

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NATHAN NAMEROW

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Jesse Braddell: This begins an interview with Nathan Namerow on October 25, 2010, conducted in Teaneck, New Jersey, conducted by Jesse Braddell and Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Thank you very much Mr. Namerow for having us here this morning.

Nathan Namerow: That's all right, my pleasure.

SH: To begin the interview just for the record could you tell me where and when you were born?

NN: I was born in the "City of Brotherly Love," Philadelphia. As a matter-of-fact my son even went to the address where I was born and he says, "Dad, your parents should have bought that property." It seems that the back of it is some famous street called Elfrest's Alley. I don't know what it is, but it's supposed to be very similar to the Village in New York, that all of a sudden the rates went sky high. Oh, and my mother got a doctor, not a midwife.

SH: That was something new in your family, right?

NN: Oh, yes.

SH: Let us begin by talking about your family. Let us talk about your father to begin with. Where was he from?

NN: My father came to this country in 1907. He was an orphan. It's unbelievable, most of the people who came from Europe in those days, the family was not complete. Either the mother was dead or the father was dead or in my father's case, both were dead. Diseases were rampant. The little diseases that the kids get the vaccines today, they weren't there.

SH: Where was he born? Where was he from?

NN: They came from the Ukraine and Russia. He came over in 1907.

SH: Was there someone from the family already here?

NN: Yes, I think his brother came first. That's the way they usually worked it. One would first come over and make some few dollars then they would ... send the money over and they could come here. My father, because he was an orphan, the family was spread apart, different relatives took them. His older brother became a barber. ... They had an apprentice system in Europe. ... You'd be an apprentice, then he took one house, he built one room, and gradually brought all his brothers and sisters back while he was making a living, but then later on the older brother left, and my father later on came too. ... In those days you had to go to Ellis Island, you had to be examined. As a matter-of-fact I was talking to one of my relatives. One of his relatives who came to the United States was sent back because he didn't pass the United States health regulations. So, it wasn't as easy as we think it is.

SH: How old was your father when he came, do you know?

NN: I'd say he must have been in his twenties.

SH: Had he served an apprenticeship as a barber as well?

NN: Oh, yes, well he had finished his apprenticeship and when he came to this country, he got a job as a barber, and ... for the rest of his life he was a barber.

SH: Was his brother in Philadelphia?

NN: Oh, yes, that was another reason. He came because of his brother. My mother, I don't know how she got to, somehow or other, my father did a better job, well it wasn't my father, his brother actually wrote out a whole story and I still have it.

SH: Oh, wonderful.

NN: It's fantastic, it even tells how my father sneaked into a circus and they caught him and they beat the hell out of him.

SH: Oh, no.

NN: Yes, the people from the circus, and he was sick for weeks, but it's all in the story, it's fascinating. ... It also tells how when my father came, his relatives who were supposed to pick him up weren't there, so he had to stay in Ellis Island some more time until they finally came. You couldn't just walk off Ellis Island, somebody actually had to come and pick you up and take you out.

SH: This was the family in Philadelphia that did this?

NN: Yes, right, the relatives.

JB: Do you want to get into how your parents met?

NN: That I don't know. All I know is I was born in Philadelphia. My first remembrance of Philadelphia, we lived on Vine Street, that's now the overhead is that bridge that goes to Camden.

SH: The Ben Franklin Bridge?

NN: ... Yes, the Ben Franklin Bridge. We lived on Vine Street, then we moved to West Philadelphia. I remember Fairmont Park. ... We'd get jugs of water and we'd get that water from the fountains there. So, I must have been about eight or nine years old when we moved to New York--the big city--and my remembrance of New York was being in a subway, and all of a sudden we came out where it became elevated. ... I remember we moved from Philadelphia where we rented a private home, and all of a sudden we lived in an apartment house, and my mother cried because it was so different, no basement. It was completely different, so she cried

because of the new type of living, but my father did it because he felt that there were more opportunities in New York.

SH: Did your mother talk about her immigration story at all to you?

NN: The only thing I knew about my mother, she came, she must have been about fifteen or sixteen, but in those days they went right to work. She worked in a garment factory and as far as her working, well later on it was during the Depression, so naturally she couldn't get a job. My father was lucky he had a job. The only time she worked, this was while I was in the Army, I found out that ... during World War II, they took any woman who was handy and put her in a garment factory, and during the war she worked in a garment factory so she was making extra money.

SH: Was she making uniforms?

NN: No, no, she worked in female garments of some sort.

JB: She went back to garments?

NN: Yes, when I came home she stopped because the war was over.

JB: You mentioned that you attended James Monroe High School in Bronx, New York.

NN: Right.

JB: What was your experience there like?

NN: James Monroe High School was in the Pelham Bay area. It was a very good school, and I still remember my French teacher, we would call her *Madame*, that's how we addressed her, and I loved the English part. I was very good at English and I liked the French too, it was a great school. As a matter-of-fact we have somebody here, I found out that he belonged to the Mathematics Club at James Monroe. It's a small world.

SH: When you made the move from Philadelphia to New York, was it because of the Great Depression?

NN: ... The way it worked, the Depression started really in Europe, and then we got the Depression, I believe it was 1929, I think 1931 was when the stock market went down, but in those days we lived on Intervale Avenue in the Bronx. It was unbelievable, we could see, there was a bank called the Bank of US in those days, and we saw them lining up when there was a run on the bank.

SH: Oh, really?

NN: Yes.

SH: Did you understand what was going on?

NN: Well, I was a kid, but what happened was President Roosevelt because of that declared a bank holiday so they closed all the banks, but the bank failed anyway. Interestingly enough, over the years the people did get most of their money back from that bank. ...

SH: What were some of your earlier experiences as a kid growing up in this neighborhood?

NN: Well, ... I remember my mother would, she wouldn't have any money in the house, and she would wait for, perhaps a customer would walk in, and my father would give him a shave or a haircut, that's how tough things were. My sister, her first job she got \$15.00 a week. She went to a high school that was a two year high school. ... She must have been about sixteen or seventeen when she went to work. It was pretty rough because jobs were few, I remember my father telling me that all of a sudden he heard that there could be a job available, some sort of a job, so he got up about five o'clock in the morning and he went to the armory. There was some sort of a thing in the armory nearby, but unfortunately they told him, "Well, you have to be on relief to be eligible for that sort of a job," and my father was a very proud man. He said, "Sorry, I won't go on relief," that's what it was called. Now they call it welfare, in those days it was called [relief], and in those days if you were on relief and you had a radio you had to hide it when the investigator came. That's how tough it was. ... You had to be really penniless.

SH: You had an older brother as well.

NN: Yes, my older brother, he jumped from one job to another. He was older than I was so during the war he already had children so he wasn't taken.

SH: Did he have a profession during the Great Depression?

NN: Well, he used to be in the fruit business in the food stores, but during the war he ... learned about doing some work in defense. ... It had something to do with doing work on mining metals or something like that. So, he worked on that and during the war. ... During the war people who had never made a living suddenly [did]. ... There were people during the war they wished that the war would never end.

SH: Because they were doing so well financially?

NN: The black market.

SH: Really?

NN: Oh, yes, and the candy store which was always open seven days a week, they were doing so well, that they closed one day a week. ... When everybody was on rations and when a grocery store got in some coffee or sugar there was a line up. My mother-in-law, God bless her, she had so much food because every time there was something that they could get, they would run and get it. Why they had to run on line, I don't know, but they had it anyway. [laughter]

SH: When you were in high school were you planning to go to college?

NN: Yes, I planned to go, I did go to City College, but what happened was I had a cousin of mine, he graduated St. John's Law School, he was a lawyer. He couldn't get himself arrested, he had opened up a law office, nothing, nada, and so, eventually this was very interesting, he went to a school where he learned cleaning and dyeing of garments, went ... to Puerto Rico, opened up a cleaning and dyeing store, and he made a living that way. ... It's true, that going to City College was practically no money, but still what happened was I dropped out of City and went to work. At least I was making some money.

SH: Who were you working for?

NN: In those days you had to be lucky that you had a relative who could give you a job. So, I worked on 87th Street and Broadway in a food store and I was a kid, you know, but I went to work. Later on, my sister worked there too. She was a cashier.

SH: Who was the relative that had the store?

NN: My cousin, he was the manager of the store. Like I said, you had to know somebody to get a job, it was not easy.

SH: You talked about cousins, so there was an extended family.

NN: Oh, yes, in those days, my mother and my father, they had loads of relatives. So on a Sunday you always went to a relative. They always had tea and cake and they'd talk to one another. ... The family was together. Now you have the situation like the people here, they have one a son in California, another son is in Baltimore or whatever. ... In those days the family was together because in those days the sons and daughters still hadn't been educated. Then when they became educated the children of those educated children started going all over the country. As a matter-of-fact one of my son's very good friends, his daughter now lives in Australia, and he visits here twice a year, which we never did years ago. As a matter-of-fact, it's funny, about going to Europe, nowadays, you know, you have people from India and Pakistan, they think nothing of going back and forth like it's around the corner. My mother-in-law used to [say], I'll say it like the way she spoke [it], she said, "I already was." ... In those days they didn't want to go back because living was so much better here, why go back to all the bad memories, and that's the way it was.

SH: Was your family observant?

NN: Well, to a certain extent, but there were certain branches of family that were more Orthodox than others. It still happens.

SH: Did you have a Bar Mitzvah?

NN: Oh, yes, my Bar Mitzvah was not like the Bar Mitzvah of today. We lived on Intervale Avenue, I went to a synagogue on Saturday, then we came back. What my mother did was there

was an empty apartment which is now very unusual to have an empty apartment. There was an empty apartment in our apartment house, she rented chairs and tables and she and an aunt of mine made all the food and that's the way it was. No brotherhood, no sisterhood giving me awards. ... When I go to services now, I go on Saturday, I go to a Bar Mitzvah, they have a million people there, it was completely different. I think it was better in those days in that respect.

SH: What language was spoken at home?

NN: ... My father because he worked, he learned English. My mother never really, she was more at ease in Yiddish. So she would speak in Yiddish to me and I would respond in English. ... My father even went to public school at night.

SH: Did he?

NN: Yes, and I remember him, Harold (Yuris's?) book, he made up his mind he's going to read that book, and I don't know how long it took him, but he finished that book.

SH: That was a very big, thick book.

NN: ... He got very active at night school, but my mother she never really learned English. She was illiterate, and I found out not just in English. Many of the women in Europe did not go to school.

SH: Any kind of school?

NN: Right, they were illiterate, but she became a citizen in those days ... prior to 1924. My father became a citizen, because it was prior to that time, she became a citizen even though she was illiterate. She voted for the rest of her life, it was very interesting.

SH: Was the family involved in politics at all?

NN: Not really. ... In those days there'd be these big cars where they'd go on the back of the cars, and the politician would say that he was honest, and this and that. I still remember one of the politicians, every two years we would see him, then all of a sudden he committed suicide because they were getting after him. So, our experiences with politicians as it is today, and as it will be years from now, it's the same thing, they're all men of the people or women of the people, and they steal anyway. [laughter]

SH: That is not a real hopeful attitude.

NN: Unfortunately.

SH: What were some of the big events that you as a young man in school remember?

NN: Well, I remember in Philadelphia the Queen Marie of Romania, it was some sort of a holiday in Philadelphia. I remember her. I remember the 1939 World's Fair. That was very interesting because all these different countries had exhibits and buildings at the World's Fair and shortly after, that's when they went to war with each other. Germany had something there, all these different countries, so they were at each other's necks and it was quite interesting.

SH: Did you keep up with the news through the newspaper or by the radio?

NN: Well, I still remember our Zenith radio. It had push buttons where you could get the station through the push buttons, ... and that's what we had. My brother, when we were in Philadelphia, I remember when I was a little boy, he made a set that could pick up some stations. It was some kind of wires that you had, and pushed the thing back and forth to get a station. He made that, I guess every young man must have built one of those. Like I said, radio was, that was our only communication. ... We didn't have a telephone I think until after World War II. The way it worked was when we lived in the Bronx, there was the candy store, kids would hang around the candy store. If my sister got a call from her boyfriend he'd run up and we lived on Bryant Avenue, no elevator, he'd run up the stairs and maybe my sister would give him about three cents or something like that, and she'd run down. We are [now] living with cell phones where the people are at the supermarket, "Yes, dear, I just bought the bananas, I think I'll buy the tomatoes, what do you think I should do about the cantaloupe, do you think I should buy it or not buy it?"

SH: Were you ever into theater?

NN: Oh, yes. I was never in the theater. ... I did see a theater from the WPA, Works Progress Administration. Also my friend learned art through a WPA teacher, this was during the Depression. Also I found out that one of my neighbors in the Bronx, she finished as a teacher, but she couldn't get a job, so she worked for the WPA on the Lower Eastside. They paid her and she was helping out teaching, but she was only getting money from the government.

SH: Did any of your brothers and sisters work in any of the New Deal programs?

NN: No, none of my brothers or sisters worked. ... They didn't do it, but it was very common in those days to try to get a job from the government because you knew that you were going to get money fifty-two weeks a year, and so it had its benefits. ... I have a book here now which is about New York City, it was put out by the WPA, it had pictures by very well-known artists and they put this book out through the WPA. My son got a copy of it, not made in '39, but it has all the information that they had in '39. In fact it's very interesting because it speaks about in Harlem it refers to Spanish Harlem, Black Harlem, and White Harlem.

SH: Really?

NN: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, when we first came to New York, my mother's relative was still living in Harlem because years ago a lot of Jews lived in Harlem. It was later on, as it changed, that many of them went to the Bronx, that's how it worked.

SH: Your neighborhood was predominantly Jewish?

NN: Well, in the first neighborhood that I was in, it was an interesting area--Irish, Italian and Jewish in the Bronx. There was one park that I was very leery about going into.

SH: Really?

NN: So, I didn't go into it. The Irish sort of took care of us, [laughter] you know what I mean.

SH: So there was anti-Semitism?

NN: Oh, yes. It was in the Army, we knew that it was there. ... We tried to make the best of it.

SH: Had your parents been subjected to anti-Semitism in Europe and the United States?

NN: Well, they didn't talk much. It's a funny thing, they never spoke much about--that's the bad thing about it. I wish they had told me about it, somehow or other they didn't, all they told us were things were bad, but that's the extent of it. They wouldn't go into details. Fortunately like I told you my uncle, he dictated the story, so I have a lot of things about my family that I knew nothing about.

SH: Did your parents talk about anti-Semitism in this country or give you advice?

NN: Well, sometimes when they got together, you know they spoke, but they wouldn't tell us too much about it. All they said is this is a golden land, in Yiddish it was called a golden *medina*, a golden land.

SH: Were your best friends on the street Jewish boys and girls?

NN: Oh, yes, kids on the street, we'd play marbles, we had roller skates, things like that. One of my memories ... my parents got me roller skates, and I went to the library and we were not allowed to bring the skates into the library, so I left the skates out. What do you think happened? I come out, no skates, that was the end of me because in those days if you got something and you lost it or whatever you didn't get it again. Interestingly enough, I still remember the name of the librarian in McKinley Square in the Bronx. The librarians were very important to us because our parents couldn't really help us. We were helped by the librarians.

SH: Oh, really?

NN: So, we really looked up to them.

SH: What was her name?

NN: Miss Jackson, how do you like that?

SH: I wanted to make sure you put it on tape.

NN: Would you believe it?

SH: Did you have a favorite subject in school?

NN: Well, during the Depression I think we all wanted to know about economics and history. We thought that if we really learned about history, maybe we could solve the Depression, but the more I think about it, Roosevelt came in, one of the good things was Social Security, that was fantastic because I remember my father first getting his Social Security when he reached sixty-five. It wasn't much money, but at least he had a monthly income. ... They had the bank insurance, so if one bank failed, it didn't mean that you lost all your money, the government reimbursed you because they had a plan like insurance, each bank contributed so that was good. Unfortunately with all the plans and everything and you name it, there were all kinds, the WPA, the CCC and all kinds of plans, the really thing that brought us out of it was World War II. Once we started shipping stuff to Great Britain, things started changing. It was really World War II that brought everything up. ... Obama now is trying all these, it's like a repetition of World War II, and I don't know still the unemployment is so high, and unfortunately things that we had in those days we don't have any more. For example, if you went on 35th Street in Manhattan, they had two hundred people working on this side of the building, and two hundred people working on the other side, a twenty story building, thousands of people, Americans, many of them were Italians, Jewish, Irish whatever, they were all working at those factories. The shoes, they're not made here anymore, the sneakers. I just got pajamas by Hanes--I opened it up, made in China. So, that's the problem. I was watching *60 Minutes* yesterday, I don't know if you saw it, it was very interesting. They interviewed people in Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley years ago, wow these were some of them were professors, some with PhDs, Masters, college degrees and many of them had no jobs. ... It's horrible.

SH: What year did you graduate from high school?

NN: I think it was 1934.

SH: You went to work for your uncle after graduation?

NN: Yes. I went to work and I had an idea that maybe I would go to college in a farm college to learn something about farming. ... I never really went into it.

SH: At CCNY did you just go the one semester?

NN: I went for one year, and then I dropped out. Later on I did go to Westchester Community College. ...

SH: For the record, we are looking at lovely paintings on the wall.

NN: Everything here is my art.

SH: What was the reaction around your family's home when Hitler invaded Poland?

NN: Well, this was very interesting because Russia and Germany divided Poland. So Russia got part and Germany got part. So all of a sudden they were buddy-buddy for a while. ... There was a time when Stalin killed a lot of his generals, that was one part of it, then he killed a lot of Jews. So he was a murderer. Nowadays they found out that during the time when they went to communism, they killed millions and millions of Russians--nobody knew anything about it. We didn't know it either. They kept everything tight, it was only later on when they went under we started getting various clues about what went on.

SH: Did your family have any reaction to what was going on in Europe?

NN: ... As far as my family was concerned, they didn't seem to have any relatives, but by that time all their relatives were out, but I met people here, many of them are from Austria and Germany. They had relatives who stayed there. As far as my family was concerned, they had no relatives, so they knew things were bad but they didn't know the extent of it.

SH: You said that your brother was exempt from military service.

NN: Yes, because if you were a father, he already had three children, but when I went into the Army, they were taking them up to forty-four.

SH: You had to register for the draft in 1940?

NN: Oh, yes. ... If you were stopped in the street, they could ask you for your draft card. As a matter-of-fact, one of my relatives, I found out later on in life that he wasn't a legal resident of the United States. I didn't even know it. He came from Russia, and he was here illegally, so I found out that during the war--of course, I was overseas I didn't know what was going on--but the story I heard was he went to see a lawyer, the lawyer told him, gave him some advice to go to Canada and come back here legally, but they were very strict, not only that, rationing and all that. ... I even have somewhere in my apartment a little ration card.

SH: Do you really?

NN: That my wife had. Even the child had one.

SH: Did your mother have any difficulty getting what she needed?

NN: She seemed to manage, yes.

SH: You had had to register for the draft in 1940, but it was in 1942 that you were called to serve.

NN: Yes, what happened was in 1941, my father had his first heart attack so because of that they sort of gave me a break, and then all of a sudden in '42 I got a letter, "Dear Neighbor, Welcome aboard," and I went to the draft board. They examined me there. The local doctors would examine you and they gave me two weeks to end all my activities. ... Then, we had to assemble at the draft board which was on Tremont Avenue in the Bronx, we walked to the subway, and I

often wondered who paid the nickel for my fare to Penn Station. I went to Penn Station and I went to Camp Dix. That was my experience on a train. I was there only for about three or four days, it was unbelievable. I was walking through a little corridor, all of a sudden one guy jabs me in this shoulder, another one, I'm getting my shots, and it was hot and I almost fainted but I didn't.

SH: Was this in the summertime?

NN: Well, it was in, I know it was in the fall, but it was in a little room. ... They gave us tests and the next thing I knew they put us on a train, they didn't say where we were going. That's the way they worked at the time. We didn't know where we were going, what outfit we were going to, all I know is I got on a train, they didn't tell us where we were going and I had to sleep with a guy, oh that was the first time I ever slept in a sleeper on a train. I'd been on a train to go to Philadelphia because of relatives in Philadelphia, but I never was on a sleeper. So, a guy and I we slept together. ... That guy didn't make it--he's one of the guys that didn't make it. ... I really got friendly with him and we got to Indiana, and it was ice cold. This was in the fall, but Indiana is much colder than New York, and we get there at night. The next day this idiot, ... this colonel who was in charge of our battalion, he gets us up to walk, you know, to march. We didn't have winter clothing, we didn't have anything for our ears, we started marching, after a while this guy had frozen ears, another guy [too], so they suspended it. The only ones who were smart were the people who had been in the CCCs, they told us what to do. We had these summer hats, they said put it over your ears, because that's one thing about the government, these men who had been in the CCCs, they were in better shape than we were because they were building parks and all that all over the country, that was one of the good things about the CCCs. Anyway, we were there. ... So we found out that we're in a telephone construction battalion, all our officers were from AT&T, and I don't know if you realize it, AT&T was ... no Jews.

SH: Oh, really?

NN: As a matter-of-fact, one of my friends in the Bronx, his sister did get a job, but she changed her name, she called herself Terry, her first name, their last name was Osterman which could have been German. That's how she got a job as an operator [at AT&T].

SH: I did not know that.

NN: Now you know it.

SH: How did you first hear the news about Pearl Harbor?

NN: Very interesting. In those days, I had a car, one of the few guys who had a car. We were on the Whitestone Bridge and the radio is on. We're seeing some girls in Queens and the radio is on, one guy worked in the Navy yard, the rest of us were civilians, and all of a sudden we hear Pearl Harbor is attacked. Well, the guy who worked in the Navy yard, he went crazy, he thought he had to run back to the Navy yard, he didn't know what to do, but that was the beginning. It's very interesting, out of that car, ... I went into the Army. I don't know what the one who went to the Navy yard, I don't know how long he worked, sometimes they worked in the Navy yard and

then they would be drafted anyway. Then, there was one of them, he found out that his heart was not good, so the Army wouldn't take him, he cried because he didn't get into the Army. It's a whole different ball game now and during Vietnam, but I won't go into it. ... We stayed in Indiana for a couple of months, we learned how to climb poles, put up telephone lines. ... One thing we were told, our officers told us, "You'll never going to see combat because we don't build telephone lines on the front lines." So, I said, "Well it's a lousy job, but hey, you know, maybe I won't see combat." ... You have all these ideas, then after we were there for a couple of months, we went to Tennessee. They called it the Tennessee Maneuvers. We used to put up telephone lines. ... In Tennessee, like if the Army knocked down a telephone line, our outfit would put up a telephone line. So, we did that, and we were there for a couple of months. At the end of my period in Tennessee, I got word that I was going to get a pass to go home for a couple of weeks. So, I knew right away that after that I'd go overseas, and sure enough that's exactly what happened.

SH: You said that your officers were from AT&T. How did they treat you?

NN: You know what? Officers were a very peculiar bunch. They didn't stay with you, the sergeants did more involvement with the men. They sort of were aloof, they stayed away. They relayed their commands to the sergeants, and the sergeants were in many cases more involved with us than the officers. They kept themselves aloof.

SH: Where were your sergeants from?

NN: Some of our sergeants were from the South, but not all of them. We had them from all over, but we also had some sergeants who had also been in AT&T so they were really knowledgeable. ... When there was an opportunity, some of the sergeants became officers, they could do that during the war. So, that brought me back to the camp in Indiana, but all of a sudden they decided I had a Pilonidal cyst so I was operated on, ... but this is the way it worked. Even though I was in the hospital and there were other people in the hospital, our officers had a big say in what happened to us. What they did was they pulled us out of the hospitals to go overseas. Would you believe my Pilonidal cyst didn't clear itself up until I was over in India. The Pilonidal cyst is back here, and they used to dress me, you know, with dressing ... while I was on the way there in North Africa. They had guys that were drunks, now it's very interesting, the drunks they threw out of the Army because they were hopeless. Then there were some--we had one guy, he ran away from his wife, figured he could stay in the Army, and also there were guys who did everything to stay in the States. One guy was released from the hospital, he tore apart the operation, so he wanted to go back to the hospital. [That's] how desperate some people were. I read in the paper there was one guy where I was, he stepped on wire to get out of the Army, you know. So, even though everybody wanted to go overseas, there were people who didn't want to go. They had what was called "gangplank fever."

SH: For your two week pass, you came back to the Bronx.

NN: Oh, yes, when I came home, I remember my brother-in-law, he took me around, because in those days they had a little thing on the car so they knew that if they had a soldier in the car, they wouldn't be stopped.

SH: Really?

NN: Yes, because, you know, they were treating the soldiers.

SH: I did not know they had those.

NN: Oh, yes, they had the "A" on the car. [Editor's Note: Mr. Namerow is referring to the gasoline rationing stickers which were affixed to American automobiles during the Second World War.]

JB: What was your family's reaction to you leaving?

NN: They didn't know that I was going to be leaving, I don't think so. It's hard to say, but I have a ... suspicion that when I went overseas my parents thought I'd never come back. There is something in our religion when you are Bar Mitzvah, you're giving, it's called a Tallis. When I came home, that Tallis was not home. I think my parents thought I'd never come back. ... Maybe I'm wrong, but when, you know, when I was getting married I needed a Tallis to get married. I didn't see one, and I have a suspicion that they thought I was never coming back.

SH: Did they pack it away?

NN: No, it disappeared. I looked for it, maybe I'm wrong.

SH: You come home for two weeks and then you go back to Indiana.

NN: Yes, I went back.

SH: You had your surgery.

NN: ... About a month or so later we got word to go to Camp Patrick Henry, that was a POE, Port of Embarkation. That was an unbelievable camp. You came into that camp and everybody there was going overseas, in other words, you stayed there maybe about a week. During the week they gave you an examination to make sure that you were in good shape, they showed you how to abandon a ship. They had a net which was supposed to be on the side of a ship, you were shown how to go down on the net. Your clothing and everything was checked, but you didn't know what sort of a ship you were going to go on. Well, that was an eye-opener, I thought I was going to go on a big ship, right? I got to the ship. ... The day before they had me loading a ship with our clothing, our duffle bags. So, loading duffle bags on this ship, I said, "This is not the ship that we're going to be on." It was a Liberty ship. Sure enough, I come there the next day, it's the same ship, and I still remember the name, *Andrew Hamilton*. It was not equipped for soldiers. We had about six hundred men on that ship, it was a disgrace. What they did was they had a toilet from one side of the ship to the other, so if the ship went this way, you got a wet behind. The toilet was all across, and two meals a day, and it was unbelievable. It was so bad, the crew, they were civilians, we'd give them money to sell us a sandwich, that's how desperate

we were, and fortunately or unfortunately, before I went on that ship, I made it a point to go to the PX and buy Hershey bars.

SH: Did you really?

NN: Yes, so every day I'd eat one Hersey bar so I wouldn't starve. ... This was very interesting. Being in a convoy, we got on the ship and we start, you know, out at sea, and all of a sudden there must have been about a hundred ships, tremendous amount of ships and at night you heard, it sounded like bombs were going, we didn't know what was going on. We knew we were going south so now I realize what happened was we went south, down to probably South America's border, then we took the shortest distance between South America and Europe, that's the way they worked it, but then ships would disappear also because they were going in different directions so we wound up in Oran, North Africa. It was a different world, all Arabs. We saw some of them had animals in their apartments, and they were pro-German naturally, and they tried to cheat us as much as they could. They weren't too nice about it. Openly, they were nice to you, but watch your back.

SH: What were you told about how to interact with them?

NN: Well, they said, the funny thing is, if we put our clothing to dry out, we watch it because they could steal it.

SH: Where did they have you? Were you housed in barracks or tents?

NN: ... I think we were in tents in those days because like I said, we weren't there too long. ... We got there sometime in October. ... November 25th, we got on the ship. Now this is interesting. Only my company was on the *Rohna*, the other two companies of our battalion were on another ship. Had the whole battalion been on that ship it would have been a disaster. Now we had about 200, approximately 250 men that was A Company. B Company was on the *Rohna*.

SH: When you were put on the *Andrew Hamilton* in Virginia, where were you told you were going to go?

NN: Oh, no, you were never told anything. You were never told anything.

SH: What did the rumor mill tell you?

NN: Nothing. As a matter-of-fact, we had heavy clothing. It was only when we got to India that they took away the heavy clothing. They were very smart. They didn't let you know a thing.

SH: When you got to Oran did you know where you were going?

NN: We still didn't know.

SH: Did you think you might be going anywhere?

NN: ... We had no idea exactly where we were going.

SH: This would have been in November of 1943.

NN: Actually, I was overseas two years. ... I was looking on my discharge papers, I think I was discharged November 26th, 1945. ...

SH: An important date for you. [Editor's Note: The HMT Rohna, the ship Mr. Namerow traveled on his way to the China Burma India Theater, was sunk on November 26th, 1945.]

NN: ... We knew nothing about it.

SH: Did you know about what we now call the China Burma India Theater?

NN: Well, very little.

SH: You had heard it.

NN: I had heard of it, but not too much. We heard of General Stillwell because he was there when we came there. I didn't realize how incompetent he was, how when we were in China all of a sudden the local troops and Chiang Kai-shek's troops were shooting at each other and what was it about--firewood. So, this gives you an illustration of what type of government it was. We had 250,000 troops, approximately, supplying China. ... A lot of it was not used. The only thing is his wife's family, the Soong family, they had good connections with the United States. So because of the good connections we were supplying them.

SH: This was something you were aware of at the time?

NN: ... I knew a little about it, but not too much. Just as the average GI knows very little about CBI. ... Especially if they served in Europe, they knew nothing.

SH: The first port of call after you left Virginia was Oran?

NN: Yes. The first place was Oran. We stayed there I'd say about a month, then we set forth on November 25th. ... November 25th we set sail, there were 2000 troops, we had three Red Cross workers, male, so there were no women on the ship. It's very unusual because later on I did see Red Cross workers that were female, but somehow or other, these were males. There was an all Indian crew but the overseers were British. It was a British ship used in the coastwise area of India. ...

SH: Were you sailing with another vessel?

NN: Oh, yes, it was a convoy. ... I don't remember how many ships. The next day I got up in the morning and relaxing. ... I was one of the older ones, I was twenty-six, but some of the young guys kidded around with the preservers, they released them, you name it, they did

anything. Unfortunately, they hadn't the slightest idea of what would lay ahead of them, and then, of course there were people who couldn't swim. So, all those things added up. ... I read in the history of the whole thing, they said there must have been about twenty airplanes above us. I had no idea because we were below deck, we couldn't fight, we didn't have guns or anything, and we heard the bang, the artillery and everything, but we were below deck. Then all of a sudden, there's a tremendous bang and the lights went out. We were below deck, the lights went out, so I went up above deck. All of a sudden--I'm now I'm repeating the story I told before--I'm above deck, and they said, "Abandon ship." Then later on there's a counter command, "No don't abandon ship, go below." I'm there about fifteen minutes another order, "Abandon ship." So I didn't waste any time, I didn't go towards the boats, you know, those little boats that they had on the ship.

SH: Lifeboats?

NN: The lifeboats. ... In one way I was smart because they couldn't release them, it seemed that they were painted over, ... the rope that held them down, and they were painted over so much, and the Indian crew wasn't helpful, they were looking after themselves. I got into the water pretty early. I must have been in the water about three hours. By that time, they hit us at 4:30. By five o'clock it was completely dark, and I reached the *Pioneer*, and the men on the *Pioneer* were throwing out ropes. I threw a rope around me, they pulled me aboard. I stayed on deck for a while throwing out the rope and pulling in men. That little minesweeper pulled in 606 men, I don't know how. They were all over the place, but we were saved. A lot of people, the story about the men who got the Bronze Star, they said that they held on to things when it happened, some people got into the water, they didn't swim, they just held on to things. The problem with that was after a while you got so weak you just died, you know, you went underwater. So, by me swimming to [the *Pioneer*], being saved, like I said that was a big percentage. They say that 900 made it, so that ship made almost a big percentage of those who were saved. The rest I don't know how they were saved, but I heard that some of them were in there as much as twelve hours. I don't know how some of them survived, and then, a lot of them, they couldn't swim, they were petrified. They just went down with the ship.

SH: To go back to Oran when you were boarding the *Rohna*, how did it compare to the Liberty ship that you had taken to Oran?

NN: Well, it was a different type of ship. We had hammocks, on the British ships they have hammocks so you get in a hammock and ... sleep on the hammock. In the American ships, they have these, about three or four up, that's the way the Americans handled it, but like I said I didn't get used to it, because in one day, bingo, we were off.

SH: When you went into the water, were you fully dressed?

NN: Oh, yes. I was so stupid I had a field jacket, I had it on. The craziest part was as I said before, I had my shoes on--idiot--take off the shoes.

SH: Did you do that then?

NN: No, I swam the whole time with my shoes on.

SH: Where had you learned to swim?

NN: Oh, as a young fella, and I wasn't a great swimmer, but I could swim, and I liked swimming. ... When I went to the beaches, I'd swim. I wasn't a great swimmer, but at least I knew how to swim.

SH: On the ship, at any point did they tell you where you were and if you abandon ship what you should do?

NN: Nothing, no, I didn't see an officer, I saw nobody. I saw people running around, but nobody knew, there was nobody saying, "Hey you do this, do that," nobody. It was like every man for himself.

SH: Was it really?

NN: Yes, that's how bad it was.

SH: How did you get off the ship, did you jump over?

NN: No, usually what they do is they put a netting on the side, you lower yourself, and then, what happened though, I had about twenty or twenty-five feet more that wasn't covered by the net, I just dropped into the water. I scrapped myself and I burned myself on the thing.

SH: On the hull of the ship?

NN: Scrapping down, I burned my hands. ... That was the least of my worries.

JB: Did you have your lifebelt on you?

NN: Oh, yes, I had it on tight, that was one good thing about it, because in reading some of them, I just am reading about that one who got the Bronze Star, he didn't have it on tight enough, and when he dropped into the water, it went off. It didn't hold him, his body went down. So, even a thing like that you had to be lucky.

SH: Were you aware of others in the water with you close by?

NN: Oh, yes, I saw other men in the water but it was every man for himself. I did see men, but somehow or other, everybody was for himself. The only ones who got involved were people who held on to things, then there'd be like ten or fifteen people holding on, but like I said the problem was if you held on, you got so tired. I was in the water three hours, some of them were in the water even more, and the water was very choppy. ... It was choppy, so after a while they were exhausted and they just went under.

SH: Did you have any sense of where you were swimming to?

NN: No. All I knew was I saw the ship and I said, "I got to get to that ship or else."

SH: That ship was part of the convoy?

NN: Oh, yes. See when a convoy is hit, most of the ships keep going, only a few ships stay behind to pick up survivors. The *Pioneer* and a merchant ship, maybe another one, I don't know, and then later on there were ships that were sent out to pick up survivors. So our ship picked up 606, so you're talking about 400 were picked up by other means. How they were picked up, I don't know.

SH: Were there men coming on board that you were pulling out of the water that were injured?

NN: I didn't notice anybody, ... but in reading about the *Pioneer*, I read that one man died during the night out of the 606, only one person died. So, that's a pretty good record.

SH: When the ship was hit, could you see the damage?

NN: No, I couldn't see because we were, like I said we were below deck, we didn't know what was going on. We heard the bombing and all that, but we were young, that was the furthest thing from my mind. We didn't think that our ship was going to be hit. When you're young your mind doesn't think [about] the worst things.

SH: Did you look back at all to see?

NN: No, ... once I left that ship I kept my eye on the ship that I was bound for, that was my goal. ... Like I said, three hours, who knows, it might have been more, but all I know is when I reached it, it was dark, but they had lights on the *Pioneer*--that helped.

SH: You were swimming towards those lights.

NN: Yes. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

JB: Before the ship was even attacked, did they give you a Thanksgiving meal on the ship?

NN: I don't think so. The officers ate very well. They ate at the officer's mess. One of the officers came down to where we were, and I think the men were complaining about the things in their cereal, but he took a taste, he said, "Oh it's not bad," and then he left. Like I said an officer was an officer, they lived in a different world.

JB: Before the attack on the ship, you mentioned they went over abandon ship drills.

NN: Yes.

JB: Were there any drills when you actually got on the *Rohna*?

NN: I think we had one, the first day.

[TAPE PAUSED]

NN: They did an abandon ship which they always do any ship you're on, but the abandon ship thing and the real thing were two different things. Like I said, I didn't see any Indians on deck when I left, it was everyman for himself, maybe that's why I survived. If you add the crew who didn't make it, it was as many as was on the *Arizona*, but like I said, everything about the *Rohna* was kept hush, hush.

SH: When you got on the *Pioneer*, what happens with you next?

NN: The next morning, we pulled it to a port. We all got off the ship, I got off in my underwear, they gave me long johns, I think, I don't know. My outfit disappeared because, I should have told you, I was picking up men, and then all of a sudden the Germans came back at night. So not being a sailor, I went below deck, the next thing I knew it was morning. I must have been so tired, I got up the next morning and we pulled into some port. We didn't have any clothing on and I think it must have been some sort of a British camp. They equipped us with British outfits, with those horrible shoes, heavy shoes they have, but at least we had shoes and a uniform. We stayed there a while. ...

SH: Do you remember what the name of the camp was?

NN: No, ... we stayed there temporarily. I don't know the name, all I know is we stayed there a very short time. We got on a train and we were on our way to Bizerte. I don't know if you have ever heard of Bizerte, "Dirty Gertie from Bizerte." That was an oldie. We got to Bizerte. Bizerte that was ... a colony of the Italians. [Editor's Note: "Dirty Gertie from Bizerte" was a popular tune sung by American soldiers during World War II.]

SH: Who took command of you and the 606 that were on the *Pioneer*? Did you all get on the same train to go to Bizerte?

NN: Yes, we must have, but we separated. ... In other words I was with the 31st, if there were others from a different organization, they were probably separated. They must have separated us there. All I know is our outfit, we went to Bizerte, and we were in tents and we stayed there. I know it was over Christmas, and believe it or not in North Africa it snowed. We had a big stove in the center of the tent and it kept us warm. One of the guys in my outfit, he was Italian so he figured, "Oh, let's go into Bizerte, maybe we can get a meal." They were so poor and so they couldn't give us a plate. We went back. [laughter]

SH: When they issued you British uniforms, did they also give you money or script?

NN: No, I don't remember anything about money.

SH: Was there anything that you lost that was in your duffle bag?

NN: Oh, a lot of things. My underwear, extra things, that's why the first thing I did when I got to India, I wrote away and asked for underwear from my parents. They didn't know. Also, it was very interesting all our watches wouldn't go because they were in the water, but somehow or other they found out if they put the watches in gasoline, it would dry out or something so we'd put the watches in gasoline and they ran. ... In India, these watchmakers they'd have little stalls, when you'd walk over they'd fix it for us. [laughter]

SH: I just thought maybe there was something that you put in your duffle bag that you were really sorry about losing.

NN: No, I don't really remember anything special because most of them were Army stuff.

SH: I thought maybe you had a little kind of keepsake or good luck charm.

NN: No, no. Yes, if I were married like all the married men, they always had pictures of their wives.

JB: How did you feel boarding the next troop ship to the CBI Theater?

NN: ... At Bizerte, we had to get on another ship. I think her name was (Tacloba?) I'm not sure. We got on that ship and it took us through the Suez Canal.

SH: Can you talk a little bit about that ship?

NN: Well, all I can remember about the (Tacloba?) was also on a hammock, I don't remember too much about the ship but I remember looking out and on the right there was desert, on the left there were desert, and we didn't see any, hardly any people, because it was all desert, who's going to live when there's desert? Interestingly enough, while we were going through the Canal, we saw a Polish ship called the *Batory*. That was very interesting, you know, the Germans took over Poland, but what happened was the Polish men on that ship rebelled, and it went over to the Polish side. So, it was quite an interesting ship to see in the Suez Canal, but they had so many guns on it, you'd think it was a cruiser.

SH: Oh, really?

NN: Yes, it was very interesting. There was nothing much through the canal.

SH: It was an Allied ship at that point?

NN: Oh, yes, it was on the Allied side, but like I said, there was nothing to see, and we went through the Suez Canal, then we went to another sea, and before we knew it, we were in India.

SH: When did they begin to tell you not to discuss the fact that your ship had been bombed and sunk?

NN: Well, I would venture to say ... when we got there ... to India. At the beginning we were in a British camp. ... We stayed there for a few days, and then they put us on another train to where we were going to go. We were taken to a place near Calcutta, and our first function in India was, our mission I should say, was building telephone lines. The B29s were going to be stationed in India. The first B29s were stationed in India, and they built about seven airfields in India and they wanted to build communications for this. So that was our first mission in India. Oh, we got praises from generals, you know, that we accomplished the mission. At the beginning our cooks used to go into Calcutta for meat, but the problem was there was no ice, by the time they got the meat to us, they had to throw it out. So, after a while everything that we ate in India was out of a can, not these little things that the soldiers [have now], you know, MREs or whatever. They would have beef and gravy, pork and gravy, all kinds, but in big cans, all our cooks had to do was take it out, ... heat it up, the vegetables they'd heat up, and then in those days we got acquainted with a new type of butter. It was as hard as rocks.

SH: Oleo?

NN: Oleo, right. That was new to us, and about the only thing that our cooks may have made was bread, even that I don't know. So, the cooks had an easy job.

SH: What about things like water and sanitation?

NN: That was the biggest problem. The theater recommendation was that all the water be boiled. Our officers did not obey that. They should have been court-martialed, because later on I and quite a number of the guys got amoebic dysentery. We were in Upper Assam Province then and quite a few of us landed in the hospital. It was so bad that a medical outfit came to us, like a chemistry outfit, they examined our stools, and quite a few of the guys wound up in the hospital, but like I said our officers should have been court-martialed; nothing happened.

SH: These were the same officers from AT&T?

NN: Oh, yes, I was in the same outfit from the day I came in practically from once I left Dix to the day I was in Fort Dix again, I was in the same outfit.

SH: Because so many of the other battalions were on different ships than you, when did the entire unit come together?

NN: We never really got together. ... We never saw them, they didn't exist for us, it was only after the war that we started reading about these different outfits. ... I belong to what's called the China, Burma India Veterans, and then later on I wound up in, the survivors formed another outfit. ... The CBI organization dissolved about ten years ago because the people were dying off. The people who are survivors, we have an organization.

SH: That is good to hear. In India, you were first in Calcutta?

NN: Near Calcutta.

SH: What kind of a shock was that to a kid from the Bronx?

NN: Oh my gosh, it was quite a shock to see so many. You have no idea, you see the animals in the streets, and they had a caste system. You know they talk about us with the African Americans, they have the caste system there. They're no better than our system in the United States, but they criticize us. ...

SH: Were you told anything as a US soldier about what to expect of the culture?

NN: Well, once we got there, they gave us booklets, you know, how to react to people, how to talk to people, things like that, you know, to be nice to people and all that, you know, that they felt that you were representing the United States.

SH: How were you able to observe your religious holidays?

NN: Very interesting, I was about eighty miles away from Calcutta, I hear that we could go in for Passover to Calcutta. I'd never been on a plane before--you may have been on a plane when you're an infant, same thing with you. I was at that time I think I was about twenty-six years old, never been on a plane and they said, "Namerow do you want to go to Calcutta for Passover?" I raised my hand, I got on a plane, no seats, it was a DC3, prop, and we sat on the floor of the plane. We got there and the Passover Seder was given by Lord and Lady Ezra, they were Sephardic Jews in India, but I elected not to go. Instead I went with a family that had run out of Burma, so this was instead of being a community Seder, I went to this family. Very interesting family, who knows maybe if I had latched on I may have wound up with somebody from Burma, [laughter] you never know. As a matter-of-fact, one of my wife's very good friends did come from India, her husband was in an outfit that used to inspect meat, and he was in Calcutta. He met her, she was Sephardic with a British accent and he married her and then brought her back to the United States. It happened because when I went to the World War II memorial, they had loads and loads and loads of women who had been in Australia and they all married GIs, we didn't realize it because the GIs, you know, after all, their guys were in the British Army elsewhere, and the GIs were there. So the two of them got together--same thing in Britain.

SH: This family that had escaped from Burma, what was their story? Did you ever see them again?

NN: No, I never saw them again, it was just that day, and that was it. I often wondered about them. All I knew is that when the Japanese came in, they ran out of Burma. They must have had some kind of a business in Burma.

SH: When you got to the CBI did you see any damage from the Japanese?

NN: I was never in a section where [that happened], although later on when I drove from India to China, I did drive to Burma, and I saw where the fighting had been, but when I was there, there was no fighting. The Merrill's Marauders and the British troops had cleared it out. This is another interesting story. My outfit decides that they're going to go from India to China. The

whole outfit got on trucks and drove to China. ... I was in the hospital then, I come out the hospital and ... went to Lido and I figured, "Well, I'm out of the hospital, they should fly me over," and I'm there and they said to me, "Oh, no, you're not flying to China," I said, "What do you mean?" "You're driving to China." I had never driven a truck, I did know how to drive a car--before I went in the Army I drove a car--but driving a truck and driving a car are two separate things. Sure enough, would you believe it, I drove a truck from India to China. I had a Chinese guy sitting next to me, we must have had about fifty trucks driving from India to China.

SH: Were you hauling something?

NN: Oh, guess what I was hauling? Gasoline, drums of gasoline, and I learned how to drive. I did it myself, don't ask me how. There's such a thing as double clutching, and you're supposed to know that. ... The problem is, I don't know if you ever drove a truck, if you're driving a truck, the cargo is pushing you, it's not like being in a car and I was going on a curve and I didn't straighten out fast enough. Guess what? Flipped it over, fortunately in some spots I could have fallen about a thousand feet, I would have been never heard of again. Fortunately I was caught in some kind of trees or whatever. When the truck came to, I was still holding onto the wheel, the front of the truck was all gone, but in those days it was made out of plastic, not glass. ... I get out of the truck, the guy next to me, the Chinese guy, the next thing you know he gets into the next truck and he's off and I'm all by myself because the convoy, they went ahead of me. So, I'm sitting there, and a couple of hours goes by, and I see an American officer come by, and he says to me, "Oh," he says, "if I pull you up, can I take the gasoline?" I said, "Be my guest. What do I care?" [laughter] So, he got a bulldozer, he must have been an engineering officer, he pulled the truck, he righted the truck, the only thing it needed was oil, when it was turned upside down the oil came out. So he put in oil, and I drove for the next four or five days. ...

SH: By yourself?

NN: By myself, but with other drivers, you know, I caught up with the group, but the good thing about it is usually where you stopped, they had trucks, so I came when it was raining, so they gave me another truck that had a windshield wiper and a top too, and that's how I wound up in China.

SH: Was this on the famous Stillwell Road?

NN: In those days they called it the Ledo Road. There's a picture somewhere of me, oh and I also have, oh, there it is. ... This is the picture of the road. That's part of it.

SH: Oh, wow, look at that. I think those are called "hairpin turns."

NN: And the problem is the roads were narrow. You really had to know what you were doing.

JB: I see how you could have fallen a thousand feet.

SH: Did you ever call it the Stillwell Road?

NN: They did call it the Stillwell, yes. Most of the people called it the Burma or Ledo Road, but it's interesting you'll notice ... it's been censored.

SH: It was prepared by the Office of Public Relations, where the other one is from *Yank* magazine.

NN: Yes, but it's also censored.

JB: There is a picture of your unit on an elephant. Did your unit ever get to interact with the wildlife?

NN: Well, the enlisted men, but the officers once in a while they would try to kill a tiger, I don't know how successful they were, but, you know, when they had their time off, they would go out and try to kill a tiger. ... Like I said I don't know how successful they were.

SH: What did you do when you had time off or did you have time off?

NN: ... We worked six days a week. On the seventh day they had an inspection, so even on the day of rest you had to clean, ... you had to do your laundry, things like that, ... shave yourself, and then we had one guy, he became the barber. It seems that with the equipment that they gave to the battalion there was a barber thing, and he learned how to be a barber, and he became the company's barber. ... That thing there, that has the list of all those men who were lost in our company--138 [men]. This is from the *New York Daily News*, February 18th, 1944. "The enemy has sunk an allied troop ship in Europe with the loss of a thousand American soldiers, the greatest toll ever sustained by US convoy. The ship carrying about 2000 was attacked at night probably by submarine. Half the men were rescued the Army said. The date and locations were not revealed. European waters could mean anywhere from Italy through Mediterranean off the west coast of Norway, the British Isles, or Norway." That gives you an idea, and this was in the American paper.

SH: Months later.

NN: Yes. ... The Germans knew they sunk us. They knew they sunk us. I feel that they didn't want to fright the Americans that the Germans had such a device, although later on the Germans ... were shooting those bombs over England, probably they're related to those bombs. I wouldn't know.

SH: Did you realize what had hit you, that it was a guided missile?

NN: We knew about it already.

SH: When did you first start becoming aware of what had really happened?

NN: Well, actually with the Freedom of Information [Act]. A group of the survivors got together and they had a lawsuit for freedom of information, they wanted to know what happened.

We found out about that guided missile much later on. We knew ... that we were sunk, but we had no idea of how it was sunk.

SH: You had said it was when you got into India that they began to tell you not to write about what happened.

NN: ... As soon as we got there, they told us we were not allowed to write anything, not only that, but we were in India, we were never allowed to say where we were. We could write India, but not what part of India, that's how strict they were. All our mail was censored and of course no cell phone, no telephone, nothing.

SH: Your parents were never aware you had been on a ship that had been sunk?

NN: Oh, no, they were never aware of anything, same thing with the parents of those whose bodies were never found. At the beginning they said that they were missing, then after a while they wrote to the parents, your son ... has died. ... Or they would write to the wife or whatever, ... but they wouldn't say where, when, or how. Some bodies were recovered in North Africa, a few bodies were recovered in parts of Europe, they washed ashore. Yes, because it was in the Mediterranean so you never know how it worked. If you want you can keep this.

SH: Thank you. [Editor's Note: Mr. Namerow gives the interviewer a copy of the list of casualties in his battalion as a result of the sinking of the HMT *Rhona* by a German guided missile on November 26, 1943. The interviewer is also given a copy of the February 18, 1944 *New York Daily News* article that about the sinking.]

NN: Yes, sure.

SH: You wrote to your parents and asked for new underwear. You were not allowed to tell them why?

NN: No, I just said, "Send me underwear," and probably maybe other things from [home] I remember, but I do remember the part about the underwear.

SH: When were you issued US clothing?

NN: Well, I think when we got to Bizerte then they gave us US clothing. Yes, they probably gave it because Americans were there, so they can do that.

JB: Since B Company lost 138 men, when did your unit receive replacements?

NN: Very good question. We got a notice that we would get replacements, they were from the Signal Corps, but the crazy part about the majority of them were not pole climbers. These was code breakers, radiomen, so what they did was when we got them, I think we got there around February, March, or April sometime, then we started getting the replacements. What our outfit did was put up poles and teach these new men how to climb poles and how to pull wires and all that. They knew nothing about it, they were in the Signal Corps. Now the type of work we did,

the government didn't check with our laborers whether or not we were okay, but those people who were the replacements if you were on that part of the Signal Corps they would check with your families whether your families were communists or things like that, and really check them out. ... These poor slob they wound up in our place, and some of them did very well, some of them didn't. Interestingly enough, one of the guys was very interesting, his name was Harold Rosenthal. I don't know if the name is familiar. ... He was one of the replacements and later on in life I read, you know, I read about him, so I sent a picture that I had where he's got a monkey on his shoulder near a jeep and I sent it to his office on 57th Street. Oh, he was thrilled. Before he got into the Army, he had something with the music business. He did very well, he wound up on Riverside Drive. ... Need I say anything?

SH: When you were in India, you said first you were eighty miles from Calcutta?

NN: And then we started moving north.

SH: In Assam?

NN: Assam Province, we worked in Assam Province, we worked in a place called Gauhati. In fact, it's funny, my son is a physician and when he meets Indians and he tells them that his dad was in Gauhati. Oh, they're thrilled. [laughter]

SH: What did the GIs do for fun?

NN: Well, what they did, they had movies, they put up sheets, and we'd have Indians watching it too, and then they had these books that were circulating. ... You could get books and then I used to get *Newsweek*, it was a little edition, very small. A lot of these magazines, United States magazines had small editions to ship over, but it took a long time, it wasn't like now. If they sent us something, sent us a package, it would sometimes take three or four months until it got to us. So, it wasn't easy. Also, we were not allowed to eat any Indian food or Chinese food.

SH: Why?

NN: Why do you think?

SH: Sanitary reasons?

NN: Well, when we were in China, I'll give you an illustration. ... We'd make holes all along, we'd put boxes with little round things, we'd use as the toilets. We're in China, one day the Chinese picked up that whole thing, and they're scooping the stuff all over the fields all around us, oh it stunk like hell. That's why we were not allowed to eat any Chinese food, it was a no, no, the same thing in India. ... In India, there was one restaurant, it was called Firpo [Angel Firpo's Restaurant in Calcutta] that the Americans used to go to. It was very expensive, three rupees, one dollar, oh, and men would wait on you with uniforms and everything, Indians, but the food was delicious, all for a dollar.

SH: It was Indian food?

NN: No, no, it was more like American food.

SH: Were there natives working with you on the base?

NN: Well, it's a strange thing, our company commander. Benjamin (Sponnermore?) from Dodge City, Kansas said, "I don't want any of them darn niggers working here." [Editor's Note: Mr. Namerow is speaking with a drawl, imitating the speech of the company commander.] He was our company commander. Need I say more? He called the Indians that. That's why other outfits used to use Indians to boil the water, he didn't even want that. He wanted no part of any Indians.

SH: How often would you move?

NN: Oh, very often. Our company was divided into platoons of about I'd say about thirty-five, forty, all along the road. So if you do ten miles or twenty miles and they did another--we were moving so often we spent all our time in tents. The only time we were lucky was when we come across an American airfield, then we'd stay at the airfield while we were working, and the good thing about it is, if you were in an American airfield, because they got food from the United States, we'd get steak once or twice a week. Oh that was a great thing, because they would fly it to them. The Air Corps ate very well. I should have been in the Air Corps. [laughter]

SH: We talked about elephants. What type of creatures did you see there?

NN: Oh, yes, we saw monkeys, and one day we were traveling along on the road, our whole outfit was traveling, we see two snakes, tremendous, big, and one guy got off and he got these long shovels that we have and that you could dig real deep, he took that, he chopped the heads off the two snakes and killed them. ... We used to see the cattle and the Indians had very big families, their idea was if you have a big family it's going to help, you know. They were all farmers and where we were, rice was the, they didn't have wheat. ... They had a lot of water because where we were it was 300 inches of rain a year. So, they would take all the water, and then they'd replant in the water to grow the rice, and also every once in a while we'd eat coconuts from the trees, things like that. ... Even in China we saw the making of all the food in China, but never made an attempt to eat.

SH: It was when you were first traveling by truck when you saw areas that had been damaged by the war.

NN: Oh, yes, we saw some of the Buddhist temples had been destroyed in Burma, and interestingly enough, while we were in India we had a Protestant chaplain, very interesting and he took care of the Jews, the Catholics--a very nice guy.

SH: Do you remember his name?

NN: I don't remember his name, all I remember we came to a place where the Indians had like phallic symbols about forty of them, and he took us to this place to show us where they prayed,

but he was a nice guy, he helped us, he stayed awhile. We had a battalion surgeon, but it was crazy. The way the set up was, the doctors stayed with the Headquarters Company. So the way it worked, suppose I got sick, what they did was they had a medic, two medics stayed with each company. If you got sick, he'd treat you and if he couldn't treat you, he'd take you to the nearest hospital.

SH: Indian hospital?

NN: No, American hospital. As a matter-of-fact, when I was in Gauhati I told you I had amoebic dysentery, ... it was operated by the American Baptist Mission. It was the American Baptist Hospital in Gauhati, but they took two wards for American doctors and American nurses and I was taken care of there. It was very interesting because while I was in the hospital I used to see these Indian kids. The missionaries used to teach them, you know, American songs and we'd hear it from our room.

SH: What was the treatment for amoebic dysentery?

NN: You know in the Army they did everything by the numbers. It was a two-week treatment, one week one thing, and the following week they did another thing, and I was telling my granddaughter because she went to Uganda, I think about a year or two ago, she was there for some reason and I told her about amoebic dysentery. Guess what, she got it, but she says, "Grandpa, it's not like when you had it." She said, "They treated me in three days." There's a difference.

SH: What was the first treatment?

NN: They gave us some sort of a shot, and they told us not to get out of bed at night, they said it would be bad for your heart, that I remember. So, I had to stay in bed under the netting. Oh, by the way, in India you always stayed under the netting, and that's the way you slept. I slept under the netting and the next two weeks they had another procedure. It was some kind of, like taking care of bowel movements, something like that.

SH: Were you taking things like Atabrine for malaria?

NN: ... When we first got there we didn't take Atabrine so it was horrible, practically every day another guy went to the hospital, and I don't know if you've ever seen somebody with that fever. ... When you have malaria, one week they're freezing and the next week they're dying of the heat. It's one extreme to the other. We started taking malaria after about a month or two that we were there--what a difference. That Atabrine was God sent because after that very few men wound up in the hospital--that was great.

SH: Were you well-supplied with what you needed to do your job?

NN: Oh, yes. Well, sometimes it was funny. We got supplies, it were interesting, from a place called Pittsburgh, California. I never knew that there was a Pittsburgh, California. They used to ship over supplies, you know, these were telephone supplies, but it took quite a while, but what

they did do was before we even got to India, we didn't know that they had shipped a lot of stuff to Pittsburgh, our outfit had shipped stuff to Pittsburgh, and they shipped it by ship. ... The sergeants had been in that group, they were sort of taking care of it, so they got the stuff over, but every once in a while, maybe they'd run out of poles, maybe we'd run out of this. We were dependent on the supplies.

SH: How did the rain affect the way you were able to do your job?

NN: It was not easy because what happened was you build a telephone line when it was dry. All of a sudden the rain came and the water would be high, how do you get to the pole if there's a problem on the pole line? That's why they used the elephant, to try to get to the pole line. Also I think earlier I said they built the pipeline from India to China, the Americans built a pipeline for gasoline--the Chinese puts spigots. They were stealing the gasoline. Oh, they were great counterfeiters. Even in those days they counterfeited, they knew how to do it.

JB: Was there any sabotage?

NN: ... There must have been some sabotage. Yes, that's why the pipeline people used to go up and down the line to check. That was built in pretty fast time because the idea was instead of ... using all these trucks to bring the gasoline to China, if they could use the pipeline to supply. Eventually what happened was when this was finished, lo and behold we got Saipan, so all of that was a waste of time, but that's the way it happened during the war. You built things, and then, that was the end of it because like I said, the 20th Bomber Command shifted out to Saipan, they didn't stay in India anymore, and they were closer to Japan and they could bomb Japan much easier. ... Oh, there was sabotage.

JB: To your communication wires?

NN: They probably did that also. We had Tokyo Rose, and also there was another person on about all the American troops in India, there was somebody who, I forgot his name, he went to Japan and used to--oh, Subash Chandra Bose--now I remember his name. Many an Indian supported him. He was against the British, but he was in Japan, and he was telling them to, you know, sabotage everything. It's funny when I speak to Indians, somehow or other they know nothing about the Americans, but all you have to do is mention Subash Chandra Bose then they know. [Editor's Note: Subash Chandra Bose was an Indian nationalist leader during World War II who opposed the British and collaborated with the Japanese.]

SH: What about Gandhi?

NN: He was pretty quiet in those days and he always was surrounded by his female followers and he practiced ayurvedic medicine, it was called. It was all Indian herbs and roots. ...

SH: Were the Americans told about the political climate in India?

NN: Oh, yes, after all, they gave us booklets, you know, told us all about it. ... Not only that we could hear the radio, we had a radio we could hear ... against the British, but we had no problems with the Indians. ... They sort of tolerated us. [laughter]

SH: Were there other Allied troops there besides the Americans?

NN: Oh, yes. The British were there, I still remember meeting a British General Slim. In fact I was reading a book the other day and all of a sudden I see his name. ... I was in an area where they had British troops, and some of these troops were from South Africa--tall, big Africans--and they had entertainment. I went over there and they had some British, just like we had the USO, they had what's called the ENFA and I sat there and I was listening to a British comedian. ... [laughter] The difference between the Americans and the British, you got to give the British a lot of credit. You have American soldiers who are over in say Germany, a number of years--they don't pick up German at all. Put the British in a country, they pick up the language. They were in India, they spoke Hindustani so that is a good feature, they were good colonizers. The Americans never do that, like in Germany, and even now in Germany they have an area where the Americans are, I don't know how much communication they have with the Germans, and they feel much better if you can speak their language.

SH: Did you pick up anything?

NN: A few words--*jao, jildi jildi*, hurry up, ... *namastey*. [laughter] I must say, but one of my neighbors who was in Merrill's Marauders, ... he was in such a bad shape that he stayed the rest of his time in Calcutta, and he picked up a lot of Hindustani. He spoke it like a native.

SH: Did he talk about being in Merrill's Marauders?

NN: Oh, sure, he always told you about Merrill's Marauders. He told his son. Well, it was a big thing during World War II. On my way to China, I did meet a relative of mine in Burma.

SH: Did you?

NN: I couldn't believe it.

SH: Tell me about that if you would.

NN: Well, I was traveling there and I don't know how I managed to find him, but I did find him. Oh it was thrilling. We had one guy in our outfit, his father was somewhere in India, he was one of the men in our outfit. He was driving and I think that heat got the best of him and he died. There were men who had accidents--not dysentery, not malaria--they had accidents in there, and it was extremely hot, and we Americans, the British would stop working when it was hot, not the Americans. We'd work right through that heat even if it killed us. Yes, the British they would stop working, not the Americans. So, it wasn't good for us.

SH: Were there other Allied troops there besides the British?

NN: Not that I [saw]. I read that there were Australians probably, and also the whole thing about *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, that story is phony, I'm sorry to upset you, but the *Bridge on the River Kwai* was sunk by British and American bombers, but the Japanese they used a lot of prisoners not, in other words, they were not Army people, civilians, they impressed them and they had a figure how many died per mile, it was a 300 mile railroad line. They told how many. Oh, they had these comfort women, the Japanese gave them nothing. We on the other hand, look at how nice we treated the Japanese internees in California, we gave them ten thousand a piece, but we're still bad, they still hate us. [Editor's Note: *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1954) was a fictional account of the construction of the Burma railway during World War II, which was later made into a film (1957). Mr. Namerow is referring to the Japanese American relocation and internment during World War II and reparation payments made to those displaced.]

SH: Did you ever see any African American troops?

NN: I don't remember. They said they were there, I saw a few. However, when I was in Camp Atterbury in Indiana, there was an African American division, the Buffalo Division. They used to be right next door to us. In Indiana they weren't discriminated against, but I hear in Tennessee I heard they were discriminated against. What happened was the Buffalo Division had white officers, but they had, you know, the African American soldiers. They were an infantry division.

SH: How long did it take you to drive from India to China?

NN: Well, I'd say it must have been about ten days or more because it was about 1300 miles I think. It was a long thing, and also I slept in hammocks. They gave us a hammock with a netting that was all set, ... so you weren't bitten by mosquitoes. Coming back at the end of the war we stopped off at a camp and we got ice cream--wow. I hadn't had ice cream in so long so all that ice cream ... went right to our stomach. We were all running to the bathroom. [laughter]

SH: The camp was in China?

NN: It was on our way home, somewhere in India or maybe on the road to. Surprisingly enough when the war ended, we had to drive all our stuff back to India. They probably, I don't know what happened, we left it, then we got on a plane across India to Karachi. Karachi in those days was a little village. I was watching television the other day. ... What do you think the population is there?

SH: I have no idea.

NN: Well, I saw that program, it was one of these traveler programs. They said there's thirteen million, I couldn't believe it, and no real stool supplies or anything like that, no toilets, it's all out on the street, that's why so many die. I think they said, although that was in Haiti, they're dying left in right from cholera.

SH: Were you aware of how the war was progressing in other areas?

NN: Well, what I used to do was in India I used to read the *Hindustani Standard*. That was a local English paper so I kept up with that. *Newsweek* I got, *Yank* magazine also gave us information and on the radio you heard things. We heard that, you know, that the Americans were gradually going from island to island, but there were a lot of things that we didn't know because we were in India. Just as a lot of the American people didn't even realize that there were so many Americans in China, Burma, and India. I speak to a lot of Americans and they said, "You were in India?" I speak to Indians, they don't even know we were there either. ...

JB: Did you hear about VE-Day right away?

NN: Oh, that we heard. ... The Germans, and then, the Japanese, but we got home very quickly. The Japanese surrendered in, I believe it was late August. I was a civilian November 26th [1945]. That's fast because when they surrendered a few weeks later we got the orders to prepare to drive back to India. We drove back to India, that took time because we were driving. Then, we crossed India by plane, that was the first time I was ever on a four engine plane and the operator of the plane, the pilot was so nice, he says, "You'll never going to see New Delhi again." He circled it around to let us see New Delhi, then we continued on our way. ... He was right, I never saw New Delhi again.

SH: Where did they take you, where was your next stop?

NN: Our next stop was Karachi. We stayed there a couple of weeks and we got on a troop transport. ... It was not like in India, that was an American troop ship run by the Navy. The food was different, we even had milk, it was completely different. It was like day and night, but when we crossed to where on that ship when we crossed to where our ship was sunk, we had like a little demonstration where all the men stood at attention. ... We had a memorial service.

SH: They did acknowledge the ship had been lost.

NN: Oh, yes. That we knew about. ... We knew about it so we did it, whether or not the Army, but we did it there, and they let us do it, it was very nice. They played taps. ... We went into Pier 86, that's where we got off.

SH: This troop ship took you all the way from Karachi to the United States?

NN: Through the Suez Canal, through the Mediterranean, through the Atlantic. ... About a week or so before, a rumor goes around that if there's any pornographic material, you'd better get rid of it because the customs inspectors are going to inspect your stuff. Well, there was a mad dash of guys running on the deck because in India they were selling us all kinds of pornographic material about Chinese girls. ... They made a picture of Chinese girls. I'm sure you understand, and other materials in India where they have stories about Jewish girls being very passionate, all right, I have yet to meet a very passionate Jewish girl, but that's what they believe. They had these stories about things like that. So, we tossed them overboard. Guess what? We get to Pier 86--we go right on. [laughter] That was the funny part.

SH: What was the reaction when you heard that President Roosevelt had died?

NN: Oh, well, the people were crying because all those years, you know, and he was our President.

SH: Did you have confidence in the new President?

NN: Well, we didn't know anything about him, all we know that he was from Missouri, that he sold hats or something, but I'll tell you, after a while he wasn't so bad.

SH: Did you hear about the atomic bombing before the surrender?

NN: We never heard anything about the bombing until the bombing. In fact when they bombed, we didn't know what the hell it was. We thought it was a big bomb. We knew nothing about maybe the Russians knew about it, because their spies, the Rosenbergs and the Fuchs and the other people, we knew nothing about it. We were completely ignorant and the crazy part about it is being in Tennessee where they were doing a lot of work for the bomb, I knew nothing about it. Later on in life, I met GIs who were drafted or went into the Army, and because they had studied physics in college, like one of the men that I used to know in Westchester, they took him, even though he was in uniform, he stayed at Columbia University working on the Manhattan project, and he wasn't the only one. I have spoken to other people, they were GIs, they were getting Army pay working along people who were getting civilian pay, but this was all over, and yet ... I knew nothing about it. ... He had a tough decision to make, should he or shouldn't he? Having already been overseas and thought that I was going to be there forever, it was, you know, one day led to another to another and all of a sudden it was over two years, my gosh. I was about twenty-seven already. I was no kid.

SH: What towns or cities were you in China?

NN: I was in Yunnan and I went to Kunming, but that was like a headquarters. I stayed there a very short time only when I drove from India to China, I think I drove to Kunming, and then my outfit went to Kunming and picked me up. I was never in Kunming that much.

SH: When did you start making plans for what you would do after the war?

NN: Well, I had a job, so I went back to the job, and I went back to the job and I wasn't married. I had sent my picture to my future wife.

SH: How did you meet her?

NN: Well, what happened was my sister-in-law gave her my picture. She saw my picture and she flipped, and she started writing to me and I started writing to her, and she was bored by the stuff that I was telling her all about India and China. ... It was like a travelogue, and when I first came back my mother made a party and my sister-in-law came to the party and brought her along and she saw me and she liked what she saw. ... This was in November. On April 7th I was married. It was a very short courtship. Well, I was twenty-eight years old already, I was an old guy, but the problem was I didn't have any civilian clothes so when I took her to the theater, I

was still in uniform, and then when we got married, it was very tough to get furniture. My wife used to work for a buying office from a Portland, Oregon store, they had a buying office near Macys and Gimbals. So every day at lunch time she'd run to Gimbals and Macys looking for a bedroom set. Finally, she saw something I think in Gimbals, she put a deposit down. Guess what, I still have that bedroom set.

SH: Do you really?

NN: Not like some of the young people, they change every ten years.

JB: Did you stay in New York City? How long did you remain there?

NN: I stayed in New York City until I think it was about 1980. My son got married. ... He said, "Maybe you ought to move." I said, you know, I said, I thought it over, and I'd always been in a rental apartment, and I said maybe I'll move to Westchester. So I looked around apartments and I bought a coop in Westchester, and I stayed there until I came here.

SH: What did you wind up doing after the service? Did you use your GI Bill?

NN: I used it for a while, but I didn't really. I was stupid, I didn't, I used it for a while, the problem was I was working and doing it. What you have to do is quit your job, and be the 52/20 [unemployment benefits], which I didn't do. Because of that, many a time I worked weekends because I didn't have a college degree and all that, but I survived.

SH: What did you wind up doing?

NN: Well, I wind up working for a bank. I sold life insurance ... in New York and it wasn't easy, but like I said, I worked weekends, I did everything and anything to make a living, and then also my wife, when my son was nine years old, she started working. At first she worked for the Division of Employment in New York, and then we lived right near Albert Einstein Medical School so she got a job there. Originally it was, my son was nine years old, she was going to save for the Bar Mitzvah, and what happened was guess what, she stayed there after it. She was there for twenty-six years.

SH: Oh, my.

NN: But she loved it, she loved getting up in the morning working and leaving me and, you know, it was great, she loved it and the good thing about it, because it was run by Yeshiva University, every conceivable Jewish holiday, on Friday in the winter she was let off early because sundown starts early. Oh, and the Christian girls that worked with her, they got the same benefits, they went home. [laughter]

SH: How many years was it before you became involved with the Jewish War Veterans and the *Rohna* Survivors?

NN: Well, I got involved with the China Burma India Veterans and the Jewish War Veterans--first the Jewish War Veterans. Then I found out what happened was I saw on the paper there was a reunion and it was in New Jersey. So I called the hotel, I didn't know anything about the China Burma India Veterans and I said, "Can I come over?" They said, "Of course, come over." I come to this hotel and they said, "Oh go to room," such and such. I go into that room and it was all guys from my outfit.

SH: Really?

NN: Because they were all Jersey boys, so I joined, I used to drive, we used to meet monthly, you know, most of the time monthly, and I used to go with the China, Burma, and India Veterans, I used to come here, let's see I think it was Exit 136 on the Garden State [Parkway], we used to meet there. I still remember where we used to meet, and it was great because all these guys were [there], but of course as time went by, this one died, that one died, but the good thing about, what I loved about the China Burma India Veterans, we met in a different city each year. I met in San Diego, Louisville, Texas, you name it, and I got to know the United States. It was marvelous, you know, all of a sudden I'm in Texas and Dallas and we're right near where the President was shot. These things were great. ... I got to know the United States much more than some of the people who never did any traveling.

SH: Where did you go after you came to back to the United States?

NN: ... Camp Kilmer. We stayed in there I think about a couple of hours at Camp Kilmer, and then when we went to Dix. Dix we were there so fast because what happened was while the Russians were not releasing their soldiers, all the congressmen were putting pressure on the War Department to release the soldiers. I was there exactly three days, ... that's how fast. In fact, I figured I'd pull a smart one, one of my shoes was old, so I threw it away, I figured they were going to give me another pair of shoes when I was discharged. They said to me, "Oh, you got a pair of shoes--that's it." My plans did not work. Whatever we had on they said, "That's good enough you can get out."

SH: Did you ever consider staying in the military?

NN: Very interesting question. I was speaking about that the other day to somebody else. I was talking to some Korean vets at my table. ... I came home and I was married and I wasn't making much, and one of my friends says, "Hey, you know, we can join the reserves, you get in the reserves, every three months you get a check from Uncle Sam, and it's easy you just sit there, and they lecture you, and maybe in the summer you go there for two weeks," and I told my wife she said, "No way, don't go, I don't trust them," and you know what, she was right because the guys who stayed in the reserves when Korea came [were called up]. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

NN: My story has been put on the Story Corps and I understand that it will be with the ...Library of Congress.

SH: What story did you share?

NN: I told them my story also, but it wasn't as long as this.

SH: Who was questioning you?

NN: No, they had it different because my son sat there, but there was somebody questioning me. I think the whole thing was about an hour, not as long as this. This is more detailed, you covered much more. Well, first of all from the time I went in to the time I left, and also part of civilian life.

JB: When did you first recount your experience on the *Rohna* and when did information about it start to surface?

NN: Well, what happened was a group of survivors got together and they had the Freedom of Information [Act], that started the whole thing. Eventually, the whole story came out. Like I said, there's a man who writes about the British seafarers and all that, you know, all about sea warfare, the name escapes me, and yet he does not have anything about the *Rohna* even though it was a British ship. Like I said, it was kept hush, hush, and it was all for nothing because I don't think anything would have been gained or lost had they released it.

SH: When you were discharged, did they repeat that you should not discuss this?

NN: Oh, no, once we were discharged we could say anything because we weren't soldiers anymore. ... I mean all the people who were discharged, ... what they wanted to do was have the government put out the material telling about it.

SH: What I think is unique about your story too is that the first time you are under fire is by the German air force.

NN: Yes.

SH: But you wind up in the China, Burma and India Theater facing the Japanese.

NN: Yes.

SH: You went across the entire world.

NN: Oh, yes.

JB: Did you ever encounter the Japanese?

NN: Well, I never encountered any Japanese fortunately even when I drove through Burma I wasn't close to them and at that time I was on my way to China and I never saw any Japanese, probably that part already was safe, that's why they were able to build that. What happened was actually when the Americans started building the road, they took a different road that's connected

with the old Burma Road, that's why they changed the name, it was a new connection so the part of where I was was already safe and they were able to build a road--but it was a horrible road anyway. [laughter]

SH: When you are driving on this road are you still putting up telephone poles for communication?

NN: ... When we were just driving we didn't put anything on that road. Somehow, I don't know if they even had telephone lines on that road. ... Although later on, wait a minute, they did build a pipeline from India to China so this was later. They must have put up phone lines along that road. ... When I went there were no pole lines.

SH: You were putting up telephone lines in China then.

NN: Yes, we were putting up telephone lines in China. ... [Editor's Note: Mr. Namerow is showing the interviewers personal documents relating to his military service.] I'll show you the check I got for nine cents from *Yank* magazine. ... Here it shows you all the work that we did all along. It shows you the plane going back all along here. All these were things that we did. ... We did work in China, Yunnan, oh, yes, see all along here.

SH: When you were doing this, what was the interaction between the officers and enlisted men like?

NN: The officers didn't do much. They had a good deal.

SH: I just wondered if the division between the officers and enlisted men still existed.

NN: You know it's a funny thing. They hung around, but the sergeants were actually the ones who told us what to do, in other words--the chain of command. Our officers had very little to do with us.

SH: How do you think your experiences in World War II impacted the man you became?

NN: As much as with the bad and the good, I think it strengthened me. It made me more of a man, it made me aware of the different people in our country, because originally I was in an entirely Jewish neighborhood, and I learned there are other groups and I was, by being in the Army I reacted better with them. I learned that they had the same damn problems that we had. They were no different, we're all trying for the best to exist and stay on this earth. So, there was a lot that I learned, and I feel the only thing is I feel sorry for the American Army now, because there's two million. ... Imagine going back to the place where you've been three and four times. That's why some of them commit suicide or shoot themselves or whatever. It's a horrible deal. Also they had the draft until later on in life. ... During Vietnam at the beginning they didn't have the draft, so all the college students were going to college. Everybody that you met, their son was going to college. The biggest idiot was going to college to get out of the draft so they didn't protest. When were they protesting? Do you remember, when the draft started, that's when they started burning and picketing and all that. ... I lived in a house, fifty families on this side, fifty

families [on the other]. The only one who was in the Army in those days was the super's son, all the rest were in college. Do you think that was right? How would you like it if you, you know, all of a sudden your son who is a blue collar worker is taken, but the other guy because he's passing time in college is exempt? I would have been angry, although in those days my son was young anyway, but by the time he reached old enough, they did start to draft and ... guess what his number was--about 365. I think he was about 360 so he would never, but that was the luck of the draw, but that's when all these young college students starts protesting and doing anything, you know, they had that college where the kid was shot, remember?

SH: Kent State.

NN: Yes, Kent State. That was the whole start, and then, also if you knew a friendly psychiatrist, he put down something and you got out of it. Well, it was the same thing during the Civil War. All the rich people in the United States, during the Civil War they did the same thing for \$400.00, I think it was. That was a lot of money, for \$400.00 they get somebody else to take your place in the Army and these were the crème de la crème of people. ...

SH: We are so appreciative of you taking time to talk with us.

NN: Yes, I thank God that I have been able to reach this stage and was able to give my story and maybe someday somebody will read the story and say, "Gee, he really had a tough life, but he survived." Right now, it's fifteen hundred a day [World War II veterans], I think, dying.

SH: Well, thank you sir. ...

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Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 8/31/2012

Reviewed by David Namerow 9/24/2012