

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS ABATE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kyle Downey: This begins the interview of Nicholas Abate on June 11, 2012, in Edison, New Jersey, with Kyle Downey ...

Shaun Illingworth: ... and Shaun Illingworth.

KD: Thank you for seeing us today, Mr. Abate. It has been a pleasure to meet you. Can we begin our interview by asking you where and when you were born?

Nicholas Abate: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, February the 28th, 1930.

SI: For the record, could you tell us what your parents' names were?

NA: Yes. [My] father's Joseph Abate and my mother is Antonia Abate. They came to the United States [in] 1922.

SI: Both your parents came in 1922.

NA: Joseph Abate and Antonia Abate.

SI: They both came over in the same year.

NA: No, I'm sorry, my father was here, but my mother came over in 1922 and that's why they were married [in] 1922, in Ellis Island.

SI: Where was your father from?

NA: Both my parents were from Messina, Sicily, Italy. That's where they're both from.

SI: Did your father ever tell you any stories about what life was like in Sicily when he was growing up?

NA: Very, very little, really, very little, not too much at all.

SI: Do you know approximately how old he was when he came here?

NA: Well, he was born in 1891 and he came here, I think, around 1912. So, he must have been--what, '91 to '12?--about eighteen, nineteen years old.

SI: Did he ever talk about what he did for work early on in this country or where he lived?

NA: Oh, yes. When he came here, he went to a place called Twin Rocks, Pennsylvania, and he was a coalminer, and then, in 1930 is when we--well, in 1929--we moved to Newark, New Jersey. That's where I was born, and then, when I was one year old, we moved back to Pennsylvania and I came here in 1940.

SI: Your mother lived in Sicily until she was older. Did she talk about what life was like there at all?

NA: [laughter] Shaun, if she did, I don't remember. I really don't. I have no idea. I remember her mother was still living, my grandmother, and they used to communicate a lot through the mail. That's about it.

SI: Did they ever bring any of their other relatives over? Did any of their brothers or sisters come over with them?

NA: No, none. Well, you see, my mother's brother was living in Pennsylvania when she came over from Italy. In fact, he paired up my mother and my father, my uncle. Her brother paired them two up, my mother and my father. That's why she came and they were married one hour after they met.

SI: Wow.

NA: They never knew each other and, one hour after they hit Ellis Island, they were married, 1922. They lived together until death.

SI: Did your mother know that coming over, that she was going to get married?

NA: Oh, sure, yes, but she didn't know my father at that time.

SI: Had their families known each other in Sicily?

NA: I would think they did. Yes, they did, but my mother never met my father until she came to the United States and he came over.

KD: You mentioned in the pre-interview survey that your father served in the United States Army, 1916 to 1918.

NA: Yes, that's right, the First World War.

KD: What did he do? Did he go over to France?

NA: Oh, yes, he was in combat. He was stationed in Georgia, in the cavalry, whatever outfit that was. Yes, he fought in the war.

KD: Did he ever talk about it?

NA: That's one thing my dad, honestly and sincerely, never talked about, the war, never ever, never talked about the war at all, to me. He might have to my older brothers. We had seven boys, no girls. So, he probably maybe talked to my older brothers. Four of them were in the Second World War. He probably might've talked to them, but not me. I never ever heard him talk about the war, never.

SI: Did he get involved in any veterans' groups?

NA: Perfectly honest with you, none. Really, he got involved in no service groups at all. No, he was busy working. He had seven kids to feed, a lot of kids in those days.

SI: Do you happen to know if he was wounded?

NA: No, he was never wounded. I would've known that through his records, but, no, he was in the cavalry. What he did? beats the heck out of me; I have no idea.

SI: Are you the youngest of the seven?

NA: No, I'm the third youngest. I had a smaller brother, another brother in New Brunswick living, and then, me, and then, my other four brothers.

SI: Tell me a little about the family before you were born, your older brothers.

NA: Well, let's see, my brothers range from 1922--my oldest brother was born in 1922--and, hell, the last one was born in 1937. That's about it.

SI: Before you were born in Newark, the family had lived in this Pennsylvania coalmining area.

NA: That's right, coalmining area.

SI: Your father worked in the coal mines.

NA: And my dad worked in the coal mine, yes. They moved out there; tried it out here. I guess he wasn't so enthused about here and he went back to Pennsylvania. He worked in a coal mine for thirty-three years.

SI: Did he have a job in Newark? Was there a reason why they chose Newark?

NA: I'll tell you, I don't know the job that he held in Newark, I really don't, never mentioned that to me that I remember. He probably did, but not that I remember, and then, we were only here about a year or two, then, went back to Pennsylvania.

SI: Your earliest memories are of growing up in Pennsylvania.

NA: I just remember that my youngest brother died in Pennsylvania, from pneumonia. What the hell? He was only eighteen months old and that's about the only thing I remember. Then, I just remember where we lived and my dad going to work every morning at the coal mine, with that damn lamp on. [laughter] Yes, that's all he used to do, go to work. I saw these fellows. Dad was working very hard. My dad worked very hard.

SI: Was everybody's father a coalminer in the neighborhood?

NA: All miners. There was nowhere else to work. In that town that we were in, which is a very small town, Twin Rocks, Pennsylvania, that was a very, very small town. There's only three hundred people and that's where we lived most of our lives.

SI: Do you happen to know what company owned the mine or what company they worked for?

NA: Well, let me see, Big Bend Coal Mine. Big Bend is the name of the company that owned it and that's where he worked. He worked there a long time.

SI: Was your father involved in any unions at this time?

NA: Oh, sure, the coalminers' union [the United Mine Workers of America]. John L. Lewis was the president, but not that my father was that active and he really wasn't. He really wasn't that active in the union, even though he was a member, but he was never that active.

SI: What was the area in the town you grew up in like? What do you remember about that?

NA: Well, I remember the town was very small. My god, if you'd compare it to here, maybe from here to Highland Park, which is the next town over, that's about how big it was, because you only had three hundred people living in the whole town. That's all there were, one strip, one road.

SI: That is just a couple of streets away.

NA: Just a couple streets and that's all there was.

SI: You said the family came here to New Brunswick in 1940.

NA: 1940, yes.

SI: You were about ten then.

NA: Ten years old, yes.

SI: You started school in Twin Rocks.

NA: Well, yes, I started school in Pennsylvania, and then, we continued here.

SI: What was the school like in Pennsylvania?

NA: Christ, I'll tell you the truth, Shaun, I don't remember that. [laughter] I really don't. I don't remember too much of this. I remember the school and everything, going to school, but I don't remember too much about it. I don't remember any of the teachers.

SI: Your time in Pennsylvania was during the Great Depression. Do you remember that affecting your family at all? Did your father get laid off?

NA: Honestly, no. I don't remember anything about that--too young. I was only, what, ten, thirteen years old? I don't remember that much.

SI: Did your mother work outside the home? I would imagine probably not.

NA: Never. My mother never was employed, always a housewife. With seven kids, that was all she could do. [laughter]

SI: Do you remember anything your mother would do to kind of keep the house going? Did you raise any food yourselves in a garden or anything?

NA: Oh, Shaun, absolutely. We had a garden. My mother was an extremely good cook and knew how to take care of food. She really did at that. People were unbelievable. We were all healthy kids and, yet, in 1930, I think the only thing my father was making was maybe fifteen cents an hour, when we went back to Pennsylvania and probably before we ever left Pennsylvania. I remember the pay as being only fifteen cents an hour and he worked a lot. He went to work in the dark and always came home in the dark. That's the amount of hours the guys worked, very, very hard work.

SI: Did your older brothers have to go out and get jobs when they were young, like fourteen or fifteen?

NA: Okay, yes. My brother, my oldest brother, went to work with my father and my father was a foreman. He was in the front car, midnight shift. I don't know if you guys know it, but they carried empty carts, train carts like, into the mine, filled them up, and then, took them back out. Well, my father had ninety-nine cars on his shift that one night. He went in and, unknowingly, there was another train loaded on the way out and he couldn't warn my brother. So, he smashed right into it. He had no control. My father got thrown into a cul-de-sac like and my brother did, too, in the last car. He was in the ninety-ninth car, fortunately, but he got his foot smashed. The next day, my father came out to Pennsylvania [New Jersey] and wanted to move out here again and we did, in 1940. We left Pennsylvania, came here in 1940, when he came out, got a job. If I'm not mistaken, he got a job at the Raritan Arsenal, which was where they produced ammunition for the service. That's where he went to work. That's about it.

SI: This accident, where your brother's foot was ruined ...

NA: That's the contributory factor for coming out here. He said, "No way," because we were all headed for the coal mines and he didn't want that. He did the right thing. [laughter] He really did, because we diversified in every direction after that.

SI: What was that move like for you? Was it difficult to relocate from rural Pennsylvania to New Brunswick, New Jersey?

NA: Well, I'll tell you, I remember coming out, because we had a two-car caravan that we came out with. I was with my mother and I don't who else, but we drove from Pennsylvania out to here, New Jersey. It just was a long ride. It really was.

SI: What part of New Brunswick did you move to?

NA: Downtown New Brunswick, near the water, the canal. There's a canal in New Brunswick, by Carman Street. I don't know if you know the name.

SI: I do not.

NA: No? but that's right along the canal, up from the canal maybe one or two blocks. We lived there for a while. Then, we made a couple more moves, and then, my father bought a home near French Street, New Brunswick, between French and Jersey Avenue, place called Comstock Street. He moved there, bought a home there, and then, we lived there until 1955. That's when my father moved to Highland Park. My brothers were all gone by then. They were in different directions, wherever they were going.

SI: Did your family know anybody in New Brunswick?

NA: Yes, my cousins lived in Highland Park, which is the next town over. My mother's sister, my aunt, lived in Highland Park and they were the factor, mostly. They'd come out here because we had relatives here. That's where it all started. From then on, we made out pretty well.

SI: Can you describe the neighborhood that you first moved into?

NA: Well, Downtown New Brunswick was not a very rich section. It wasn't poor, but how can I describe it? They're not "poor" poor, but they're not well-off. We all worked. I went to work when I was eleven years old and my brothers did, too. We all worked, and then, a few of my brothers, two of my brothers, had to quit school in order to support the family.

SI: You went to work at eleven. What did you do?

NA: You know where Albany Street is at in New Brunswick? There was a little fruit and vegetable store there. I worked there from the time I was eleven years old until I was about fourteen years old and I mean going on the truck delivering vegetables to people [who] made orders. I did that for quite a while. My top pay was seven-fifty a week. [laughter] I worked a lot of hours for that, really did. That was a nice time, really enjoyed that.

SI: Would you work before and after school?

NA: After school only, yes, only after school and on weekends, yes, after school only and Saturdays. Sundays, everybody in New Jersey was shut down on a Sunday. Nobody worked. I don't know if you guys would remember that, but Sunday was a taboo. There was nobody working at all.

SI: The blue laws? [Editor's Note: The blue laws, also known as the Sunday laws, were intended to restrict activities and work on Sunday largely for religious reasons.]

NA: Yes. Everybody was closed and, after that, then, things started breaking loose.

SI: You moved to New Brunswick just before World War II started or before America got involved in World War II.

NA: That's right.

SI: Your father had a job at Raritan Arsenal.

NA: I think he worked at the Raritan Arsenal; now, don't quote me. I'm not sure exactly if he worked there, but, during the war, he worked other places.

SI: Do you know where?

NA: He worked for Carter Products, Carter Pills. I don't know if you remember the company. Carter Pills, that's where he used to work, in North Brunswick, and that's the only place I remember him ever working in--Raritan Arsenal in Edison, and then, North Brunswick, Carter Products. They made pills. That's about it. That's all I remember him working in. Then, my other brothers, well, they were going into the service. Four of my brothers went in the service.

SI: Tell me a little bit about that. When did your first brother go into the service? Was it early in the war?

NA: Oh, yes. My first brother went in the service in 1942, right in the beginning of '42, then, one right after the other, because the ages were close. They all got drafted pretty much right in a row. My oldest brother, my top four brothers, my older brothers, all were in the service.

SI: Were they all in the Army?

NA: Three in the Army and one in the Navy. My brother in the Navy didn't see no action, but he was in the Navy during the war, and then, the war ended. My other three brothers were all [overseas]--one was in the Pacific and two were in Europe.

SI: Did you correspond with them? Did you try to follow where they were going?

NA: Oh, yes, they used to write a lot. My dad would write to them. Three of my older brothers, they were really in the war. One was in the First Division. My other brother, Tony, was in Fifth Army with [General] Patton. I think Patton was the Fifth Army or the Third.

SI: Third Army.

NA: Third Army, was it? because I know he was with Patton. My brother Joe was in the 41st "Sunset" Division. He spent eighteen months in New Guinea, which was a rat hole. [laughter] It

really was. How the hell he ever stayed there for eighteen months is beyond me. He'd say, "Hey, Nick, we had to do what we had to do because our next step was going right into Japan." Fortunately, it didn't happen. Yes, they had a rough, rough time in the service.

SI: When Pearl Harbor was attacked, where were you?

NA: I was standing right at the corner of Carman Street and John Street in New Brunswick on a manhole cover. We were playing ball. That's when somebody came down and said the war broke out. That's when we all went in to listen to the radio, because we had no TV. So, we all listened to it and, I'll tell you, at that point, what the hell was I, twelve years old?

SI: Yes, probably eleven or so.

NA: Well, I don't remember that much. Yes, I didn't know too much about what war even meant at that time. I knew what war was, but, well, it didn't strike me as hard as it would've now, if it would've happened now, but there was a pretty bad year. My mother and father went through a lot of turmoil thinking about it.

SI: To step back, was your neighborhood mostly Italian or was it a mixed neighborhood?

NA: After the war, was 1946, it was mostly, well, a lot of Italian, but, then, there was a lot of Hungarian and Polish people, because we lived between French Street in New Brunswick and Jersey Avenue in New Brunswick, which is a lot of Hungarian people, Polish people. That's about it, just Polish and Hungarian, mostly, and Italian. That's about it, yes, but there were a lot of Italians in that area.

KD: During your school years, did you have any hobbies or did you play any sports?

NA: Well, I personally did not play in any sports, hobbies, no, not that much, but my next brother to me, the younger brother, he did play sports. I didn't. I didn't play; I went right to work. I didn't have time for sports, really didn't. [laughter]

KD: The money that you made, did that go over to the family?

NA: I gave it to my parents. I gave it all to my mother, yes. She knew how to take care of money. They really did. My mother and father knew how to take care of money and they spent it wisely and, mostly, on food. [laughter] For that many children, you have to have a lot of food, but, then, again, she knew how to do it.

SI: When you lived downtown, was it also a mixture of the same people or was it different?

NA: Well, I'm going to tell you the truth, in Downtown New Brunswick, there were a lot of Italians, there really was, a lot of Italians, and I think it was just a real good mixture of people, German, I remember Jewish. We had a lot of Jewish people, German, and, boy, we really all got along. I'll tell you, unbelievable, the way people got along at that time and we really did. Everybody had no problems, hardly ever.

SI: Growing up in an Italian family, were there any traditions that were passed down from your parents to you, in terms of food or language or the holidays?

NA: Well, we just had a tradition at Eastertime, you must kiss your father's hand before dinner, and went to church. We all attended church pretty regular. That's about it, nothing extraordinary.

SI: Which church did you go to in New Brunswick?

NA: In New Brunswick, we used to go to St. John's, which is one block up, and then, we moved up to, in--what year was that? maybe late '40s, early '50s--we moved to New Brunswick up in the northern part. Then, we went to St. Mary's Church, which is the large Catholic church in New Brunswick. That's on Sandford Street and Remsen Avenue.

SI: Did a lot of family activities focus on the church? Were you involved in social groups at the church?

NA: No, none, really, none, never. We never got involved in anything like that.

SI: Would the church sponsor any festivals, like Italian festivals or just general religious festivals?

NA: Oh, yes, oh, sure, they did. Oh, yes, they had a lot of the occasions, Italian. Then, in North Brunswick, they used to have the Italian carnival, things like that, yes. They had nice programs going.

SI: Would you go to them?

NA: Oh, yes, I went to them. I went to a lot of them. I didn't go to that many, a lot of them, but not a great amount. I had too many things at home.

SI: You went to work very early and you went to work at this fruit stand.

NA: Fruit and vegetable market.

SI: Fruit and vegetable market. Tell me what a typical day was like when you were working there while you were going to school.

NA: I don't know, a typical day? Working, that was mostly it, work. I then had a lot of work to do at home, too, help my mother. Yes, we did a lot of work together, our family really did. We did a lot of work all together. We all pitched in and that's just about it. It wasn't anything extraordinary, just the run of the daily goings. That's all.

SI: Can you talk about what was life like then and what it took to get through the average day?

NA: I'll tell you, mostly working. We used to have a lot of fun. I used to go to the games. New Brunswick had a lot of sports there, football. We used to go to a lot of football games, basketball, was really prominent then in basketball, and that's just about it. We used to go attend the sports activities. That's about all.

SI: Did they have leagues for children?

NA: Well, we used to have, more or less, a grown league, which is called the Industrial League. Five of my brothers played in those leagues, yes, because my brothers, when they went to the service, after that, they went to work in Squibb's. Yes, I had four brothers, all of my brothers were in the service, all went to work at Squibb's right after the war. As soon as they came home, they all went to the same place, and then, my other brothers, my younger brother--I don't know where he worked, doubt if he worked, because he was still in school. Then, I worked in that vegetable market. That's about it.

SI: As the war went on, could you see the vegetable market being affected? Did rationing affect the vegetable market?

NA: In the vegetable market, no, but I knew that there were a lot of--we had, what did they call that? You had to have slips in order to get sugar.

SI: Ration coupons?

NA: That's it, ration coupons, I remember that, yes. Boy, you could only buy so much [that] you're only allowed to buy, that's it.

SI: Did you have to collect them at the store or did they not collect them at the vegetable market?

NA: Oh, no, they collected them. I'll tell you the truth, I don't remember anything being rationed in the vegetable field. I really don't; had some weird stories when I was working there, guys coming home from overseas, but that's about it, no.

SI: Do you want to share any of those stories?

NA: Well, I remember, when I worked in that fruit and vegetable market, when the war ended, these guys coming home from Europe--they mostly came home from Europe in that area, because Camp Kilmer's right here. Well, when they came home, we had, I think, two or three Air Force officers that came to New Brunswick. We used to sell Brussel sprouts, a lot of Brussel sprouts, and these were prominent in England. So, these three guys, these three officers, they bought the whole--we had big cages of [Brussel sprouts]--they bought the whole two or three big boxes, paid cash for them, picked them up, went out in the street and threw them in the gutter. "What the hell?" "We never want to even see another Brussel sprout," because that's all they ate when they were in England, [laughter] is Brussel sprouts. That was very, very funny, but guys would do that and we didn't [understand], "What the hell?" I figured, I guess, they were right. They just didn't like Brussel sprouts. My boss went out, picked them up off the gutter and resold

them. [laughter] He was funny, boy, but a lot of GIs coming through New Brunswick. [Editor's Note: Camp Kilmer, in Piscataway, New Jersey, was a major transportation hub and processing center for soldiers heading to and returning from Europe during World War II.]

SI: What kind of impact did Camp Kilmer have on the town, during the war and after?

NA: Well, I'll tell you, things were really moving, because these guys bought a lot of stuff. The gin mills were really going full blast and these guys over here, there were a hell of a lot of people here. I don't know if you know that, but, in the Second World War, they processed thirty-three million applications through this Camp Kilmer. That's guys going over and coming back and going over, back over, back and forth. They processed applications for thirty-three million GIs. Most of them were probably two, three, four times filing, but they did a lot of processing here, when we were really loaded. Then, across the street, towards the end of the war, they had all Italian prisoners here. They used to actually get leaves to come [to town] and they shopped in New Brunswick, yes, but they bought. Whatever they could buy, they bought, and the GIs, too. Yes, the GIs really had things going.

SI: Did they have USOs [United Service Organization] in town?

NA: Yes. Now, USO, I think there was one in Highland Park. There was one in New Brunswick. I think it was on New Street. I think there was one on New Street and I don't remember where else, but they had them.

SI: It sounds like the town was pretty welcoming towards the GIs.

NA: I think so, oh, sure, because it was unbelievable when that war ended. The excitement there was phenomenal. It really was a very happy time and there was, oh, a lot of GIs around, [laughter] but it was good, though. They were good guys.

SI: You went to high school during the war years.

NA: Yes.

SI: What was New Brunswick High School like when you went there?

NA: Well, my brother and I are the only two that attended high school in New Jersey. We were the only two. It was a good school. We all got along. I didn't start school until I was almost seven years old. Things were just rough at those times. I don't know. It was just a regular school. We didn't have a lot of problems. People got along with each other.

SI: Did you have a favorite subject or something you were really interested in?

NA: Well, for me, mathematics was my favorite. Math, I never got below an "A" in math. For some reason or other, I liked that, but all the rest of those subjects, you could throw them away. [laughter] I wasn't interested. I wanted to go to work. I really did.

SI: You probably did not get too involved in extracurricular activities.

NA: No, I didn't. I really couldn't, Shaun and Kyle. I had to make money. I sincerely wanted to make money, too, for my family, because we needed everything we could get and I worked a lot.

SI: Who owned the store that you worked in?

NA: A fellow named Levine, a Jewish fellow, treated us terrific. I worked there and two of my brothers worked there.

SI: At the same time?

NA: Yes, at the same time. Periodically, at a time, we did it, three of us. The three youngest all worked there. It was good. We really enjoyed it.

SI: How far was this from where you lived?

NA: Oh, I lived [and] worked in New Brunswick. I would say maybe a mile-and-a-half. I used to walk it. I lived on Comstock Street and we'd walk to Albany [Street], about a mile-and-a-half, two miles.

SI: At that time, that area was full of shops.

NA: Oh, yes, they had a lot of little shops around. They used to sell live chickens. They'd kill them while you were there, skin them while you were there. Yes, you'd watch them, I'd watch them. Not too many, there weren't a lot of shops, but there was enough. There were a lot of markets, clothing stores, Newberry's Five-and-Ten, Woolworth Five-and-Ten, that type of stores. They were mostly the ones that were prominent in New Brunswick, and then, they started coming out--what, 1947, '48?--they came out with the shopping malls and that killed the towns. Yes, then, they started building those malls, people all went out to shop out there. They [the downtown stores] didn't last too long.

SI: That is a big difference between now and then. Today, there are restaurants and specialty shops, but, back then, you would go downtown because you needed things there to live.

NA: That's exactly right, Shaun, that's right. We only went into town for the necessities and to work, that's all. When I went to the movies, first movie I went to in New Brunswick cost ten cents. That was the Albany Theater. There was a theater in New Brunswick. Then, there was another one called the Strand and the State Theater on Livingston Avenue. Well, you put down ten cents, you went in to see a whole movie. That was cheap, [laughter] but, then, again, not much money around, either.

SI: Did you have any other opportunities for entertainment, anything you would do for fun?

NA: Attend dances in my early years, eighteen, nineteen, twenty. We used to go down, we had in this area here, in Edison, they had very popular bands, Harry James, Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy

Dorsey, Xavier Cugat. They all came up here and we used to attend them really regularly. That was really a nice time. It really was. Those bands were so good and they were loaded. Oh, I'm telling you, they were packed. Those people packed them right in. We enjoyed that. That was a good time in my life.

SI: Golden era of Big Band music.

NA: Big Band music, yes. Harry James, man, that was tops. [laughter] That really was, and then, later on, you got the musicians, the singers, Frank Sinatra, Al Martino and those guys. I'll tell you, those guys used to pack those places, unbelievable. Well, I know you guys don't remember that, because, at that time, Frank Sinatra [was] almost gone. You remember him?

SI: No, I know Frank Sinatra, when he was younger.

NA: Yes, but do you remember listening to him a lot?

SI: Yes, a decent amount.

NA: Yes. All the main [singers], Al Martino, Perry Como, I'll tell you, every time those guys would come around, they would be loaded. They really would and that was our entertainment, mostly.

SI: Did you ever get a chance to travel outside of New Brunswick before you became an adult and went into the service?

NA: Never. Honestly, Shaun, Kyle, we never, hardly, left New Brunswick. First of all, I couldn't afford it, but, no, didn't travel that far out. We really didn't. The only thing we used to do is maybe go to the seashore, maybe a couple times a year. That was it. That's all. They're not exciting years, but they were good years. They were happy years.

SI: Would you ever go to New York City?

NA: [laughter] Oh, the first time I went to New York? I think that the first time I went to New York was to see a Yankee game. That's the first time I saw New York--too damn crowded for me. Oh, I'll tell you, it was awful. The traffic there is unbelievable. No, we never left too much. We really didn't.

SI: You said that V-J Day, when the war ended, was very memorable. Can you tell us more about it and where you were?

NA: Coming down, you know where the elevation to the train station is at in New Brunswick? Well, there was a company called Smith and Solomon, was a trucking company. They brought all their tractors and trailers through New Brunswick and the whole damn top of the trailer was all filled with people, inside [and] out. I mean, it was unbelievable. It was just like you see like it happened in New York. I mean, the people were really unbelievable. Boy, when that ended, I'll never forget that. I was caught in that traffic. I was delivering vegetables that day and I'm

coming through New Brunswick. It's hard to get through. I couldn't believe that all these people [turned out], said, "Oh, my god, look at this." It was so memorable, I'll tell you, that's unbelievable, a lot of people there, really happy people.

SI: Were all of your brothers still overseas?

NA: Oh, yes. My three older brothers were still overseas. My other brother in the Navy, I think, if I'm not mistaken, he was in Sampson, New York, but my other three brothers were still there. In fact, my brother Joe, which is the third youngest from the four, he went to Hiroshima right after they bombed it. Boy, he said he could not believe the disaster that produced. I imagine that must stick in your mind for a lot of years, because that was real devastation they went through, but they were happy, because, hey, they were ready to invade Japan. It would've cost us over a million GIs. Had that invasion happened, they claimed that a million of our guys would've been killed. That's a lot of guys. So, you've got to be happy that that happened, unfortunate it happened, but that's the way it is. That's war. It's brutal. You guys were never in the service, were you? [Editor's Note: Hiroshima was the target of the first atomic raid on August 6, 1945. Nagasaki was attacked on August 9, 1945. V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific.]

SI: No.

NA: Well, it was difficult. It was really difficult times, but everything came out all right.

SI: How would you get news about the war? Would you follow it in the newspapers?

NA: Radio.

SI: Radio.

NA: Yes. I did get a little radio and we'd get a lot of the news from there and we'd listen to *The Green Hornet*, *Mr. America*--what the hell was that?--FBI, there was some program about the FBI we used to listen to [*Gang Busters?*], but that was the only thing we had to really go by on anything. There was a radio we had. 1946 is when we got our first TV. It was only about that big and you had to have a magnifying glass to see the picture. [laughter] That was really nice. Boy, I'll tell you, those inventions came along and they came rapidly right after the war. Boy, they were coming up with everything, TVs, nice telephones, the whole bit. Yes, this country was really on the move at that time.

SI: What was it like welcoming your brothers back? Did you notice a change in them when they came back? Did they talk about things?

NA: Well, I remember my older brother came home from Europe and my mother, my father and my brother went to Fort Dix to pick him up, and then, the second brother was in Fort Dix. The other brother, my youngest brother, was in New Guinea, he came in by train or whatever. I don't remember picking him up, but, yes, it was really a happy occasion to go over there and pick him up, because he hadn't been home. He went in in 1942, in early '42, and didn't come back until

the end of '45. None of my brothers ever had a leave, never came home, too, went away, went in the service, that was it, except my brother in the Navy. He came home on leave. The others didn't. They all went from boot camp right to [overseas].

SI: They all came back to your house. Did they have families of their own then?

NA: No, none of my brothers were married until after the war.

SI: Did you notice any changes? Did they have trouble adjusting to civilian life again?

NA: Yes. My third brother, the third youngest, came down with a terrible case of malaria and my mother had a rough time with him. It was really awful. What that guy went through was unbelievable, how the hell they could live through that, but he really had a severe case of malaria, always sweating.

SI: Yes, a lot of guys in the South Pacific had horrible diseases.

NA: Yes, the South Pacific guys had a lot problems, physically.

SI: You mentioned earlier that this was obviously a very difficult period for your parents, having four sons in the service.

NA: Yes, my mother had--well, let me see--I was in Korea, so, yes, during the Second World War, there were four sons in service. Then, after that, I went to Korea, and then, after that, my brother went. He was not in Vietnam. He also was in the Navy, but he was on a destroyer during the Korean Era. So, he didn't see action at that time, but rather served time at sea in the postwar era in Europe.

SI: Were your parents involved in anything else related to the war? Was your father an air raid warden, that sort of thing?

NA: No, nothing really. My father never got involved in too much of anything. No, he really wasn't. He wasn't involved at all. He was happy to be home, period.

SI: When people in your neighborhood or in your circle of friends would lose family members, people killed in the war, was there any kind of reaction or neighborhood effort to help those folks?

NA: I'm going to tell you, I was too young. I don't know, how old was I in the Second World War? fourteen, fifteen years old, and I didn't see too much of that, even though it probably went on, but there wasn't too much for me that I saw. Maybe my older people remember, but I don't remember much about that. I just remember the happy occasions. The war was over. I remember being stopped on the street in New Brunswick one time, that a woman got a letter from the War Department and she couldn't read. She asked me if I could read it and I did. It was only--what the heck was it?--maybe her son was in transfer, wherever, but she was very deathly afraid that he was killed. So, I told her, "No, no, he's okay. He's there," wherever he's at,

wherever he was going, and I told her, "It's nothing, no problem." Boy, she was so happy, ran home. That's about the only thing that I remember. Personally, I didn't know anybody that was killed in the service, nobody.

SI: When did you graduate from high school?

NA: 1950.

SI: 1950. It was just before the Korean War started.

NA: Yes.

SI: Did you just see yourself getting a job?

NA: When I got out in June, right the following week, I joined the Marine Corps, right after, because I knew I was going into the service. Between you and I, I knew where I was headed. So, if I was going over there, I wanted to make sure I was going to be taken good care of. That's why I joined the Marines and I was right, let me tell you, a good bunch of people.

SI: That was your main reason for joining the Marines. Did you know anyone who had been a Marine that influenced you?

NA: I probably did, because I remember them being a Marine; no, I don't remember that as much. I really don't. I just knew that I wanted to. I enlisted with a buddy of mine in New Brunswick. We both went together. We went to boot camp together, but, when boot camp was over, I went to Korea and he went to Europe. So, what he did in Europe, beats the hell out of me, [laughter] but that's about it.

SI: What was the whole process of signing up and getting inducted into the Marine Corps like?

NA: Well, I signed up in New Brunswick, and then, I had to go to Newark for induction. I went there, got on a train and went to Parris Island, South Carolina. It was like coming from out of the day into the night. [laughter] It really was. It was a real experience. I would want everybody to go through that, because you grow up very rapidly. You really do. You grow up overnight, because, boy, these people knew how to handle people and knew what they had to have done and they got it done. They really did.

SI: The drill instructors at Parris Island.

NA: Oh, boy, yes. Three of them, they were really good guys, but they were rough. I mean, they really were. Well, they were all combat veterans. They knew what we were going up against. They just wanted to make sure you're not going to go over there really green. They helped you out as much as they could. They really did. They showed you the good ropes.

SI: Once you get in to Parris Island and you get off a bus or something ...

NA: Off the train.

SI: Off a train. What happens right away?

NA: There was a drill instructor there, name was Sergeant (Bell?). He was a big guy. He was a Korean veteran. Boy, let me tell you something, he hustled us like we couldn't believe. We actually thought we'd made a terrible mistake. We really did. He was very rough and very crude. Boy, he got us, rustled us along and took us through Parris Island. From then on, boy, every day was really rough. It really was. They knew how to handle people for sure and they knew how to prepare you. I came to find out they did.

SI: What was the physical training like?

NA: Well, there was a lot of running, enacting combat, exercises, marching. Marching was the basis of coordination, for some reason. From the time that I remember getting there, we looked like a bunch of I don't know what, but, when the nine weeks were up, man, we were really a sharp, sharp-looking bunch of guys. We really were. I'll tell you, they whipped you right into shape. It's mostly coordination. They don't want you to think. When they tell you something, you're not to think about it--do it. The hell ever it was, you do it and that was the basis. They're terrific. They were terrific guys. They really were. Thank God for those guys, got us through a lot of problems.

SI: This was in the summer.

NA: Yes, July 24th.

SI: That must have been particularly rough in South Carolina.

NA: 115 degrees, they would stop training. Once it was less than 115, we trained. It was a lot of physical training, fighting, running, boxing, how to handle yourself in hand-to-hand combat, the whole bit. They went through the whole routine and they wanted to make sure you knew what you were doing.

SI: You mentioned a lot of these guys who were training you were combat veterans. Did they bring in any examples from what they had been through?

NA: No, never did, just, "Do what I'll tell you and you're going to be okay," never got that close to a DI. He wouldn't let you get that close. At the end, when it was all over, we all went to the "slop shoot" and had beer and that was it. [laughter] You were gone and so were they. That's how quick it was, but you remembered every one of them very clearly.

SI: Can you give us some examples of things they would do to keep guys in line or just to keep you on your toes?

NA: Those DIs would come up with--I remember the first day we went into service. There was a guy that had a Marine tattoo on his shoulder here, on his arm, and he went berserk, the DI.

This was the big guy. He went berserk. He hollered out to his guys, the other two drill instructors, "Get me a razor blade, get me a razor blade," and he scared the hell out of that guy. They threw him right down the middle of the barracks, from one end to the other, I mean, really worked him over. That was it, and then, "Go to bed," [laughter] but he really worked him. He scared the heck out of that guy. He really did. They would pick a fight. They picked on my buddy that I went into the service with. They didn't like him. His name was (DeMillio?). He was a big Italian kid. This drill instructor was a Canadian; well, not that he wasn't American, but he'd come from Canada. He'd come right out, pick that guy up, he said, "Come into my office." I'll tell you, I was at the window where I could see into his office and they fought like hell. They really did. At the end, when it was all over, they came out, my buddy stayed at attention, puffing like heck. His shirt was ripped, he's bleeding; the DI too. He really worked him over a little bit. He really did. They were both beat up and all he did, the drill instructor walked around to every guy, and then, pushed the lights out. That meant, "Go to bed." That was it. The psychology, man, those guys must've known what the heck they were doing. They really did. They straightened a lot of people out. [laughter] I'll tell you, they did some crazy things. I saw two guys crack up. Two guys really went berserk and, after that, not too much more, just run-of-the-mill hard work, hard work. They went into training, combat training. That was just run-of-the-mill, but they were on you. They trained you good.

SI: Was that during your boot camp or after?

NA: No, that was during boot camp, and then, we got transferred to Camp Pendleton, California. That's where I received extensive training.

SI: That was the advanced training.

NA: That was the advanced. I stayed there for six months. Yes, I stayed there for six months, and then, I went to Korea. They trained us into a weapons company, battalion, artillery, mortars, seventy-five recoilless rifles [the seventy-five-millimeter M20 recoilless rifle], all the specialized [weapons], like I said, the mortars. They trained you in that in every area, and then, when you go overseas, they put you where they want you. That's about it.

SI: When you were at Camp Pendleton, did they do a little more of, "This is what is happening in Korea and we want you to be ready for this?"

NA: Oh, yes. There, they took us through mountains that resembled Korea, snow-capped mountains. We used to get raided by our own guys, just to show you what could happen. I'll tell you, they were really good. Up in Upstate California, the temperatures up there were brutal. We went on a twenty-six-mile forced march, ninety-pound pack on your back, for twenty-six miles, and, boy, I'll tell you. If anybody would get frostbitten during that hike, because the temperatures were as much as forty degrees below zero, if anybody'd ever got frostbitten, they were court-martialed. Two of our guys did get [frostbite], but they had no reason to get [frostbite]. They had the correct facilities not to get frostbitten, because that was the brutal part. Two of our guys did get frostbitten and they both got court-martialed. I don't know what happened, but that was not permitted, because [with] the equipment you had, there's no reason why you should get frostbitten. Then, let me tell you, that was a forced march through ice and

snow, sleet. It was good training. It really was. I'm so thankful that I went through that. I really am.

SI: In Pendleton, were you with any of the men you had been with at Parris Island?

NA: Nope.

SI: All new people?

NA: They all separated into different areas. Not one fellow from my platoon was in there.

SI: Just to stick with Parris Island for one minute, was there a relationship between the men in your training platoon or company?

NA: You mean with the DIs?

SI: With the men you were training with on Parris Island.

NA: Oh, we got to know each other pretty good. We really did. Yes, I had a lot of good friends. I really did. I had a lot of good friends. One time, I remember, we were marching and this one fellow, black fellow, could never hold his rifle straight. It was always crooked and the DI told him a hundred times, "Leroy, you can't do that--hold that gun up." [laughter] So, one day, the DI got mad and this guy happened to be in front of me. He came over and said--his name was Leroy Washington--he said, "Leroy, I told you. You don't understand?" He says, "Give me that rifle," and he took his rifle away from him. He says, "Abate, kick him in the ass as hard as you can." [laughter] I knew that if I didn't, he'd have kicked me. I kicked that guy--he went through the whole platoon. [laughter] I just hit him a certain way and he just couldn't stand up straight. He just kept knocking guys down. [laughter] He said, "Abate, that's a good one." That was so funny. The guy looked so funny, Leroy Washington. I felt bad for the guy, but I said, "Hey, Leroy, what was I going to do?" He said, "I don't blame you."

SI: Were there a lot of African-Americans in the unit?

NA: Not that many. Oh, I'd say maybe three or four at the most.

SI: This is the first time that the Marine Corps went into a war integrated. Did everybody get along?

NA: At that time, we all got along. We really did. I remember getting along very good with this fellow I'm talking about and the other guys, too, they got along well, but there weren't that many, wasn't maybe three or four, that's all, out of all of us.

SI: Did people from different regions of the country get along together, North and South or East and West?

NA: Well, you would know that "the Rebels," the Southern people, they didn't like that too much. They really didn't, even though they didn't show it too much, but you could see that they didn't like the guys, but, eventually, as far as I could see, as time [went on], even in Korea, they got along pretty good, hey, because you've got to depend on that guy. You really do. It sounds old-fashioned and everything, but you've got to depend on that guy and you certainly don't want to rub them wrong. So, that was it. You got along pretty good. You would find out that the guy's worth it, that I know I did. "He may be able to save my life one day and he will. Being a friend of mine, he will," and that's what the service is about. You've got to depend on people with you. That was very important.

SI: Tell us about being out in California. Did you get a chance to go on leave or see anything of the area?

NA: I went on leave when I came out of boot camp. I came home for, I think, two weeks. Then, from there, I went right to California, to Camp Pendleton, and, from there, I went to Korea. That was it, the advanced training and that was all.

SI: You said you had not really been outside of New Brunswick before. Were you curious to find out what other parts of the country were like?

NA: Yes, I mean, when we were in Camp Pendleton, we visited Los Angeles, San Diego. I went through a few places. I've got pictures downstairs of the time I had in San Diego, Los Angeles. It was nice, but, like I said, I never did that much traveling, but I did do [it]. I went out. We went out together, a big bunch of us. That's about it. You got to know a lot of good guys.

SI: In-between boot camp and Pendleton, you came back home.

NA: Yes.

SI: What was that like, coming back home?

NA: Oh, I'm sorry, no, from Camp Pendleton, I went right to Korea.

SI: From Parris Island. After Parris Island, you came home.

NA: I came home. I think, if I'm not mistaken, I got a two-week furlough.

SI: Did you feel any different coming back home in a Marine uniform after going through Parris Island?

NA: Yes, I imagine I was really proud of myself. I really was. Yes, I was really proud of what was going on. I attended a wedding. My brother's brother-in-law got married. I went to his wedding. Nothing exciting happened during that time, spent a lot of time home with my parents and the family.

KD: In California, did you find yourself excelling in anything that you trained in? Was there anything you were really good at when you were training in California or did you find anything that you liked?

NA: Well, I wasn't a good sharpshooter on the rifle range, but I was a marksman. Well, I wasn't that bad, but, then, I got involved in the mortars, heavy machine-guns, because we were definitely scheduled to go to a weapons company. Weapons company means that you're going to be trained in all types of weapons, mortars, which I wound up with in Korea. I was in with eighty-ones. There's two different mortars--well, there's three--eighty-ones [the eighty-one-millimeter M1 mortar], sixties [the sixty-millimeter M2 mortar] and four-deuces [the 4.2-inch M30 mortar], they called it. They were all mortars. That's when I wound up in the eighty-one mortars. When I first got there, I was training--not training, you get involved in knowing the gun, knowing that weapon--and then, after I was there maybe, oh, I don't know how long in Korea, they sent me to [be] what is called a forward observer for the eighty-one mortars. That's what I did for I don't know how long, and then, I went back into the infantry company. Then, from there, in the last month of Korea, I was the supply sergeant for the entire platoon, entire brigade. That's what I did the last month. I was right at the 38th Parallel in Korea, because I was there maybe--the war ended in August and I left in February of that year. So, we used to watch these guys going into Panmunjom, at the peace meetings, admirals, colonels, all of them, going in these caravans. [Editor's Note: The Korean War ended with the signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953, at Panmunjom.] Boy, I'll tell you, they got a lot of blasting from the GIs. [laughter] I left before the war ended.

SI: When you say they got blasting from the GIs, would they shout things at them?

NA: Shouting, yes, shouting over, and those officers wouldn't even turn one way or the other, because GIs were mad, because it's a shame. They'd have you go up and take this hill, and then, you come back down at night, and then, you go back up again. "What?" The reasoning in these wars, we thought they were all screwed up. I guess they knew what they were doing, but they couldn't see that yo-yo effect, up and down, up and down. You get it, keep it--they didn't do that. So, it was an exciting year, for sure.

SI: Tell us how you got over to Korea and what that journey was like.

NA: Well, I was on the ship for two weeks.

SI: Do you remember the name of the ship?

NA: The one coming back I remember, but I don't know the name of the one going over. I forgot. The one coming back was the *General Hase* [USS *General W. F. Hase* (AP-146)], but the one going over, damn if I remember that one. It took us two weeks to get there, to Korea, a long time on the ocean.

SI: What were the conditions like on the ship for you?

NA: Well, they were mostly training, pulling guard duty on haystacks [smokestacks?]. We had three haystacks and we had to draw guard duty on those haystacks. [laughter] Now, why would you want to put me out there? We couldn't understand why we would want to guard a haystack. I said, "Why?" I'm looking at that ship, I look at the back of the ship and it's a hundred feet in the air or wherever, and then, I look at the front of the ship is under the ocean, under, and it was really rough, rough waters. I was going to say, sometimes, you'd pull guard duty, you wonder, "What the heck am I doing here?" but that's the way it was. You had a lot of guard duty to pull, KP [kitchen patrol]. Unfortunately, my name was A-B-A. I was the first one to get any kind of dirty duty, always. I was always the first in line for everything.

SI: Was the ship packed?

NA: Oh, yes. I think we had twenty-eight hundred of us on there and, coming back from Korea, we had six hundred war brides, guys that married Japanese and Korean women. No, I'm sorry, the ship I went over on, when it left Korea, it went back with these brides on it.

SI: Did you go directly to Korea or did you stop in Pearl Harbor or Japan?

NA: No, no, went directly there, if I'm not mistaken. Oh, no, I'm sorry, stopped at Okinawa--I'm sorry, Yokohama, not Okinawa. Then, from there, we went right into Pusan, not in the invasion of Pusan--they had an invasion there--we just landed there. Then, from there, we started going to our units, because it was right near the combat zone. We had to load up in trucks, and then, we got transported up to our area, wherever we were going.

SI: From getting on a truck in Pusan, did you go to a repple-depple [replacement depot]?

NA: No, we went right from the ship right into those trucks into our area, wherever we were going.

SI: You went right to your unit then.

NA: Yes, right to my unit, and that's when we were told what we were going to be doing.

SI: As you were going up to the line, could you see things happening?

NA: Yes. I'd never believed this [could happen], but we were in a line going up and we never knew it, but there was a battery of howitzers right next to us going up. As soon as we reached there, all of those guns went off. We really didn't know what the hell happened. It shook the heck out of the trucks. The dust was all over. After two seconds, we knew what had happened, but, boy, that was brutal. That noise was unbelievable, the way they let out with those guns. Almost all of them fired at one time. Boy, now I knew I was in Korea. That was the feeling. It happened right then and there. It was unbelievable, on the way up. It didn't take us long to get to the lines from there, didn't take us long at all.

KD: Do you remember the exact date that you arrived in Korea?

NA: Now, it was February the 28th [that] I left San Francisco. It had to be sometime the beginning of the second week in March, probably around the second week in March. The exact date, I don't really remember. I don't know.

SI: Was it cold when you got up there?

NA: Yes, it was pretty chilly. It wasn't snowing, though. It was cold. Korea's a very cold place. Boy, they had brutal cold there and we settled in at whichever platoon. I was in weapons company, First Battalion, Fifth Marines. That's where I went to. I got there and, from then on, they'd tell us what we're going to be doing.

SI: Tell us about getting acclimated to being in Korea, being where you were. You said you were getting familiar with the weapons. What was the average day like in that first period?

NA: Well, first when I got there, I was on the mortars. I would put charges on the mortars, hand them to the guy that was going to put them into the tube and we just kept doing that, just kept loading up and whatever. They would tell us how many charges to put on it and I'd give it to the guy that was going to handle it, the guy that's going to load it into the weapon, into the mortar. I kept doing that for a while. To tell you the truth, I don't know how long I did that. Then, they transferred me to a forward observer for the eighty-ones and we were up there with an artillery lieutenant and an Air Force captain. Those guys were so good, God, they really were. You wonder how these people do this, but they do it. Boy, they do it willingly. These Air Force guys would come over, right over our bunker, and as soon as they hit our bunker is when they'd start firing their weapons and you'd see those weapons going. I saw napalm going into the trenches. It was unbelievable. They would drop a napalm bomb in one trench and it would go like a snake all the way through, unbelievable. Those guys were so good. I'll tell you, [we have] got a lot of good people in this country. How the hell they ever got a lot of guts, they had it, they really did. That takes a unique guy to do things like that, especially when somebody's shooting at you.

SI: With the forward observers, you are up in the front of the line.

NA: You're on the top of a hill. We had a battery of machine-guns in front of us, and then, our mortars were behind us. We would tell them where to [fire], the charges and the whole bit. These machine-guns in front of us, they're good guys, boy, I'll tell you, and a lot of Rebels. [laughter] I hate to keep saying Rebels, but most of those riflemen, machine-guns, came from the South. They were really, really enthusiastic and good. They really were. I spent I don't know how many months there. Then, I got transferred. Then, the end for me was when I was supply sergeant for the platoon and, after that, went home.

SI: Once you joined the Fifth Marines, were you pretty much in the same spot?

NA: Oh, no, we kept moving. We moved a lot. In fact, we went from the East Coast to the West Coast, but I don't remember when we did that. Then, the Army took over certain areas, and then, we would move on to something else. It was just kept moving, back and forth. Some of these towns, I don't know none of the names of these towns that we were in, because they've got odd names. They were really odd names--you could hardly pronounce these names. That was it.

We just kept bouncing around. Then, at the end, we came down to the perimeter at Panmunjom. That's where I wound up my tour. We were a hundred yards away--we had a one-hundred-yard area around Panmunjom. We were not allowed to shoot within that zone and we were not allowed to shoot from that zone, but I remember that the guys in the Seventh Marines, they got court-martialed, almost a whole damn company of them, because they fired into the perimeter, the hundred-yard area. They weren't allowed. You were not allowed to shoot there, but the North Koreans were in that perimeter on the other side shooting at us and, yet, we weren't allowed to shoot at them. Finally, they [the Seventh Marines] did, but, after that, what happened? beats me. I didn't hear too much after that; things you're allowed to do, things you're not allowed to do. I'll tell you, it was a unique kind of war, right after the Second World War, where you did what you were supposed to do and that was it, it was over, but not here. Here, it was a different type of a war.

SI: To go back to when you became a forward observer, were you always with the same two other guys?

NA: Yes, mostly, the time I was there, three, four months, never changed. They were all the same guys.

SI: When you would call in fire, was that during an assault or was it when the Chinese were attacking?

NA: Yes, or the Koreans would be maybe probing our line. We were told--the Air Force captain would tell us--he wanted a certain area bombed or machine-gunned and he would tell us to fire a white phosphorus [round] so many yards and we did. If that was a good target, he would tell the guy, "On that white phosphorus, that round that was sent, hit that area," and the guy would know where to go, because a white phosphorus bomb would leave up a lot of smoke, white smoke. This way, they knew where to hit. As soon as they hit the top of our bunker, they'd start shooting. Man, I'm telling you, those guys, they almost took our helmets off. [laughter] They were so good, they really were. Guys knew what they were doing in my time, that I saw.

SI: Where you were, would you come under fire often?

NA: Yes, a few times, usually artillery. You would see incoming artillery. We would mostly get fired on when the seventy-five recoilless rifle was called up to hit a certain bunker or a certain outpost. They would come up, zero in on that outpost and that seventy-five recoilless rifle was accurate for I don't know how many miles. I mean, it was an accurate weapon and the North Koreans knew that. As soon as they saw one of those things fired, they would circle that whole area and saturate it with bombing, with mortars and artillery. That was the worst part. We always used to get mad at those guys, because we knew what was going to happen as soon as they left, but, hey, we needed them. They knocked out a lot of good positions. My only fear in Korea was calling in the rounds that may have been short rounds and hitting our own guys. I'll tell you, that plays on your mind when you knew that that could happen, if one of your guys made a mistake or if you made a mistake with the charges on there and you get a short round. A short round might hit your guys. That was hard, but that didn't happen that often, but it did happen.

SI: What were some of the most memorable things that happened in that period? What was it like living in the field and what were your living conditions like?

NA: Well, every once in a while, after being on the lines for so long, we'd come back to a rehab area, just a rest area, for a week or so. One time, when I was in with these guys, I don't know how many of us there were, maybe twenty-four in one tent, in the long tents. We'd be in tiers on the opposite [side]. In other words, over the hill, it'd be the Koreans, but we'd be always on this side over here, so [that] they couldn't see us. Well, this one fellow, his name was Jones, from one of the Southern states, all of a sudden, he lets out a yell and I heard a ping, like a shotgun. A shot came through that tent and went right in the top of his high hair and it came out at the bottom here, tore his whole face apart. They called the helicopter in to take him away, but he was only about three beds away from me. I said, "Oh, my god." The guy was cleaning his pistol on the next one up and accidentally discharged it and hit this guy. What happened to him? beats the hell out me. I don't remember. I saw South Koreans--you know what a Bangalore torpedo [a tube mine] is? Well, these folks didn't know it, but they put two of these Bangalore torpedoes on a fire. They were going to cook. When those things went off, they took both of their legs off. They evacuated them to a military hospital, but it's just stupid things like that, that people, they didn't know, I guess. They're older people, they didn't know it, but they used--it was a grill. Well, boy, that was pathetic. A lot of things happened. An eighteen, nineteen-year-old boy that was supposed to booby trap, he was supposed to booby trap a box, made a mistake. I don't know how the hell he did it. He either took the tape from the wrong area, took the tape from the down-up instead of from the top-down, and it went off, killed him, blew him up. Yes, you hear things like that and the guy was a young guy, eighteen, nineteen years old. He was gone. Stupid things happened, but they happen.

SI: How many casualties did your unit suffer?

NA: Well, we would have people getting hit by mortars. I made friends with a fellow, I'm not going to tell you his name, from Staten Island, New York. He was with [me] and I'd just made friends with him. He was married six months before and he went on the ship with me. I got to like him, an Italian kid. I got to like him. We'd shoot the breeze and everything. The first night we were in Korea, we had a sixty-one mortar--I guess the gooks had sixties or whatever they were, it was a small round--fell right between his legs, the first night in Korea. Man, that blew my mind terribly, because he was a nice guy and he was just married six months ago. That stuck with me all through my life. I've thought to myself I was going to go and see his wife, but then, I considered, "No, I'm not going to go, because what the hell am I going to say to her?" That's why I didn't want to go. So, I didn't go see her. That was a terrible time for me, the first night. The first night in Korea that happened. Poor guy landed and went his first night, gone, but, yes, we used to have casualties. We had company prayers for the guys who were killed, things like that. Other than that, that's about all, day in and day out, took one day at a time.

SI: When you were a forward observer, were most of these actions at night or during the day?

NA: Most of them at night, but some of them were during the day, but mostly all at night. That's when they did most of their probing. It didn't happen that often, but they did, they had day

times, too. I was on patrol in the daytime, too, when I first got there. We'd probe the areas. We never got into a combat fight in that area, but the guys did that every day. They probed the different areas every day.

SI: You yourself went out on a patrol.

NA: No, no. We would go out with either an officer or [a NCO]. There would be always an officer leading any type of patrol. You wouldn't go by yourself.

SI: You were in the patrol.

NA: Oh, yes. I was in the patrol, regular rifleman, carrying a rifle, waiting. We never got into a combat area. I've never got into a combat zone like that, but, then, again, after that, I went to go work for the eighty-ones. So, I didn't see too much of that combat directly. So, I was never in any kind of direct conflict with the enemy, never.

SI: Still, it must have been very stressful.

NA: It's really stressful in a sense, because you don't know what's going to happen, Shaun. [laughter] It could happen any minute or it could not happen. Fortunately, it didn't happen.

SI: How long was a patrol, usually?

NA: Oh, maybe an hour-and-a-half, two hours, walking around, going into different areas, marking down where you were, reporting back to headquarters what they saw, what you didn't see. That was all it was, but, then, remember that the war was sort of winding down at that time, with the peace talks and everything. There really wasn't that much going on, but it was enough for me. [laughter] Right, yes, that was enough for me.

KD: On patrol, did you ever encounter booby traps or mines?

NA: No, never did. The only booby trap I had anything with, well, when we went through rice paddies, we had to be very careful. There had to be somebody mapping that thing out to make sure there were no mines there, but other than us making booby traps for them, that's the only time I had a problem with a booby trap, the guy made a mistake. He pulled the tape the wrong way. That's unfortunate that happened, too.

SI: How long was your tour? Was it twelve months or thirteen months?

NA: Thirty-six [months].

SI: Thirty-six?

NA: Oh, you mean in Korea?

SI: In Korea.

NA: Oh, twelve months. I came home in the thirteenth month.

KD: Did you ever interact with any of the South Korean Marines or troops?

NA: Oh, maybe when I got out, but, then again, after that, all the people that I met were people I [had] never met. So, we didn't have too many more to go on and you weren't with guys too long. You kept changing personnel, personnel coming in, these guys leaving, going to another outfit. So, you really didn't get that close to any of them real personally.

KD: Did you ever encounter any enemy prisoners?

NA: Well, the only people we saw was when the Chinese came across the Yalu River. These troops were big people; they were big guys. They really were. I saw them bring a guy in--his knees hung over the stretcher. The Chinese-Mongolian people were big people. They weren't little guys. They were crack troops, too. They were really good. They knew what they were doing, those guys, but I never had any encounter physically with any one of them.

SI: Particularly when you were a forward observer, but, also, in your other jobs, what kind of weapon did you carry? Did you carry a regular rifle?

NA: Just my forty-five. That's the only thing we carried for a gun. We had machine-gunners in front of us. We had carbines if we wanted to use them, but we mostly carried a sidearm. We had a mass shower maybe once every couple weeks. That was terrible. [laughter]

SI: You said you had this area that was in the back where you could rest a bit.

NA: Yes, rest areas.

SI: Was this a place you would go back to every day?

NA: No, no, only certain times.

SI: Where would you sleep normally?

NA: Well, they had rows of cots in these tents and that's where you would sleep. Christ, I don't even remember how many, but there were quite a few guys, twenty, twenty-four guys, maybe, in one tent, a long tent. We all had, they all had, cots there. You slept on a cot.

SI: That was in the rest area.

NA: Yes, only in a rest area.

SI: When you were on the line, would you just sleep where you were?

NA: Oh, yes, we had our bunker there. We had no mattresses or anything. There was four of us in the bunker, four or five, that's all that was there. We took turns sleeping. Then, we had to keep alert.

SI: Would you have cold rations with you or would they try to bring food up to you?

NA: Well, we used to get our C rations. That's all we had. We never had any hot food there. We had all rations. The South Koreans would bring them up to us. We had to worry about that, too, because we didn't know whether they were South Koreans or North Koreans. [laughter] Really, in a war, you never know. These people, you don't know. They all look alike and you don't know if they're North or South. They're supposed to be South Koreans, were the ones that made these trails right up to their lines with our rations. We always worried about that, but we had no problem, fortunately, none at all.

SI: Was it difficult to sleep in those conditions?

NA: Yes, Shaun, it really was. You're always thinking, thinking, and then, you doze off. After a while, you can't get totally used to it, but you get used to it to the sense you're going to be able to sleep. Then, I think I was there maybe six, seven months, we got a rest, an R&R. We went to Sasebo, Japan. Boy, they really treated us good there. They really did. They had everything--steaks, milk--we never had, but they really treated us good, boy, I'll tell you. That really was nice. We spent maybe a week there, a week or two. Then, we go back to the lines. I remember, I went to Sasebo, Japan, with 211 dollars and eleven cents and I came back with eleven cents, deliberately. [laughter] Booze, beer, yes, we really had a good time while we were there, but, then, we had to go back. We had trouble with one guy, graduated UCLA. He flunked out of Officer Candidate School and he fell in love with a Japanese girl. He didn't want to go back to the lines. He didn't want to come back. We had a hard time with the guy to get him back, but we got him back. He was ready to go AWOL [absent without leave] to marry that Jap, that Japanese girl. Yes, you can't do that; had a hard time with that guy, never forget it, played football, too. He was a football player. He was not a little guy. [laughter]

SI: You had to physically get him back here.

NA: We had to, but there were a lot of us. We really got him out of there. I'll tell you, it was very difficult, couldn't imagine. What the hell type [of person]? He flunked out of OCS, but what type of mentality will you have not going back? What the hell? Don't you know what's going to happen to you? Then, again, he was drinking a lot, too, which didn't help the situation, but finally got him back.

SI: When you were on the line, did you see anybody who could not handle it after a while or had to be sent back?

NA: No, not on the lines, no, never did, not on the lines. The guys, they were pretty well seasoned for it, I guess, but, no, never had that happen. They all put their time in and that was it. The only time, I saw two kids crack up in boot camp. That's hard. That was very brutal.

KD: During the night when you were on the line, did you hear any activity from the enemy? Did you hear them moving around at all?

NA: Oh, yes, sure. You'd always hear that. They want to rattle your cage.

KD: Was there psychological warfare they used against you?

NA: What rattled my cage one time, when I was not a forward observer, I was on the front line, I was standing guard duty and I could've heard--thought that I heard--something coming at me. All of a sudden, it must've been a rabbit or whatever it was, hit the top of my helmet. I said, "Holy crap." It was an animal, hit the top of my helmet jumping out. I said, "Oh, my god," scared the hell out of me. I didn't know what that was, but that's all it was, things like that, but I never had an occasion where they broke through our lines, never did.

KD: When you were on the line, were you near any major outposts further out, like in no-man's-land? Were there any outposts out there?

NA: No, no. We knew mostly where these guys were, because we could see them during the day, where they were coming from. I could see them running in the trenches. That's what I'm telling you, when those napalm bombs hit those trenches, they would go through there like a ball of fire, right through the trenches.

KD: Could you feel the heat or anything from them? I have heard stories where people could feel the heat from the napalm.

NA: No, we were not that close. We were not that close, but I'll tell you one thing, those guys there must have--boy, I don't know how the hell they could've gotten [out]. If there were any guys in that area, they had to be scorched. That's a brutal bomb. I think they banned that bomb after the Vietnam War, during the Vietnam War, weren't allowed to use them no more. That's a brutal weapon, that really is--too bad, but what are you going to do? That's war and it's not good, but I feel sorry for these guys now in these types of situations. You don't know who your enemy is. That's a hell of a way to fight a war. A guy could smile at you and, all of a sudden, he's got a bomb on your back. That's rough. I'll tell you, I would never have wanted to be in a war like in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's brutal. You don't know who these people are and which ones are going to get you. You've got to be suspicious of everybody you look at. I didn't have that situation, fortunately.

SI: After you were a forward observer, you said you went back to being a rifleman.

NA: Rifleman, yes.

SI: Were you going out on more patrols then?

NA: Well, we would go on patrols. We'd come into a few of them, not many, that we had any problem with, because, like I say, it was already January, towards the end there, and the war was sort of slacking off by then. Then, in August, the war was over. So, things started slacking off.

SI: Was there a sense of, "Let us not attack them if they do not attack us?"

NA: Oh, yes, yes. I remember one of the lieutenants was killed in that probe. They were out and we were behind them with the mortars. If they wanted to call in mortars, we were there and they did. We would shoot anytime they wanted, give us an area, the coordinates, and we would fire on them. I remember this one guy named Lieutenant (Shrewbridge?). He was killed. He was killed right in combat and, from what I heard from the guys that came back, he broke a rifle over a gook's head. So, he was a good guy, he was a rough guy, but he was killed. Oh, boy, you remember all these guys; I don't know what the hell they were thinking about. They were good guys, they really were, a lot of guts, some of these guys. Those Rebels, these machine-gunners we had, we had a big probe coming up one night and they were really coming at us. They decided to fall back. (We were cut off from the main bunker?), going for more ammunition, and then, all of a sudden, the gooks decided, the North Koreans decided, to back off. They [the Rebels] were mad. They had all these machine-guns all ready to go and they're pulling out. I said, "You guys got to be nuts. Hey, you're going to eventually get them, but you don't have to get them right here. I mean, why would you want to do that? Why would you get mad if they took off?" Anyway, they were good guys. They were there--they'd protect you. That's what you needed. You needed good guys in front of you. We were happy [they were] there, but we were not discouraged that they didn't decide to come in, never. [laughter] Oh, yes, those were some times.

SI: Were you ever in a situation where you had to personally fire your rifle?

NA: No, never, never had that occasion, never had an occasion to fire actually at somebody that was coming in, because we had too many people in front of us. On patrol, we hardly ever contacted anybody on patrol, but, no, we had enough guys in front of us that took care of all that and never remembered anybody coming through on us. They never did. My lieutenant, if I'm not mistaken, told us that there was an occasion there where our mortars put eighty-one rounds--we had a section of nine mortars, would be firing--they would put eighty-one rounds in the air before the first one hit the ground. That was a lot of work, a lot of timing. That's hard to do, put that many rounds in the air before the first one hit the ground. Then, I remember one guy in our platoon, he was putting them in so fast that he put one in too quick and it hit his arm here. His arm blew up like a balloon and they airlifted him to Japan. That round coming out of there must have been a brutal shock to him. His arm swelled right up. They evacuated--that's one of the things they could do good, was evacuate. If some guy was injured, they'd get him help.

SI: Did you have corpsmen with you, up where you were?

NA: No, never remember ever a corpsman being near us, no, never had it.

KD: When you were on the front lines, could you describe what it was like, terrain-wise? Was there barbed-wire positioned in front of your lines?

NA: Yes, there would be barbed-wire positions, but, see, we had really good binoculars in my area. So, I could see those guys moving, where they were going. There were not too many guys

that ever came out of those bunkers where they were at towards us. I never had that happen, because we really had our eyes on those guys. We could really cover a good, long area. We had the Air Force with us, too, and they knew that if they stepped out of line or we saw them coming, they knew that the artillery, our guns and the Air Force were there. So, they didn't too much moving. They really didn't. I didn't see too much of that, because we had good coordination and they knew it.

SI: It sounds like you had a good working relationship with the Air Force.

NA: Oh, yes, let me tell you, those guys had machine-guns on them coming all the way in and they did their job. They really did. They were very good.

SI: Did you ever have to work with any Army units?

NA: No, never involved with any Army units. The only time we ever heard about the Army was either we took over one of their positions or they took over one of our positions. We moved out or they moved out, whatever, but that's the only time I had any dealings with the Army. They did their job. They really did. It's not easy being in an area like that. You've got to really try to do your best. People can get hurt.

SI: You said, before you went into the service, you just wanted to get a job. When you were in combat, did that change what you had planned for your life? Did you think, "If I get out of this, I am going to do this and this?"

NA: To tell you the truth, Shaun, I didn't, really, because I mostly spent my time in the market. When I came out, I'm thinking I was going to get a job in a supermarket. I don't know if you've ever heard of Acme Markets. Well, when I came out of service, I applied there and I applied at Delco Battery. I came out July the 24th and I think that I started one week later. I started with Acme, never took any time off. I never collected a dime from the federal government for any relief. Nobody in my family did, I mean that, of all of my brothers, my father, never, ever got any money from the government, like unemployment.

SI: Like the 52/20 Club? [Editor's Note: The GI Bill included a "52/20" clause, which provided twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks to discharged servicemen while they looked for work.]

NA: Yes. We never collected any of that. We all went to work. As soon as we got out of service, we went right to work. My four brothers, they all went to work in Squibb's, New Brunswick, all four of them. They were all there from thirty-three years to forty-two years, they worked there. Then, I went to work in the Acme, and then, after the Acme, in 1963, I went to work for Prudential. I was there for thirty-two years.

SI: Maybe if you set other goals for yourself, if you said, "I want to start a family after this," did the war change your thinking at all?

NA: Not really. Shaun, I really don't think so. Marriage, to me, was far away, I thought, and it was. I didn't get married until 1965. I got married in 1965. So, no, I really didn't think too much of that.

KD: How often did you keep in contact with your parents and your brothers during the war?

NA: Oh, yes, we were always very close. God, we really were.

KD: Did they follow the war?

NA: Yes. My brothers followed Korea. They were all veterans, so, they kept track of us. They really did. My brother got the Bronze Star in Normandy. So, they saw their part of action for sure.

SI: In that last period, you were a supply sergeant near Panmunjom.

NA: Yes, right near Panmunjom. In fact, we were almost ready to go home--I only had thirty days--and I remember that the Lieutenant came to me. I told the Lieutenant, I said, "What the hell are we going to do with all these cigarettes?" We must have had a million cartons of cigarettes. He says--I was a corporal then, I was not a sergeant at that time--he says, "Corporal, look. Get those cigarettes, put them in a two-by-four," those big Marine trucks, "fill them all up, back them up right into the Sachong River," threw them all out, thousands of cartons of cigarettes. They were mostly the off-brands. We could never get rid of Camels, Luckys, Chesterfields. The popular brands, the South Koreans would take them with open arms. They would buy them, but Raleigh, "Get rid of them," threw them away, thousands of cartons right down the river.

KD: Did you smoke during the war?

NA: Did I?

KD: Yes.

NA: Yes.

KD: Did you smoke prior to the war?

NA: Oh, yes, I smoked before the war. Unfortunately, I shouldn't have smoked, but I did. My father, I should have never smoked there, looking at him, because I remember that he suffered a lot from black lung. He worked in a coalmine for thirty-two years and he smoked like hell. He really got done in by that. I stopped smoking when I was thirty-eight or thirty-nine. I stopped because that's a brutal illness. That really is. That's a terrible illness. That was it.

SI: Tell us about coming back from Korea. You said you came back on the *General Hass*.

NA: Yes, USS *General Hase*. We landed at San Francisco and there was only one woman there from the Red Cross. Nobody met us there at all. I didn't care, though, but she was the only one, really nice, gave us donuts, but there was twenty-eight hundred of us in that ship coming back home. There were a lot of people. Poor lady, she was the only one there. Then, from there, I went to this transfer unit down off of San Francisco and I took a plane to New York. I got transferred to the Portsmouth Navy Prison in New Hampshire. It was eighteen hundred prisoners there, fifteen hundred sailors and three hundred Marines. I spent eighteen months there and that was it.

SI: What were your duties?

NA: I was a guard there. Eventually, I got promoted to sergeant and I became the discharging officer every Friday. Every Friday, I had a load of guys either going back to duty, dishonorable, undesirable or medical, whatever it was. I'd have maybe fifteen, twenty guys every Friday and they used to have the proper haircut before they left. They were not allowed to have hair like they did. They had to have a GI haircut. A lot of these guys were all prisoner sailors; they're all prisoners giving these haircuts. So, I used to get these guys, because I used to have to take them before the Colonel before they got discharged. I had to process the discharge. I look at these guys, they don't have a haircut. I know the Colonel's going to chew either them out or me--I thought it was going to be me. I'd march them right back into that outfit, right to that barbershop, and I told all those guys, I said, "Look. [If] these guys don't get a GI haircut by the time I come back, you're going to the Colonel, all six of you." Well, those poor guys came out with no hair on their head at all, [laughter] but they tried to get away with that. They'd try to get away with the nice, neat haircut and you're not allowed. You've got to have a GI haircut before you leave and that was it. That was not a bad time. I saw a few guys try to escape. We had a major there for extortion. I guess he robbed the payroll or what-the-hell and he got money from people, whatever he did. He was the highest-ranking officer we had, a major in the Marine Corps, and we had a lot of sailors, jeez.

SI: These were guys who had committed fairly serious crimes.

NA: Well, some of them were rapists in Japan, but we had mostly AWOL, getting in fights, something like that, robbery or what-the-hell-ever. We had a pretty good bunch of guys there. We really did.

SI: Was there any violence that you had to deal with?

NA: Once in a while, yes. We had a couple guys try and escape. They went out and they tried to climb the cyclone fence. We had to get them down, and then, a lot of those guys would get in fights. We had a lot of guys getting in fights. They're very frustrated. They really were. My buddy here from Edison, he was a guard with me. He sees this chief petty officer in the Navy. He had a beard on. He looks at him, he says, "What are you doing with the beard, I mean, with the no shaving?" He says, "Well, I have a doctor's certificate that I don't have to shave." Oh, he made him stand at attention for two hours. He [the guard] got court-martialed. He had to go before the Colonel. We had guys that wouldn't use their head. You can't do that. You can't do things like that, because the guy had a legitimate excuse. It's not that he was doing it to be a wise

guy, but he was a pretty nasty individual, this guy. He got court-martialed for it, got broken down, everything. You don't do things like that.

SI: In Korea, what did you think of the officers you served under? What was your relationship like with them?

NA: I'll tell you, Lieutenant (Park?) was one of my officers. He was a really good guy, I mean, really. We had a good relationship. I remember this captain in charge of us, his name was Captain (Gram?) and he was really top-notch. He'd help any time he can and he wasn't a rough guy. He was really the best, but we had good relationships with our officers. We really did. Yes, they were good.

SI: Did they play much of a role in your daily life? Were they doing something else and you had your regular tasks that you had to do?

NA: Well, we knew what we had to do. They didn't bother too much, except if anything new came up, if we had to attend any type of classes. We'd go in if anything new was coming up, but that's about it, because we never had really too many dealings with officers. It was mostly non-coms [noncommissioned officers], sergeants, staff sergeants, buck sergeants, gunnery sergeants. One of my good friends, he was a gunnery sergeant, name was Sergeant (Lupo?) and he was killed toward the end. He was ready to go home and he was killed. A lot of disastrous things happened.

SI: Did you ever think of staying in the Marine Corps?

NA: Yes, they offered me a stripe, have my own quarters, the whole bit, but I come from an Italian family. If I would've shipped over, I think my parents would've killed me. No, see, I knew that and I wanted to get home, too. I mean, I spent my time and I didn't think I wanted to stay any longer and I left. They offered me staff sergeant stripes, my own bunk and everything, my own office. When that was it, I left.

SI: You said you went right into working for Acme.

NA: Acme Markets, stayed with them. I was a manager in 1959, and then, I left there and I went to work for Prudential.

SI: Which Acme did you work in?

NA: New Brunswick. I worked in New Brunswick, worked at the one in Middlesex, worked at the one in Edison on Amboy Avenue. I spent some good years there. Let me see, from '54 to '62, I worked with them. Then, I went into insurance.

SI: Those eight years, as you mentioned earlier, that was when supermarkets really replaced the traditional downtown shopping areas.

NA: Yes, that's right. They were up-and-coming. They were really good. The one in New Brunswick, I was manager there for three years, I think, and then, I went to work for Prudential. So, yes, those supermarkets were [expanding], but they weren't large like today. They're just a regular store, like you would see on Raritan Avenue in Highland Park, small stores. Then, these big chains, ShopRite knocked us right out. ShopRite now is good, but Acme Markets is under Albertsons and they're doing very well. They're really the second-largest supermarket in the nation. I think Safeway is first. So, yes, they did pretty good.

SI: What stands out as most important in being a manager of one of those stores in that era?

NA: Making money.

SI: Making money. [laughter]

NA: Your inventory; you had to worry about your inventory. I, unfortunately, was in New Brunswick. I don't want to knock you guys, but, look, [when] a lot of students there wouldn't get their what-the-hell-ever, they'd do a lot of shoplifting. At the time, there really was a lot of it, but, anyway, I caught one kid there one day. Just, I said to him, "Really, what are you doing in college?" He told me he was going to school. He said, "I'm going to be a lawyer." I says, "You're going to be a lawyer?" [laughter] I got so mad at him. I brought him in the cellar and I made him clean up my whole cellar, stack the boxes up. I could've went to prison for that, because I'm not allowed to do that, but he kept his mouth shut. He cleaned that place up immaculately. I said, "Now, I'm going to tell you something. You'd better get out of here. If I ever catch you in this store again, I'm calling the dean of your college. I'll have your ass fired." That was it. He left and I never heard from him. That was it.

SI: Where was the store located?

NA: In New Brunswick, George Street.

SI: Okay, on George Street.

NA: Right on George Street. Well, you won't remember, there was a movie theater right across the street called the Rivoli Theatre. What the hell is there now? What the heck is there now?

SI: Is it where the supermarket is now?

NA: What?

SI: There is a C-Town there. It is not in the same location.

NA: I'll tell you exactly where. You remember the corner of George and Albany?

SI: Yes.

NA: Well, if you're going toward the University, one block up, right, half a block up, across the street there was the Rivoli Theatre. I was there for a while, and then, I moved to different areas. The fellow that was a manager there was a tank captain in Korea and he liked me. So, he opened up a new store in Middlesex on Route 28. He said, "Hey, Nick, how'd you like to come with me, open up my store?" I says, "Yes, Bill, sure," and I went with him and he really pushed me along. He got me pushed from there into manager. So, I made out well. I really did. He was a good guy. After that, then, I went to work for the insurance company. I did very well there. My best year was 1979; I sold 2,637,340 dollars of insurance. That was a good year I had.

SI: Why did you decide to go into insurance?

NA: Well, because, I'm going to tell you, I used to be the manager in New Brunswick at that Acme, I was working seventy-five hours a week, making 175 bucks a week. I said, "What am I, nuts? To hell with this." I started in that company there with fifteen employees and, by the time I finally packed it in, I was down to seven employees, doing more business. I said, "I've got to get out of this." So, I talked to a guy working in Prudential. He said, "I'm doing good." He said, "Nick, I'm going to work for a brewery." He's going to sell beer. He said, "Why don't you go up and see the manager?" and I did. He liked me and I got a job. He sent me to school and I was there for thirty-two years. So, I did well with them. I really did.

SI: That whole time, were you selling personal policies?

NA: Yes, mostly life insurance, health insurance, and then, I forget what year it was, they came out into the stock market. Then, I was a charter member in Prudential, my Series 7 license, and I went into selling, also, funds. So, we did good. We really did good there, and then, that was it. I retired in 1992. That was it.

SI: Do you think your experience in the Marine Corps affected the way you acted in your job?

NA: Absolutely. Honestly and sincerely, I mean that, because I changed from an ordinary person into a really hardened--not hardened--I mean, I learned a lot about life. I really went through the mill. We went through some hard times in the Marine Corps. They really were rough on you. I remember, one time, I was standing in line and I had a little toothpick caught in my mouth. I get my tongue to get it out and a DI said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I've got something stuck in my tooth." He says, "Open your mouth up." We used to have chains around our neck for our locker [keys] or whatever. He said, "Open your mouth." He shoved those chains in my mouth and he made me chew on it for an hour. He said, "Abate, I want to hear clicking of those teeth on them keys and, if I don't, you've got a problem." I didn't stop. I'm serious. I chewed on those--I think I chipped some of my teeth--but the whole thing being that you learn, "What do you want to do?" In other words, "You've got to do something." I went to work in the Acme and I come to find out that some of these kids didn't want to work. Guy's name was Pasquale; I said, "Pasquale, what is the problem?" I used to give him a truck to put groceries on. He'd take his time. I said, "What are you doing?" "Well," he says, "I'm doing my job, ain't I?" I said, "No, you're not." I said, "You should've had this done an hour-and-a-half ago and you're still on it." He said, "Well..." I said, "Hey, Pasquale, get the hell out of here." I fired him right on the spot. I would've never done that, since I was a pretty timid guy, I really

was, and it shocked me that I even did it, but I know you can't do that. You can't purposefully try and make a fool out of somebody. It hardened me up in that respect. I tell the guy, "I have the authority to tell you because I'm paying you. It's not the company paying you. It's me, really, paying you, because you've got to do the work. You do the work, then, you get paid." So, his wife came in screaming at me. I said, "Hey, look, talk to your husband. He'll tell you what he did. If he's any kind of a man, he'll tell you he deserved it," never heard from him again. That's what I'm saying. It hardened me up in the sense that I knew what I wanted, I knew what I was supposed to do. I'm the manager--I've got to make money for this company. If I don't make money, they're going to can me. I knew that and that's what I did. So, it brought me to the realization that you must get things done. "You have to get them done the way you're supposed to. You know the way you're supposed to get them done--get them done," and that's it. I mean, that taught me a lot. It really did, because I was a timid kid before I went in the service, but I knew where I was headed. That's why I wanted to get into an outfit that was going to be a good outfit from what I heard. That's what I did, but, yes, it helped me out a lot in my life after that. I recommend that to every kid in the country, either Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, whatever, take two years of your life and really get in and learn. I mean that. I really do. I felt that's good for everybody, because you go on your own. You're on your own now. When you went in there, man, I don't have my mother and father around no more, I don't have my brothers, I have nobody, just myself. You wake up very quickly; you really do. You change overnight, for the better, not for the worse.

KD: When did you meet your wife?

NA: I met my wife working at Acme Markets. She worked in the Acme Market in Franklin Township and we had a company picnic one day and that's where I met her. So, from then on, we got along good. When I was a manager, she used to come help me with my store. That's another mistake I shouldn't have made, because, see, the more work I was doing, my super was thinking, "Hey, this guy don't need [so many employees]. Take this guy, take this guy." I'm down to six employees from fifteen, doing more business. So, I got out of there, and then, we were married in 1963, October '63--I'm sorry, I meant October '65. [laughter]

KD: By the 1960s, were you following the Vietnam War at all, being a Korean War veteran?

NA: Yes, I really was. I felt so bad for those folks. I really did, because I could imagine what they were doing and what they had on TV was true. You remember they were going up these hills, taking the hill, come back down. Next week, you go back up again, then, next week, you go back up again. It was just unbelievable. I'm surprised that we went along with that, the country itself; the political ones went along with that. How could you ask guys to give their lives for something, and then, give it right back to them, and then, spend a couple more lives to take it back again the next week or the next week? How do you do that? It's not fair. It really isn't. I felt bad for those guys. Now that I'm in the Marine Corps League, one guy was in Vietnam, had a heart transplant, kidney transplant, from Agent Orange, a hell of a nice guy, but these guys went through the mill. Vietnam people and the Iraq, Afghanistan [veterans], I feel very badly for those guys.

SI: Did you get involved in veterans' groups right away or is that only recently?

NA: Not right away, I really didn't, not right away. Then, my brother in the Navy told me, "Hey, Nick, why don't you join the Marine Corps League, because they look for guys?" I said, "Okay." So, I joined up five or six years ago and I've been with them ever since. I meet guys coming over from overseas, from Afghanistan, Iraq, good guys. You really do. I became the League adjutant. I just take care of the minutes and everything. So, I enjoy it there. I meet a lot of guys.

SI: Have you stayed in touch with anybody you served with?

NA: No, because, well, the guy I went in with died, my friend I went in with, and then, the others are scattered, Maine, wherever. I never really [stayed in touch] and they never held any reunion, which I'm surprised at. They never had any Fifth Marine reunions or anything, because I would've probably went to one of them, because I know I would've met guys there, but I never had that occasion, not too many people.

SI: You were in Prudential for so long. What were the major changes that you saw in the company or in the business?

NA: Well, I'll tell you, like things are going on now, in Prudential, it was a good company. At that time, Prudential was a really good company to be with, but, then, when you get to this upper echelon, they'd come out with pretty flakey things. They don't look flakey to you as they come out, but, then, you come to find out that these things were not right. Things like that, when they get that kind of out of hand, it sort of lets you down a little, but, hey, you don't think that of everybody. You still keep plugging and you still do your job. You're doing your job you're supposed to be, because you're supposed to be doing something for an individual. You're insuring a guy--you're insuring him for a reason. You've got to watch out for his family. That's the most important thing, watching out for the guy's family. The guy doesn't know, really, but, when you come down [to it], if a guy's going to have a family with one or two children and he knows that this guy has got a wife, he's got a home, he's got a family, what the hell would happen if anything happened to him? You've got to drive that home to these individuals and, sometimes, it's hard, but, then, again, sometimes, they realize and they do and they buy. I've had an occasion to pay off on people that didn't want insurance. Something happened to them. Even my own nephew, my own nephew, I tried to [say], "Ant, you've got to watch out for Karen." "What am I going to do?" I said, "Well, buy this policy. At least you're taken care of for a while," and he did. Son-of-a-gun got killed. A forklift slammed him against the wall and killed him. Now, so, he got double. So, his wife could use that money, because she had two kids. She's still, to this day, very thankful. She says, "Uncle Nick, it was the best thing that ever happened, you talked my Anthony into doing that," because, now, she has no problems. She has good insurance, she's got money, she can do what she wants, bought a nice home for the kids, put them through college. That's a good thing. That's very rewarding that you did do that for the guy. The Marines taught me a lot. Yes, they really did. I'm really so thankful that I did what I did with my life. I really am. They used to think I was crazy, but that's all right.

SI: There are very few Marines I interview that are unhappy that they were in the Marine Corps.

NA: Really?

SI: Yes, it is very true. Marines, they do not say they are an "ex-Marine." They are just a former Marine or retired Marine.

NA: Just a former Marine. You're absolutely right, because there's a lot of pride in it. I'll tell you, unless you've gone through that, unless you've gone through it, you really have no idea, because you're talking morning, noon and night, five o'clock in the morning to nine, ten at night, I mean, really. You go through a lot and that carries on in your whole life. I know it did [for] me. I'm eighty-two years old. I really am. I don't feel bad. Health-wise, I'm all right, I think. Doctor tells me I'm doing okay, but I actually attribute a lot of that to the right attitude. If you've got the right attitude, you can go a long way, but, hey, who knows what can happen at any time?

SI: That is a very good point.

NA: That's my mother and father, 1922.

SI: We are looking at a picture of Mr. Abate's mother and father in a large oval frame. Was this just after they got married or soon after?

NA: That's, I would imagine, just as soon as they met. Probably, they were married after that. I don't remember.

SI: Have you been involved in any community activities or anything else you want to talk about?

NA: Community activities? not really. What we do at the Marine Corps League is, we have fundraisers every three, four weeks. We go to different stores, ShopRite, Walmart, Sam's Club. We're heavily involved in that. What we do is, we collect money, and then, Christmas, Easter, St. Peter's, Robert Wood Johnson, two more other hospitals, we go and give kids toys, only kids with cancer, only kid's cancer, at Squibb's down there in Robert Wood. So, we do a lot of work like that. Then, we mail packages to guys in Afghanistan, Iraq, wherever they're at. We mail a lot of packages. My post commander, he mails out packages unbelievably, almost every week to our guys. So, I get involved and a lot of satisfaction. Then, I got an award from the--you ever hear of the Post of the Four Chaplains? [Editor's Note: The Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation encourages selfless sacrifice and interfaith cooperation and holds ceremonies honoring citizens who have done exemplary service in their communities.]

SI: Yes, I have heard of the Four Chaplains.

NA: Well, I was recommended by the Marine Corps League for that award and I got it. I'll show it to you when I go downstairs, but that was very rewarding to get a thing like that, because the Post of the Four Chaplains, what a unique thing to belong to. It really is. Those fellows, you ever hear the story of what they did?

SI: Yes. Actually, one of them was a Rutgers graduate.

NA: That's right.

SI: Clark V. Poling.

NA: Yes. So, that was very rewarding to go to something like that.

SI: Tell us about that experience.

NA: Well, my Marine [Corps League] chapter, we do a lot of work, and then, he knew that I helped older people. I really do. I help a lot of older people. My mother and father, my mother was completely senile. She lived with me for seven years. This was her bedroom and she lived with me for seven years. I took care of her. I really did. I took care of my father and my wife is not doing that well. She has dementia and it's getting worse, progressively worse. You wouldn't know it from talking to her, but things like that. So, you have to be civic-minded, helping people, and I got that award. They took me up to someplace up here, a Lutheran church in Flemington or somewhere in that area, and I got that award.

SI: That is great.

NA: I was very thankful for that, I really was. So, we help a lot of people. We really do. We go to the Veterans [Home] in Menlo Park. They're all old guys.

SI: The retirement home.

NA: Yes, but these people are old and sick, but they're all service people and we help them a lot. We go there. I belong to the Catholic War Veterans, too. So, they go up there and we play bingo, we watch them playing bingo and we enjoy it. We really do, because they're so happy to see us. God, when we go there, they're happy, they're wide awake and everything. I enjoy that. I really do. So, that's what the Marine Corps League does. It helps a lot of people, guys coming back. We have a guy come back from Iraq. Poor guy was in bad shape. He had no job. So, we donate money. We give him money to help him along. That guy that lost both legs, the Marine that lost both legs, down in South Jersey, I forgot his name, but, anyway, we help him. We give these people money that need it. If you don't need it, you don't get it, but, if they need it, we give it to them. So, that's really rewarding for me, because it helps these people out. So, we do a lot of fundraising. We work every weekend--not every weekend, I mean, what weekends we work--Saturday and Sunday. It's nice. I enjoy it. You help people. That's about it.

SI: That is very good.

KD: Have you visited Korea or Japan ever since?

NA: No, never have had that occasion to go. I was too busy. I really was. I was too busy, Kyle.

SI: Would you be interested in doing that?

NA: Not at this point, Shaun. I'm in good health, but you never know. You don't want to be doing this at this age. I should've done it before, if I was going to do it, but I was too busy. I was very busy. I have a place down the Shore, Seaside Park. I've had it for twenty-four years now. I'm in the process of getting rid of it, because things are going out of hand, money-wise, my god. They want a lot of money to be down there now. They really do. I'm giving it up, just as well.

SI: Have you gone back to Parris Island?

NA: Yes, I went to Parris Island. My brother-in-law was going with a girl from Edison whose brother was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps stationed at Parris Island. So, I told him we were [passing by] on the way, because, when I worked for Prudential, we used to go to conventions, to Florida a lot of times. You had to meet your certain quota. If you meet that quota, you get a free trip for three, four days. So, anyway, I went to Parris Island. [laughter] I'll tell you, it brought back so many nice memories. It really did. Then, when I went to the naval station there, man, I'm telling you, Shaun, Kyle, the gunnery sergeant told me, "You guys better wear these," these earmuffs. These guys were practicing coming down in these fighters. They hit the land. They just have the wheels scrape the land, and then, they shoot back up into the air. The noise those guys let out was horrendous. My god, it went right through your brain, even with the [ear protection]. How the hell do these people keep up with this? How did they do that? my god, the noise, but, anyway, I enjoyed that. I went to the PX [post exchange], buy some stuff, brought back old memories. Not too many things changed. It's the same. Yes, I enjoyed that. Then, I went to South Carolina--no, what the hell is the name of that place?

SI: Lejeune?

NA: No, not Lejeune, down in Maryland or Virginia.

SI: Quantico?

NA: The FBI trains there.

SI: I know they train at Quantico.

NA: Yes, Quantico. We have a base there. I went to Quantico, nice there, really nice. Yes, my nephew went through training for the FBI at Quantico. We went down there. We enjoyed it. I enjoyed doing that. That's about all.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the recording?

NA: Not really. I think we got most everything. You were here for two hours.

SI: Thank you so much for your time and for sharing.

NA: I appreciate you being here. I really do. I'm glad you folks are interested in that.

SI: Absolutely. Thank you for your service as well.

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Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 8/3/16  
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/14/16  
Reviewed by Felix Abate 4/18/17