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RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM PILLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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KP: This begins an interview with Mr. Sam Piller on February 22, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

KP: ... Kathleen Plunkett

KP: And I guess, I'd like to talk about your parents, who seemed to have led very interesting lives, beginning with your father who was an immigrant from Austria.

SP: Right. Right.

KP: Do you know what prompted him or his family to come to the United States?

SP: Well, religious freedom, I think, was one thing. And to earn a livelihood. At that time, the States was the place [that was] "paved with gold" and you could at least earn a living. And, that's when his family came over.

KP: So he came with his family?

SP: Right, right. I don't know whether they all came together or not, I don't know. But that's what happened.

KP: How old was he when he came to the United States?

SP: I think he was four years old, which would make it 1893.

KP: Your father was remarkable in that he got into City College, which was a very hard thing to do in that era. It was a very selective school.

SP: Well, I don't know that. I'm glad to hear that. But I know that he graduated from City College and taught for a year before he went to medical school. And my father is very interesting because he did all kinds of odd jobs in order to put himself through college. He drove a horse-drawn trolley in New York. And he carried a spear as an extra in the Metropolitan Opera, and he taught school to raise money to go to medical school. And he did quite a few other things.

KP: So were your grandparents of very modest means?

SP: My grandparents, yeah, very. You know, like so many immigrants, in those days, they worked in the garment industry, at sewing machines. And eventually, two of my father's brothers started their own ladies garment manufacturing operation. They made a lot of money and then lost it all in the 1929 Crash.

KP: And your mother?

SP: My mother came from Lithuania, and her father was a scholar and, somehow, he got to Louisville, Kentucky, and he opened a bookstore. In those days, and up until the very recent past

in Kentucky, children from grammar school on up had to buy their books. So the bookstore was a flourishing business. And it was mostly used books that he dealt in. Not only textbooks but classics. And I can remember as a child, going out there and visiting the bookstore with my mother, on the train. And he passed his bookstore to one of his sons. And eventually when that son passed away, it was sold, probably torn down. But he was a scholar. In fact, his father, which would be my great-grandfather, was a rabbi who spent some time in China. It's hard to believe, in those days. But I have some kind of letters at home that talks about that. And my mother went to, let's see, she was the oldest of a fairly large family and she went to nursing school in Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and my father was in Cornell Medical School, that's where they met. She was within a few months of finishing and getting her RN when they just couldn't wait anymore, so they got married.

KP: Your mother came up from Louisville to become a nurse?

SP: Right. Right, she had some cousins in New York City and she lived with them, and that's how she got to go to school in New York City.

KP: Did your mother continue working as a nurse once she was married?

SP: Never, never. No, she raised children. Raised four children. It was tough in those days. My father got paid in apples, and he took care of the farmer and the farmer would take care of anything that went wrong in the house. And he'd take care of the gas station man and the gas station man would give him gas for his car. That was in the '30s and it was pretty tough. And people today have no idea what life was [like] in the Depression. It's unfortunate, in a way, but it's fortunate in a way. Because, hopefully, we'll never have to go through that again. But [for] people who came up in that era, it was really tough.

KP: So you felt the [hardships of the] Depression, even though you'd figure a doctor's fairly well off, even by today's standards.

SP: But that's why I'm telling you that. My father got two dollars for an office visit, whenever anybody came in. And I know my father sat in his office, which was in Paterson, day after day, and nobody even came in. And three dollars for going to a house in his car. He got three dollars, if they could pay. See. And, like I say, many of the people, it was a barter arrangement because they just didn't have dollars. And in the hospital, which he was affiliated with, most of the patients were in what they called the wards, free wards. And, that's where the doctors kept up their skills in working on the free patients because there weren't many private paying patients. It was a tough life.

KP: What hospital was he affiliated with?

SP: He was in Barnert Memorial Hospital in Paterson, from 1920 'till he died in 1960.

KP: Your father practiced until he died.

SP: Yes, but in his later years, he became affiliated with a geriatric institute down the Shore and he was on staff there the last few years of his life, rather than in private practice. I have some of my father's financial books that he used to keep. It's just amazing, the small amount of money that he took in and how he raised four children and owned a house.

KP: You're looking back on this ...

SP: Yeah, well, you know, I had to take care of things when he died and when my mother died, so ... I was the oldest son.

KP: Your mother, was she active, she had her hands full in raising you, but was she active in any organizations? Volunteer organizations?

SP: Well, yeah, she belonged to the library, the local library, and the garden club and was affiliated with a couple of religious organizations. Not too much, because there just wasn't any money, and she had to do everything herself. No washing machine, she had to wash all of the clothes herself. It was tough.

KP: How active was your family in the synagogue?

SP: Well, they were steady members. They would go every Friday night and it got to the point where they couldn't pay their annual dues, but they still would go every Friday night. But other than that, they were neither extremely religious nor were they extremely active. Most of their social contacts were among the doctors and the doctors' wives, who were all in the same boat. Not all of them, there were a few that were thriving, as I recall. Thriving as compared to today, no.

KP: You were in high school at the time of the Depression, so were you looking ...

SP: Well, I was in high school in '35 to '39, and grammar school before that.

KP: Were you looking towards college that whole time?

SP: I was looking towards college, because of my parents, from the day I could think or comprehend anything like that.

KP: Even with your sisters, as well?

SP: Pardon?

KP: Women at that time didn't attend college that often, did they?

SP: Well, some did. I think the general intellectual level or the intelligence level of those who went to college had to be higher in those days. No ill reference there, but only the smarter ones

went to college. Unfortunately, if you were average, like me or somebody else, you might not get the chance to go because it was very selective and expensive.

KP: Your sister was very exceptional?

SP: Yeah, she was the brightest one in the family, my older sister. She went to the University of North Carolina, I don't remember whether that's on the ...

KP: Did she get a scholarship to go?

SP: No. Well, maybe she did, I'm not clear on that. But our high school principal was from North Carolina and he recommended the school and that's why she got to go there.

KP: You mentioned that your parents went to the Friday services, how observant were your parents in other areas. Did they keep kosher?

SP: No, they were Reformed, in the Reformed, which is the least religious. And they were not, as I said, they were not extremely observant. They would bring out the fact that most of the traditions and customs of the kosher house were cleanliness. And, of course, my father, being a doctor and understanding microbiology, we were clean, if nothing else. But we had relatives in our family who wouldn't eat in our house, and things like that.

KP: Because on your mother's side, there's a rabbi.

SP: Way back, yeah. And on my father's side, he had sisters who were very orthodox in their beliefs.

KP: You mentioned that your parents mainly socialized with other doctors and doctors' wives. Were the other doctors Jewish, or was there a mixture of Gentile and Jew?

SP: Well, Barnert Hospital was a Jewish hospital. So most of the doctors were Jewish doctors, yeah. That's the way it was. In Paterson, there was St. Joseph's Hospital and Barnert Hospital and there was Paterson General Hospital, which was supported by the city. And, I think that the staffs kept pretty much to themselves and they were only affiliated with one hospital. Although I think they had courtesy rights in the other hospitals if a patient had to go to another one.

KP: You grew up in Hawthorne. Did you always live in Hawthorne or did you ever live in Paterson?

SP: Well, in 1940 we moved from Hawthorne to Paterson. That was after my, let's see, it was the beginning of my sophomore year here, we moved to Paterson. And my father set up his office in the home, that was just a block away from the previous office which he had rented.

KP: So your parents moved back into the city?

SP: Yes, we moved into Paterson.

KP: But you grew up in Hawthorne?

SP: Right, right. My parents felt that children should be reared in the country. I never regretted that. It was good for children to be in the country.

KP: Were you a Boy Scout?

SP: Yes, I was a Boy Scout, but the troop was in Paterson. So Monday night meetings, I would, Father would have evening office hours every evening and he would take me to the Boy Scout meeting on Monday night and after his office hours, pick me up and take me home. So it worked out all right.

KP: Your father had long hours. I mean, if he had office hours at night ...

SP: Well, he would go to the hospital in the morning and do whatever he had to do there and at one o'clock, he'd have afternoon hours. He'd come home from the hospital for lunch. It was three miles, so he'd come home every day. He wasn't going to spend money to buy lunch. So then he'd come home after three o'clock and then he'd go back for seven o'clock to nine o'clock for evening hours. And, there may not have been anybody there all day long, but he had to be there in case somebody came in. That was the tough part of it.

KP: How good was your education in Hawthorne? Both elementary and high school?

SP: Well, it left a lot to be desired. But I see the same thing today. Unless you put in the effort and do a little more than required, you don't get a good education. Only, maybe ten percent of the class had any desire to go to college. And we had what we called a college preparatory curriculum, at that time, which required language and math and science and so forth. And there were only a few in there and they were the brighter ones of the entire class. And even that was not good enough, because they did not bring you up to the standards where you could pass the college entrance exams. We had college boards in those days, which are similar to, I forget when my kids went through it. There were certain aptitude tests, not only aptitude tests but we had to take tests in English, math and science and a scholastic aptitude test. Well, the math in our high school, even though I was in a college preparatory curriculum, did not go far enough up to prepare us, so I had to be tutored in my senior year in order to prepare myself for the college boards. And also in language, in German.

KP: So you realized when you were going through high school that you weren't being fully prepared for ...

SP: My parents realized it. I didn't realize it, I had no knowledge. But my parents realized it. My father said, "You've gotta read these books because when you get in the English college boards, they're going to tell you to take one of the following novels and write about it. And you better have read one of those or you'll get a zero." So I had to read Sir Walter Scott, Zackary and

a few others. That was, I would never had read those otherwise. So that was the situation in high school. But it wasn't any different in Paterson High School. My younger sister went through high school in Paterson, she had the same problems.

KP: When you came to Rutgers, did you have a sense that you needed more preparation, that other people were better prepared, at first?

SP: Well, not in English, math or science. But in the manual skills, I had none. When I got up in that drafting room in the engineering building, I was lost. I didn't know a triangle from a T-square.

KP: You never had mechanical drawing?

SP: Never had mechanical drawing, never had any exposure to a machine shop or engineering processes. I mean, I was really lost. Some of the fellas in our freshman class had worked summers at this kind of thing. Whereas I had worked summers as a waiter and a busboy to earn money, 'cause otherwise I wouldn't have been able to go to college. So I was very ill prepared. In fact, my engineering drawing professor, who was the assistant dean at that time, he looked at me and said, "You'll never make it." I'll never forget that. He said, "You'll never make it."

KP: Which you did.

SP: But I did.

KP: But you must have been a little concerned, because ...

SP: Well, it was rather frustrating, too, you know, because you take a kid who never spent a lot of time away from home and you throw him into an environment like this and then put him into something that he knows nothing about. I was not very happy the first few months here. But I spent so many extra hours in that drafting room in order to keep up with the class. It was tough. But in English, math and science, I did better than average. In fact, math was my best subject. As a matter-of-fact, in Van Dyck Hall here, there was an auditorium, a lecture room ...

KP: It's still here.

SP: ... A big, and that's where I took my scholastic aptitude test. It must have been in '38 or something. And I had my freshman physics lecture in there.

KP: I have two questions. What prompted you to go into engineering? You mentioned that you really hadn't had a shop background.

SP: Well, it was, I don't know. It was, "What do you want to do?" and, "I don't know," and "What are you best prepared for?" and you kind of narrowed it down, and you had to pick something, so I picked engineering. It was not that I was madly in love with engineering. I didn't even know what it was, really.

KP: And you hadn't thought of medicine?

SP: I knew that I didn't want medicine, 'cause you had to go to school too long. And you starved. So I didn't want medicine. And I don't think my father wanted me to take medicine. He was quite disillusioned with the medical profession at that time.

KP: With the profession or ...

SP: Well, both. His ability to earn a living. He never joined the AMA, because he was against most of their policies and philosophies just like many doctors are today.

KP: What philosophies and practices was he against? Do you remember?

SP: I don't really remember.

KP: But it must have been an issue if you realized that he was against the AMA.

SP: He was against it. I really don't know the specifics of that, whether it was political or economics or ... It was really led by a small number of doctors who set the policies, and I guess there were certain ones that he was very much against. But my father was one of the first to put the finger on smoking causing cancer. And he was, he knew that ...

KP: When did he tell you ...

SP: Well, I remember when I was in high school and his daughter, my sister, he caught her with a cigarette. I mean, I thought the world was going to come to an end. And then, he also was one of the first to put the finger on asbestos. Because in Paterson in the '40s, he had a couple of industries where he was the retained doctor for industrial medical problems. And one of his clients was the Union Asbestos Company, which became infamous for people working in the asbestos field and causing cancer. He was aware of that and nobody wanted to believe him.

KP: So he would tell the industrial managers?

SP: Right. And other doctors and everything else. But you know, the lobbies were too strong. It was just one voice in the wind.

KP: Did you ever smoke when you were in the service?

SP: No, I never did.

KP: So your father's anti-smoking attitude prevented you from being tempted? Because cigarettes were so cheap for service people.

SP: Right, no, I never had anything to do with it.

KP: What led you to come to Rutgers?

SP: Well, that's an interesting story. Well, it was money. Economics. Where am I gonna go? Now here I am, I'm working in a summer hotel up in Dutchess County in New York, which was owned by some relatives. And I'm making some money so I can go to school, but I'm not in any school yet. And, they had a thing going, where I was going to live with my uncle in Manhattan and go to City College of New York, which was free to all residents, at that time. But I had applied for a state scholarship and took the exams and so forth, and we didn't know anything until practically September. It was practically a last minute thing. And the state scholarship came through and I was away and my father handled it all. The state scholarship came through and right at the last minute, I came down here.

KP: So if the scholarship hadn't come through, you probably would have moved to New York?

SP: I'm afraid so. I shudder to think. But I think that probably would have happened.

KP: Why would you have shuddered?

SP: Well, I would not have liked to live there. I would not have liked to live with my uncle. He was a nice guy, but at that age, see, I was only fifteen when I came down here. I wasn't sixteen until a month after I was here. At that age, moving any place is traumatic.

KP: To get through high school, were you bumped ahead?

SP: Yeah, in grammar school. I was bumped ahead twice in grammar school and I started when I was three years old. See, I was a month before I was four.

KP: Today, you would have had three more years of high school. I mean, you would have been seventeen or eighteen.

SP: Right. Well, that's why every time I go to a reunion, I'm the youngest one of the reunion. I can go to my fiftieth reunion, I'm still the youngest one in the class. That doesn't change.

KP: You said that it was hard getting used to life here. What made it better after the first couple of months?

SP: What made it better? Well, I think, as you get to know your classmates and they're helpful and friendly, that makes it better. And you have a fairly decent living arrangement. In the beginning, of course, my parents knew I was very unhappy and they would come down on a Sunday and that made it better. One of the things that bothered me so much was the expenditure of money. I never had any money to spend. When I got down here, I had to buy this and buy that. I remember writing to my father, "Do you think it's all worthwhile?" But what made it better? I think that was it. It got a little more comfortable. Of course, the work was extremely tough. There was no social life. Was none.

KP: Because you had mentioned before the interview had started why you hadn't joined a fraternity. It sounds like your work load was ...

SP: It was terrible. We sat up every night until after midnight on school work, and all day Saturday. All day Saturday. We'd take time out to go to the football game, come back and, I don't remember the exact load in the freshman year. I think there were two laboratories and two laboratory reports to write every week. And that engineering department was a stickler on the lab reports. I don't know whether they have this thing today, I guess it's all in the computer. That's it. But we had to do everything by hand and it had to be to drafting standards and prescribed formats. And, it was tough. And I know in our junior year, we had four labs a week. And, I think, thirty-one hours of classes. That was the toughest year. And in the freshman year, I had to spend all this extra time every afternoon in the drafting room. And, that's what made it tough.

KP: Were you ever jealous of people who could join fraternities and were in snap curriculums?

SP: Well, yeah. We had, one of our engineering buddies had a roommate who was a journalist. That was a laugh. It was an absolute laugh. Later on, I guess, it was in '42, he took an eight hour job down in one of the defense plants down here. He'd go to school 'till about three o'clock, work until noon, get up at ten o'clock in the morning, never had any homework, never had anything to do. It was a laugh. Then the other curriculum was business administration. They didn't have anything to do. All they had to do was read a few books and recite in class and that was it. But we had to produce on paper and out of our minds. And our math class, every day we had a ten minute quiz, every single day. Just to make sure that we understood the assigned homework which had to be handed in at the beginning of the class. It was tough. I tell my wife about this. She's a school teacher. Over the years, she's gotten sympathetic, but she never heard of such college routine. But even on Sunday, I don't know if I mentioned, we'd go to chapel. We had to go to chapel at least every other Sunday. Then we'd get something to eat and go back to the dorms and [study] all day long on Sunday.

KP: What did you think about having to go to chapel? Both the weekday and then the Sunday chapel?

SP: Well, I think it was healthy. It was non-denominational, and we had good speakers and it made you get dressed up once a week, you know. It put some regime in your life other than class work. We really couldn't spare the time, but we had to go.

KP: What did you think of Dean Metzger? Almost everyone has some sort of story or memory of Dean Metzger.

SP: Well, Dean Metzger, I'm afraid that we didn't give him the respect that he was due. But he was a stately old man, and he obviously had devoted his life to Rutgers. But the poor man had a loose denture and whenever he got up there to speak in the convocation or in the chapel or wherever it was, he whistled. And, children, you know, freshmen in college, were not very

respectful. That's my memory of Dean Metzger. You've heard that before, I'm sure. They use to call him "Whistling Willie".

KP: Yeah, no, I've heard several stories on that. You were in ROTC, like everyone else, for the first two years. What did you think of ROTC?

SP: Well, it was a necessary evil. Again, it took up time, which we couldn't spare. It was a necessary evil. We didn't think much about it, really.

KP: You didn't stay in ROTC?

SP: No, see, you had to make the decision at the end of your sophomore year. My decision at that point, the end of my sophomore year was '41, yeah, the spring of '41, right, yeah. There was no war and we made the decision to get out because we needed the time, especially in our junior year. Junior and senior ROTC took up more time than just the hour that freshman and sophomore did. So that was the basis on which I stopped. Now, a year later, I probably would have made a different decision. I don't know. But it didn't, and the feeling at that time was, of course, there was a war in Europe. If we got into the war, it didn't matter whether you were in ROTC or not, you're going to be in the war, and being in college, you probably would have been able to get a commission one way or another, so it really didn't make much difference. That was the general feeling at that time.

KP: In retrospect, what do you think of your ROTC training? As limited as it was, did it help you at all when you actually entered the military?

SP: Well, I think it gave a little touch of military discipline and a little bit of background and knowledge of what to expect. If I had had a little touch of engineering drawing before I came in here, I think I would have done much better. So I think that it's an analogous situation. We had active duty officers as military science professors, and they were capable and set a good example. As a matter-of-fact, one of them, I ran into many years later as a professor of Newark College of Engineering. He was a public speaking professor. I took a class with him. I just happened to run into him there. But I think it served the purpose. And certainly, because of the numbers that they put through the course, it was helpful in preparing this country. Now this, Colonel (Morfit?), that I gave you his name, he got into the Civil Air Patrol. See, because he knew right from the beginning, when he came here, that he was going into the Air Force, and at some time, he'd become a pilot. That was his, and he joined the Civil Air Patrol and they took flying lessons out at Hadley Airport, which was out here. And he learned to fly out there. And then at the end of his sophomore year, he enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Program and went into the flying cadets.

KP: I have a series of other questions about the war, but I want to make sure I ask, before you mentioned that Merle Galbraith was your favorite professor. What stood out about him?

SP: Well, first of all, it was math, which I did well and, therefore, I liked that. And most of the time, it was a five credit course. He was very precise, straightforward, and if you got an eighty-nine, you got a, what we called a two in those days, and if you got ninety, you got a one. There

was no argument about it, everything was very precise and he was very good at putting the stuff across, to me. Some of the fellas didn't agree with that, because they didn't understand. And he was very helpful. If you wanted help, he would be glad to sit with you and help. He was very impersonal, totally impersonal. So a lot of people didn't like him, but I thought he was excellent. He stands out in my memory.

KP: Was he was very fair?

SP: Well, that's why, I felt he was extremely fair. Because he would mark your tests and quizzes and so forth, add them up, average them and that was the number. So there was no argument about it. And that's, I guess, one of the things that I like about engineering, over all, was that it was a numerical thing, in many cases. You can reduce things to numbers, measure them and come up with specific, qualitative, quantitative answers.

KP: You would enter Rutgers in September of 1939, and I read the *Targum* from '39 and saw President Clotheir's speech to welcoming freshman. And in there, he really sort of argued that the war in Europe was none of our business. Growing up in the '30s, how did you feel about European affairs?

SP: Well, the one thing we indulged ourselves in, we got the *New York Times* every day. And I've been reading the *New York Times* since I was able to read, and it seemed to me that every few months, [there] was a blow up in Europe, and that went on for a while, and then there was another blow up. And that was all through the '30s, I guess. From way back when President Hindenberg in Germany was deposed. What was that '33, I think. I don't remember much before that but there was always something that was happening, it was, "Oh, they're going to have a real problem," and then it would blow up and blow over. My thinking was, [that] whatever was going on in 1939 was just going to be another one of those things and it was gonna blow over. And then, I was up working in New York State and September 1, 1939, I guess it was, when Hitler marched into Poland. And then Britain and France declared war. And it was just not a little thing blowing over anymore. So when I got here at school, it was a war, but that was their war. I mean, gradually, through '40 and '41, our involvement became deeper and deeper. And then I was sitting up there in Ford Hall on December 7, '41, and we were listening to music from the Meadowbrook while we were doing our homework, and all of a sudden, somebody broke in and, I'll never forget that. That was one thing you'll never forget. We were listening to one of the big orchestra there, I think it was Jimmy Dorsey and they were playing "It happened in Hawaii." It's unbelievable, but that's what they were playing when they broke into the, and announced Pearl Harbor. Then, that was a whole different life.

KP: I'm curious, how did you feel about the increasing American involvement in '40 and '41? Did you favor intervention and aid to Britain?

SP: Not really, no. I think my own feeling and the people that I associated with felt that it was none of our business. We ought to keep out of this. So I don't think we had the overall knowledge of the situation, the realization of the background. Of course, there were a lot of

things that were not even known at that time, what was going on in Europe. People didn't know what was going on.

KP: On campus, were there any very active interventionists or isolationists that you can remember in '40, '41?

SP: I don't specifically remember. The one thing I do remember is when Charles Lindbergh was over in Madison Square Garden on his isolationist and anti-Semitic tirades over there. And there were people here who were fully in sympathy with them. I have to liken that to Pat Buchanan, unfortunately.

KP: What about your parents, with them being a little bit closer to Europe than you were?

SP: Well, they were scared to death, because they came over here for religious freedom. They had, not total knowledge of what was going on in Europe, but obviously they had more knowledge than I did. They had relatives over there and they were very concerned. I don't think they had very much interest in getting involved and in protecting. They were very anti-British as well as anti-German, because of the British history in Palestine. And they certainly did not want to help England.

KP: So your parents were Zionists?

SP: I don't know whether you'd call them Zionists. They believed in Israel or Palestine, at that time, as a Jewish territory. But Zionists, in the sense that they wanted to go back there, no.

KP: No, but they did support Israel.

SP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

KP: You mentioned that Pearl Harbor changed your life quite a bit, that the world was not the same after December 7th. What immediately changed?

SP: Well, they set up .50 caliber machine guns over at Johnson and Johnson and closed the gates. They were waiting for, I don't know what, but they were sitting there, the National Guard. And right away, we had to go to school in the summer of '42.

KP: How did you feel about having to go in the summer? You were already on such a demanding curriculum. How did you feel about that?

SP: Well, we were very concerned. But the curriculum was relaxed then. There was, I believe, one course we didn't have to take, and the professors, there was a whole different attitude at that point. There was not as much work dealt out and it was a much more relaxed situation. I don't remember whether we had any laboratory work or not that summer. I know that I worked every weekend that summer, so I was able to spend that time away.

KP: Where did you work?

SP: I worked the same place that I worked the previous summers, as a waiter. And I used to hitchhike up there. It was about a 100 miles up. Then I'd get a ride back to New York City.

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SP: ... Take me up to Yonkers and dump me off on the Saw Mill River Parkway up there and I'd hitchhike the rest of the way. Never had a problem.

KP: After Pearl Harbor, did you think that you'd be enlisting right away or did you hope to finish school? What were your plans?

SP: I wanted to finish school, but the pressure was on right away. There were a lot of fellas, some fellas, not the engineers, it was an excuse [for them] to quit school. "Oh, I gotta enlist, otherwise I'll be drafted," and so on. But that was in the liberal arts area. But in the engineering area, they soon let us know that they were going to finish school. But in order to be qualified, you had to enlist in the Reserve. And the bulletin boards were full of all the programs, the Army, the Navy and the Marine Corps and so on. All the programs that you could enlist in. And it was some kind of hysteria, where everybody signed up for one, almost everybody signed up for one of those programs who was not in ROTC. So I enlisted in November '42. I had to go down to Newark, raise my right hand. And then they sent us back to finish school. They said we could finish school, but they didn't say we could go to our graduation. So January, we finished school, I think, in the middle of January of '43, and graduation was a week from that Sunday, and, in the meantime, we were gone. I was gone. Some fellas were still here for graduation, but I was up in New Haven, doing nothing, sitting in civilian clothes, which were a week old, sitting on a floor in a dorm room in Yale, assigned to a section up there. But absolutely doing nothing, because they had just moved that training program into New Haven and really weren't organized yet. They had people flooding in there and they didn't know what do to with them. But that was the story of my enlistment.

KP: You mentioned that there was a hysteria to enlist. Why such hysteria?

SP: Well, they didn't want to get drafted.

KP: Why the fear of being drafted?

SP: Because, if you were drafted, you went right into the infantry as a private. Whereas, all these programs were commissioned programs, which lead to commissions. Well, I guess that, really, the fear was that you'd stand less chance to get shot if you were commissioned than if you were an enlisted private in the infantry, which I think was very true. So it was just a general, there was a lot of patriotism. People felt that, you know, "We're in it, we gotta do our part." And I would have done it the same way all over again. I wanted to enlist into the flying cadets, but my parents had to sign because I was under eighteen.

KP: You were quite young when you enlisted.

SP: Well, I was nineteen when I was commissioned in June of '43.

KP: So you could have waited, in some ways. You could have taken a little longer with the draft?

SP: Probably.

KP: So you would have liked to have been an aviation cadet?

SP: Oh, yeah. As a matter-of-fact, after I got in, I applied and I was accepted for flying school in grade, as an officer. But just before I was scheduled to go up to Santa Monica, they put through an arbitrary ruling, "As of this date, you can't go through as a commissioned officer unless you're back from an overseas tour." So that was the end of my, but then I got into the B-29 flying, later on. I was a flight engineer. So that was it. But yeah, I would have preferred to fly training. Probably wouldn't be here, you know.

KP: You reported to Yale. In the program you enlisted in, were you scheduled to become an officer?

SP: Yes, an aircraft maintenance engineer, which, there was one in every squadron in the Army Air Corp. That was a position which had to be filled and they had to train people.

KP: I've interviewed Bill Bauer, and he went to Yale, too. And he had some mixed feelings about his treatment at Yale. I'm curious as to the general treatment you got at Yale and the community at Yale. Do you have any memories of that?

SP: The community?

KP: Were you welcomed by Yale?

KP: By Yale University?

KP: Yeah.

SP: I don't think we had any contact with Yale University. We were using their buildings and we were directed and supervised by military personnel. They could not have existed, as far as I was concerned. We had, we lived in dorm rooms. Of course, probably five times as many in a room as they had in school. And we ate in Yale Commons. That was an interesting thing you probably heard about. We had Glenn Miller and his orchestra up on the balcony playing during mealtimes. Have you heard about that?

KP: No, no one's told that. That is pretty nice.

SP: That was unbelievable. You know, Glenn Miller enlisted and he brought in his whole band as an Air Force band. As a matter-of-fact, I have a clipping from the *New York Times* at home, I was going to bring, but I couldn't put my fingers on it this morning. Because they had, in the fiftieth anniversary of all this, was an item about the Glenn Miller Orchestra being at New Haven. And they had this balcony in the Commons, and that orchestra was up there playing Glenn Miller music every lunchtime and for dances on Saturdays. And it was just an unbelievable thing. You didn't want to leave there. It was absolutely fantastic. But to answer your question about Yale. Like I said, we didn't have any contact with Yale. Well, we did have one contact in our physical training. We had two hours of physical training every day, and that was conducted by the Yale athletic department on contract to the Army. We had some of the toughest physical training anybody could ever imagine on that Yale gym floor. They just really gave us the business. And as part of the thing, they had a ten story field house there. And part of the exercise was double timing up and down the stairs. Up and down ten floors, and then when you got to the top, you ran two or three laps around the track, which they had on the roof. And then double time down the stairs and double time up the stairs. Double timing through the streets of New Haven and all this kind of thing. That was the one big contact with Yale. They had that beautiful Payne Whitney Gymnasium up there. It was a beautiful thing. We occasionally got to swim in their intercollegiate pool. That was beautiful. All their buildings are beautiful. I've been up there a few times to visit. It's changed, just like this campus has.

KP: But there's certain things you remember still.

SP: Oh, yeah. They had underground tunnels from building to building with the steam pipes and the electrical conduits and so forth. And we had to stand guard duty in those tunnels in the middle of the night to see if the rats were taking over. That was very scary. Very scary. I'll never forget that. Then the last few weeks we were there, they moved us out to the New Haven Airport. And that was a mistake, because we had classes out there. We had aircraft out there, which we worked on. But there was also a little six foot fence on the side, and we went over that fence and you were home free. You were right down into New Haven. So we got to know a couple of girls who lived right out there, and they'd park their cars right on the other side of that fence. And every night we'd go over the fence and go into New Haven.

KP: So they actually move you out to that airport?

SP: Yeah, they had barracks out there.

KP: Which sounds like they had tighter control over you on the campus in some way?

SP: Oh, yes. No question about that, because out there at the airport, we had student guards. We had to take guard duty out there. And, of course, you knew where the guard was and we just waited until he was down at the other end and went over the fence. So it was an experience that children get into, I guess.

KP: You mentioned that you had a lot of physical training, but what was your typical day when you were at Yale?

SP: Yeah, up before dawn, or just breaking dawn. You'd have to fall out for a head count, pull a hat down over your uncombed hair. We had hair at that time. And you had to be fully dressed and get out there for the head count, and they'd give you ten minutes. Everybody go back inside, clean up, get ready and you had to march to breakfast. We marched every place. There was no such thing as walking there. You marched. You had to fall in with your unit and march. March to breakfast, and then I think, we were in class by six o'clock in the morning. There was class all day. March to lunch, march back to class, afternoon and evening classes, back to the barracks. Some of these classes were physical training, most of them were aircraft subjects. Most of these fellas in this curriculum were engineering students or graduates. So you had a unique group, although, everybody was out for themselves. It wasn't like here at Rutgers, where you had gone to school with the same fellas for four years and they were buddies. These were all strangers and everybody was out for themselves. They were in the Army and might not be here tomorrow. So there was a totally different psychology.

KP: It was very competitive? Then people wouldn't help you?

SP: Oh, no. Nobody helped anybody. They'd rather slit your throat than help.

KP: Why so competitive? Was it that people ...

SP: I don't know. It wasn't exactly competitive. It was a survival type thing. There was nothing that you were competing for. It was just that nobody was friendly. They were from all over the country and nobody knew each other, mostly. You had to be very careful. Somebody [would] lose a piece of uniform, they'd think nothing of grabbing the next guy's piece of uniform, rather than being short themselves. It was not a friendly community. I was going to tell you something else, but forgot what it was. But it was pretty intensive schooling down there for, what was it, twenty weeks? Oh, I know what I wanted to tell you. Out of our class here in Rutgers, at the time I was in Yale, most of the time I was there, there were eight or ten of us up there. Now, we were all in different units and you might see one guy go by marching, when you were marching one way. There were eight or ten of us at the same time there, in New Haven. Though we never really saw each other, but we knew they were there, we'd see them once in a while. That's because so many enlisted from here. It was strange because some of them went for basic training to Florida, Boca Raton. Some of them went to Scott Field in Illinois, some of them directly to New Haven. They all ended up in New Haven.

KP: You had simply started at New Haven and you did not go to basic elsewhere. Since your training was combined, your basic ...

SP: And the technical training was combined, yeah. That's right. Mostly these other fellas who came from Boca Raton, they had strictly six weeks of basic training, and they went up there. So they were, they looked at themselves as head and shoulders above the rest of us. They knew how to march.

KP: How good was the technical training that you got?

SP: I think that technical training was good for the time. The school had been, I think, out at Scott Field. Yeah, I think that's where it was, yeah. And, they moved it to New Haven. And they moved everything, lock, stock and barrel. All the training aids, equipment and course material and everything else. They just packed it up and brought everything into New Haven and settled into classrooms. And they did a remarkable job. Of course, most of us were totally unfamiliar with aircraft and aircraft systems and what made it run. But the most important thing was that they impressed upon us, "That your life may depend on what you're learning here. And they were only going through this once, so you better get it." And it wasn't like going to an engineering lab at Rutgers where, if you didn't get it, you'd go back and or you'd forget it, or your life wasn't going to ... Up there, they let you know that your life may depend on you knowing how this system works and what to do in case of an emergency. And there was no problem in keeping the attention and motivating the students. That was a big difference.

KP: One of the things that strikes me when I interview Air Corps people was how dangerous flying was. Did you have any sense how fragile aircraft were? Even in training, they were ...

SP: Listen, I keep telling my wife everyday, these guys who fly airplanes are a distinct breed. I mean, it's not driving a car, where if something happens, you pull over to the side of the road. There's no pull over business. It's a very, very demanding and risky business. Even today. I can remember being in the, we had B-24s where I was, in several places and I would fly quite often on training missions. And I'd be in between the pilot and co-pilot, just standing there, looking out the window on a takeoff, just for the experience. It would be cold weather and these pilots and co-pilots would have sweat just pouring down their faces while getting that airplane off the ground. It's a tough business. You know, when you're on the ground, if you get lost, you just pull over and pull out the map and try to figure out where you are. Here, you don't do that. It's a whole different ball game. And especially in that day and age. It was tough.

KP: Now, that's why. People are navigating by sight or by compass.

SP: Not only that, but everybody had known people who had crashed, died in crashes. You know, a month didn't go by where there wasn't some kind of accident wherever you were. And somebody in the next bed wasn't there anymore. So you know, that shakes you up.

KP: You mentioned the orchestra and you mentioned dances on the weekends. How was your social life at Yale? But you mentioned the fence at New Haven ...

SP: Well, even when we were on the campus, I guess, if I recall, Saturday night, we were allowed off the campus. And New Haven was deluged with aviation cadets and, of course, they made the most of it. There were all kinds of bars and nightclubs in downtown New Haven and we had a good time. We had a good time. People were friendly. We had to be in by a certain hour. I think it was midnight. I don't remember. But we had a good time. You'd end up going to the same place every Saturday night because you got to know the people there. Maybe you ran into a few girls that you knew there and they'd be back the next Saturday night. You know, that sort of thing. But it was very friendly, very nice.

KP: How many times did people break curfew?

SP: It happened, because, see, we had guard duty in these tunnels. And those guards, one of their functions was to keep people from coming in after hours. But if you knew how the guard was operating, there were people who managed to come in after curfew. But it really wasn't worth it because, you know, you could ruin your whole life. And one of the things, once you got started in a class, the worst possible thing was to be kicked out of that class and to go into an unknown surrounding, or maybe kicked out of cadets. It was a very desirable lifestyle and procedure to go in, get your commission and go into the service in that fashion. So you didn't want to jeopardize it too much.

KP: Were there many who didn't make it?

SP: In those schools?

KP: Yeah.

SP: No. Oh, yeah. Their intent was to get people through, not to get them out. And like I say, it didn't take much motivation to make you want to learn. And the testing was, I don't even remember the testing. I don't think that the testing was very extensive. They went through the material, you participated in it and they could tell whether you understood it or not. That's what they really wanted. And they wanted to get you through it, because they realized that all they were giving you there were the basics, and after you got into your operation, you have to learn the specifics of your airplane or your situation.

KP: So when you finally were deployed, stationed somewhere, that's when you really learned?

SP: That is when you really learned what was going on, yeah. Well, you have to realize, I guess, it's the same in other places. The equipment and the training aids and everything else were far behind what was actually out in the field. So really you just got the basics, But they were important.

KP: When did you finish and get your commission?

SP: It was June 23, '43, yeah.

KP: And where were you stationed first? Which base did you go to?

SP: Wendover, Utah. Wendover Army Air Base.

KP: Now, you had mentioned that you went to Kentucky when you were growing up. Did you travel elsewhere in the country?

SP: Not really, not before I was in the service.

KP: So except for Kentucky, you really hadn't left the New York, New Jersey area?

SP: No, I don't think so.

KP: What did you think of Utah?

SP: Well, it was a tremendous experience. One of the fellas I got my commission with was going to the same place. He was from the Boston area. We were on the same orders and we agreed to meet in Penn Station in New York and go out together. But we had ten days leave between graduation, or getting our commission and going out there. And we got on the train, everything was train in those days. I'd been back and forth across this country so many times on the rail, in that era. And we got to Salt Lake City, and I think we stayed over night and it was a beautiful place. We thought we were in heaven. Then we got on a train to go to Wendover, and all of a sudden, you come out of the city and you see nothing but salt flats and telephone poles for 100 miles. And all of a sudden, the train stops and this is where you're gonna be. And it was, it almost made you cry. It was terrible. It was flat land, right on the Nevada border. The Nevada border, the mountains start going up. A portion of the runway was in Nevada, as a matter-of-fact. And this is where you were going to be. And there were barracks, airfields, runways and that was it. A hundred miles down the road was civilization. And this is interesting because, this Colonel (Morfit?), I was telling you about, he was in the aviation cadets and he was in about a year before me, and went through pilot training and everything else. The first day at Wendover, I walked into the officers' mess and there's Lieutenant (Morfit?) sitting there. He's stationed at Wendover. And he was married, he got married after he got his wings. No, he got married before he went in. And I knew his wife very well. She was a nurse over here at Middlesex Hospital. And he decided to bring his wife out to Wendover. She got off that train crying. I'll never forget that. And, he had rented a converted chicken coop for the two of them to live in while he was at Wendover. That's the kind of situation you had out there.

KP: Was there a town near the base?

SP: Right across the Nevada line, was [the town of] State Line, Nevada. I understand that they've got big casinos there now. But they had, that was Nevada, which was a whole different environment than Utah. And they had an all night bar and grill there, in this little tiny settlement, like a roadhouse with slot machines and the whole bit, over there. And that was the only place to go, other than the officers' club. There was an officers' club.

KP: So did you do any gambling there while you were ...

SP: Oh, yeah. I'm sure I played the slot machines a little bit, but nothing much beyond that.

KP: But aside this casino and roadhouse, there was ...

SP: The officers' club. They would bring in a busload of girls on Saturday night from Salt Lake City. The guys would stand out there in front of the officers' club when the bus came with two

drinks, and try and lasso one of the girls when they got off the bus. But there were fifty girls and 500 hundred officers, and half a dozen nurses on the base and that was it. That was the social life. Now every other, I think it was every other weekend, we could go into Salt Lake City.

KP: And how'd you get there?

SP: There was a bus. And it was a long ride, but we could go in there. Yeah, that was a beautiful city.

KP: What type of aircraft did you have at the base and what were your responsibilities at Utah?

SP: Well, we had B-24s, four engine heavy bombers. And, like I said before, each squadron had an engineering officer who was responsible for the aircraft maintenance. Now, what that meant was that, first of all, in the squadron, it was a training squadron at that time, getting outfitted, people and planes and everything else. And the training airplanes were old airplanes. They were not the new ones which would go over seas. We only had two or three airplanes. And eventually the squadron would have ten, as I recall. But we had two or three airplanes and they were old clunkers. And we had a staff of mechanics, enlisted mechanics. And we'd have to, we had, and those mechanics were all my responsibility. And they worked two shifts, and there was a sergeant in charge of each shift. And every airplane, maybe you know, after twenty-five hours of flight time has to go through a certain inspection. After fifty hours it has to go through a certain additional [inspections], and after 100 hours other, and if you have an engine failure, you've got to change an engine and all that kind of thing. And this group of mechanics, with the sergeants, had to do the physical work to accomplish all this, to try and make the aircraft ready for flying. I had to sign off on the paperwork, that that airplane was ready. They all reported to me. I don't remember how many there were there. We only had two or three airplanes, so maybe, I only had four or five on each shift, something like that. But that was the group. And we were in training and getting ready to be outfitted and fully manned to go overseas.

KP: So you were learning and they were learning at the same time?

SP: Oh, they knew a lot more than I did. You're absolutely right.

KP: What about your sergeant, was he a career Army person?

SP: Yeah. There were two sergeants and, as I recall, they were skilled mechanics. And they weren't really leaders, but they were skilled mechanics and they knew what to do and how to do it. But whether they wanted to do it for some brand new 2nd lieutenant, nineteen years old, you know, was another story. That was a problem.

KP: Were they older than you?

SP: Oh, yeah.

KP: So you had an interesting relationship with them?

SP: Well, I faced that even after I got out of the service, in industry. Every place I worked, people that reported to me were older than I was, up until a certain point. And that was a rude awakening when my boss was younger than I was for the first time.

KP: But so often, it was the other way in the military and ...

SP: And in industry. But that was my responsibility.

KP: Was there ever any test of wills between you and the sergeants?

SP: Oh, yeah. "I don't know how to do this. You better show me how to do this," you know, trying to play the game to show that I didn't know either. But see, the Air Corps had a very complete documentation system. They had what they called "technical orders" on every airplane, every part, every system, operation, parts list, everything else. So you could go to the book and get a lot of help. Maybe not exactly what you needed, but you could go to the books and get a lot of help.

KP One of the things I'm curious on, 'cause I've interviewed a number of Air Corps people. The Air Corps was a bit more informal than the regular Army or the Navy. What was your sense of that? It sounds like Yale was very strict because it was the training base, but how strict was discipline and the separation between enlisted men and officers at Utah?

SP: The separation between enlisted men and officers was pretty complete because there was just no trespassing into the officers' club by enlisted men and vice versa. The non-commissioned officers' club was friendly but there was very little socialization. When you went into town, it was different. If you ran into some enlisted person you knew in town there was no problem having a drink and socializing with them, or even a female person. That happened many, many times. But on the base, there was no such thing.

KP: What about the decorum, like saluting?

SP: Yeah, it depended upon the base commander. How strict he was or regular he was. A lot of the bases, they were trying to instill discipline and that was part of it. And you saluted. Every officer and every enlisted man saluted you, in most cases, where I was. Now, overseas, I understand, was a different story.

KP: No, I've interviewed some people that went overseas and it almost sounded like anything went. One person even said, "You know, you just wore whatever you felt like. You could mix up your uniforms and even wear some civilian clothing and no one would care."

SP: No, I don't know. But I know it was much more relaxed overseas.

KP: Yeah, so you, in a sense, wore a regular uniform and there was a lot of saluting.

SP: Right.

KP: How well did you know the people under you, your enlisted men.

SP: Well, I always made it a point to know their names, last names. And I tried to be on a name-to-name basis with them. That gave them a sense of belonging. And just general management techniques and leadership. Complimented them on what they did and tried to help them where there were problems. We had a pretty good relationship, but there was always problems about this young, wet behind the ears, 2nd lieutenant trying to tell them what to do, 'cause most of these fellas, all of them were older than I was. But that's pretty hazy in my memory. I don't remember that too much.

KP: What about discipline in general? Did you have any problems, particularly in Utah? Did any of your men ever get in trouble, either on the base or off base?

SP: I can't say that I remember anything. I'm sure there were some problems but I don't ...

KP: Nothing sticks out particularly ...

SP: No, no.

KP: Did you ever serve on a court-martial or ...

SP: No, no.

KP: What about your first base commander at Utah? What do you remember of him?

SP: Well, you see, I had more contact with the squadron commander and the group commander. The base commander was a whole different ballgame. He was in charge of seeing that the grass was mowed. Grass, there was no grass out there, but the maintenance of the station. But the squadron commander and the group commander were the ones that I had contact with and I had some real problems with some of them.

KP: Really? Why?

SP: Well, I think they expected me to know everything, and they didn't have any time for the fact, that I just gotten out of school and didn't know anything. They didn't realize, they didn't accept the fact that I was going to need help. And they didn't have any patience. So I was moved, that was why I left Wendover. I went up to Boise from there.

KP: So how long did you spend in Utah?

SP: I was there from June 'till September. Just three months.

KP: During the hottest part of the year.

SP: The hottest part.

KP: So initially, you expected that you would go overseas with the squadron.

SP: Yes, yes. As a matter-of-fact, this feller I went out there with, who I still have contact with up in the Boston area, he went overseas with that outfit. He was from MIT. So when we got out there, there was an opening in the group staff and there was an opening in the squadron. So the MIT boy got the group staff and I got the squadron. And he went overseas with the group and served overseas with that group. And I went on in a different direction.

KP: And you went up to Idaho. I guess, because you had such a great description of going to Utah, what was it like in Idaho?

SP: Well, Idaho was a much better situation. (Gowen?) Field in Boise Idaho was not far out of town and was a beautiful area in the mountains, and wonderful restaurants, and so forth. I wasn't there very long. I don't remember how long but it was, it was a kind of a melting pot, waiting disposition into other areas. But that was civilization again.

KP: So you only remained in Idaho for a few months?

SP: Oh, it was less than that. I think I was only there for a month. Then I got shipped to Pocatello, Idaho, into another squadron. And that again, it was fairly decent town. It wasn't in the middle of the, but then, the whole outfit moved from Pocatello out to Muroc, California. Muroc is where Edwards Air Force Base is now. And that is in the middle of the Mohave Desert. And there is nothing out there. There was nothing out there. And we flew out there, we took everything we had out there. All the airplanes, all the people, and everything you owned, and that better not be much. And we flew out there, and I vividly remember riding in the B-24 tail turn most of the way out to California, going over the mountains. And it was quite an experience. And we got out there and set up shop there. I was there for over a year.

KP: With the same squadron?

SP: Yeah, with the same squadron. But that was a training squadron. This was not a squadron that was getting ready to go overseas. It was training crews.

KP: So crews would come in and out?

SP: Right, and the crew would get their training and the crew would go overseas. These were replacement crews for the ones who were shot down. That's really what it was.

KP: So you saw a lot of pilots go in and out, and crews go in and out?

SP: Right, right.

KP: And also with this being a training squadron, if you were with a regular squadron the pilots get better, but you keep seeing, sort of, greenhorns?

SP: That's right. That's probably why I saw more accidents than you normally should have.

KP: Are any of them particularly vivid to you, particularly from California?

SP: Well, I can remember an airplane coming in to land and then just going up in flames and black smoke on the runway, you know, right in front of me.

KP: And, did you find out why?

SP: No, you never found out why. It was crew training, it was ninety-nine percent pilot error. You never found out why. You just had to swallow that lump in your throat and go on.

KP: A lot of pilots I've talked to had a lot of respect for their ground maintenance people. From your perspective, was there any sort of resentment or envy from the pilots, since, while your job was still very demanding, it was a lot safer than being the crew on an airplane. As head of a ground crew, did you experience any sort of this feeling from the plane crews?

SP: Well, we liked to feel that we earned their respect by being able to put them in a safe airplane and do what had to be done to the airplane. And I always had friends among the pilots and felt that there was not any demeaning of my position by the pilots. And we were always friendly. I think there was mutual respect. But I think, my respect for them, [for] being able to fly these things, was tremendous.

KP: You really realized how hard of a job they had?

SP: You bet. You bet.

KP: How often did you get into the air yourself?

SP: Well, I got in the air quite often, 'cause I wanted to. The first time I was ever off the ground was out there in Wendover, in a four engine airplane. I didn't know what was going on. That was the first time I was ever off the ground. But I would fly quite often, whenever I could.

KP: Did you ever get a chance to sit in the pilot's seat?

SP: Oh, yeah. They would always let you sit and fly the airplane. Of course, when you fly one of those big things, you'd take your hands off and it goes. It's trimmed so that you could practically take your hands off and only meander very slightly, if at all. So, yeah, I always got in the seat and flew the airplane.

KP: At the Mohave Desert, what was your relationship with your sergeants and enlisted men? You probably had a bit more experience, than you had when you got to Utah.

SP: Yeah, I had more experience. Oh, yeah. Well, I knew a little bit more about what was going on and was able to handle the people better and also get in on the technical things to a greater extent and keep things going. And we had a pretty big organization there. I only had a small group and it wasn't very difficult. It really got to be boring after a while. And that's when I applied for pilot training first. Right after I got there, I applied for pilot training. I thought I was going to get out of there that way. But then that fell through. Then myself and another feller applied for flight engineering training, and finally, we got taken for that. That's when I left Muroc. I left Muroc in May of '45 and got to the first station for B-29 Flight Engineering Training on VE Day, in Amarillo, Texas.

KP: Before we get to Amarillo, what was it like to be in the Mohave Desert for a year?

SP: It was terrible. There was only one good thing, every other weekend [we were] in Los Angeles. And the alternate Saturday nights, they'd bring the busload [of women] from Los Angeles out to the officers' club. But there was nothing out there. I mean, you could see mountains in the distance, snow on them most of the time, up at the top. Everybody would say, "See those desert wildflowers out there?" "You've been here too long if you see wildflowers." It was sand and brush and that was it as far as you could see, and the roads were flat. There was a Marine Corps station in Mohave, which was about thirty miles one way, and a fighter group in Lancaster, which was thirty miles the other way. And Palm Dale, where there was a Lockheed installation, was down the road another fifty miles or whatever. But we rarely got to those places. And the worst part of being in Muroc, first of all, we lived in sixteen by sixteen huts. And you know, a quonset hut is with ...

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Sam Piller on February 22, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

KP: Kathleen Plunkett.

KP: And you were talking about the huts you lived in.

SP: The huts we lived in. There were four of us in there. There was a cot on each side. In the center was a kerosene stove and that was the heat. And believe me, it gets cold out there in the wintertime, very cold. And the stove only gave out so much heat. Now, some of the fellas who thought they were really capable, would try to modify these oil stoves to get more fuel to burn to get more heat. And every once in a while one, [one] would blow up and the whole hut would burn up, you know. They were basically wooden partitions and they would just burn up and you were lucky to get out of the thing. But the thing I wanted to mention was dust storms. There was a constant wind blowing out there, and one day, you would have a terrible dust storm and you had to wear gas masks to go from one building to another. And the next day it would rain, torrential rain. And the mud would be such that the four by four trucks couldn't go through it. And then, two days later, we'd get the dust storm again, coming back from the other direction,

you see. These winds would go one way and then the other way. And the dust would get into everything. And even in your footlocker and in your bed. And, oh, it was awful. It was really awful.

KP: You have very vivid memories of being in California.

SP: Oh, yeah. I remember that very well. It was terrible. That was the worst part of being out there, was the weather.

KP: You went to Amarillo, Texas. How did you find that in terms of location?

SP: Well, we got there on VE Day, and, of course, everybody was quite friendly on VE Day. But Amarillo was a good town with traditional Texas hospitality from all sexes. And we had a good time out there. And we were in school and we were officers and it wasn't as regimented as, of course, New Haven, when we were cadets. It was an engineering school to learn the B-29. It was ground school. I think I was there six weeks. I don't remember, a month or six weeks, and went to school everyday, all day, all evening. And that was it. We'd go into town every night. And, of course, you had to get up at five or six o'clock in the morning, so you couldn't stay out forever. We had evening classes sometimes, as I recall. Not all the time. And it was a fairly decent base with facilities.

KP: So you had actually learned quite a bit and it sounds like you enjoyed this part of the service the most?

SP: The B-29 part, yeah. Right, right. I enjoyed that the most because I felt, first of all, I was learning. Secondly, I was contributing. And I had a destination rather than sitting out there in the desert for a year. Not knowing where you were going [or] when. By the way, when I was out there in the desert, I think, twice I made railroad trips on leave, back home. And that was pleasant, but that's a long way. Four days and four nights on a railroad train. But I did get back there, at least. Amarillo was a pleasant environment and a good school. That was about all I remember of Amarillo.

KP: You expected to go overseas?

SP: Oh, yeah. I was headed for Saipan or Tinian in the B-29s. We went to Hondo from Amarillo. Are you ready for me to go on to that?

KP: Well, unless we forgot. Is there anything we forgot to ask about Amarillo? In terms of the flight engineers, did you have any people that had been overseas?

SP: Yes, we did. As a matter-of-fact, if I can go back for a moment, at Yale we had a fellow as a cadet who had been in Hawaii on Pearl Harbor Day, in B-17s. And he ended up somewhere in the South Pacific. And he was on a mission to bomb a Japanese ship. And they got over the ship and the bomb refused to drop out of the bomb bay. And he went out there with a screwdriver,

with the bomb bay doors open and toggled, what they called “toggled,” the bombs out and he hit that Japanese ship. Would you believe that? And he got a Silver Star for that.

KP: Which you must have all been ...

SP: Oh, yes. But you asked whether other people, that reminded me of that particular individual because that was way back in New Haven. And because of that Silver Star and so forth, he got an opportunity to into cadets and become an officer, because of the bravery he exhibited. But in flight engineer’s school, I don’t remember any who had been overseas. No.

KP: What about in the training squad? Did you have any experienced pilots?

SP: Oh, yeah. We had a lot of experienced pilots who were instructor pilots, who were teaching these new pilots how to fly that airplane.

KP: Did any of the pilots talk about some of their experiences overseas?

SP: I don’t recall any, no. I’m sure they did, but I don’t ...

KP: But nothing stuck out?

SP: No. But I know quite a few of the instructor pilots were back from overseas. I don’t think they wanted to talk too much about it. You had to be very careful. There was a lot of reticence talking about it, because it wasn’t fun. It was not a game. It was deadly.

KP: How much was a surprise was VJ Day and where were you?

SP: Well, I was at Hondo. We went from Amarillo to Hondo. And at Hondo, we had cruise control training. We had B-24s outfitted with eight flight engineer stations in the bomb bay. It was rebuilt to be a cabin and they had instrument panels, eight instrument panels in there, so each student had his own instrument panel. And we would have to plot out a maximum range mission or a maximum endurance mission. And if, we had a whole book of charts on it. As a matter-of-fact, I still have it at home. I don’t know whether your interested in it or not, I would be glad to donate it to you. Are you getting any of this memorabilia?

KP: Yes, we’re really looking for written stuff. Except a lot of people want to give us helmets and stuff. The library doesn’t have room for that stuff, but documents and that type of thing, we always welcome.

SP: But, going back to Hondo. We’d fly these missions way out to New Mexico from Hondo and determine whether our calculations and our plot, of what we’re gonna do was and when, was correct. And that’s what we were doing there. And then, at the beginning of August, we were finished, we got our flight engineering wings, at the very beginning of August. And then August 14th was VJ Day, we were still there. No wait a minute, no. As a matter-of-fact, we finished there and we were transferred over to Randolph Field, that’s what it was, Randolph Field, right

out of San Antonio, for a crew assembly and actual B-29 flight orientation. And so, well, I was only there for a week and had only flown a few times and there was VJ Day. And the instant that was announced, it was automatic cancellation of all the fuel contracts. Did you ever hear that?

KP: No, no.

SP: All of the government's contract to supply aircraft fuel were automatically canceled as of the day peace was declared. What were they going to do with all that fuel? They weren't going to keep flying all those airplanes. So, now we had no fuel. But that's where we were, and immediately, everybody headed to downtown San Antonio. It was bedlam, absolute bedlam for twenty-four hours.

KP: And you were in uniform?

SP: Oh, yeah. It was party, party for twenty-four hours. Total bedlam.

KP: And did you have the sense that you would be getting out pretty soon, or what were your thoughts?

SP: Well, at that time, you know, it took a few days for it to soak in, "What's going to happen?" And of course, nobody knew what was gonna happen. Stories would go around that we were not getting out for six months, it's a duration of six months, and stories are, "We're going to throw you out tomorrow morning." And after a while, it got a little bit organized and you had to fill out questionnaires [as to] whether you wanted to stay in or didn't want to stay in. And most of the people, I think, at that point, had had it right up to here and they, you know, like any soldier, "When am I gonna to get out of here?" And they wanted to get out. And I wanted to get out. I'm not sure I made the right move. I guess I did. I indicated that I wanted to get out. I stayed at Randolph, I don't know how long, and then, all the people who wanted to get out, were sent over to Brooks Field, just for a place to live until they could process us out. And [we] stayed over there for about a month. And I got a leave and I went back to Jersey and spent the leave, and then came back out there and then got shipped over, back to Randolph, which was a separation center. And I got separated in November, I guess it was. Yeah, I think it was November.

KP: And then you headed back to New Jersey?

SP: Well, see, they gave you a choice of either them giving you a train ticket or collect the money afterwards, or something. Or give you cash and you buy the train ticket. So I made a tour on the way home. I went to see my relatives in Louisville, and I went to Roanoke, where my sister lived. Not Roanoke, it was Norfolk. And then I went home around Thanksgiving time.

KP: It sounds like you sometimes think it would have been a good thing to stay in the Air Corps.

SP: Well, after I got out and went to work, I went to work for the Western Electric Company in Kearny. And I wasn't too thrilled with that because, first of all, when I left the service, I was on

flying pay and I was at grand pay of about three or four hundred dollars a month, with flying pay. I got to Western Electric and I was a graduate engineer at \$45.00 a week.

KP: Oh, yeah. That's quite a ...

SP: Gross, gross. I figured, "What in the world am I doing here?" you know. Well, it took a while, that settled in, but I wondered where I was going. And there was a guy sitting next to me at Western Electric, had been sitting at that desk for forty years, and I figured, "Jezz, this could be me, forty years from now." So, I filed an application for a regular commission to go back into the service for a regular commission. And I indicated that I would not accept it unless I could fly. And that did me in, 'cause I was not a pilot. If I had been a pilot, I probably would have gotten it. But they wouldn't take me in unless I was a pilot, so that fell through. I took all the exams and everything else without my parents knowing it.

KP: Because your parents were glad you were home?

SP: Oh, yeah. They were glad I was home and out. And I had to go down to Fort Dix for two days and they wanted to know what age I stopped wetting the bed and everything else. All kinds of examinations. But then, that fell through and I went on from there.

KP: You stayed in the Reserves though?

SP: Yeah, I did stay in the Reserve because, well, there was, initially, there was the possibility of qualifying for a pension. And I had an opportunity to fly, once a month, down at Newark Airport. That was always fun. And it didn't interfere too much. I was single and that was no problem. So I stayed in until they wanted me to spend all my summer vacations on two weeks active duty training. And I didn't work all year to go into the Army for two weeks because the company that I worked for at that time, they weren't about to give you two weeks active duty training and then two weeks vacation. They weren't that altruistic. So I finally got out. Well, I didn't get out of the Reserve. Actually, there was an opportunity, I was qualified to retire. So I'm actually in the Retired Reserve. I get communications from them every once in a while. I was called back for Korea. They wanted me to go back in. And my boss, at that time, wrote a very convincing letter, and some colonel in Olmstead Air Force Base decided I was very important to the war effort ...

KP: But otherwise, if your employer hadn't interceded, you would have been back?

SP: Oh, yeah.

KP: It sounds like you weren't that thrilled about ...

SP: No, I wasn't that thrilled about going back in. Although, I wasn't totally against it, because I was single and adventurous. And, you know, I figured that I could live with it. But I went along with the letter. I could've torn the letter up, I suppose. You didn't know whether the letter was gonna do you any good or not. I hadn't opened mine, you couldn't figure one way or the other.

KP: So did you had a very positive experience?

SP: Oh, yeah. I had a lot of positive experiences. When I was down in Texas in Hondo and Randolph and Brooks, I made a lot of friends in Texas who are friends of mine today.

KP: So you've stayed in touch with people you met in the military?

SP: Oh, yeah. Yes, and I've stayed in touch with the whole group of engineers from Rutgers. As a matter-of-fact, every five years, at my house, we have a reunion. My wife does a tremendous job of pulling it all together. And we have a big party. We had a fiftieth party, I have a whole photo album of all that. But so, as a matter-of-fact, when I go down to see Colonel (Morfit?), next week, one of the other engineers, who was my roommate up there, is gonna join us from North Carolina. So we're gonna have a little reunion down there in Florida. But I've stayed in touch with quite a few of them.

KP: Did you ever join any of the veterans organizations?

SP: No, I never did. No.

KP: Have you ever gone to any of the other reunions or back to any of the bases you were at?

SP: Yeah, I've gone back to Randolph Field. That was a beautiful place, and I wanted to show my wife that Officers' club, which was unbelievable. You know, I don't know whether you know, but Randolph Field was the West Point of the air before the war. Aviation cadets were trained there. That's where all the pilots were trained. Were you aware of that?

KP: No, no.

SP: That was the West Point of the air and that should have been the Air Force Academy. The buildings were all there. But that made too much sense, so they put it out in the mountains somewhere. But that was the West Point of the air. And all, Hap Arnold was trained at Randolph Field. So I've been back there several times. Just, I think, two years ago, I was within a few miles of Hondo, and I said to my wife, "I'm going to take you over and show you where I got my wings." So we drove over to this Hondo Field, which, at the present time, is a kind of a satellite field from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio. And we drove over there and I showed her where I lived. And the parade ground now, was apparently planted with trees. And it's got these huge trees in it and it was all parade grounds. There wasn't one of those trees there at that time. So I've been back there. Where else have I been? I've been to Salt Lake City a couple of times.

KP: But never actually to ...

SP: To Wendover? No.

KP: Yeah, or to Mohave Desert. Did you ever ...

SP: Oh, I wanted to take my wife out there and she refuses to go to California. She's sure, when she gets there, there'll be an earthquake. But I would very much like to go there because when I was stationed there, we use to go up to Lake Arrowhead, and Big Bear Lake. It's beautiful country out there.

KP: Once you get out of the desert?

SP: Yeah, yeah. Riverside. I had a lot of memorable times in Southern California.

KP: So it sounds like when you did get off base, you had a fairly active social life?

SP: Oh, yeah.

KP: Did it help in terms of getting dates, to be in uniform?

SP: Oh, no question about that. Yeah.

KP: So, along those lines, you didn't come home and get married and ...

SP: No, I ...

KP: ... Waited for a special woman?

SP: No, I met a girl in Salt Lake City and who I went back to see several times and, but she had a very unfortunate situation. She came down with tuberculosis during the war. And then she was totally withdrawn, didn't want to talk to anybody or see anybody or anything else. Then, I went back on a business trip to Salt Lake City in the '50s and I looked her up and she was in good shape and she was married. And then she got a divorce. And I think, if I had made myself available, I could have married her. But it wasn't very interesting at that point. And what else, no, I never, well, I had a little girl, nurse, friend in Middlesex Hospital that I had met and then she got married while I was up there, in Ford Hall. I saw her after the war, but I never, I didn't get married until twenty years, after I got, well, in '62, twenty years after I got out of Rutgers. I think I was the last one of our class, certainly the last one of our group, to get married.

KP: You must have been tagged as "the perpetual bachelor" of your classmates?

SP: Yeah, probably, yeah. I'm sure. But I have two lovely, very successful children now, and everything worked out beautifully.

KP: Since we're on your children, neither of your children served in the military?

SP: No, my wife says, "They're not taking my sons. I'll move to Canada." I said, "If they call him, he's going." Fortunately, they never called him.

KP: Did you ever work again with aviation in your engineering career? You mentioned your first job was with Western Electric. In any of your firms, did you ever work with aircraft?

SP: Well, I think, the closest was when I was with Fada Radio Electric Company. I was in their group that handled military contracts. And we had contracts with the Air Force and we had contracts with the Navy and the airborne equipment and seaborne equipment. That was the closest that I ever got to anything like that.

KP: Is that the company that your boss wrote the letter, when Korea came up?

SP: Yes, yes, as a matter-of-fact, right. Yeah, I was, you know, anytime that you had a contract which was classified, confidential or secret, they would hang on that and say, "Ww can't even talk about it, but he got to be here. You know, it's like the CIA, can't talk about it, but they've gotten billions of dollars.

KP: How did your engineering training in the Air Force affect your career as an engineer? Did it help at all?

SP: Well, yes, I'm sure it did. Because I realized that you can't learn everything out of books. You've got to have on the job, practical training, and that applies to any phase of engineering I've been in. You've got to know the books, you've got to have the background, education or the training, but you've got to apply it to the real thing. What was your question? What was that last question you asked me?

KP: I think you answered it. But in terms of your aviation experience impacting your career.

SP: Well, at one time, I was considering applying for a flight engineer's job with the airlines, not long, I guess, after I got out of the service. But I never did that. But that's the closest I've ever got.

KP: But it sounds like you really liked your aviation experience in general?

SP: Oh, yes. I really did. And I think that it goes back to [because] I was a frustrated fighter pilot.

KP: One of the things I was struck by your career path after the Air Force was that, a lot of people I've interviewed, they worked for one company. Whatever company it was, they might have moved once or twice, but you moved to a number of different companies. I'd be curious, in some ways, your career path is very exceptional.

SP: I'm sure it is. And you might say, "Well, the guy couldn't hold a job," you know. 'Cause when I was hiring people, I always would be very suspicious of a person who had four or five jobs in the last two years, or something like that. But I only had one space of time there, where I was in a job for a short time. For instance, I was in Western Electric for three years and then I

was with Fada Radio for nine years. And then, I was out in Ohio for a year. That was the period of time, when I was out in Ohio for one year, then I came back here and was with a company for a year, then I was with another company for a year until I went to Westinghouse, in '62. I got married, changed jobs and changed living place all in the same week, the same month, rather. But then I was with Westinghouse for nine years, and then I was with (Beck & Dickinson?) for six years and then I was with Dranetz for nine years. But other than that one spot in there, which was a problem of, I was out of a job and I had to get a job, but I didn't get the right job, but it was a holding job until I found the right one. So that happens.

KP: Well, the reason I commented on your career path is because I think it is more common today. But my sense, in your era, was that a lot of people stayed with the same company for a long time. You alluded to the fact that you feared that this could be you in forty years, you know, sitting at the same desk.

SP: Yeah, well, a lot of people stayed with the same company. I have one friend stayed [who] with IBM his whole career. My roommate stayed with U.S. Rubber, unfortunately, his whole career. And he regretted it very much.

KP: What I'm getting at is, was some of this job switching a very deliberate strategy to take better jobs rather than be wedded to one company?

SP: Well, not really, because, when you get right down to it, Western Electric was just frustration. I just couldn't see staying there any longer, I had to do something different. When I got to Fada Radio and I was there for nine years and doing very well and was very happy. But the company went broke. They were in the radio and television manufacturing business and nobody survived. So they went broke, so I had to go look for a job. And I got this job out in Ohio but that didn't pan out very well. So then I went through this rigmarole. Then I went to Westinghouse and I was there for nine years and that was one of my most desirable positions and I learned a tremendous amount there and had a terrific group of people. That company should have gone through the roof, but they decided to go out of the home electronic appliance business, which is what we had down in Edison on Route 27. You know where that plant is? It's White Westinghouse now, I think. Yeah. They decided to go out of that business and I was out of a job. So I didn't have much choice at that time. I had friends in (Beck & Dickinson?) and so they hired me there. But the job that I got there, [there] was not good people and they didn't want to learn. It was a mom and pop shop. So it was not that ...

KP: You necessarily wanted to jump around?

SP: But when I got there, I decided that, well, there were management changes, people changes, the people who brought me in, left after six months and there I am, you know, out on a limb. Well, I was there six years, 'cause I didn't want to keep jumping. But I wanted to go somewhere else. And then I went to Dranetz, was through somebody I worked with previously. And he owned the company and I was there for nine years and then retired from there.

KP: It sounds like Westinghouse was your favorite company that you worked for.

SP: Well, I think I learned the most at Westinghouse. We had an exceptionally bright management group. Dranetz was probably the biggest accomplishments of my career because I took everything I learned at Westinghouse and applied it at Dranetz and became a hero.

KP: What did you learn, and what did you apply?

SP: Manufacturing techniques. Industrial engineering techniques, which I didn't learn in school, and which are very important in modern day manufacturing. Manufacturing engineering and those kinds of things. I learned at Westinghouse, and how they should be done and how they should be applied. And then when I went to Dranetz, they didn't have any of that, and I, and a couple of people I brought in, instituted these things in Dranetz and we saved them a tremendous amount of money. So that was probably the most satisfying, as far as accomplishments are concerned.

KP: Did you like being an engineer?

SP: Yeah, but don't kid yourself. It was a tremendous amount of work. When I worked at Westinghouse I was in the plant before seven o'clock in the morning and never got home before six at night. And that was for nine years. Now, I was in charge of all the manufacturing in that plant, which was a two and a half shift operation. On Saturday nights, I'd take my wife out and stop at the plant on the way home. I'd put in an appearance on the second shift to see what was happening. And things like that. Plus, I don't have to tell you, the work doesn't stop when you leave the plant. I mean, I was constantly at home, working. That was at Westinghouse. After I left there, I didn't do that anymore. I decided that life was too short. I wasn't going to do that anymore. And at Dranetz, it wasn't necessary, because we made such improvements by doing the right thing rather than working harder.

KP: I'd be curious, because manufacturing, over the course of your career, took quite a battering. And you even alluded to it. What mistakes did you correct and how did you pull it all together at Dranetz?

SP: Well, in Dranetz, it was again, a mom and pop shop, people doing manual labor at their own pace. And when they got done with what they were supposed to do, they sat there, maybe for an hour or so. There was no mechanization of any kind. Everybody had their sandwich and cup of coffee at the work station and the place was dirty and disorganized. And there was a tremendous amount of moving things around, which is wasted time and motion and money. But the biggest thing we did was, we were expanding, because of the nature of the business, and we moved into a new building. And I and my cohorts had an opportunity to lay out the building the way we wanted it and incorporate progressive assembly lines. Discipline, where work was done at the workstation. And basically use industrial engineering techniques to measure work content and to provide equal amounts of work to individuals on the progressive assembly line so that there was no wasted time. And that was the first thing. Then, we were making up circuit boards for our equipment and we had girls putting in all the parts as the board went down the conveyor line, and then the board would go through the solder pot and so forth. Well, in the early '80s, machines

became available to insert all these components for the circuit board. And we bought two 250,000 dollar machines to do all that insertion without reducing the workforce, because of the expansion of the business. We got the cost down to less than half and we put out twice the product with half the labor. So it was a fourfold improvement in productivity and reduction in cost.

KP: You also turned this around in the era where a lot of manufacturing firms in New Jersey threw in the towel, from my sense of it.

SP: Well, this company is still in existence, but it was bought out. A year after I retired, the two men that owned the place sold it out. And I knew that was coming, that's one of the reasons why I retired. I had a physical problem, so that really is why I retired. But you know, you put it all together, and it's time to retire. I had bypass surgery a year and a half before I retired. But I went back to work. I wanted to convince myself that I was still human. So, but the company was bought out and it's still operating. But not the way it was and not as profitable as it was. Unfortunately, between the, a lot of the other companies have gone out of business and manufacturing in New Jersey is, unfortunately, way, way down.

KP: The question that I have goes back to your time at Rutgers during the war. A lot of people didn't know what was going on in Germany, a lot of people didn't know much details of the concentration camps and stuff. When did you learn about what was going on over there?

SP: Well, I'll be honest, I didn't learn until after the war was over. I didn't know what was going on over there. I don't know who did, but I sure didn't. I don't know who did. But I don't remember anything ever, I know that there were refugees coming over here before the war. In fact, my father helped a couple of people come over. But I didn't know anything about that during the war. It was, I doubt, if you go back through the newspapers in those days, that there was anything in there. So to answer your question, I guess, is I didn't find out about any of this until after the war. Then I knew there were a lot of refugees, but I figured, "Well, there's war." The Germans drove into Russia, so you've got people who don't have homes and the English, the Allies went through Europe and there were people without homes, and those were refugees. But as far as genocide and Holocaust, there was no knowledge of that at all. My wife and I have traveled excessively through Europe with our children, and we have gone through the battlefields and the, from Normandy right on through to Berlin and visited all the notable places from Bastogne to Luxemburg, General Patton's grave, Joyce Kilmer's grave near the Marne, and Omaha Beach and (?). We've been to all those places with our families, because we're both very interested in this part of history.

KP: You did use your GI Bill benefits. Did you ever go for anything graduate work?

SP: I noticed, in reading over my questionnaire, I said I didn't do any graduate work, but then I said I did use the GI Bill. I went to Newark College of Engineering and took electronic courses when I was working at Fada and Westinghouse, both. Yeah. I took electronic courses. And I took, the Air Force had an electronics course in their Reserve schooling program. I forget what they called it. I took quite a few of those courses. But down in Newark College of Engineering,

that's [where] I took quite a few courses. That's where I met this ROTC professor, I mentioned to you earlier. That's where I used the GI Bill.

KP: Did you buy your house with the GI Bill?

SP: No, no. I didn't. I don't know what they could have done for me at that time. Maybe, I missed something but, I think all they had, at that time, was FHA Mortgages, right. I don't think that there was anything in the GI Bill that would help you buy a house. There were GI Mortgages.

KP: GI Mortgages, yeah.

SP: No, I never looked into that, 'cause I didn't need it, I guess. And I don't think, I supposed it was not of any big benefit. If you didn't have any credit, you could get your mortgage from them. Well, I had enough credit, so I didn't have to go to them to help me find a place to loan me money and pay them for use of it.

KP: We are curious as to how you met your wife?

SP: Oh, well. Well, let me back up. This Colonel (Maggio?), that you have on record, he got married just a few years before I did. He was in the service, and I think he got married in '58, something like that. And he was one of the last to get married. Well, I, to answer your question, Labor Day of 1960, I guess it was. I went up to Lake George for the weekend with another fella. And we had always gone up to Lake George during the summer on the weekend, occasionally. We were in this nightclub where they had an ice show and they had dancing and my wife was sitting at the other end of the bar with a couple of girlfriends. That's how I met my wife. She was a, I don't know, did I give you her background yet?

KP: Yeah.

SP: She has a Master's [Degree] from Syracuse in education and she taught in the Utica school system for nine years. She's still substitute teaching in Bedminster.

KP: Another thing you listed on the survey is that you've been a longtime independent voter. In the '30s, what was your father's and your attitude towards Roosevelt?

SP: My father thought Roosevelt was the greatest. He was all in favor of Roosevelt because he pulled the country out of the Depression and he saved my father's home. There was, my father was having trouble with the mortgage, banks went under and they put together this homeowner's loan corporation. And the homeowner's loan came along and refinanced my father's mortgage and enabled him to save his house. And he thought Roosevelt was an excellent man, as I do.

KP: At the time, did you think highly of Roosevelt or were you more skeptical?

SP: Well, no, I was very favorable to Roosevelt. Of course, I don't think I was a deep political thinker at that time. I don't remember being a deep political thinker. But he was the president and, for a long time, he was the only one that we knew, for sixteen years. That's a long time. I think, at that time, we saw a lot of things that he did. Putting people to work, even though it was [with] a rake and a shovel, at least people were doing constructive things. We saw a lot of things during the Depression that were done by the government. They built our high school football stadium, for instance. And one of my neighbors was in the Civilian Conservation Corps and he would have been jobless if he hadn't been in that. Another father of a friend of mine was in the Hawthorne Symphony Orchestra, which was a WPA proposition. But at least these people were doing something and surviving, getting enough money to survive.

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

KP: What are your thoughts now?

SP: Well, my thoughts at the time, was that we have to have faith in our government and our military, that they're doing the right thing and we have to support them. That was, and that's from my inbred military discipline, I guess. But I've read enough since then to know that my faith was a little, was a little bit misplaced. I read Peter Arnett's book, have you ever?

KP: I know which book you are referring to.

SP: I forget the name of his book, but it's an autobiography. He spent an awful lot time in Vietnam. And of course, I remember him completely from the Gulf War, sitting up there in the El Rashid Hotel and watching the bombs go off and then reporting on CNN. But he, I have to assume [that] he laid it out as he saw it in Vietnam. We were in the wrong place at the wrong time. We shouldn't have been there.

KP: But it sounds like at the time, in '65, '66, '67, you had this, from your own military experience, you had this desire to support the cause of this country?

SP: Right, absolutely. I feel the same way about Bosnia now. I don't know whether time will tell whether we did the right thing or not. But if you're going to be a world power, you've got to shoulder the responsibility somehow, and if you want world trade, you have to have a place to sell it and not have people murdering each other. And go back to the Holocaust. I am assuming, though I haven't been there, that these stories I read about the genocide in Bosnia are true. Now, maybe I'll read some book five years from now, that they were. I'm very distrustful of the media, I'll tell you that. I see and hear on radio and television, reporters that are so loose with the truth, and just going in with words that they don't know what they're saying, and absolute untruths, they're just reading off a piece of paper. This is what people listen to. And if they don't have enough knowledge to analyze what they're listening to, as to whether it's fact or not and accept it as fact, we can be in deep trouble. And most of the media, these days, I feel, I think they're in the performing arts and not in reporting.

KP: And Kathleen you are in the *Targum*, right?

KP: Well, no, no. I majored in journalism, originally, and ...

SP: Oh. I'm in trouble.

KP: No, no, no I agree with you. I finished journalism and I'm taking history now. That's my field now. I couldn't become a journalist, the way it is now. A friend of mine works on Florio's campaign and she wrote a press release, and sent it out, and it was for Florio, and all it was for was a press release. Nobody looks at the story, nobody looks at the facts. They just print it up the way somebody told them to print it up. It's crazy. You're right, the stories about Vietnam and Bosnia, they have to be more complicated than that. It's interesting to me that you share your World War II experiences with your kids. My dad was in Vietnam, and only now am I even beginning to hear stories from him. For years, there was no comment about it at all. It was probably the difference between wars.

SP: Well, you see, that's the other thing. Like I said in the beginning, on December 7th, the whole world changed. You have to have lived it to realize how everything changed. There was no, "Well, I'm gonna finish school next year, I'm going out and get a job and these companies are gonna come and recruit me, I'm gonna go to work and I'm gonna be an engineer," you know? And all of a sudden, life takes a whole different turn. And people don't realize that these days. And even in Vietnam, this country was not one hundred percent mobilized [behind] the war, either psychologically or physically, in any way. It was guns and butter. A lot of people did not realize what was happening. It alarms me to no end the number of people that I run into every day that don't read a newspaper. It's very alarming. And people vote for people in primaries, that's even more alarming.

KP: We were talking about that last night in my class. Someone actually said what you said earlier how Buchanan sounded like Lindbergh.

SP: Yeah.

KP: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you?

SP: Oh, I don't know. I could always think of things but I don't ...

KP: Yeah, I will think of things. I always think of things an hour or two later and people have said to me, that when they drive home they realize it.

SP: But I certainly enjoyed the discussion and am glad to be privileged to contribute to the project.

KP: We're glad to have you.

SP: As I said, I have at home, some Air Force publications from the B-29 era. You're not interested in that?

KP: Actually anything documented we are interested in. And the only reason I am being hesitant is we don't want helmets and artifacts, you know.

SP: Well, I have pilots operating manual, complete, on the B-29.

KP: See, that would be something we would be interested in.

SP: And I have some of the text books that we used in cruise control school and things of that nature which, I don't know, I hate to throw them away.

KP: Yeah, we would take them especially if you would throw them away. Our basic rule is, we would take things because we want to create a written archive with the oral history archives. But we don't want anything that you don't want to give away. And we also, the only thing we discourage is actual artifacts, helmets and rifles, just because our facility at Rutgers doesn't have space for those, really.

SP: Did you read about the curator from the Smithsonian?

KP: Yeah, my wife was the first to tell me about it. But anything that you would be willing to contribute in terms of literature, that we would be interested.

SP: Well, it's something like that, people are interested in. And, I know if I give it to one individual, it's going to end up in the trash bucket somewhere. Maybe if I contribute it to you people, maybe somebody will, it will be seen by more people and appreciated. But I do have those things at home.

KP: And that would be very helpful for people who are preparing interviews, because a lot of the Air Force history hasn't been written. It surprisingly full of gaps. We found that it was the same way with the Navy, that you'd think that there's a lot written, but we actually don't know very much about.

SP: What did we say about Rieger, did he fill out a questionnaire?

KP: Apparently not. Apparently not.

SP: But you ought to contact him because he was on the USS *Pensacola*, a cruiser. And they were supposed to take the atomic bomb from Hawaii to Tinian and something happened to the ship, and the bomb was transferred to the *Indianapolis*. And you know the story of the *Indianapolis*?

KP: Yeah.

SP: And there but for the grace of God there goes my roommate. And he survived the war and saw lot of action on the *Pensacola* and could have been on the, it could have been the *Pensacola* that was bombed instead of the *Indianapolis*.

KP: Yeah.

SP: Now the other, I just want to mention, are you aware of the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas?

KP: No, no.

SP: Admiral Nimitz is from Fredericksburg, Texas, was from Fredricksburg. And they have in Fredericksburg, which I've been through a couple times, the Nimitz Museum. And it's all of his library and memorabilia, plus the Japanese contributed a Garden of Peace to this museum and installed it up there in Fredericksburg. It's a very interesting World War II collection. And they have open air and indoor artifacts. Actually have airplanes and tanks and everything else up there. And commemorative plaques and so forth and ...

KP: It seems like World War II has fascinated you very much.

SP: Oh, yes. I've done a lot of reading and read some the Pearl Harbor books and the intelligence situation in the Pearl Harbor area. *Time Magazine* area. And as I said, we've been through a good part of Europe and visited a lot of these sites. And visited German cemeteries as well as the American and the British cemeteries and it's quite a study. Been to Bastogne the Arnheim and we've been to the Munich airport which was where Chamberlain came back with "Peace in our time." Been to Vienna, Saltzburg and we've been to the Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden. That was a bad experience because the Germans were up there buying memorabilia of Hitler, to this day. Beautiful country there. Well, we took our children there, as a matter of education, when they were in high school and grammar school. We took them all through this country, of course. We toured the thirteen original colonies and all the historical spots. I'm not sure they remembered too much or appreciated it too much, but they had the background knowledge, which a lot of people their age group did not get.

KP: And your kids have had fairly successful careers.

SP: Yes, yeah. Daughter's living in the penthouse on 56th Street and my son is a practicing attorney in upstate New York. I'm very proud of them. She has her MBA from the Boston University, he has his law degree. Is that what you're going to do, is go get a law degree with your journalism degree?

KP: Actually, I think I want to teach.

SP: What?

KP: I think I want to teach. Teach history. In high school, I didn't have very good history teachers and I've only come to appreciate it here. So I think I want to be on a secondary school level and teach. But my friend is going to law school, probably right around the corner from where your daughter lives.

SP: Oh.

KP: She lives on 58th and something, 58th and 8th, maybe. And she's going to Fordham Law.

SP: Fordham Law, oh. Your ex-roommate?

KP: She is actually, is a friend from my freshman year in high school and we've been friends ever since.

SP: Oh, well good.

KP: Thank you very much for coming.

KP: Thank you very much.

SP: I enjoyed it and hope I have contributed.

KP: Oh yeah, you certainly have.

KP: Definitely.

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

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