the kids would clean up the stuff and in vegetable stores they’d pick the rotten food and threw it out.

SH: What was your job?

PS: I was in my uncle’s tailor shop.

SH: That’s what you were.

PS: Yes and a movie cost a dime. You saw two feature films, a cartoon, the newsreel, and some other. So, it was all afternoon affair, but you didn’t need to pay. You could work your way into the movie. The way of advertising, of course, newspapers, not everybody got a paper. So, they passed circulars out under the doors of houses. So, if
you wanted to deliver circulars for an afternoon, they’d give you two or three passes for the next three weeks. So, we’d deliver circulars, some kids would help them clean, they were privately owned places, clean up the movie after the performance. There was always a lot of gum to scrape off the floor. [laughter] So, most of the kids my age worked and got the passes for it. There wasn’t much money around, so the kids who worked in the bakeries would tell us, go around the back door of the bakery and ask for broken cookies, they’ll give them to you. [laughter]

SH: You had this little society all working here.

PS: Yes. There was not much money around, but we learned to have happy activities as it was.

SH: I know in today’s age, it maybe seem strange, especially for Matt, but the only source of news that you have would be the radio or the newspaper or the newsreel as you said. How much interest did a young man have, did you have, of what was going on around the world or within the United States?

PS: It was more than my kids have; I mean they are very interested, believe it or not. Number one, everybody was interested in athletics. I mean it was more popular then. When they had a world championship prizefight, I mean, everybody had the Joe Louis fights on the radio, everybody, and we saw it in the newsreel. The World Series was a big thing. World news, a lot was going on. In the ’30s, the Japanese were fighting in China and you could see what happened during the Rape of Nanking, I mean the executions, the beheadings were right in there. [Editor’s Note: The Rape of Nanking was an event which occurred during the Second Sino-Japanese War in which Japanese soldiers massacred, raped, and looted the Chinese city of Nanking. At the time, Nanking was the capital of the Republic of China.]

SH: In the newspaper or in the newsreel?

PS: Both. As a matter of fact, my own thought, when Pearl Harbor happened you had almost universal support. They couldn’t handle all the people who volunteered for the Army. They didn’t wait for the draft to go and they couldn’t handle [it].

SH: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor? Where were you and when did you hear?

PS: I heard it as soon as it happened. It was Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon here, and I was home. I was working on my stamp collection when I heard the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

SH: On the radio.

PS: Yes and I was very familiar, because geography was a favorite subject of mine and interest in the Navy was a great interest of mine. So, I knew exactly what was
involved. The recruiting stations couldn’t handle the rush because they’ve been, not brainwashed, but they’d seen, and then, of course, Hitler had been running through Europe and we saw the Invasion of Poland and the Bombing of Warsaw and it was a lot more gory than you see in today’s television, a lot more.

SH: More graphic images.

PS: Graphic, I mean the people who edited that stuff believed in showing it the way it came in. I mean they weren’t worried about advertising revenue and whatever it was, they didn’t yield to pressure.

SH: Did anyone in your family ever express concern for the family members that were left back in Romania during this time before Pearl Harbor?

PS: Oh, very much, very much. As a matter of fact, a cousin of mine was in Romania before the Nazis walked in and she couldn’t get out. We devised a plan to get her out. She was an adult. She was a French teacher in Romanian public schools, French and English. If she was married to an American she could get out. So, we found a young Jewish guy who agreed to go there, marry her, and bring her back as his wife.

SH: Now what year was this?

PS: ’41.

SH: Before Pearl Harbor takes place.

PS: Before Pearl Harbor, right. Hitler had already taken over Czechoslovakia and all of the western part of Europe and Ben Flax, who became my cousin through marriage, he was her age, went there, married her, with the idea that when they came back, they’d get divorced. They stayed married all of their lives. They couldn’t get out through the German part so they had to take--they had to go across Siberia and take a boat from Vladivostok in Siberia to Japan. This is, I say, before [Pearl Harbor] and went by Japanese passenger liner to Seattle and because I collected post cards mailed from ships, I told Ben, I gave him a postcard, plain piece of cardboard and said, "Would you mail it from whatever ship you’re on." It turned out to be the very last ship to leave the United States for Japan and it had its own postmark, the Helen Maru with Japanese postage stamps. It's in my collection, it's one of my treasures and I wrote an article that won a prize about it and when it returned to Japan, they converted it into a submarine tender for Japanese submarines and it was the headquarters for a Japanese submarine unit in the Marianas Island and eventually it was sunk by a US submarine and by coincidence I had written to the postal clerk on that submarine a few years before for their post mark. [laughter]

SH: That’s amazing.

PS: It makes a nice little human interest story.
SH: Amazing story. So, they came to Seattle and then cross country by train?

PS: Yes, he came from Chicago and she went to live there and she insisted he go to college and be a professional and he became an optometrist. [laughter]

SH: That’s a super story. Thank you very much. So, you were very aware of what was going on both as your family and as a young man in Elizabeth.

PS: Oh, we had the Nazis in Elizabeth, the Bund was there. [Editor's Note: The German American Bund was an American Nazi organization that was established in 1936. Its goal was to promote a favorable view of Nazi Germany in the United States.]

SH: I was going to ask, what about anti-Semitism there and what you saw?

PS: They had their own club, I mean before we went to war, with their own uniforms and Swastikas and everything and anti-Semitic. It was a little different then because a lot of people didn’t tolerate that, not only the Jewish people, but non-Jewish people, one of whom was a very close friend of mine. When I was in the fifth grade, this would've been about 1935; this kid shows up in my class from Germany. His name was Werner Von Dolan, blond-haired, blue-eyed, and it turns out that he just arrived, living with his aunt in the next block from where I lived.

SH: You said you were in a German neighborhood.

PS: With everything really, yes. So, he said his parents didn’t want him going to school in Germany because of what they were teaching. He didn’t say Nazi. So, he went to live with his mother’s sister in Elizabeth. Werner was in my high school graduate class. We joined before--we went to volunteer before we got out, but they couldn’t handle the crush even then and they wanted us to finish school anyway. If you insisted though, they would take you, but most of the kids finished school.

SH: I wanted to ask that. Did the high school administration encourage all of you to stay in school and to finish?

PS: Not only that, they began military training in high school.

SH: Can you tell us about that please?

PS: Yes. Physical education, instead of athletics, was military. They put up these walls with ropes that you had to scale and carry heavy bundles on your back, run long distance with that. That became physical education. Then they added what they called pre-military induction courses that were elective, that were given either an hour before school hours or an hour after and they were topics that the military needed, like if you had an auto mechanics course going in school, they added truck mechanics. I took two courses, early in the morning I took celestial navigation and after school I took radio communications. So, when I went in I had a choice to either be a navigator or a radio
operator, supposedly. They said you’re going to be a radio operator, that’s all there was to it.

SH: That’s what they needed right?

PS: Yes.

SH: To back up again, you were talking about your friend Werner and how being anti-Semitic was not tolerated by some of the people who were not in your neighborhood but also were German. Can you talk about that at all?

PS: I either couldn’t recognize anti-Semitism or it didn’t exist. I’m just saying, people use these expletives that you don’t use anymore, but it wasn’t meant in an anti-anything way. It was usually said in anger or in jest and we did it ourselves. I mean everybody did it, it wasn’t right, but it was a way of life then. They weren’t fighting words.

SH: Okay, so there were no fistfights or you did not have to run a gauntlet?

PS: There were a lot of fistfights, but fistfights were an easy, I mean that would be, if you like the Dodgers and the other guy liked the Giants, I mean that was a fistfight right there. [laughter]

SH: Okay, fair enough. Actually, in December of 1941, you would have been a junior, yes, you would have been a junior or at the end.

PS: My math is not good but you’re probably right.

SH: I think I’m right here. You said that there was no way to get in because they were filled, but yet the school did change their curriculum. Were there other things that you noticed because the rationing goes into effect, people talk about victory gardens, how did that all impact your family?

PS: There was rationing. They had the AB&C labels in the car windows for how much gasoline you could get and sugar was rationed, but it didn’t impact really. I mean if you couldn’t get it, you did without it. If you couldn’t get the gas, you walked. You just learned to live with it and not complain. People who are normally complainers complained about everything. That was one other thing, but for the most part nobody cared, really.

SH: Did your mother have a victory garden?

PS: [Editor’s Note: Victory gardens were gardens planted at private homes and public parks that were used to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs. They were used to reduce pressure on the public food supply during World War II.] These were European people; they all had gardens all the time, all of them. I mean ever since I was a kid, I mean it was a 40 by 75 plot of land that this two-family house was on with a garage. There wasn’t
much room for a garden, but there was a garden, I mean it grew an awful lot of cucumbers and squash. [laughter]

SH: Was your father able then to eventually buy a house again?

PS: Never did, always rented after that.

SH: What about as far as the air raid wardens, or civil defense, how was that handled in your neighborhood, keeping the blackout curtains?

PS: There were people who volunteered, plenty of people to volunteer for all of that stuff, plenty of them. We did it. As a matter of fact, our playground at Warinanco Park became a military base for an anti-aircraft outfit.

SH: Really?

PS: Yes and people used to bring the soldiers hot meals, not that they needed them, and the girls used to flock there to talk to the soldiers. [laughter]

SH: Now did your father’s business change at all because of the war?

PS: He lost that business, never went back into business again.

SH: Into tailoring?

PS: He worked as a tailor for a clothing chain where he did the alterations and stuff like that.

SSH: So that’s what he started doing then?

PS: Yes, he worked permanently. He joined the tailor’s union and he was able to get all the benefits. Social Security then wasn’t what it is today. So the fact that in a union you got your medical benefits and retirement, all of that kind of stuff. So, it was easier to do that than doing it on your own plus the fact that the hours were better. He worked seven days a week in that business from dawn till dusk. As a union tailor, he worked forty hours a week and he also made more money. He wasn’t that good a businessman, he did his best, made a living, but he did better working for a well-run business.

SH: Was there a specific store that he worked for more than most?

PS: He spent his whole--I can’t think of the name of it. It was part of a chain, it’s not around anymore. It was a local chain.

SH: Did your mother continue helping him?

PS: No.
SH: Things improved for them.

PS: Very much so, yes.

SH: Then tell me about your decision to join the navy rather than being drafted or whatever? You graduated in 1943?

PS: There’s another thing that you should add. 1943, those of us who went to join.

SH: Had you graduated, and then, you went?

PS: Oh, what happened was, a lot of us, when we were 18 and had to register for the draft, immediately volunteered to go in and they sent us back and other’s waited for the draft. Twenty years ago, I went back to Thomas Jefferson High School. I was in the neighborhood and there’s a big plaque of the guys who got killed. A bigger percentage were killed who waited for the draft than those who volunteered. What happened was the ones who got drafted were put into the 106th Infantry Division. It was a brand new division and they never really fully trained that when they had to dump it into the Battle of the Bulge and they were the ones, that was the weak point that the Germans went through, the ones that weren’t killed on the spot were taken prisoner, were massacred as prisoners and it was the Malmedy Massacre. [Editor's Note: The Malmedy Massacre occurred during the Battle of the Bulge in which a German SS unit massacred 84 American POWs. ] So, most of these guys who waited to be called didn’t make it at all. On the other hand, the guys like myself who wanted to get in combat right away joined the Marines, most of us survived.

SH: That’s interesting. Now you chose the navy. Why?

PS: Because I was a stamp collector and I loved seeing foreign places and I figured, boy, I’m going to all of these foreign places. If I’m going to fight, I might as well make it interesting. [laughter]

SH: Where did you first report for induction?

PS: Right in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

SH: Did you, at the armory?

PS: I have no idea. I don’t remember.

SH: Okay. Now when did you first have to leave home then?

PS: When I graduated.

SH: You had enlisted before graduation, when you turned eighteen?
PS: Yes. Actually, I was rejected, yes. They said you’re 4F. 1A was you go right in. 4F meant you had a physical disability that disqualified you. I had 2 punctured ear drums that impaired my hearing and I was nearsighted and I argued with the doctor. I had good reason to argue with him. My oldest brother wore glasses that were this thick and he got drafted. He wasn’t 4F, he was like 1D and the next thing we knew he’s assigned to the Air Force. How the heck is he going to be in the Air Force, and they sent him down to Miami Beach, Florida to train in the Air Force, at an Air Force training base, but he was being trained to be an Air Force clerk typist, to work in the administrative. [laughter] So, I mean, I told the doctor about my brother. I said, "If he can do it, why can’t I?" The doctor says something like, "Listen, I don’t have the time to argue with you. Leave the next doctor to listen to your bullshit." [laughter] I’m not kidding. So, they put me on a train. Since I was in a Navy place they had examine me to join.

SH: Now this was in Elizabeth?

PS: This was in Newark. I had to take the physical exam somewhere in Newark and they put me on a train with all the other guys who were going to Newport, Rhode Island Naval Training Base and get off the train, we got a more close exam, and the doctor said, "How the hell did you to pass the medical?" [laughter] "Well you’re here; let somebody else worry about it." One of the first things that I had to be trained for, the whole company, was gas mask training because they expected that sort of thing. We all got gas masks and then we got this quick exam and the doctor looks at my ear and he said, "Holy cow, the gas can get through your ear, and he says make sure you carry cotton balls with you to put in your ear when you go into that gas room. [laughter] That’s not the end of it though.

SH: The Navy was so strict.

PS: They assigned me to this ship.

SH: Now before they do that, tell me about your training and the testing that was going on? Were you given a battery of tests in Newport News?

PS: Newport, Rhode Island, lots of tests, aptitude tests, interest tests, that sort of thing, yes, and something called the GCT, a general classification test.

SH: Did you take the Eddy Test?

PS: I don’t know that. I have no idea what it even is. [Editor's Note: The Eddy Test was the name used for a classification exam given during World War II as a means of identifying men with the aptitude for being trained as electronics maintenance technicians in the U.S Navy and U.S Marine Corps.]

SH: Okay, I was just curious about the tests that you were given.

[TAPE PAUSED]
Could you tell us about your first impression when you report to Newport, Rhode Island, what you saw, how much of a shock that was for this young guy, just out of high school?

PS: I was excited, it was a new adventure. It was the farthest place I’d ever traveled to. Until then the farthest I’ve been from Elizabeth was Brooklyn and the Bronx and here I was at this old Navy base and I used to gobble up old stories about the Navy, whether it was the American Navy or the German Navy. One of the earliest books I read as a kid was about Count Von Lockner, the sea devil in the German Navy in World War I. Here are all these sailors marching around in these old barracks buildings and the anchors and bells. I said, "Boy, I made it into the Navy." I never thought I would, never thought I would, but here I was. I’m really happy that I was part of the whole thing.

SH: Now, had any of your buddies from Elizabeth also reported at the same time you did?

PS: None. Some before, some a little after but none exactly together.

SH: How did your day unfold there? Were you the only one there who thought it was an adventure or were there others?

PS: It was a common feeling, it was a common feeling. First of all our unit was all volunteers. After our designation which was V6 program, V meant volunteer, 6 meant whatever the hell it meant. V6S, we were selectee volunteers. No one had to come together in other words. We were very proud of it. We were in for the duration of the war, that’s what it meant. None of us were there to make a career of it.

SH: Is that where you went to boot camp, was that the boot camp? Were there any adventures in boot camp that you recall?

PS: It was one big adventure, one big adventure. We had to learn to abandon ship. They had big towers, diving towers, a big pool, set the pool on fire with burning oil and we had, like, jumping off the ship into the burning oil and we took our dungaree pants off first and tied knots in the bottom of it and when we jumped in the water, got wet and you could use it to collect air to keep you afloat and help to swim doggie paddle to get the burning oil away and you’re seventeen, eighteen years old. I mean, you like doing exciting things, the gas chamber, the burning oil that was all part of it.

SH: What about your ears?

PS: I had problems with it. [laughter]

SH: What about KP and all those fun things?

PS: It was something you had to do. I mean you would peel potatoes all day, cleaning garbage cans, that sort of thing. It’s something everybody did it and you went and did it. The crazy thing stands out on my mind. My mother told me don’t eat food that’s not
Kosher. She kept a Kosher home. You’re brainwashed into this sort of thing, so they used to send us these salamis, Kosher, this big, loaded with garlic. They don’t have to be refrigerated, but we had to live out of a sea bag. Everything you owned went in that sea bag and this is month of July when it’s really warm and boy when I had that salami in the sea bag, it just stimulated the appetite of the entire—a hundred guys in that barracks would be waiting for me to come, "Come on Schreiber get the salami out." [laughter] I wouldn’t eat the meat served at the base. So they’d say, "Hey, you’re not going to take that pork chop, give it to me." [laughter]

SH: Were you able to keep Kosher in boot camp of all places?

PS: I didn’t eat the meat. It didn’t bother me one bit, especially about three weeks later, everybody landed up with diarrhea and I was the only one that didn’t. So, they determined that it must have been the meat. Of course the guys would say, "He’s the only guy that never," that didn’t bother me one bit.

SH: So you were able to get through boot camp physically and in good shape?

PS: In one piece, oh, yes.

SH: Was it ninety days?

PS: Six weeks.

SH: And then where were you sent?

PS: At Newport, Rhode Island, I was on Coasters Harbor Island. This is the original naval training base from whenever they had the original navy, went back to 1700 or something. I loved it there because of the history and all of that kind of stuff. They had the Naval War College where the admirals go with their museum, I mean it was my meat. Then they assigned me to radio school, which was also Newport, Rhode Island, but on the main land, a place called Coddington Point and that was a five month course. It was a lot of hard work, but I mean everybody did it. The basic thing was to master Morse Code so that it was part of your life. I mean, you could communicate Morse Code like you communicate in your native language and they started out very slowly. I mean, even a moron could learn at this slow rate, but I mean, you had to put the time in and it wasn't voluntary, you were there. I still know Morse Code. As a matter of fact, no one uses it anymore. Every year around veteran’s day, the Avenel middle school asks my American Legion post to send us to talk to the classes about being a veteran and I tell them about Morse Code, they don’t know anything. The kids love it. We started learning, it's just dots and dashes. A dot came over on the radio so you put E down, a dot, then a dash, is T and you put T down and you put dit da right together, that’s an N. You can spell ant, the kids loved hearing that story. I also passed the helmet around so they can wear it and get the feel of being a veteran. [laughter]

SH: Just for the record, you want to explain the hat you’re talking about?
PS: Yes, this is a helmet liner, I have no idea what it is made of, but it goes inside a metal helmet to shield the shock of whatever hits you in the head to prevent head wounds, naturally. It has another purpose. It’s used like when you’re in construction work taking on cargo, you don’t need a helmet, but you got to protect your head and in the tropics, it’s used as a sun hat as well.

SH: What did you do for your helmet? Can you describe it?

PS: The helmet was used strictly in combat. The ship I was on was built to be in more firefights than any ship in the Navy. It was the amphibious force of the Navy. It was the first to go into the thick of it all the time. So, the helmet, I felt bullets going ping right off of it or shrapnel, whenever it’s flying around, go off the metal part. When I left the ship after the war was over, we had to turn everything in, but no one was watching too closely. So, I gave them the metal part and they just assume that it’s all there and they couldn’t care if it wasn’t and it fit in my sea bag. I stuffed my socks and underwear in it. [laughter]

SH: But you personalized it with a diary only. We can talk about that more when we get to it, but that’s why the children really liked the helmet too.

PS: They loved looking at all these places; they want to know just where they are. I mean being a stamp collector, interested in geography; I mean, I never heard of places, because mostly they weren’t even on the damned map. Some of them, believe it or not, at high tide were under water. [laughter]

SH: Between boot camp and going to radio school, did you get a leave to come home?

PS: We got lots of that, not long. Usually Sundays were off completely, usually, and in radio school, a couple of nights a week we’d go into the town of Newport, Rhode Island. If we lived within sixty miles we could go home, but we couldn’t go farther than sixty miles and after boot camp, I got a five days leave to go home before reporting to radio school and my parents would come to visit me from Elizabeth up there.

SH: Did they really?

PS: Yes. They weren’t alone. A lot of parents came up on Sundays to be with their sons there.

SH: Now would you go out to dinner?

PS: No, right on the base.

SH: They could come on the base.

PS: They’d be guests of the base, right, and my parents wouldn’t eat things that weren’t kosher, but the meals were so elaborate that if they took everything but the meat, it was
more than enough. To give you an example, I was recalled for the Korean War and I was at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and it was critical, the Korean War had just started and we had to be on call. I couldn’t leave. Thanksgiving Day they said, "Anybody who is your guest in your family can join in the Thanksgiving meal." My parents were flabbergasted, because it was so elaborate, but they didn’t eat the turkey. They were user friendly; let me put it to you that way.

SH: That’s amazing, I’ve never heard that civilians were allowed.

PS: At least where I was.

SH: The radio school, I would have thought, was secure.

PS: Well, the mess hall was completely divorced from everything in every case, completely. As a matter of fact Sunday was compulsory church services, whether you went to church or not and if you were a wise guy and said you were an atheist, they say okay, you are captain of the head. That was the guy in charge of the latrines, who made you clean them. [laughter]

SH: Did you go to services?

PS: Oh, I went to Jewish services. First time I ever went to one that wasn’t Orthodox, it was Reformed and it’s the first time I ever heard someone speak English during the service and I was really very pleasantly impressed that, hey, this is a big improvement.

SH: Now was this service held on a Sunday or Friday?

PS: Everything was Sunday. The Navy had its rules, but they only went so far.

SH: They were user friendly up to a point.

PS: The people from the local synagogue would serve refreshments after the service and they’d bring their daughters and we could go out on dates that night, so hey, I mean there was a war going on, but I mean there's no reason you couldn't enjoy. [laughter]

SH: While you were in radio school and you were talking about how you had to learn the Morse Code like it was your native tongue, were you aware of what was going on in the Pacific and in the European theaters as far as the military advance or not?

PS: Oh, yes. Whatever was made public, we knew of, but a lot wasn’t. First of all, they didn’t want us to know the extent of the damage done at Pearl Harbor. They didn’t want us to know that the Japanese were taking over the whole damned Pacific Area, Malay and the Dutch East Indies; I mean they down played all of that sort of thing, but it was a lot of news. For the most part we knew what was going on and the stuff that they kept to themselves, no one was concerned about.
SSH: Now, after the five months that you were in the radio school, where did you expect to be sent next? Was there any talk about that?

PS: To sea.

SH: To where?


SH: Okay, so was there a wish list or a dream sheet that you filled out of what you like to serve on or where?

PS: Yes, which they didn’t pay any attention to and you were told that, but you had to put it down.

SH: What was your top three?

PS: Mine was an aircraft carrier that was the biggest ship there was. It had more conveniences and everything. The next bigger ship was a battleship or cruiser, and then, a destroyer.

SH: So those were your top three?

PS: Yes. None of the above I got. [I] got a ship, I never even heard of the damned thing.

SH: What were you assigned to?

PS: A ship that had no name because they didn’t expect them to survive, an amphibious landing craft, an LST, a landing ship tank. It goes right up on the beach, the cannons on the beach shoot at it, the airplanes above shoot at it, going over the submarines, and then, the infantry coming in get at you.

SH: From Newport, Rhode Island now where did they send you?

PS: From Newport, Rhode Island, to Norfolk, Virginia, for LST training.

SH: And what did that consist of?

PS: They had a wooden mockup of the ship, a wooden mockup of it. So, at least we had some idea where everything was and the first people you talked to were the guys who arrived in the classes ahead of you. Well, we asked them about this LST. Some said it means that it’s your last sea trip; others said it means it’s a large slow target, where you ever ride one, nobody here has ever been on one because no one's ever come back. [laughter] It took some of the wind out of our sails, but people kid around a lot with that, they’d just be joking, but all through that training we never ran into anyone who’d ever
been on an LST and the reason was, first of all, they didn't tell anybody this; they didn't make announcements about it. They were expendable and they didn't expect them to last. They build more damn LSTs than any other ship in the navy. They ordered a thousand because they didn’t expect them to last. They would need replacements, but the fact is I’m here, but the LST turned out to be very durable. They were all basically the same.

SH: How long does this training last in Norfolk?

PS: LST training was six more weeks.

SH: Now we’re getting into the late fall of '43?

PS: Yes. The ships carry completely green crews, ninety-nine percent green. So, whatever they trained you to do that was it, you don’t have anybody to check back with. If you were a radio operator, so they gave me during that six weeks, six weeks of amphibious radio training because there would be nobody to go to. I mean, you’re on your own completely and it was the same for the other ratings, the gunner’s mates, the navigators, the machinists. The ships carried 130 in the crew, ten officers. Of the ten officers, the captain had been to sea for a year. He was, in civilian life, a concert pianist. The second in command had been in the Fleet Reserve. That meant he put thirty years in the Navy, but in the Fleet Reserve you had to agree to go back in time of war. He had been a chief petty officer, a sailmaker. Well, they hadn’t used sails in years, so they used sail makers because a guy with sailboats knows how to handle a small boat very well. So, they used these guys when they became chief petty officers to be in charge of the small boats of the Navy, stuff around the Navy yard, the launches and stuff, but they know the rules of the road. It's like driving a car, whether you’re going to California or just staying in town, these guys knew navigation. So, they commissioned them as a lieutenant junior grade, they jumped them all the way up, and assigned him as second in command my ship. What would happen is, they'd keep these guys as a second in command to learn how to be a commander, learn from the captain who was learning himself.

SH: Where was the captain, the pianist, where was he from?

PS: He came from Milwaukee and his father was a minister, a church minister, and nicest guy you’d want to meet, nicest guy you’d want to meet. My first experience, really, on a personal basis was the first time out on a ship; he wanted to meet me because I was doing something. In the Jewish religion, if you’re religious, you put these letter scraps on and box on your head. They're called tefillin or phylacteries. They got passages from the bible in it from Deuteronomy and from Exodus and my mother made me promise I was going to take those tefillin and the prayer shawl with me and at least pray that I get home. We have no privacy, there's none, even in the bathroom. So, the only place to really be alone was up in the very front of the ship where they had an anti-aircraft gun and unless you’re in battle, nobody is up there, and in foul weather it’s raised up and you can go underneath and be sheltered. The first day out on a ship, I was putting
these on in the morning and the captain's on the bridge, commanding the ship, and he sent his messenger to find out what that the heck is that guy doing. Is he a Section 8? That means that guy is going to have to be sent for a psychiatric exam. So, I told the guy and he said, "Well you got to come back." So I said, "Can I finish?" "The captain wants you." I had to go there with him because he came from a religious family, I guess he had some understanding and he said, "Okay, go back and finish." Every morning we had to muster, count everybody there. So, at morning muster he asked the crew, "All you guys understand we’re going into combat. How many prayed this morning that we come back? Step forward," and he looks at me and I was the only one out there. So, I stepped forward and he says, "Come up." He says, "This is the only guy who stepped forward. He happens to be a Jew. I know you guys have other words for it and I know how a lot of you may feel about having a Jew, but anybody who interferes with him; I personally will throw to the sharks at the first opportunity because if he’s the only one praying for us, we're going to need that help." So, you talk about anti-Semitism. I guess it was the reverse.

SH: That’s a super story. The first I’ve heard, this is wonderful to hear. What was the captain’s name?

PS: Randall Shake.

SH: And he was from Milwaukee. Where was the XO [Executive Officer] from?

PS: He came from a little island off South Carolina where people are in the oyster business. I guess that's why he joined the Navy. He knew boats.

SH: Can you just talk a little bit, kind of going back then, because you are still in the LST training. You were assigned to this right there?

PS: They assembled the crews there. I was on LST crew number blah, blah, blah; we’re all together training as a unit.

SH: Oh, okay. I thought you were training just as radiomen.

PS: That was in addition. That was an addition. So, I was getting additional communications training with the special equipment. For example, we had to be familiar with Army equipment too because we carried troops. We had to know how to use their stuff, repair it, and calibrate it, and operate it, that sort of stuff. So, it was a six week course.

SH: Was there any difference in the way that you were treated in Norfolk as opposed to Rhode Island?

PS: Not really. We heard that Norfolk hated sailors. It didn’t turn out to be that way. It’s all hearsay.
SH: Did your family come down to Norfolk?

PS: No.

SH: So, you were assigned to a crew while you are there training?

PS: Yes and the way it was working the ships were being built and they coordinated the assembly of the crew with the commissioning of the ship, so that we would be ready to immediately to go aboard a newly built ship and head right out.

SH: So, when the ship was commissioned, were you there on board for the commissioning?

PS: Right there.

SH: What was the commissioning like for an LST?

PS: They line us all up and they read, a superior officer reads the captain’s orders to take control of the ship and the flag goes up and you’re now what they call a plank owner which is the guy who is in the commissioning crew of the ship.

SH: Now how soon did you start shakedown cruises?

PS: Immediately.

SH: I mean you got on board right there?

PS: We arrived about three weeks before it was ready.

SH: Before it was commissioned?

PS: Yes, in order to start helping. It was a great time because most of the ship builders were women, housewives and girls fresh out of high school. Oh, boy it was a picnic. [laughter]

SH: This is the first of these stories I have heard. This is great.

PS: What do you do when you're eighteen years old, they got all the girls fresh out of school, they’re welders now and there’s a war on. [laughter]

SH: Dare I ask what some of the entertainment was, with you in particular?

PS: I don’t remember any, it was work.

SH: Was it?
PS: Yes, in Norfolk it was lots of work. I mean, because they were really pushing the making of these LSTs and they had to get the crews aboard. They were putting all green people on them, people who had never been to sea except for the captain and the executive officer.

SH: None of the officers had been to sea either?

PS: Not a one. They were a year or two older than us. At that time, to be an officer, you just had to be in college. First, if you could make it into college, you could become a 90 Day Wonder. They'd send you to ninety days of officer school. I went to school longer to be a radio operator than they did to be officers, and they knew it, and they were told what the hell, "You’re sending us with ninety days and I’m going to be a communication officer?" "Don't worry; these guys know what they're doing." [laughter]

SH: When did you first start standing watches on the LST?

PS: Immediately, right after the commissioning.

SH: Oh, not until the commissioning? You said you were on a little bit before.

PS: We were at a barracks in the Boston Navy Yard part of the time.

SH: In Boston?

PS: The ship was built at the Boston Navy Yard.

SH: Oh, so from Norfolk you were sent to Boston.

PS: To Boston.

SH: Oh. I’m sorry, we missed that.

PS: We didn’t finish Norfolk yet.

SH: Let's finish Norfolk.

PS: Okay, Norfolk. On the ship they have a schedule, it’s called the watch quarter and station. Your watches, when you do whatever you do, your station was man overboard, after docking or leaving, where you go at that particular time.

SH: General quarter's kind of thing?

PS: Right, general quarters. Well, they put me--this had a lot of guns on the ship, a lot of anti-aircraft guns. It was made especially to go in the beginning of the invasion, wherever it was going to go, it had more damned anti-aircraft guns. So, the gunnery officer, we're all standing there and he says okay, "You’re on gun twenty-one, you’ll be
the pointer, the next guy will be at the loader, the next guy will be the Trunnion operator, which turns it. So, he says I’m going to be the pointer. I wore glasses. "Hey, let me get this done. We’ll worry about you later." So, I became the aimer of a 20 millimeter gun. I still hadn’t gotten over being a radio operator with hard of hearing when I told the instructor, who is just a few months ahead of me in this training, he said, "Well, here is the volume. You just turn it up if you can’t hear it." [laughter] So, with that attitude, okay, I mean you do what you’re told. They know what they’re doing. So, they made me the pointer. It doesn’t really have a gun sight on these things. It’s sort of like a spider web and you line it up, as long as you can see the target you can shoot at it and we got target practice so you know how to lead it and everything, but in target practice I was always the last one to start shooting, because the other guys could see the damned thing before I could and when I reminded the gunnery officer, he said, "Don’t bother, we’ll take care of it." He took care of it. During the Battle for Leyte Gulf, a torpedo bomber came at us and everybody on my side of the ship was shooting at the damned thing. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Leyte Gulf broke out on October 23, 1944 and ended on October 26, 1944. The battle is considered to be possibly the largest naval battle of World War II and possibly the largest naval battle in history.] This guy was not a Kamikaze. He was determined to drop that torpedo at point blank range. He came right above us, right above the sea there, with these anti-aircraft guns if keep shooting him, after a while their barrels get hot and they got to be changed. The gunner's mate comes and he changes them. Well, because all the guns began shooting before I did, they all got hot at the same time and I was the only one who hadn’t been firing. I can’t talk back to the guy, can’t say I don’t see it, but I’ve got earphones where I’m getting directions and the gunnery officer, "Gun twenty-one commence firing, commence firing." I’m saying I can’t see it. Finally, by the time I see it, I could see that pilot. Of course, we were eye to eye and I could see my tracers going into the damned plane, but he didn’t release the torpedo. I must have killed him, I don’t know, but it explodes, a ball of flame right on top of the ship. I mean, the plane just disappeared on top of the ship there. After that, the guy said, "Hey, I’m glad you got it, but that’s too close for comfort. You’re going to be a loader from now on and not a pointer." [laughter]

SH: Did you get credited with getting a dive bomber?

PS: Yes, it wasn’t a dive bomber, it was a torpedo bomber. Torpedo bomber is the easiest to hit. Of course, it’s slower and it comes in lower instead of dropping a bomb, it’s got to aim the plane at the ship, at the target. So, that was the end of my aiming. [laughter]

SH: But it took them all the way to Leyte Gulf to take you off that gun.

PS: That was not our first invasion.

SH: I can see that from the hat, the helmet liner. Okay, we’re trying to get from Norfolk to Boston. So, tell me how that takes place. Battle stations, you’re the aimer; you’re getting practice shooting.
PS: All that kind of stuff, yes. They just march us to a railroad station in Norfolk and said, "You’re going to Boston." They brought us to a warehouse called the receiving station. It's where sailors stay until they're assigned. They didn’t have room yet at the [Boston] Navy Yard barracks because they were shoving these damned LSTs like whatever. So, we were at this warehouse that was turned into a barracks and we lived in a winter house for I don’t know, quite a while. They had bunks, five high. The guy who had the bottom bunk got stepped on the most, because there was no ladder, you just climbed. [laughter] I had a mishap. I landed up in the Scollay Square Brig. Brig is the Navy jail. Boston Common, it’s a big park and if a guy wants to meet a girl, it’s a good place. Well, a friend of mine and I go there and we were trying to pick up these girls, they were playing hard to get, but they’re there for the same reason, they’re teenagers also, and the shore patrol would come around and say you can’t be here after this time. Whatever the time was, I guess it wasn’t dark yet. So, the guy I was with got uppity. He said, "Oh, I wish I was a shore patrol." So, they handcuffed us, and then, chained us to a street light until a paddy wagon came and brought us to the Navy lockup at Scollay Square there. [laughter] They took our shoe laces away and our neckerchiefs, so we wouldn’t hang ourselves in shame. There was one big cell. There were guys who were inebriated, who knows what they were there for, but they said it was for safekeeping. If you can’t keep your mouth shut, you can’t stay sober, this is it. They let us out so you’d be back to wherever you were supposed to be by reveille. The other odd experience, believe it or not it, was in the men’s room of the Boston Opera. I’m in a stall and a guy talking a foreign language in the next one. We both come out the same time and he’s in the British Navy, the British have HMS on their hat. He’s talking to me and I don’t know a word he’s saying. I still remember he kept trying …, and then, finally, he waved his cigarette at me and I say, oh, mate do you have a light? [laughter] So, you never went out alone. I was with a group of guys; he was with a group of guys and one of the guys made a remark that was highly offensive to one of his buddies. He called him a Limey. "Hey, you're a Limey." He was so indignant; he was going start a riot, this guy who didn’t like being called a Limey. He was a (Scouss?). He was very proud of being a (Scouss?) and he had to explain to us a Limey comes from a place called Limehouse. They’re the lowest of the low. A (Scouss?) comes from a certain section of Liverpool, which is no fancy place either, but he’s superior to a Limey. [laughter] I don’t know why I remember this stupid thing.

SH: So you were still enjoying being

PS: This was in Boston.

SH: So, how did the people in Boston treat the Navy men?

PS: I dated a girl. Her name was Jacqueline (Squataratssa?), which is definitely Italian, and man you know how kids can fall in love, I mean with the testosterone the way it is, she was what you call a (?). She had it all in the right places and we enjoyed each other’s company. She was a welder on my ship, that's how we met. She said that when I go out with her the third time, the third time I got to bring you home. It’s a family rule with Italian families. She lived in Cambridge. So, I said, "Where do you go in
Cambridge?" She says, "You go to the yard." The yard is the campus of the college there at Harvard. The people who lived out around that, it was an old neighborhood with these old little one-family houses that they built before there were cars or driveways, are very close together. It’s a big Italian neighborhood there. So, going to this house with her, the whole family in a tiny living room and you can see all the generations are there and one of her cousins asks Jackie, "You didn’t tell us your friend wear glasses. What is he, a Jew?" She says, "Yes, so what," and they all begin yakking alarmingly in Italian. This isn’t done. This is in the days if you were black, I mean, but Italians, even if they were Catholic or Irish, I mean, I don’t know what you are, but I mean it just wasn’t done. Like I said, she had her own mind. She was the original of the feminists. [laughter] "This is my third date mom and I’m here with him and he’s going to war and I’m here and I’m going to be nice to him and I’m a good girl and you know it and I won’t bring shame to the family." So, they had their family confrontation. We went out on a date after that. Another two weeks I was gone, yet what I remember, I can’t tell you the technical things because I didn’t know what I was doing [that was] technical.

SH: You left Boston and was there a shakedown? Did you come back to Boston?

PS: Never went back to Boston, the ship didn’t. Went to Chesapeake Bay for a shakedown cruise, it took a week, and we got damaged there, because the captain is learning to handle the ship. He dropped the rear anchor and then he backed into it and he fouled it with the rudders, and then, our sister ship plowed into us. We were there a couple of weeks.

SH: Now, where did you have to go to be repaired then?

PS: Probably Newport News. I mean it was a big shipyard. I think it was Newport News.

SH: Finally, I get you to Newport News.

PS: Yes, it’s right over there. From there we went to Bayonne, took on a cargo to deliver to an unknown destination, not even the captain knows where he was going. He goes under what they call sealed orders. When he leaves it tells him the next place he goes to, then he gets more sealed orders and they tell him the next palace. So, Bayonne has what they call a Navy supply depot and we picked up our supply. It was a cargo of canned spinach for the enlisted men’s mess hall somewhere, we don’t know, and a cargo of beer for the Marine officers club at our final destination, very interesting cargo. One of the few guys who’d been to sea before was the chief boatswain's mate. He’s like the foreman of everything. His name was Eschalmen. If you remember the old movies, there was a guy called W. C. Fields, never sober, had a big red nose, and I shouldn't say never. Well, Eschalmen was a fleet reservist, but he’d been demoted so often that he never made chief. If he made chief petty officer, they wouldn’t give it back to when it was time for his thirty years, but they made him a chief when they called him back. They made him chief boatswain's mate on the ship and he was the guy who posts the guards and stuff like that and makes the inspections. Anyway, the cargo, ultimately we found, was destined for
Pearl Harbor and we unload the pallets of the spinach on to the dock and we’re told not to unload the beer. A Marine working party of enlisted men commanded by an officer is coming to take it off, cases of bottled beer. Well, it turns out that all the bottles are empty and the caps were put back. The first guy to pick it up said, "This is kind of light." So, they began ripping all them boxes open, the whole cargo was empty bottles of beer. So, the upshot was that was the commander of the Marine Guard at Pearl Harbor asked for a court martial of what they call the chief boatswain's mate. They also call him the master at arms. Master at arms is like the chief of police. He’s in charge of guarding that stuff for dereliction of duty. Since the court martial is determined, the gravity is the value of it, this will call for a general court martial, grand larceny or whatever, who knows. So, Eschalmen appeared before a court martial, which was three officers at a court and the jury or whatever and there’s two Navy captains, they're four strippers, very high, and a Marine colonel and they present the case and they asked Eschalmen, he denies knowing anything. Like I said, the guy always looked like he was drunk anyway, so no one ever believed him, and they say, "Before we consult," the three officers, "Do you have anything to say in your defense?" Eschalmen said, "All I can say is, I didn’t have anything to do with it," and the Marine colonel exploded and said, "Who the hell did have anything to do with it then?" Eschalmen said, "When we left Bayonne with that cargo we were headed for Guantanamo Bay," that was our next port. We had to go through the Bermuda Triangle and anyone who’s ever been to sea over there knows entire ships disappear in that Bermuda Triangle and nobody can explain it and the two Navy captains nod in agreement and the Marine colonel said, (?) and we said, "Yes, we do." I mean its history. I mean, it’s recorded that these ships--so they voted two to three for his acquittal. This isn’t the end of the story.

SH: It can’t be.

PS: It can’t be. I was invited to give a talk last year before a group of guys, adults who make model airplanes and model boats. They want to know about being on an LST because they make that too and I told that story and this one guy stands up, he says, "He was telling the truth," and the guy says, "How the hell do you know?" He says, "I’m from Bayonne and if there was any beer that ever was on that base it never left there." That’s it. [laughter]

SH: I thought you were going to tell me that you found where the boatswain’s mate had a big stash.

PS: This thing that the guy brought up that the workers would have drunk it up.

SH: It had nothing to do with the Bermuda Triangle either. That’s a great story. You talked about the shakedown cruise in the Chesapeake and how eventful that was. Then you were sent to Guantanamo. What do you do in Guantanamo? That’s where you were sent next, I assume?

PS: Yes, we went to Guantanamo Bay where a convoy was being assembled to go through the Panama Canal and we didn’t know where we were going, had no idea. As a
matter of fact, they issued us winter clothing, the watch cap and the heavy woolen sweater. So, we all figured we probably going to where it’s cold and from Guantanamo, you can go either east or west. So, we went to Guantanamo, we were there for about maybe five or six days and being a stamp collector and being in my first foreign country and just seeing it as we approach, I’ve never seen a live palm tree growing anywhere. There they are and we didn’t dock, we anchored out in the bay and had to take our small boats in and the dolphins came to greet us and they’re banging against the boat and sticking, it was a real experience. I wasn’t a beer drinker, but everybody else is a big shot, they're eighteen and they can drink. So, I had this Cuban beer called Hatuey. That's the name of a Cuban Indian, looks like he’s spitting, but the beer was 20% alcohol. Oh, boy, between the dolphins and the Hatuey beer, that’s all I remember of Guantanamo Bay.

SH: What time of year is this? Do you remember? This is where you assembled to go through canal.

PS: Let's see. The ship was commissioned May 6th, so it was probably June or July of ’44, yes.

SH: So, the invasion in Europe had already taken place?

PS: North Africa, sure, even Sicily, yes.

SH: June 6th, 1944 the allied invasion of Europe.

PS: Yes. So, they’ve been in Italy, I think, I’m not sure.

SH: You are right. They had already been there as well. I was just wondering if you were aware that the allied invasion had taken place.

PS: As a matter of fact, because I was the radio operator, I could hear all of the news services, the Associated Press, all of them, sent their news in Morse Code to the newspapers and I mean it wasn’t part of my job, but I was curious. So, in my time off, when I wasn’t doing the regular work, I’d type out the news from the American news services and from Reuters, which was the British one, from Domei, which was the Japanese English language, from the German one, forgot the name of that. They were all English language and we didn’t have a mimeograph or anything, but I’d make carbon copies, I’d print a lot of carbon copies and I’d have a newspaper and I’d have the messenger give the original to the captain and it pays to have friends and the second carbon copy went on the wardroom bulletin board. So, he gave it to the communications officer, which was my boss, to put up there. So, he was the first to read it and the rest went in the different bulletin boards in the mess hall and the ship and I became the ship’s newspaper editor. So, I kidded around. I called it the South Pacific Seagull after a while. So, we did have the news. The sports was important, everything.

SH: Most of the guys that were on the ship, were they all from the Northeast?
PS: It was a mix of everything, a mix of everything. It's odd how it worked out. The Northeast was better educated. These were the petty officers like myself. They call them artificers. They're trained to be radio operators, machinist mates, ship fitters, that sort of thing. The Northeast and the West Coast were that. As it went south, it was the deck gang because depending on where they came from, they never went beyond certain grades there, so it varied. If you were black, it didn’t make any difference where you came from, there were only two jobs. He either was an officer’s servant or an officer’s cook, that’s it, period. You were a steward or a cook. You didn’t even wear the same uniform that the white guys wore. That’s how much--that’s what was done. I mean it was a fact of life, like having a mad dog around, whatever you want to call it, something you put up with.

SH: Now did you have African Americans on your ship?

PS: We had four. We had two steward’s mates. The steward’s mates would clean the officer’s rooms and act as servants, serve the officers their food. They didn’t stand in line and the cooks did the cooking for the officers. There were ten officers, so you had the four guys, but battle station was something else. Battle station was something else. Invariably, they gave them the worst job at the battle station in the magazine, loading the ammunition to come up. If you’re hit, that’s the worst place to be.

SH: That is very hard work to load the magazines.

PS: Yes.

SH: Where were they from? Did you ever talk to them?

PS: Everybody was friendly on the ship, even the guys from down south. I mean, as a matter of fact, they were even friendlier, but they were superior, but they had more experience dealing with blacks than the average white guy did and they kid around and talk, but the black guys came from Mississippi and Louisiana, places like that where you could see they knew how to behave. They knew they were in hostile territory, but where they came from they had that hostility.

SH: Were you able to keep in contact with your family? Was the censorship very heavy or not?

PS: It was the easiest thing to keep in contact. You wrote letters or sent V mails, yes. That was no problem at all. Censorship, yes, if you wrote a letter you didn’t seal it; you gave it to your superior officer. On my ship your superior was the censor and he’d stamp it censored, write his initials, seal it and go. If you did something you shouldn’t have, he’d give it back to you, and say hey.

SH: How many radiomen were on an LST?

PS: We had three. So, to go twenty-four hours, you needed twenty-four hours
coverage, it worked out to eight hours a day each.

SH: What did you do when you weren’t on watch or you weren’t at battle station? What did you do to entertain yourself?

PS: First of all they had a lot of books, a lot of magazines. The magazines like *Time Magazine* came out with these little editions. They’re about a quarter the size, no advertisement, but they didn’t have any weight to make a shipment bulk. We had a movie screen. If we weren’t in a combat area, we had movies and we’d swap them with other ships when we were in port. Card games, poker, 21, crap, gambling was forbidden, but you didn’t do it. So, there was recreation there and just standing around telling tall stories to each other.

SH: Talk about the convoy that was assembled to go to the Panama Canal. Was that impressive? Could you see the other ships?

PS: Yes, they’re close, they were all close. It was just a combination of everything. Going through the Panama Canal was impressive.

SH: Was it?

PS: It was.

SH: Can you tell us about what you remember?

PS: Okay, there’s two towns. There's Cristobal and Colon, one at either end of the [canal]. I don’t know which is which actually, but one of them adjoins Panama City, which is the capital of Panama, and we were among the first LST of the convoy to get through, so we were able to wait two days and go into town and everything like that. All I remember is going into town and it began to rain like anything. Nobody is doing anything, even the sailors. You’re drenched. We’re looking for shelter and a guy who had obviously been around, said, "Don’t worry, when the sun comes out you’re going get a dry as you were before," and that's exactly what happened, exactly what happened.

SH: The locks, were they impressive to you?

PS: Very much so, very much so.

SH: What kind of security was there? Were you aware of it?

PS: I have no idea. I mean we’re there, but we don’t know what the hell was going on, really. It was funny, you’re going low, and then, they let the water in or out whatever it is and you’re up and you’re down.

SH: Now, how long did it take to go through the canal? Do you remember?

PS: I don’t remember. I don’t remember how long. All I remember is they let us off the
ship and you’re right in Colon and these little kids are pimping. These are kids like they’re maybe seven, eight years old, "Hey fellow, you want to go out with my sister, four dollars." [laughter] We had gotten very intensive, not training, but information on the dangers of venereal disease and they showed us these movies that were horrible of people falling apart, looked like they had leprosy, I’m telling you, and if you had any idea of taking these guys up, those movies.

SH: They worked.

PS: They worked, although they gave us the contraceptives. You had to take it when you left the ship, it was compulsory, but if you caught a venereal disease that was an offense.

SH: Was it?

PS: Yes. The offence, like you lose an extra ten liberty ports, something like that.

SSH: Did you have a medical officer on board the LST?

PS: No. We had 3 pharmacist’s mates, those are Navy medics. One was a third year medical student, who they said was crazy because he only had another year, but he was so anxious to go. Another was a second year medical student and another was—they all got hospital training. I mean these guys were great, doing ninety percent of what had to be done. We had a case of spinal meningitis and the guy was a personal friend of mine, I can’t think of his name, the guy who had been a third year medical student made the diagnosis and it seemed that the executive officer, who is supposed to okay the guy being transferred to a hospital or hospital ship, said, "No, this guy is a malingerer. There’s nothing wrong with him," and finally when he got so sick the captain said, "Send him," the diagnosis come back from the hospital ship where he was and he died.

SH: That was your first casualty?

PS: I don’t remember.

SH: It wasn’t that contagious where he had to be quarantined or anything like that?

PS: I don’t know. I really don’t know.

SH: You talked about being in Guantanamo and being issued foul weather gear or winter gear. When did you know that you were going through the canal and that you were definitely heading to the Pacific?

PS: Only when we left Guantanamo. The captain doesn’t open those sealed orders till the next twenty-four hours at sea. He’s told to go on a certain course, in twenty-four hours, open it up, that’s it. So, although we were heading to the Pacific, so then we knew where we were going. We thought we were going to Alaska, which we weren’t, of course.
SH: Yes, because you have this gear.

PS: Yes, we're going to Alaska. [laughter]

SH: So, when you get to the other side of the Panama Canal, then you set a course and wait?

PS: When the convoy was all assembled, we headed north to San Pedro, California. I think that’s the port of Los Angeles, yes. The port of Los Angeles, we waited for another convoy and headed out. It turned out we were headed to Pearl Harbor, where Eschalmen was court-martialed. [laughter] Pearl Harbor, we were there about three weeks. That’s on the island of Oahu. We went to the Lualuabay on the island of Kauai for a week where there was a Marine base and we picked up Marines for the next destination, which was Guadalcanal.

SH: Now, you at this point had taken all your cargo off and you don’t put anything on until you picked up the Marines?

PS: That's right. As soon as we arrived in Pearl Harbor the cargo was completely unloaded.

SH: Now, what time did you arrive in Pearl Harbor? What is the month and year?

PS: I can look it up and see. I got it, if you want me to. July to August 1944.

SH: So, it’s like the end of ’44?

PS: Right.

[TAPE PAUSED]

PS: August 8th, 1944.

SH: That’s when you left Pearl Harbor for the other island.

PS: That’s for the Solomon Islands.

SH: So, you’ve already got your Marines? 17th Marine (AAT?) BN.

PS: We got the Marines aboard, yes.

SH: Was there any other equipment that you had on board?

PS: Yes. As a matter of fact, we loaded two one and a half LCTs. An LCT is a landing craft tank. It can carry 4 big tanks, it’s big.
SH: It's like a ship.

PS: It is like a big barge. Like a big barge, right, and they put one and a half on the deck, the top deck.

SH: Where's the other half?

PS: They don’t tell us that and they also landed pontoons along the sides of the ship, these are big metal pontoons that ran. The LST is 328 feet long and they put these big pontoons that ran the entire length on either side of the ship. That’s at Pearl Harbor, at the Navy yard there. We took on ammunition, we took on fuel for the vehicles, and I was detached to the jungle training center. I don’t know where it was, they just took me there, me and six other guys.

SH: What did that training consist of?

PS: We were in something called a beach party. It sounded real good.

SH: It does.

PS: It does. A beach party are the sailors who are in a landing force. When the troops land, you go before them to set up the reception spots. You go with frogmen who destroy underwater obstacles and place markers for the invasion boats to come in the clear channel and six of the crew have to go with the frogmen. They’re from the crew of the ship. One is the radioman, one's the generator operator, the radio power was generated by a generator that you had to pump like bicycle pedal and he was also a rifleman.

SH: And the frogmen were part of your crew?

PS: No, no, they were not part of our crew. They were an independent unit who sailed with us to that destination. They trained at Norfolk when we did but completely separately. The frogmen were never a part of a crew; they’re a part of a team. They called them underwater demolition teams.

SH: Did they sail with you on your ship though?

PS: Yes, we picked them up at Pearl Harbor.

SH: Now, at Pearl when you pulled in, did you see what had happened?

PS: I saw everything.

SH: What was the devastation like almost three years later?

PS: It wasn’t there; just the Oklahoma was still there.
SH: The Arizona?

PS: The Arizona, the Oklahoma, the rest had been repaired. They’d done a good job on that.

SH: That quickly they got them all up.

PS: Yes. By the time we got there--I don’t remember, except for the two battleships that were beyond repair, that was it.

SH: How long was this training that you needed to go on this beach?

PS: That was three weeks.

SH: Now where was the ship during this time?

PS: That was at Pearl Harbor. They were putting on the one and a half LCTs and the pontoons and we had to learn hand to hand fighting. We were not given weapons. We were loaded with equipment. I had to carry a radio, the other guy had to carry the generator, and you had the one guy who was the rifleman to stand guard and the officer in charge.

SH: Who manned the boat that took you in?

PS: We carried small landing craft called LCVP, landing craft vehicle and personnel. Well, first of all, with the landing party, you’re supposed to be surreptitious. The frogmen don’t do the explosion until right before dawn. So, what we go to do was one guy was like a surveyor, he's got your surveying instruments there, and they taught us how to kill people with our bare hands, it was awful. So, thank God I never had to do anything like that. That I don’t even want to talk about it.

SH: Who was training you to do this? Were these Marines or other sailors?

PS: These were people who were trained to train us. They were professionals. They called them instructors.

SH: Now, were you housed in barracks there?

PS: Yes. It was called a jungle training center. It seems that in the Pacific, in the dense jungle, when you want to operate surreptitiously, you got to use these methods without making any sound and to kill someone without making any sound.

SH: So, it was a very secure facility?

PS: Well, it was in Hawaii, not in Pearl Harbor, in a jungle. I have no idea where we
were. They didn’t tell us and they took us by truck and they took us out by truck.

SH: Okay, but there were no civilians around?  
PS: Nothing. It’s like being in a Boy Scout camp up in Mahwah area, that sort of thing.

SH: So, now you get back on the LST. What was the number for your LST?

PS: 991, way up there, but they weren’t built in a sequence of those numbers. LST number 1 was like the 200th LST built. The very first one was 383. That doesn’t make any difference.

SSH: Now you’re traveling in convoy to--where are you heading now?

PS: From Hawaii, okay, we’re going to the Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal, but the orders don’t say Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal is the main island of the Solomon's, but the fighting was on all these little islands around there, Tulagi, this and that. We were going to a place that we thought we were going to have a good time, Florida Island. That was one of the offshore islands. The fighting in Guadalcanal was, for all practical purposes, over. I mean there were Japanese, there was resistance, but it wasn’t--I forget what they call it. They had the garrison troops there and we were there, actually, not for an invasion, but it was the point for the next invasion or the first one out.

SH: Like the staging area?

PS: That’s what it was, the staging area. Hutchison’s Creek, it was where we were, it was fantastic. It was like being in a pet store’s tropical fish aquarium. It was so clear looking down at the tropical fish and everything.

SH: So this is at Florida?

PS: Florida Island, yes, the Solomon Islands. When we arrived there, we're greeted by a billboard, great big billboard, and it says, "Kill Japs, kill Japs, and kill more Japs. Signed, Admiral Nimitz."

SH: This was on land?

PS: Right when you arrive. It wasn’t a seaport but right there. I mean whatever ships came there was the anchorage or harbor, whatever you want to call it, Hutchinson’s Creek.

SH: How long do you wait there in the staging area?

PS: Not too long. I don’t know. I could tell from looking here, but it wasn’t long and we weren’t even allowed off the ship, nobody was, nobody was allowed off.

SH: How was it to refuel and get resupplied? From Hawaii to the Solomon's, did you
ever have to refuel?

PS: That’s why we went to the Solomon's, to meet the rest of the convoy and refueling. As a matter of fact, each of the destinations was actually a refueling stop.

SH: I may be jumping ahead and I shouldn't, did you ever put into practice your jungle warfare skills then?

PS: At the next destination.

SH: At the next one, okay.

PS: We left Florida Island, to get to Florida Island; we had to cross the equator, which is a big thing. You become a shellback and you get this big certificate, which I still have, it says en route to Florida Island. So people say when did you go to Florida? [laughter]

SH: Little do they know, right?

PS: Yes.

SH: Do you want to explain to Matt what the shellback ceremony is?

PS: Yes.

SH: How it was for you?

PS: Yes. Crossing the equator. That’s being introduced into the mysteries of the deep. It’s like a fraternity hazing of the freshman and you go through a religious ceremony with King Neptune and you got the people who already have been initiated, they are called shellbacks, and the uninitiated are the pollywogs and you got to go through a hazing where they’re equipped with paddles and they whack you and they ring mops out on your head and they got this poorly make, like an above ground swimming pool, where they dunk you in it. Then they shave your head and put axle grease on it and this hazing thing, you got to go from one end of the ship to the other, through it, sort of like an Easter Egg hunt until you reach King Neptune and you got to kiss his belly button, which, he’s not wearing much of anything. Once you kiss his belly button, you get this terrific whack on the behind and you’re now officially a shellback and you get this big certificate that’s equivalent to a master’s degree, I guess. [laughter]

SH: Who on your ship was already a shellback, because they were also green when you started?

PS: Well, let’s see now. Eschalmen was. We had about four chief petty officers and let’s say a 130, I’d say there might have been about ten shellbacks on the ship. The chief gunner’s mate, the chief machinist’s mate, the captain, the executive officer, and a couple of these southern kids from down south who are forever being transferred of someone’s
inept. That ship is full, you got to give up some people. They’re the first to go. [laughter]

SH: Now, did the black sailors also go through this ceremony?

PS: Yes, they went through it too. They went through it too. They were the result of an eternal mark of shame for the pharmacist’s mate who was the first year medical student. He came from an old aristocratic Orlando, Florida, family and when he had to— he didn’t train with us for the LST. He didn’t report aboard until the ship was already in commission and down in Chesapeake Bay and we were anchored, like, ten miles out in the bay. We had to send one of these small boats out to pick him up. Him and two of the steward’s mates that he thought the Navy was so far off base that they would put him on the same boat with him. [laughter]

SH: I should have asked this before. Were you ever seasick?

PS: Once in my life. I went fishing with my daughter and grandson from Sandy Hook. It was the darndest thing. She didn’t want to go because she’s afraid. Listen, I spent so many times at sea and I go fishing all the time. The one time, a few years ago, but on the ship, no.

SH: From my understanding, having talked to other people, the LST is not a comfortable ship to ride. I don’t think that is the right term.

PS: We were all so inexperienced and stupid. We thought this is just the way it’s supposed to be. [laughter]

SH: So, from Florida Island now you head to

PS: Place everybody knows, it’s the tip of everybody’s tongue in World War II battles, Angaur Island. You’ve never heard of Angaur Island. Oh, for crying out loud. There’s a battle. They gave us a battle star for it. Now we almost all got—the first Marines to leave were massacred as soon as they left the ship. We had a battle right at our ramp on the beach there. You haven’t heard of it.

SH: Tell us about it.

PS: I’m not kidding. Angaur Island, September 15th, it’s always in my mind. September 15th we landed at Angaur Island and we’ve been told and brainwashed through the movies, the media that the Japs don’t know what the hell they’re doing. They wore thick glasses, all they knew how to do is make cheap toys out of old tin cans, inept, they were little, they were bowlegged, because you saw the Fu Manchu movies and that’s the way they always were and they couldn’t tell the end of one gun from the other. We were attacked by Imperial Marines who made our Marines look like midgets. I’m not kidding, they were Japanese Marines. They got right up to the ship there.

SH: Really?
PS: Yes, where the ramp comes down and the tank comes out. They were all killed, but it was a battle and they were big and years later, you read in these World War II books about these things, the northern islands of Japan, they tend to be bigger, not like on the other islands. Not only that, Koreans tend to be bigger than Japanese and a lot of them were a mixture of Japanese and Korean and because of their size and I mean they’re gung-ho war-like demeanor, they were in the Marines, the Japanese Marines.

SH: How many ships were involved in this landing?

PS: I don’t know. I do have the information. These landings always took quite a few, because we carry no more than twenty tanks. Of the invasions we were on, we could take about two or three hundred troops.

SH: And you were carrying the Marines for this?

PS: That was Marines for that one, yes. The first group to leave was the point men as they call them, the reconnaissance group, and the beachhead was very narrow where the jungle came out. As soon as they stepped into that jungle the Japanese knew we were there, so they were waiting for them. They were wiped out. We didn’t know about it until we took the beach and the other guys could tell us.

SH: From your personal experience, was that the first time you were under fire or were you?

PS: Oh, sure.

SH: What do you remember? What did you do that day?

PS: I was at my gun. I was the aimer of a 20mm anti-aircraft gun. It may seem strange, but there are recesses from the battle. For some reason, the air raids only occurred, from the Japanese, before breakfast and before dinner. As a matter of fact, I have a picture somewhere of the guys, the communications division, the signalmen, the radiomen, a group picture taken on D-Day and I think I wanted a souvenir for my collection of Navy postmarks. So, I asked the ship’s postal clerk, the yeoman, the office manager, if I could borrow his postmark and put the date September 15th in and he gave me some official envelopes and I stamped them that date and I gave them to the communication officer, Mr. Zelewski and asked him to put his censor mark on. It was done during the battle, but during the respite of it.

SH: Now, before you actually go in to land your men and the equipment, had there been a lot of bombardment from the big cruisers and things like that?

PS: A lot, a lot. First of all, before we’re even close to it, maybe a week before the battleships or whatever it is, they softened it up supposedly and after we arrived, but before we land, they do it. Then the rocket ships come in. These are landing crafts that
carry rockets and they’re called LSMR, landing ship medium rocket, they were given numbers. It meant Landing Ship Medium Rocket. They had these rocket launchers, a whole bunch of them. They go whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, and then, the mortar ones LCI-M: Landing Craft-Mortar, come in. They use white phosphorous mortars. They could burn the jungle to a crisp there. So, it’s hard for the Japs to hide in the jungle. The LSMP, the mortar LCTs, the rocket, they’re small boats. They go in very close, they really soften it up. Of course, we didn’t realize that the Japs, all through this, weren’t really hurt at all because they were in caves that they built in these heavy concrete pillboxes. The main weapon the Marines used was flame throwers. Flame throwers I found out were nothing but great big cigarette lighters made by Ronson. They just shot a lot more flame a lot further and they just shoot it right into the cave or into the little holes of the pillboxes. That was the end.

SH: You talked about having this respite where you could get the picture and get everything stamped, but when do you actually go in and land as part of your training?

PS: Land the troops, you mean? The first wave.

SH: You were in the first wave?

PS: Very first, yes. We’re made for the first wave.

SH: So you went in, dropped anchor?

PS: No, don’t even drop anchor.

SSH: Oh, really?

PS: Go right up on the beach, this is what it looks like. See the ship has doors in the bow and a ramp that goes down. You just beach it. Against all maritime law is to beach a ship, and then, you wait until you go in at high tide, and then, you can retract at high tide.

SH: So, you literally have to sit there for twelve hours?

PS: Well, whatever.

SSH: Alright. Matt has had to leave us. We’ve been joined by Dan Ruggiero and we were just talking about September 15th where you got your Battle Star and what actually you were doing. Again, please continue with the story. This is fascinating.

PS: Okay, we’re talking about the invasion of Angaur Island.

SH: Can you spell that?

PS: A-N-G-A-U-R in the Western Caroline Islands, up the adjoining island, gets all of the publicity. That was Peleliu. We were just a little side show.
SH: But with tremendous losses you said to the Marines that went ashore first.

PS: Yes, but the only place you’ll see mentioned is in a very detailed discussion of World War II. Otherwise, it’s largely ignored and the ship, as I pointed out earlier, in Pearl Harbor was loaded on the top deck with one and a half LCTs and pontoon barges. We launched the one and a half LCTs with their crews and an adjoining LST had one and a half and both ships had brought Seabees, construction battalion, with us to unite the front and the back of the two halves of the LCT.

SH: Now they do this all at the same time that you’re preparing for this invasion?

PS: Yes, it’s during the invasion, before we go on the beach. This is before the actual H-Hour. It’s launched and we also unchain those big metal pontoons and the Seabees attached outboard motors to each pontoon. It seems that our beachhead was shielded by a reef. So, we beach on the reef and launched those pontoon barges and make a causeway to the beach to unload the rest of the ship.

SH: How long does this take?

PS: Reveille for an invasion, if you’re H-Hour is 2:30 AM. So this sort of thing has to be done during daylight, naturally. So, it’s the first crack of light, the LCTs are in the water and even before because they got to be doing the mechanical attaching in the light.

SH: Now how do you keep maintaining blackout conditions and still being able to do this?

PS: You don’t do it until--it’s like a false light coming up.

SH: Is the adrenalin just pumping? For you, what was it like? Do you remember?

PS: It’s exciting, it’s exciting, but the adrenalin isn't pumping. I don’t know how to explain it.

SH: It was just more like a role, like this is my job and this is what I’ll do?

PS: Everybody has been trained to do these things, everybody. To give you an example of the detailed training, we trained how to escape if a ship has already been sunk and you’re trapped underneath in the pitch black. They claim that obviously it was to crude during training, that no matter how dark it is, in that condition there is some light and if you keep your eyes open for just a matter of ten or twenty seconds, you’ll be able to have some vision to get around in that darkness. So, you’re trained with the flaming water, all that sort of stuff. Sometimes you get over confident, which can be not too good either, but they maintain darkness always, until the light was going come, usually before dawn. There is enough light to drop it, so these guys can be ready to work with their wrenches and pliers and tools.
SH: Are you at battle stations at this point? You’re on your gun, is that what you’re doing?

PS: Okay, yes. Normally at that time, you’re at your gun, normally you are. During an invasion you’re at battle stations; however, if combat isn’t imminent, in other words, the picket ships that are way out haven’t spotted any bogies or any unidentified aircraft coming, they don’t send you to battle stations. They say its condition yellow or something when you’re in the combat area. Condition red means the attack is imminent, but otherwise, you’re free to do whatever you’re supposed to be doing.

SH: So you would be at the radio.

PS: Probably or getting pictures taken or stamping. [laughter]

SH: That amazed me that you would have the foresight to think to do this. Did you get a copy for yourself?

PS: Oh, yes.

SH: Good. Okay, please continue.

PS: Where were we?

SH: I was just asking what you did just before H-Hour, where you were.

PS: Okay, as soon as unidentified aircraft are coming, we go to our battle stations, the horns ring, the bells ring, and everybody grabs their helmet and go to your battle station. Some battle stations are at guns, some are at repair party stations, your hoses for fires, some are down in the magazine to send the [ammunition], some are in the mess hall to receive casualties. That becomes the operating room, at the mess hall tables, that sort of thing.

SH: Now at this battle you’re still the spotter?

PS: I’m still a pointer.

SH: A pointer, I'm sorry.

PS: I’m still a pointer. They didn’t notice yet that I’m not shooting on time.

SH: So how long did this last, this invasion of Angaur?

PS: I’m not too sure, but I can tell you. We landed on the 15th and I’m looking at the 19th, here they’re shooting at us from the beach. We’re still there the 24th. What happens is, we land the immediate combat equipment first, but we also have their
supplies. That doesn’t have to be landed immediately. We got to make room for the other combat troops. You pull off the beach until the beachhead has been secured and then you unload the gasoline for their vehicles and their ammunition and everything. The way they load an LST, the way they loaded our LST anyway, was you have two decks. You’ve got the enclosed one down the inside deck, they call the tank deck, where these big tanks are, and you got the top deck, the main deck. Before they load the vehicles, they put down crates of ammunition. They buildup the deck with the ammunition to be loaded, unloaded later on, and then, you have the fuel, that’s the big drums, that’s next. That’s short of wooden things, so once you got the gasoline and the ammunition there, then you drive the vehicles up on top of it, so they can drive right off with the troops and that stuff that it was sitting on stays there until the beachhead is secure. Then you pull into the beach and you can unload the ammunition and the fuel. So, the reason back home they called it a last seat trip is with gasoline sitting on top of ammunition, a seatbelt isn’t going be much help. [laughter] We used to kid about it. We said, "Boy, if this ship goes up, we’re going up with it, but we won’t need to worry you about it."

SH: For sure. So, you’re there at least a week in this time. When battle is over, what do you do now? Is there a base that you go back to for supplies?

PS: We assemble a new convoy. We go into a safe anchorage, I mean, safe from the shore batteries, but not from the air raid until we receive orders. We don’t know what they’re going be, but when the convoy is ready to leave, the captains of the ship all go to the flag ship and get their sealed orders.

SH: Okay, that’s what I was going to say. How do you get your orders? Do they come to you on radio?

PS: Well, first of all the captain goes to the flag ship. There’s always a flagship, one of the ships is designated, and the admiral or commodore, whatever his rank is, will issue sealed orders to the captains. He doesn’t tell him where he’s going, except he’s to head on a certain course for a certain amount of time, and then, open up the sealed orders.

SH: Now what group are you with at this point and what was the flagship? Do you know?

PS: We’re part of a flotilla. It’s like a dozen LSTs. We were normally designated LST Flotilla 14 and we had a commodore, that’s the commander of a small fleet, not big enough for an admiral, and it’s not a rank either. It’s just a designation like the captain of the ship could be a chief boatswain’s mate. A commodore of a LST Flotilla is equivalent to an army major maybe.

SH: Is this Commodore (Schlief?) on pre-interview survey?

PS: Oh, that’s when I was in the Korean War.

SH: Oh, okay. So, I’m reading the wrong thing.
PS: Yes, Commodore (Schlief?).

SH: Okay, let's not jump there just yet.

PS: No, we've got five years to go and at this rate it may take longer. [laughter]

SH: Now then after Angaur, where did you go?

PS: Angaur, there was no Angaur there. That's what we called it. We don’t even know what it is. Go into google and you might find it.

SH: Where do you go into this safe anchorage and how much time before you leave?

PS: It’s usually within a day or two, within a day or two, and we headed to the next staging area for whatever the next battle is going to be. That was Hollandia, New Guinea, it was back over the equator. We're going back and forth over the equator, but we have no pollywogs so it’s not more fun. [laughter]

SH: I was just going to say, did you ever have to get replacements? You talked about the young man that died from undiagnosed meningitis.

PS: Yes.

SH: Was that later that that happen?

PS: That happened later, yes.

SH: Okay.

PS: We were moving from the South Pacific up north towards Okinawa then. We crossed the equator quite a bit, but it was never as much fun because everybody was a shellback by then. They had to be one to get down to the south.

SH: What about the de-grousing stations? Was that something that an LST has to go through?

PS: Yes. I don’t know anything about it, but we did go through it. All I know is that we went through it.

SH: In Hollandia, was that a battle or is it already secure?

PS: It’s already secure. You take a place and when it was secure, it could become the staging area of the next place. Hollandia became the staging area for MacArthur’s return to the Philippines.
SH: That's what I was checking on.

PS: Yes, that’s exactly what it was and we went to Hollandia, and then, I think from there there’s a lot of little islands off the coast of New Guinea where there had been fighting and the troops we were going to land were spread out on these island--Biak, Los Negros, Manus Islands.

SH: Oh, okay. So, they were like replacements.

PS: No. They’d been in those invasions, now we’re taking them to the next one.

SH: Oh, okay. They had two types of troops, they had garrison, who came in after the fighting was over, and then, you had the actual invasion troops. So, the invasion troops were never the garrison troops. I mean that was their job.

SH: Now were these Marines that you took on then or were they Army?

PS: In New Guinea, Air Force. Well, they didn’t have an Air Force then, it was the Army Air Corps, believe it or not, and it was called the aviation engineer battalion, something new, never heard of it since. They could put up an airfield in nothing flat on a beachhead. They carried rolls of steel mesh things, they lay it on after the level a landing strip, they put this steel mesh down and a plane can land on it.

SH: Was it the equivalent of the Navy Seabee construction battalion unit?

PS: Yes, but Air Force, building an air base, and we took this aviation engineer battalion with these big coils of stuff and bulldozers and tractors, not tanks, heavy construction equipment. We didn’t know where we were going, but we’re going to Leyte to be with MacArthur for D-Day and this aviation engineer battalion, it turned out, was to land on D-Day because they expected a lot of ships to be damaged and have a lot of aircraft carriers maybe sunk or so damaged that planes that were in flight couldn’t return to them, so they can’t return to the other ships because they had a full complement. So, they needed an emergency landing field which would be a beachhead that had been leveled with these.

SH: So, where did you put them ashore at?

PS: A place called Dulag in Leyte. That was the main invasion beachhead there and the Battle for Leyte Gulf was a very big battle. The Japanese sunk three of our aircraft carriers there. A lot of planes that were damaged in flight that wouldn’t be able to land on the carrier because it takes special skill, well, we had planes landing on the darn thing while they were rolling the last bit of it because they were either out of fuel or else they were so severely damaged.

SH: Could you see all of this from where you were?
PS: Yes, we’re on the beach. We’re on the beach.

SH: You’re not on the ship on the beach?

PS: The ship is on the beach.

SH: Okay, you stayed on the ship?
PS: We’re on the ship and the ship is on the beach like this is here. So, you see the whole thing going on there and we’re also their anti-aircraft defense while they’re being attacked, we’re being attacked. They don’t have anti-aircraft guns. They’re construction crews.

SH: You’re their protection.

PS: And our own. [laughter] So, we saw that actually unload. So, we saved a lot of pilots and a lot of planes that would land there.

SH: How long do you stay there?

PS: I’ll have to check my thing. Let’s see. D-Day for Leyte was October 24th. Okay, now there were two operations on D-Day going on at the same time. You had the invasion, which was us, and then, you had the Japanese battleships coming for the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The Japanese plan was to send their biggest battleships, the Yamato, which were bigger and more powerful than anything we had, to attack the beachhead and destroy the troops and the ships, that was it, and we were on the beach at that time and I was on radio watch. I wasn’t on a gun at that time and it wasn’t the coded message. Normally they came through in code and you gave it to the officer who decoded it in a machine. This was so urgent that they didn’t care. They knew the Japanese knew what we were doing by then, so it was in plain language and it said, "Japanese battleships approaching from Surigao Straits," which was the southern approach to the beachhead where we were, "Prepare for bombardment." That was the exact word. Well, with anti-aircraft guns against the battleship, what do you do? The remark was the equivalent of oh, boy, are we [in trouble].

SH: So, you take this message immediately to the captain?

PS: We have a messenger and we give it to him and he brings it to them. So, you can’t do anything anyway. You’re stuck on the beach, the tide is out, and even if it was in the harbor

SH: What are you going to do? Where are you going to go?

PS: Yes, with battleships coming. The battleship that got sunk in Pearl Harbor that we didn’t see when we were there, were there to meet them. These old battlewagons had been rebuilt and met them and its history there. I mean it was the last great naval battle of history, like a thousand ships.
SH: Could you hear this battle going on? Were you close enough?
PS: Oh sure, yes. I mean it’s the ocean. You see the flashes of gunfire, not only that, we were almost sunk by friendly fire though. We couldn’t get together with our convoy because we were stuck on the beach at low tide. So, they pulled out without us and we were told to proceed under our own power as directed in the orders. We got to go through Leyte Gulf and we know something is going on, but they don’t say a battle. Planes are flying and shooting at you, all that kind of stuff. So, high tide was like late that day and we’ve been damaged. Our IFF had been shot off the mast. IFF means Identify Friend or Foe. It receives a radar signal that tells you if the radar that's picking you up is friendly or a foe. It had been shot off. So, we see on the radar screen these blips, but you don’t know if it’s our ships or their ships and you feel yourself being pinged on the radar, but you don’t know because the signal is not there and we’re going through the middle of Leyte Gulf where the battle is going on, which we don’t know about. All we know is there’s a lot of shooting going on. At night, your radar man says that we’re surrounded by three ships that are circling us. He says—we were close enough, two of them can be cruisers and one a destroyer, and so, it looks like they’re reconnoitering us to attack. We don’t know if they were Japanese and we were blackened ship. It was black of night so no one could tell what was going on. So, the captain figured he’d use his own tactical response. If he acted dead in the water by stopping the engines, he wouldn’t appear as a threat to anyone, friend or foe. So, he stopped the engines and we drifted like from eleven o’clock at night until the sun comes up and as soon as the sun comes up we see two American cruisers and a destroyer. They’re in a triangle so they could all open up on us at once without hitting each other and the captain of the main cruiser wigwagged, how they signal, by signal. "Congratulations, it’s good that you killed your engines. We didn’t know who you were and we were waiting to see, you’re dead meat."

SH: Do you know which cruisers?

PS: I have no idea, no idea at all.

SH: So, where did you go now? How much more excitement can one man take?

PS: Okay, we proceeded alone back to New Guinea and after that, it was either Hollandia, I got it in here, or Finch Haven, that was another place, or Los Negros or Biak. I mean these all staging areas where you pick up the troops. Milk runs are resupply runs or reinforcement runs. You still have the Kamikazes. You still got all the other garbage coming at you, but I have it all in my book here, doesn’t make too much difference though. It just says you got air raids, you don’t have air raids, you got this, being shot. That was a very--I completely forgot about this guy.

SH: Now this is the invasion at

PS: Leyte.
SH: Leyte. What was the civilian?

PS: Red Cross. So, we asked him if he’s going give us donuts on the beachhead. He says he didn’t bring any with him.

SH: Do you remember his name?

PS: I have his name, but I don’t have it here, because I bought the ship’s log from the government. I have it home. It's about that thick with those details and he told us that his orders from the Army, he’s in the Red Cross; he’s got this Red Cross on, with these aviation engineers. He’s supposed to proceed independently to Tacloban, which was the main town on the island of Leyte, it’s not far, and establish a whore house for the troops. [laughter]

SH: So, is this your diary?

PS: That’s what he told us.

SH: Okay.

PS: And on a subsequent milk run, when things were quieter, I went to see if I could go to the post office there and get some postage stamps of the place and there it was. Venereal disease caused more casualties that anything else. So, what they did was they were able to monitor the prostitutes and examine them for venereal disease, rather than have the soldiers go off independently and get sick and he had what’s called a prophylactic station. He recruited them. They were independent contractors and he had the guys from the Medical Corps with all of the equipment that the Medical Corps would need, right there in Tacloban, right in the main section there, had a big Red Cross and it said pro-station. Pro meant prophylactic station. So, something that doesn't not appear in the history books.

SH: It does not.

PS: But I don’t know if they would admit it, but this is what he told us. He had no reason not to tell us and certainly, I mean, nature being what it is, troops being as young as they are, they’re going to get sick and some of them are going to be careless and they knew what their casualty rate was. When one of these guys got the clap they couldn’t work, they got fevers, but his name, his full name and Red Cross serial number, are in the log because everything that comes aboard the ship is registered there, every soldier down to the lowest buck private, I have his name.

SH: Now, where did you pick him up?

PS: We picked up in New Guinea. I don’t know exactly where because he surfaced on the ship. We’re going from picking up people in Hollandia, Finch Haven, Los Negores, Biak, they’re all a day’s ride away there, but that’s where he was and he landed with the
first troops and we picked up a second passenger at Leyte, a guy named Sadeo Nakamura, the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Force. The plane we shot down, he was the radioman/gunner and he survived and when the air raid was over, someone spotted a guy floating in the water in a Mae West. [Editor's Note: A Mae West was a name for a life preserver.] They went and they picked him up, I mean we don’t shoot prisoners, we pick them up. He was eighteen, spoke perfect English, he took English in the high school, and he had a gash on his head from whatever happened and the pharmacist’s mate cleaned it, brushed it. He said, "If you’re going to kill me, what are you doing this for?" The pharmacist’s mate said, "We don’t kill prisoners." He said the equivalent to baloney. "I’ve been told about you guys." We shot him down, I think, at the early morning breakfast raid and we didn’t have any place to keep a prisoner. The closest thing was something called the peacoat locker. You don’t need peacoats in winter wear. So, you got this mesh you make fences out of it. So you can lock up the peacoats and everything and no one will bother him. We emptied out the peacoat and we put him in there. It’s big enough so that a guy could stand up and be comfortable. We locked Nakamura up in the peacoat locker there and they didn’t want him, the MPs on the beach, they didn’t want him. They didn’t have a POW camp, so we had to keep him until we got back to New Guinea and he turned out to be a very friendly guy. Nothing like you worry about terrorists, he was just another guy who's doing his job. He was doing his job.

SH: So, he didn’t fit your profile either that you had said.

PS: Not at all, not at all.

SH: And you didn’t fit his.

PS: No, but his guard, they needed an armed guard outside this peacoat locker, got boring, so he brought a deck of cards and taught him to play poker and a few of the other guys, not during battle, so they got a foursome and a five some going and he taught them how to play the equivalent in Japan, something called drum and they were betting all kinds of stuff and someone got the bright idea to make it a little more interesting. They lent him a few bucks. I mean you didn’t get paid much, money was useless anyway, and he got very sharp at the cards and he was winning all sorts of stuff. I mean they were betting these government issued jackets that they don’t use and he had the damned peacoat locker loaded with the stuff that he won. [laughter] He taught me to write my name in Japanese and because he was convinced that we were going lose the war.

SH: At that point he is still convinced?

PS: Absolutely.

SH: But this is the end of October in ’44.

PS: I know.

SH: And you’ve sunk big ships, battleships.
PS: Well, we didn’t know that at the time. We had no idea what happened.

SH: Oh, you didn’t?

PS: This is during the battle.

SH: Yes.

PS: We didn’t know anything until we got news. I got it on the radio later. They didn’t announce it immediately. I didn’t even get it on the radio for a while.

SH: Oh, okay. So, we didn’t know really what was going on yet and he said, 
"Americans can’t win. They were an inferior people." He says, "You may be nice guys, but nice guys don’t win wars" or something of that nature. He said, "But I like you," and he wrote a note in Japanese for me with my name on it. When I’m captured, if I’m still alive, to show the note to be nice to me. [laughter] It was in Japanese.

SH: Have you ever had it translated to make sure?

PS: There was a newspaper correspondent came around at some time and he was going to translate it and give it back to me, it's the last I saw of it. All I did was where he wrote my name so I could sign the paper saying that I won’t fight anymore, that I surrender. I ripped it off. I got that piece of paper. It’s in one of my albums, but the correspondent, I guess he’s got it. So, Sadeo Nakamura, when we delivered him to the prisoner camp in New Guinea, I asked the officer, who signed the receipt for him, how I could contact him so we can write back and forth. He said, "He’s a prisoner, you can’t write to prisoners." He gave me an address in Switzerland, the International Red Cross Prisoner of War Bureau. He says, "That’s the only way to reach a POW," at that time anyway. So, I wrote him a letter when I could and about six months later I get a letter from Switzerland, I still got it in my collection, saying they will not deliver my letter because unless I’m a member of his immediate family, they will not transmit messages otherwise. They have to document that on my member of the immediate, they’re holding the letter, but I got their letter to me telling me that. He gave me his home address, Shikoku. This is after I’m home, about a year or so. I went to college and I had this stuff packed away and forgot it. I pulled out my diary, holy cow, Nakamura. I hope he made it home. So, I wrote to him in Shikoku and never heard from him, never got the letter back, and I had a Japanese stamp collector in Japan who I swapped [with]. He was a veteran of World War II, he served in China though. So, I told him about it and I said I’d really like to contact him and he said, "Number one, you didn’t get the letter back." that meant somebody got it or the post office would have given it to you. "Number two, don’t pursue it because it’s not uncommon for people who are militaristic to feel if you’re captured, you’re dishonored, your whole family is dishonored." So, he said, "If he’s still alive and home, don’t add that to his burdens." So, I never found out what happened to Nakamura and just a few years ago, I called up the Japanese embassy, I figured I’ll give it another try, but a little different. I called up the embassy in Washington and spoke to their public
relations officer and I explained. He said, "Your Japanese adviser was right." He says, "There are people who still," I mean they’re not a majority, far from it, but "he will become the butt of the family. Better off if he’s home and thought to have fought honorably, leave him alone."

SH: That’s very interesting.

PS: I wrote that in a small article for a stamp magazine and--oh, when I went to Tacloban, I wasn’t looking for the Red Cross guy, I was looking for postage stamps. Nobody will believe it, but I do have the postage stamps that I was there and the postal clerk thanked me by giving me some stamps issued by the Japanese and used there. This is the picture from the article. The top show Jose Laurel was the Japanese puppet president of the Philippines, but I wasn’t aware of this until years later. I had it in my collection, I liked it. The date is, I think, October 13, like twelve days before he was captured, before the battle. This letter was mailed when he was getting ready, when we were on our way to invade Japan and the bottom envelope there is a letter to my parents I sent from the staging area in New Guinea and the middle one is a commemorative honoring the three carriers that was sunk that we were involved with by laying the mesh airfield. I made a little nice article.

SH: That had to be extremely interesting. Many different people in several countries.

PS: Yes, and they all come together on those dates there. During one of the air raids, my eyeglasses, that’s another memorable thing, was hot, fell off and broke. So, even as a loader I could get along without them, but you’re better off with them and that was my spare pair. Another pair had broken before and the captain said, "You got to go to the base hospital, they’ll make you some." Well, he says, "You’ll have to find wherever it is."

SH: Now this is in

PS: On Leyte Island, on the beachhead.

SH: Okay.

PS: But this is on a milk run, you’re still being attacked and everything. So, I asked an MP. I told him I got to get glasses, do you know where the base hospital is? He says, it's about ten miles down the road." He says, "Yes, trucks are going," I mean they were fighting more inland there. He says, "You hitch a ride," and the first truck I flagged down and tell the guy and he says, "Yes, I’m going by the base hospital." He says, "Hop in the back." It's full of Japanese prisoners. They’re all blindfolded and all they have on is a little G-string, I mean they're nude there, no place to sit down, you’re just jammed in with them. Orders are orders; I got to get new glasses. [laughter]

SH: Anyone of those speak English that you knew of?
PS: I didn’t even try to strike up a conversation.

SH: You were really outnumbered this time.

PS: I didn't want to, so I just kept my mouth shut and they were blindfolded, but leave well enough alone. The next truck might be worse.

SH: Did you get your glasses? I mean how long did it take them?

PS: They made them while you waited. They made them right on the spot. They had the lenses, took a couple of hours, so you hang out in this base hospital, just a bunch of tents in an area there.

SH: Did you get to have an extra pair?

PS: They made me two pairs, made me two pairs there.

SH: You just caught another truck back then?

PS: I can’t remember how the heck, I have no idea how I got back, none.

SH: It’s amazing that they get a base set up and ready and rolling.

PS: Yes, this is like after the initial invasion, a lot of the island had been taken and as a matter of fact before they even conquered the whole island, they were off into the next one.

SH: Where did your ship go then? I mean you are doing all these milk runs running supplies.

PS: Back and forth to Leyte, back and forth and that was October. Yes, we were doing milk runs until October and November and into December and December we invaded another well-known island. Did you ever hear of the Malukas? It’s in the Celebes Sea. Most people never heard of either of them. Well, there’s an island called Morotai. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Morotai began on September 15, 1944 and didn't end until end of war in August of 1945. The Allies wanted to capture the island and use it as a support base for the liberation of the Philippines.]

SH: That I’ve heard of.

PS: Oh really?

SH: How did that go for you and your ship?

PS: It was uneventful. We just got bombed from the air, that’s all. [laughter] New Year’s Eve we were there and it was a well-known fact by then that the Japanese only
bombed us before dinner. It must have been a rule of theirs, or before breakfast. So, New Year’s Eve, the captain says, "We’re going to celebrate. Bring your canteen cups up on deck at supper and you’ll have some holiday’s spirit." The ship’s cook had mixed some of the medical alcohol with grapefruit juice. This alcohol, that’s 100 proof that they use for

SH: Disinfecting wounds?

PS: Yes and a canteen cup holds a pint and it was in these big soup tureens that the cook had. So, you just scooped out, if you wanted a full canteen cup, that’s what you got.

SH: Meanwhile the Japanese are coming?

PS: Well, it was midnight. They never come at midnight.

SH: Okay, I thought you said bring it for supper so I'm thinking it was before.

PS: Well, it was after supper. For some reason they gave the Japanese the nickname Washing Machine Charlie. I don’t know why, but the plane made a lot of noise. They were outmoded planes over there that could still make it. Washing Machine Charlie decided to celebrate New Year’s too on his own. Instead of a group, just one guy comes by himself. Well, everybody is pie-eyed and I don’t know what happened. I wasn’t on radio watch, I don’t know if anybody got a warning, but we hear him up there and it’s still not dark and there he is. He begins dropping bombs and we all run, stagger to our guns, I should say. He always dropped the bombs from an out of range area so we could never get him anyway. So, it didn’t make much, but that’s the big event at Morotai. It was such a memorable event that I was reading in a dictionary of American naval fighting ships. It’s got everything in there. It doesn’t even list us being there.

SH: Really?

PS: Yes. So, I called up, at the Washington Navy Yard they got the Navy Historical Branch and I found one report that we were there. It should be in that little blurb that they put in the dictionary there and the guy says, "Can you prove it?" So, by then I had bought the deck log. I said, "Yes." He says, "Is it notarized?" I told him I was there. He says, "We don’t believe everything we hear." I said, "We’re entitled to a Battle Star on our ribbons." We already had a Gold Battle Star, that’s equivalent to five Bronze ones and two on our--but I was going to reunions every year, it's something to talk about and I'd figure I'd be a hero in telling the guys that they're entitled to another star because its officially a battle and we never got the Battle Star added. As a matter of fact, the ship officially has never been written out of the Navy, no ultimate disposition, sold, scrap, lost, nothing, nothing. I mean I tried to get an envelope from every LST and I make a copy of each history, each LST's history, and I mount it with them and the Navy History Branch, the guy I spoke to, checked the records and said, "Yes, I see that LST, your flotilla detached you so you weren’t reported there. You’re reported as being back in Finch Haven." It was only a couple of LSTs were detached to go there. He said, "You
were never there." So, I said, "Also, why don’t you put down the date of our decommissioning" and he says, "There’s no record of it." Well, like I said, we have reunions, well, we did. I’m one of the last of the Mohicans now and the subsequent captain of the ship, the one who replaced our own subsequently was one of the young kids who was like two years older than me. He had been the gunnery officer and they promoted him to captain and we’ve been buddies ever since then and he’s very much like me, he saves stuff, and he saved his orders to decommission the ship and he sent me the copy of it and he sent me a copy of his orders, there were two, and I sent scans of it to the Naval History Center, but to this day, that’s why I say history is a lot of fun, but it ain’t necessarily so. It ain’t necessarily so.

SH: With the ship’s log saying that you were there, as you said, everything was logged in as to name, rank, serial number,

PS: They’re understaffed, it’s the same thing until they get to it. This is twelve years ago, I think, I’m talking about.

SSH: I’m putting this back on now?

PS: Yes, part of it, it’s just an aside. The captain’s orders read, "To bring the ship from Hong Kong," where I left it, "to Shanghai and deliver it to a representative of the US State Department for further transfer to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration." Well, who flies the flag, the UN? So, I wanted to know what the UN did with it and I contacted the UN and they said, "They’re not going to go looking for that invitation in their archives, forget it." So, I contacted my congressman who had been a radio man on a Navy ship and who we had honored in our club by giving him one of these envelopes. So, he was really gung-ho to help us and he said, "Write the details in a letter to me," and a couple of weeks later I get a phone call from the chief librarian of the archives of the UN inviting me to search the archives myself and I can bring somebody along with me. One of the guys in our group has a degree in journalism and he started out being an investigative journalist. He got a job with a business publication. I figured he’s a good guy to bring along. We both went there and they brought this dolly out with us with these folders and sure enough, naval vessels acquired by the United Nations and I found out that it was turned over to the Taiwan government, actually Nationalist China, but when I wrote to them to find out just what happened, there was no response. So, I figured maybe the communists got hold of it. So, I wrote to Beijing, then I wrote to the American ambassador in both places, and they all said something to the effect that, "We can’t help you now, but don’t call us again. I mean if we find out anything we’ll let you know. Well, my friend thinks like an investigative journalist and he said, "Let’s see if Lloyd's Registry has it since it’s not in Jane’s Fighting Ships, it may have been a merchant ship acquired by them. Sure enough, it appears LST 991 delivered to the China Trading Company, renamed Mei Ling, or something like that, and we go through the years under Lloyd's. In 1958, it disappears. It’s not in the 1969 Jane’s, and it’s not in Lloyd's. So, he says we’ll search some files maintained by The New York Times. I mean one of his classmates, otherwise you can forget him, and he comes up with the August 28, 1958, New York Times. A sea battle off the island of Quemoy between mainland
torpedo boats and Taiwan LSTs. Two LSTs attacked, one is the sister ship of mine, which survived, and one was sunk, which was unidentified.

SH: What a story.

PS: So, I went to the library and I got a Xerox of the newspaper. I made a copy of the article, it was right on the first page, it's got pictures of LSTs, the whole thing, "Unidentified LST sunk." It’s strictly guesswork, but now you know why I say history is my hobby.

SH: You’re very good at it. Back up then and talk about you doing these milk runs and you’re at Morotai, we will take your word for that. Let’s talk about where you head to next.

PS: Then we had busy time. That was New Year’s Day that we had the party and a day or two later we head back to New Guinea and we load troops for the invasion at--that would have been January 13, Lingayen Gulf, the Philippines and we landed troops there and by then the Japanese had developed suicide swimmers. There’s a lot of garbage floating when you’re blowing up boxes and things. It turns out these Japanese swimmers, they have a box, a piece of garbage box floating and they’re under it with an explosive charge and they’re damaging ships. I don’t know of any ship that got sunk with it, but quite a few ships got sunk by Kamikazes there, but out at Lingayen Gulf, we didn’t carry many weapons on that ship, rifles and machine guns, that we did, we had a few. So, we had a couple of guys who were good with rifles shooting at boxes. They were having a great time. They never saw anything, but they shot up a lot of boxes there and there was a lot of that. We shot down some more planes. We weren’t being attacked by Kamikazes, we were being attacked by planes that were, they didn’t want to blow up, bombers, torpedo planes. There was a lot of that going on and there was a heavy loss of ships there.

SH: Your ship came through fairly unscathed?

PS: Completely unscathed, I mean, me putting those tefillin on was really paying dividends to those days. [laughter]

SH: You got your troops ashore and off the beach?

PS: Everything worked out. Everything worked out, we headed back to New Guinea, and we’re headed to a new invasion. It’s going to be whatever time it takes to go back again. I think they were both in January with Subic Bay, that’s the south, then we take Bataan. That we got a star for Subic Bay, we got a star for Lingayen Gulf, because both were major battles accordingly. We were the first LST to beach on the beachhead at Subic Bay and we earned our Battle Star. We were greeted by Filipinos waving American flags and saying whatever it is in Tagalog, "Welcome home buddy," and they asked where the Japanese are and they left when they saw you coming. It's what the Filipinos told us. These are just Filipino residents there. They remembered what they
did to you, to the guys in Bataan, and they’d rather fight you somewhere else than here. So, we got a Battle Star for that. Morotai, no. Subic Bay, yes. As I say, I get a kick out of reading the history about all of this kind of stuff there.

SH: So, how long did you have to stay on the beach then at Subic?

PS: We landed everything and headed back again to New Guinea, the staging area—not to New Guinea, maybe to Leyte, it was one or the other. By then Leyte was becoming a staging area for Luzon too. So, that brought us to January. We kept running milk runs because in Luzon there was heavy fighting going on. So, February, we were doing milk runs there. Then in March we loaded up for a big invasion. We didn’t know what it would be. It turned out to be Okinawa. Okinawa and Iwo were in the same time frame with amphibious ships, you were either at one or the other, but you couldn’t, they’re too slow moving to do both. So we hit Okinawa on D-Day. That was April 1, Easter Sunday, and according to my Jewish calendar, it was also Passover and 2:30 in the morning we get up for the H-Hour, there’s no bread on the mess table. There’s boxes of Manischewitz matzo. So, I asked the cook on our ship, he said, "I thought I was the only Jewish guy on this ship. How come everybody is eating? Everybody's going where’s the bread, what's that stuff?" I was explaining to him about Passover. He says, "All he knows is it’s the captain’s orders. If it’s Passover, we’re going to observe it, especially if it’s on D-Day, and especially if we’re in the first wave." He says, "This guy probably brought us some luck, let’s not quit while we’re ahead of the game here." So, we celebrated Passover on D-Day by eating Matzo there.

SH: Were you ever able to get to any services while you’re there?

PS: Yes. When Leyte was the staging area, a signal went out by blinker to all ships present from the cruiser Indianapolis. "Attention to all Jewish personnel, we'd like to hold a memorial service, a Jewish memorial service, for all of the people, but we don’t have the quorum of ten Jewish adult males. So, if you can get permission to come, come." The captain said, "Schreiber, we’ll give you a boat and you go." So, I went and they had a little chapel with a little Torah, the whole thing there, and there were a few guys from other ships, but we had our minion, as they call it, a quorum and we said the Kaddish, the prayer to memorialize the deceased, and in the Navy, I mean there’s no such thing as a total stranger, forget it, especially if you’re Jewish. So, this guy says, "You got lousy duty on an LST, you get seasick, you got this, you got that, we are in a big ship here, it’s really great." He says, "If you could get a transfer would you take it," and I said, "Yes." So, he takes me to the captain or the executive officer and he says, "Yes, we could use another radio man." He says, "I'll signal over to your captain if it’s okay to send your stuff over, transfer you." My captain says, "No." He says, "I'll be short one radio man," and you can’t do that and I wouldn’t. He said, "No," period, that’s it. So, I was disappointed, I didn’t want to leave my shipmates, but [I'd] be better off on a cruiser. Boy you talk about luck. You know the story of the Indianapolis. [Editor's Note: The Indianapolis was sunk en route to Okinawa by a Japanese submarine. About 300 crewman went down with the ship and the rest were set adrift.]
SH: How did you find out about it?

PS: It was after the war. I mean that happened late in the war and I didn’t know about it until I got the news on the radio, which wasn’t immediate, because the war was still on. I don’t know exactly what.

SH: But you did hear about it before you came back stateside?

PS: Oh yes, yes. I don’t know when though.

SH: So, did your captain say now you owe me?

PS: I don’t remember. He may have, but I don’t know. It’s a funny thing. At that time we dropped the [atomic] bomb in August sometime and we’d been making milk runs to Okinawa.

SH: We should probably talk about the war, I mean the invasion of Okinawa. That was horrible.

PS: Yes, that’s where the Kamikazes really came out in force. They were really in force there. They were all over the place. The picket ships, the ones out, they were the real heroes. They were getting the brunt of it and they were getting sunk and everything. We were, again, the first wave to go into Okinawa.

SH: Were you taking in Army at this point or Marines? It must be Marines you’re taking in, no?

PS: It was the Army, the 383rd Regimental Combat Team. This is a little--it’s a regiment, but it’s a self-contained army. They made it that way, I don’t know why. So, it’s more combat use than the regular regiment there. They had the extremely high casualties because they were the first in and bearing the brunt of it. We landed near a place called Shuri Fortress. It’s on a mountain and the mountain is a cliff that overhangs and these guys had to take the fort. You wonder, the mountain the way it is, how the heck they’re going to do it. They must have had of a plan of some sort and we were told to make sure as soon as we retracted from the beach, after dropping the troops off, we’re going to just wait to be called back to go to a certain anchorage, it's laid out on a map and because they had these shore batteries up there, the coastal artillery, and the Kamikazes kept coming over like mad, so our sister ship’s captain decides to pull out of the area where we’re getting beat on by the Kamikazes and everything else into the area that they told us to stay out of, and as soon as he gets there, that coast artillery had him in range and he got a direct hit on that LST. It hit him right where the control is and killed all of the captain and the officers and all those, the guys who were in that part of the ship.

SH: Did it sink?

PS: It’s hard to sink an LST. It’s like a tin can, like a bunch of tin cans. You can punch
holes in one of them, but the rest of them, they’ll blow up, but sink, you’d have to really ignite that gasoline and the ammunition. Of the nearly one thousand LSTs they built, most of them were not sunk, they were blown up by a torpedo, whatever it was, and the ones that survived looked like jagged pieces of stuff and unless you were—as a matter of fact, they survived so well that they didn’t need all they built. So, what they did was they converted them from LSTs into other types of ship, the most common was a repair ship where they can follow the invasion fleet and if they could do the repair afloat, they would do it. They were called ARLs, the Navy lingo. The A is auxiliary, the R is repair ship, and the L means it was a landing ship before. They converted them and as a matter of fact the crews of the LSTs never went on rest and rotation unless they were so damaged that even an ARL couldn’t do it. Most LSTs could be fixed by an ARL, mine included, whatever happened. The same ship that rammed us in our shakedown cruise in Chesapeake Bay rammed us in Leyte on the beach. Yes, we were on the beach and it was supposed to head straight in, for some reason the current shifted and he banged into us.

SH: Were there the same captains?

PS: Same captain. It was LST 1014. [laughter]

SH: Like you said you hardly ever got any kind of beach time as far as recreation or anything like that. Did you get to know any of the other crews of these other LSTs?

PS: No.

SH: You were still self-contained basically?

PS: There was no way to get to from one to another.

SH: What about supplies like clothing and things like that? Were you well supplied?

PS: Supply ships brought them out to us.

SH: So, you didn’t have to worry about your clothes disintegrating in the tropics?

PS: They had a variety of supply ships. One was an ice cream factory. It was a liberty ship. The liberty ship was a big ship, did nothing but make ice cream and it would pull in and after things were a little more secure or in a staging area and give you all the ice cream that you wanted, drums of it.

SH: I have never heard that before.

PS: Yes. So, they have all sorts of ships of that nature. I have to check and find the names of some. Maybe I’ll get a postmark of one.

SH: At Okinawa you said you were told to stay there until it was safe.
PS: We kept making milk runs. I mean the milk runs were [ongoing].

SH: So, you didn’t just stay there. You left and went back.

PS: By then the staging area was Leyte.

SH: Okay, because you talked about your sister ship pulling out because it was so bad and pulling into the wrong area. So I just wondered if you just stayed.

PS: We were lucky. We got a few dents from friendly ships, but we got some holes in us from whatever they came from, but nothing that couldn’t be repaired either at the staging area or right at the battle scene itself.

SH: So, you just kept going back and forth from Leyte to Okinawa supplying ships?

PS: Exactly.

SH: I mean now we all know it was the atomic bomb that was dropped. What did you hear as a radioman on an LST?

PS: The whole thing was in the news; I got the news right away that we had dropped that bomb.

SH: What did they call it?

PS: I don’t remember what they called it and I wrote the article. I don’t remember, but it was an atom bomb, I think they called it that.

SH: They used that term, an atom bomb?

PS: I think so. I think so, but I have no recollection of it.

SH: Did they describe it as a super bomb?

PS: Yes. It was the most powerful bomb and it had destroyed the entire city of Hiroshima, I mean, we never knew of anything like that and they asked Japan to surrender and if they don’t we’re going to drop a second one and the Japanese told us to go, they didn’t believe it, so we dropped it on Nagasaki and then a response came quick, we’ll surrender unconditionally. I never was involved in the celebration that big.

SH: Where were you?

PS: Leyte preparing to invade Japan.

SH: That is what I want to know. Tell me what you knew about the preparations. You finished Okinawa, so what is the next stop?
PS: Yes, we got such a great farewell from Okinawa before they dropped the atom bomb. The milk runs were, the Japanese were losing more and more stuff. On the way back from our last milk run in Okinawa, July 25th, our convoy was attacked by suicide submarines, they’re called Kaitens, K-A-I-T-E-N, never heard of them before. That morning we saw we had general quarters, we were north of Luzon. We’ve left a couple of days out of Okinawa and the Japanese reconnaissance plane is out in the distance. So, we know we’re sighted, so we got to be on the alert for periscopes or submarines or planes coming in, none of which happened. All we know is we got a message from the flagship, the destroyer escort Underhill that they sighted a floating mine and they’re going to explode it and gave the location, told us to stay away, except it turned out it was not a floating mine, it was the periscope. We had no idea. They were shooting at it with rifle fire. The anti-aircraft guns are no good, you can’t depress them. So, they’re shooting it with rifle fire and all of a sudden, I was in the radio room, we’re all at general quarters, got one porthole in there and I hear the guy at the gun outside saying, "Torpedo is heading at us right amidships, standby," the announcement standby, because the ship is to slow to maneuver out of the way of a torpedo and it was the periscope actually that you saw, but obviously they thought it was a floating mine in the distance, goes right under us. He aimed so he could hit us smack and under the water line. He didn’t realize we had a flat bottom and unloaded with--that’s why it’s hard to right it, unloaded you practically riding the top of the wave. [The torpedo] zoomed right under us and directly abreast of us two hundred yards is our flagship, blew up, hit him instead, and then, I could see because I could look out my porthole window and all I see is this smoke, just smoke. They obviously hit the magazine amidship, the breeze blows the smoke away, and you see the fantail still afloat and the bow is still afloat and these guys, survivors standing on the fantail and all of a sudden the bow just plunges into the sea, but the fantail stays afloat of the Underhill and we’re looking for more submarines, but obviously it was only one that was launched from the mother sub and evidently the mother sub didn’t have torpedoes. It was made just to launch that Kaiten. So, the other escorts, we had this one, the Underhill was gone, close to three hundred in the crew, most of them were killed, we later found out. We had two or three patrol craft as escorts and they went and took the guys off the floating fantail and sunk the fantail. I don’t think they sunk it, but it went down and we all began putting boats in the water to rescue survivors. You don’t know if they’re living or dead though and even if they’re dead you have to retrieve the body. So, we spent the rest of that cruise with funerals for the bodies that we retrieved. The boatswain’s sews the body in canvas with an anchor link, it’s a heavy anchor at the foot so it goes right down, and the captain reads a burial service for each one and the ship’s carpenter builds a slide to slide the homemade shroud down.

SH: So, your ship took on several of these casualties?

PS: Oh, yes.

SH: Did you take any survivors?

PS: None.
SH: How many burials at sea did you do?

PS: I don’t know. I was quite a few. It took quite a while to go one at a time. So, when we got back to Leyte, that was after July 25th, like ten days later or so, we got the atom bomb dropped. After the second one was dropped, they said they’d surrender. On the signal bridge where they have the flags and everything, they have signal pistols of different flags, every signalman on every ship was shooting all of his pistols and I’ll tell you, there was never a 4th of July like that. The men were shooting their tracer bullets from the anti-aircraft guns up in the air and normally you keep radio silence all the time especially on the voice circuits because the Japanese could identify your voice and know what ship was around. Well, the radiomen just went wild on there. "Is there anybody out there from Peoria? Is there anybody out there from the Greenwood section of Brooklyn," old home week and you could tell some of them had been drinking and singing. When these voice circuits were loaded with this sort of thing and we keep the voice circuit on the loudspeaker so the captain could hear from the commanding officers and he says, "Leave it on, leave it on." Then a very powerful transmitter, you could tell because it can blot out the other signals, that squeal, so the squeal keeps going to blot it and by then it’s complete silence and a very commanding voice says, "This is Admiral so and so, you’re all breaking the rule by you sending unauthorized messages. You’re commanded to cease and desist or harsh measures will follow," near silence for a couple of seconds and a voice with a real southern twang comes on. "You tell them horseshit, you’ve been on the road," and the whole thing starts again. [laughter] That’s how we celebrated, the Japanese [surrender], after they dropped the atom bomb. We were preparing to do landings on rocky beaches.

SH: Was this being done at Leyte?

PS: At Leyte, yes. They took beaches that were very that would be similar to whatever the Japanese beach we were supposed to be at.

SH: Did they give you any idea of when they plan to do this?

PS: Absolutely none, but they call it scuttlebutt. It’s the rumor that passed around, "Hey, we just knocked off Okinawa, that is Japan, that is Japan," so the next stop is going to be the rough one because they’re going to throw everything at us. He says, "You'll probably have to fight civilians and things like that and we thought, "Hey, we survived this long, that next one has got our bullet on it. The bullet has our number on it." So, as far as dropping the atom bomb, whenever I hear someone saying it wasn’t necessary, if he had to go in, he wouldn’t be talking like that. It wasn’t necessary for him, but if you survived all these other things--that’s how the war ended.

SH: So where did you go from there, because I remember you were taken off the ship in Hong Kong?

PS: We had our worst experience after the war ended. We were ordered to proceed to
Korea. We didn’t know why, but just go to a place called Jin Sen. It’s the Japanese name for Inchon, we found out later, and we got weather warnings, it was typhoon season, that they told us to alter our course away from too close to Okinawa because of the typhoons that were going on and the typhoon shifted course away from Okinawa as we had, we were traveling alone, and went right into it. I saw that movie the Perfect Storm and that’s exactly what it was. We could measure the wind, we could measure the waves, the wind was 145 miles an hour, keeps going, which is more than [what] hit Louisiana. Our masts were sixty-five feet high and the waves were breaking above them. You couldn’t be on deck. I was up in the radio room and could look through the porthole, half the time the waves would break and we would be completely submerged. Then we found ourselves in the eye of the typhoon, didn’t know what an eye of the typhoon was except, well, the typhoon swirls and there’s a whirlpool there and we’re in it. We’re in it and in order to get out of it, somehow or other the captain has to go perpendicular to it and I was getting these weather forecasts, but there’s so much interference, electrical interference going on that I’m missing a lot of it and they’re telling the coordinates to head into and I get this, I couldn’t hear to go east or west because the interference blocked out the first two letters and all I got was the S-T. In training they had told us that very often you think you don’t hear something and you do, but I mean they went over that in training and in a case like that you write down, you’re using a typewriter, tell you to do, I forgot what I wrote down, but I did and the captain ordered on to that course. We escaped by heading perpendicular. Our ship could only go at full speed, eleven knots under its own power. When we were at a tailwind, we were doing forty knots. I mean the wind was blowing us away from the typhoon and all I heard on the other circuits were SOSs, ships that were broken up in the waves and sinking or dashed on the rocks. I think about ten thousand Navy people were killed in that typhoon. It was bigger than any battle and when it was over, we were told to pull into some harbor, not to proceed to Korea anymore. All we saw was gigantic ships that were thrown up on the beach.

SH: Do you know what harbor you pulled into?

PS: It was called Hagushi.

SH: It was on the Japanese mainland?

PS: No, no, this is Okinawa. This was Okinawa. We never went to Japan, we were passing Okinawa at the time and it had killed a lot of people on the island. So, we stood there like a day or two and they told us not to go to Korea, told us to go to Taiwan instead and we hit another typhoon, it was typhoon season. We had to go out to sea. It wasn’t as bad as the other typhoon and we sailed past that and they told us forget about going to Taiwan, go to Hong Kong. Well, we head into Victoria Harbor, this is the first civilized place we’ve been to since we left Pearl Harbor actually and we were the first American ship, Navy ship, to pull in. The war had been over, VJ Day, the British Navy was there and we get a message from the Admiral on the British flagship, a battleship, the Anson. It was an old battleship, “Welcome to Victoria Harbor, standby to receive honors.” The captain had to look that up in the book. When one ship honors another, the crew lines up
facing it and as the ship you're honoring passes by they come to attention, they ring their bell, and the boatswain blows his pipe, certain tunes, and they dip the royal ensign to you and courtesy says that your crew has to stand, return the salute, and we dip our ensign to them. So, the ensign dipped it’s ensign, then *HMS Illustrious*, their carrier did the same thing and then the cruisers and destroyers. They were all lined up in a row to welcome us. It was quite an experience, and then, we were all invited to be guests of the Royal Navy at the Royal Navy Yard, NAAFI [Navy, Army, & Air Force Institutes], N-A-A-F-I. It was the equivalent of our USO [United Service Organization] and we were buddy, buddy with the British sailors. For ten American cents, you had to pay for the beer; you got a liter of beer. [laughter] It was a much stronger beer. Nobody had had beer period since who knows when.

SH: Since you had that beer in Guantanamo.

PS: Since then, you’re probably right, but it was Australian beer we were having with them. It was old home week for us in Hong Kong and I was there for about a month and I got my orders to go home.

SH: How did you proceed then? Are you the only ship that there, the only American ship, or were there others coming in?

PS: I think we were the only one there. What they were doing was making us a post office depot to receive mail for ships in the South China Sea area because we received a bunch of rated postal clerks and they begin building these bins for whatever they do in the post office. We became from LST 991 we got a second official name, Mobile Fleet Post Office No. 18.

SH: Now how did you proceed back to the States then, by ship I assume?

PS: I got orders, a ship pulled in, a Navy cargo ship, an amphibious attack cargo ship, the *Kenmore*, and I got orders to report aboard it for transfer home. It wasn’t fast. It took thirty-one days from Hong Kong.

SH: Were you the only one going home?

PS: No, no. It had been to Manila to pick up a lot of other guys. It was loaded. The cargo hold they had built these racks for bunks, they were very high, like five or six high, sort of like that warehouse. We were very happy. It was a happy thirty-one days.

SH: What did you do for thirty-one days? Did you work the radio? Did you sit back?

PS: Shoot crap, play cards, read books, eat, you lined up, there was long lines for the mess hall, B.S.-ing all the time. I was very good at craps and I won a lot of the souvenirs that the other guys were bringing home to their family, silk pajamas and stuff like that.

SH: Never had to go shopping yourself. How were you treated ashore in Hong Kong?
PS: Extremely well, extremely well, except it was different. I mean the British had just taken over from the Japanese. The Chinese had a lot of refugees, because they were not only fighting the Japanese, the Communists and the Nationalists were fighting. We went to see a Chinese movie just to see what it was like and I guess it was the refreshment stand with the big Taurine that served what looked like French fries out of it, they wrapped it in newspaper and it wasn’t French fries, it was something that was deep fried and Hong Kong is English speaking, so there are English speaking Chinese there and me and the two guys with me at the movie are wondering what the heck we’re eating and the guy says you’re eating locusts, deep fried locusts. It seems there are a lot of them there and they harvest them. That was it. I mean we began handing our things to other people who never get the idea of it.

SH: Not exactly Kosher.

PS: It is Kosher. I checked with a rabbi at one time.

SH: Really?

PS: Yes. Some insects are and that happens to be. I asked about it. I still didn’t like it. We started; let’s lean away from the Chinese food. So, there’s this restaurant in Victoria, the main town, European restaurant. It’s run by Europeans, they were neutral Portuguese and steak and eggs is on their menu. I’d never eat steak and eggs, but by then I wasn’t that Kosher and I had these friends who loved steaks. They said, "We’re going to order a steak and eggs." Well, the guy from Texas said, "I ate a lot of steak because that’s what we eat in Texas," but he said, "This is good, but we don’t grow this kind of animal in Texas," and they put these Sunnyside eggs right on this steak, but they’re the size of your thumbnail. They turned out to be bird’s eggs of some sort and the guy from Texas said, "What is the steak from," and the guy says, "Dog," and he sees the expression on our face, he says, "Don’t worry, we only have the finest dog meat there is," and he takes the guy from Texas by the elbow, he says come with me and I’ll show you.

[laughter] So, we go into the kitchen and there is skinned dressed dogs hanging from the hooks. [laughter]

SH: The finest. So, you guys are still looking for a good meal as you go back on the ship.

PS: Well, anyway, we were off the ship every day. The thing is stay away from the Indian restaurants and the movies, maybe there’s a good Chinese restaurant we could go to and one of the guys asked one of the British guys about it and he recommended a place that he’d been to with his friends and it was good. He told us what he got, pressed duck. Alright, duck is okay and a few other things. So, we go. About six of us go to this restaurant and they give us a private party room and the menu is in Chinese and English. So, we get the pressed duck and nothing you see on an American, nothing there. There’s some beef, there’s some pork, there’s some veal, and so, the waiter tells us—we told him we don’t know what to order. He says for six people I’ll bring you four meals. He says it’s more than enough because you get all of the right things that you can eat and
the way you eat it is with the rice. The duck came whole, a whole duck on the frame but it was cut in cubes so you could take the chopstick, just take a cube, put it on your dish, everything is family style in the middle. The rice, you take a spoonful of rice, they got all these different sauces, it was fun, and the duck was very good, I mean we really enjoyed, except none of us was good with the eating, I still can’t eat rice with a chopstick. So, he says that’s okay, we know how to deal with Europeans and the guy says, "We’re American," and he says, "Same thing." He says, "You each are going to have your own private Geisha." So, we said, "I thought Geishas were in Japan." He says, "Well, the Japanese were here for the last four years and he said, "We got to put them to work." They’ll feed you and being young guys, one of the guys said, "What else," and he said, "What else do you want?" [laughter]

SH: Part of the price of the meal?

PS: No, he says, "You have to tip them, you tip them."

SH: So, no one got anymore practice with their chopsticks.

PS: Well, they couldn’t if they wanted to. [laughter]

SH: Any other good adventures?

PS: I can’t think of any. I think you’ll take everything with a grain of salt thereafter.

SSH: We're talking about history. Because of the lateness of the hour, we’re going to conclude this session with Mr. Schreiber and we will continue the next time, thank you so much.

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

Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 6/24/2015
Reviewed by Philip Schreiber 10/14/2015