

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER B. REICHMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview on October 4, 1994, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler. I would like to begin by talking a little bit about your parents. Both of your parents were born in Newark.

Walter B. Reichman: Yes.

KP: Did their parents come to Newark also or were they native to the area?

WR: My father's parents were born in Newark, as a matter-of-fact, and my mother's parents, [one] came from ... Romania. In fact, they both came from someplace in the middle of Europe. ... My mother's mother was born in England, while they were en route to the United States.

KP: Your family has long-term ties with Newark.

WR: Yes, yes.

KP: What section of the city did they live in?

WR: ... I don't know where they lived, exactly. They mentioned Vailsburg, which is up near the South Orange end of the city. We lived in the Weequahic section from the time I was born until I left for Rutgers, and then, to the service.

KP: Your father was a scrap iron and metal dealer.

WR: Right.

KP: Did he own his own business?

WR: Yes. In fact, it was started by my grandfather.

KP: What section was his business located in?

WR: It was on Frelinghuysen Avenue in Newark. That's the road that goes from downtown Newark to Elizabeth, southern end of Newark.

KP: How big was his store? Did he employ more than ten people?

WR: More than ten people, I would say about twenty or twenty-five people.

KP: It was a family business.

WR: Yes.

KP: How did it fare during the Great Depression?

WR: Well, it survived and they worked very hard, of course. I was growing up during those years and I didn't see very much of my father. He worked seven days a week, from early in the morning until seven or eight o'clock at night, by the time he got home, and they really ... didn't complain. They just worked. I guess you've heard that same story before. ...

KP: He was not forced into bankruptcy?

WR: No, no, he survived intact. We never lost our house. We were able to get through it all right.

KP: Your mother became a school teacher.

WR: Yes, she was a teacher in Newark.

KP: Did she teach while you were growing up?

WR: Not while we were growing up, but, when the war started and they needed teachers. While we were in the service, ... when I say, "We," I mean, my brother, [my] sister, and myself, she went back to teaching.

KP: Did she stay in teaching after the war ended?

WR: No, when we all came home and the grandchildren started to come, she wouldn't teach.  
[laughter]

KP: What elementary school did she teach at?

WR: I really don't recall.

KP: Was it in your neighborhood?

WR: No, ... it was close by, I think. One school she taught in was Bergen Street School, maybe Avon Avenue School, not far from where we went, but, she never taught at the school where we went to.

KP: You went to Weequahic High.

WR: Correct.

KP: Did you expect to go to college? Did your parents expect you to go?

WR: I expected it. It was sort of understood that we would go to college. ...

KP: Do you mean it was expected of all the children in the family?

WR: Yes.

KP: Including your sister?

WR: Yes.

KP: How did you fare in high school?

WR: I guess I was an average student in high school, maybe. I would say average, about in the top half of the class, but, not anywhere near the top of the class. [laughter]

KP: Weequahic now has a reputation for being a great high school.

WR: At that time, it was really a great high school. Kids from Weequahic went to Harvard, and not too many to Princeton, but, they went to Yale, Harvard, Penn, all the Ivy League schools, the ones ... that wanted to and had good enough grades.

KP: Your teachers expected the best to go on to rather good universities.

WR: Yes, yes.

KP: In your community, how many people were immigrants and how many were second-generation Americans?

WR: I would say that, ... this is just a judgment, seventy-five percent of my friends were children of immigrants. Their parents had been born someplace in Europe.

KP: Which language was spoken most on the playground?

WR: Oh, it was English, for the most part. At home, I'm sure some of the parents spoke [other languages], Yiddish was the language that they spoke, and the kids could understand their parents, of course, but, when ... we were together on the playground, they spoke English.

KP: Did you travel much before coming to Rutgers?

WR: Well, my grandparents moved from Newark to York, Pennsylvania, so, we went there a couple of times a year, at least, and we took trips to Virginia, to the Skyline Drive and places like that, but, [we] never went [beyond that]. ... After I got out of high school, I took a trip to California, before I came to Rutgers.

KP: How did you travel to California?

WR: Three other fellows and myself chipped in and bought a car and we drove across the country.

KP: When was this?

WR: 1938. It was my mother's idea. We were sitting ... in my house one time, these same three fellows and myself, and we were going to hitchhike to Washington, DC, for spring vacation, and my mother said, "You know, you guys are all working, why don't you save your money, buy a car, and go to California this summer," and we did. [laughter] That was a great trip, great trip.

KP: Which route did you take?

WR: We took the southern route through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas. [We went] all over Los Angeles. ... We went up to San Francisco from Los Angeles and took the northern route, through the national parks, [back].

KP: What was your impression of this trip?

WR: Oh, it was a wonderful trip. We slept out every night. We had great experiences, and, ... [in] the places that we stayed, we got very close to people, on occasions, and I could tell you a couple of experiences, if you want to hear that kind of stuff.

KP: Yes, please.

WR: ... I think we were someplace in Louisiana, it was along the Gulf, and the mosquitoes were terrible, so, there was a pier that extended out into the Gulf, and we went out to the end of the pier, and there were no mosquitoes, and we had folding cots. ... We put our folding cots up, and slept through the night, and, in the morning, we heard kids giggling. ... It turned out that we were in a Catholic orphanage. ... The sisters came over and asked us who we were, and we told them, and asked us where we were going, and we told them, and we got a postcard from them at every [stop]. We stopped at the general delivery post office on the way, every city that we got to, and there was always a postcard from the sisters at that orphanage waiting for us, and, of course, we sent postcards back to the kids every place we were. So, we made friends, and we were someplace in Wyoming, and we pitched our tents on what looked like a nice, grassy knoll, and it turned out to be the front lawn of somebody's house, and a woman came out, and saw us, and asked us who we were and how we're doing. She saw a New Jersey plate on the car, and she insisted that we come in and ... have breakfast, and we did, and the man ... raised coyotes for pets. ... He couldn't understand why we couldn't take a coyote back to north Jersey. [laughter] We told him, "It would never survive." He couldn't believe that. He had lived there all his life. He didn't have any concept of what a city was like.

KP: He had never been to a major city.

WR: No, no, and then, I have one other story, and then, I'll stop. We were at the Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, where you buy steamed crabs out of these great, big barrels, they wrap them in newspapers, and we're sitting there, with our feet dangling over the edge of the dock, eating crabs, and a couple of women, I'd say middle-aged women, were taking movies of us, and, when they finished, they said, "We'd like to know who you are and where you're from," and we told them that we were from Newark, New Jersey, and it turned out that they were teachers from Southside High School. [laughter] They thought they were taking pictures of the local color. [laughter] ... That trip was a good experience for us.

KP: What did you think of all the different dialects that you came across?

WR: ... It didn't make an impression. We knew that Southerners spoke differently than we did.

KP: What about the different foods?

WR: When you're young, you have a caste-iron stomach, so, we tried everything. Fortunately, nobody got sick at all. We were in pretty good health all the way.

KP: When you got further West, say around Texas, Arizona, and California, did you encounter any Oakies?

WR: No, that was after the Oakies. They were there already. We didn't see ... very much poverty, you know, where we traveled, not that we stayed in the greatest places, but, out West, there were a lot of national parks, and we stayed at national parks, and there were always families at the camp areas, and people were very friendly, very friendly. ... We had one fellow with us that was a great, big, strong, strapping guy, and the first thing he did when we got to a camp site, he would go in the woods and just tear down anything that was dead, break it up, and put firewood next to everybody's tent, and, as a result, we never had to cook a meal. [laughter] ... Getting firewood was the biggest chore most people had when they went camping.

KP: There was very little traffic out West in the 1930s.

WR: Oh, not on the roads. We went across the State of Texas, from, I guess it was, Dallas to San Antonio, the whole stretch of Texas. We drove a whole morning and didn't pass a car, one way or the other, not a car coming in the opposite direction, and ... nobody passed us. It's amazing. We were just alone.

KP: When you came to Rutgers, did you know that you wanted to be a physics major?

WR: ... No, I sort of drifted into it. I started, as I said, in sanitary engineering, which was, I started taking just about the same courses as pre-meds took, and, in my sophomore year, I took a physics course, and did fairly well in it, and liked it, so, I took another physics course in my junior year,

and, when it came time to tally up the points, I had enough to be a physics major. I really didn't plan to be. ... I didn't know what I wanted to do all the time that I was here. Really, it was very difficult for me in that respect.

KP: Did you think that you would like to go into the sciences?

WR: I always enjoyed [the] sciences. My hobby was amateur radio and I enjoyed building radios and experimenting with electronics. We didn't call it electronics in those days, we called it radio. [laughter]

KP: Did you have a ham set when you were growing up?

WR: I built ham sets for all the hams around Newark that I knew.

KP: Did you have a license?

WR: No, because I couldn't ... learn the code. You had to learn Morse Code, and take a certain number of words a minute, and I was just too lazy to do that.

KP: You joined a fraternity.

WR: Yes.

KP: How did that come about?

WR: The fellow that worked in Dean Marvin's office, my brother's friend, was in that fraternity, and I'd come down so late that I really hadn't made any living arrangements, and he said, "Well, we have a room in the fraternity. Why don't you come join it?" [laughter] So, I did. Again, it was a choice I made not knowing or not investigating anything else and it was a great experience. I was very lucky that I got into that fraternity.

KP: Other people have mentioned that there was a real distinction between the life of a fraternity man and the life of a non-fraternity man.

WR: ... Right, right. Well, the social life for a non-fraternity person was completely different than that of somebody who was in a fraternity and the fraternities really served a function. ... They gave a student, ... maybe [this was] the first time he was ever away from home, someplace that he'd belong. You know, when he ... came home from classes, there were people to say, "Hello," to him. So, it really was good for some people, and the fraternities had a lot of bad features, and, I guess, the controversy still exists on campus today.

KP: Even though you were in a fraternity, you realized that tensions existed between these two lifestyles.

WR: Oh, sure, because I had a lot of friends that were not in fraternities. Some resented fraternities. Some would love to have joined the fraternities, but, couldn't afford it, and it was rather expensive, more expensive than living in a dorm.

KP: Have you stayed in touch with any of your fraternity brothers?

WR: Some of them I see even today.

KP: So, you really bonded with your fraternity brothers.

WR: Yes, yes. ...

KP: Everyone had to attend chapel and students who lived on campus had to attend chapel more often. How did you feel about chapel?

WR: I didn't resent it. I can't say I really enjoyed it, but, I went. I think we were required to go to two chapels a month and I went. In fact, ... about five or six fellows from the fraternity used to walk down Sunday morning and go. Some people didn't. Because of religious reasons [they] were excused, but, I never felt adverse enough to request an excuse. I just went.

KP: How did you feel about ROTC?

WR: Well, I had very bad eyes. ... I think ROTC was two years.

KP: Yes, it was required for two years.

WR: Two years, yes, and I didn't mind it at all, ... but, I failed the physical to ... go on further. I would have wanted to go on, but, I couldn't. I didn't pass the physical.

KP: Did you want to stay in ROTC?

WR: Yes.

KP: Why did you want to stay in?

WR: Because I saw the war was coming and I thought that, if you got out of ROTC, you were sure to be an officer, rather than being an enlisted man at the mercy of the draft or some other ... avenue that you had no control over.

KP: When I read some issues of the *Targum* from the pre-war era, I noticed that there was a lot of sentiment, especially in 1939, for not getting involved in the war in Europe. President Clothier said that this was a European matter and, basically, we should not get involved. Then, around 1940,

1941, I noticed that there was much more interest in terms of intervention. How did you see things at the time?

WR: Well, you know, because of the fact that I'm Jewish, and the Jewish people were being persecuted and were going through some hard times, and ... I knew some who had escaped and come over here, ... we had two of them in our fraternity at the time, we were in favor of intervention. There were a lot of people who [were isolationist]. The America First movement was pretty strong, even in New Jersey, at that time, and they were opposed to any intervention. So, there were wide extremes, I think, in the country.

KP: At Rutgers, were there any America First-type groups?

WR: Yes. There was ... a group of Nazis on the campus. They were ... not well-organized, and, ... to my knowledge, they didn't have meetings, but, there were a few here, a few there. There were a couple of guys that we had big fights with that were living in the fraternity house right next door to ours.

KP: You fought over the issues of Nazism and anti-Semitism.

WR: Yes.

KP: Were these Nazi sympathizers native-born Americans or were they German-Americans?

WR: Oh, I don't know. I know that they had swastikas flags with swastikas on them in their bedrooms and ... they were Nazis.

KP: This was in 1939 and 1940?

WR: Right, '39.

KP: Were they angry that two of the people in your fraternity were refugees?

WR: I don't even know if they knew that we had two German refugees in our fraternity.

KP: However, you knew.

WR: Oh, we knew, yes, ... so, that's why we had these out-and-out fist fights. We had brawls on the lawn. [laughter]

KP: How did your professors come down on the war?

WR: ... I didn't take very many political science courses. I had a history [course]. Thinking back, ... Professor [Arthur] Burns was a modern European history professor, but, he never expressed any

political [views]. If he did, it went over my head. I don't know. He was strictly business and ... I don't remember him ever expressing any sentiment about our entry into the war, ... pro or con, [or] what was going on in Germany at the time. ... That's the only history course that I took, so, I was not exposed to anything political.

KP: Were there any interventionist organizations on campus?

WR: Not that I recall, no. What about the other people you asked that question [to]? Were there any? Did they say there were some?

KP: I am still trying to figure that out. The *Targum* mentioned that there was an organization trying to aid refugees. I also know that Norman Thomas used to speak at Rutgers every year and, actually, he was speaking here on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

WR: I was home that day, so, I don't know, but, maybe he did. See, we ... always had a group of what we called the leftists, at the time, up on campus. I don't remember any people on the extreme right, but, I do remember people on the left, and ... they were active in the *Targum*. You know, a lot of them were writers for the *Targum*. So, the *Targum*, if you wanted to call it that, could be a leftist leaning paper, editorially. ... You know, it's funny how, I think, students today are much more aware of what's going on politically, at home and ... in the world. We were not. ... We were just here to learn something, and we sort of knew, ... at least I felt in the back of my mind, that we were going to be in that war and that that was going to be my future for the immediate future, was to do something involved with the war. I didn't know what.

KP: How did your parents feel about the coming of the war in the 1930s?

WR: I don't think we ever discussed it.

KP: Your father did not serve in World War I.

WR: No. In general, I think they were in favor of intervention, though.

KP: You said that you did not know what kind of career you wanted before Pearl Harbor. Did the war, in a sense, give you a temporarily career path?

WR: Well, it did. It ... made up my mind and gave me a vocation. ... As I said, I was always interested in radio, and, when I got into the Air Force, I went through communications school and radar school, and then, I ended up in what they called radar countermeasures. Now, it's called electronic countermeasures, and I was responsible for maintaining, as well as using, a lot of different types of equipment, and that was where my interests lie, and I stuck with it after the war. ... In my business, I ... bought and sold radio equipment, and then, electronic components, and I just sold my business, but, we still deal in electromechanical equipment, robots and robotic components.

KP: You followed the technological end of your service experience.

WR: Yes.

KP: Hypothetically, if the war had not happened, what do you think you might have done? Would you have gone into your father's business?

WR: ... No, I don't think so, 'cause I really didn't like that business, but, I probably would have gotten into some other business, maybe gotten a job for awhile, and then, gotten into a business of some kind.

KP: What was your immediate reaction to the news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

WR: To get back to school as soon as possible, [laughter] to see what's going on, which I did.

KP: Was it a shock that Pearl Harbor was attacked?

WR: Yes, yes.

KP: What happened after you got back?

WR: I got back, and then, all these different programs opened up and were advertised on campus. I got in the aviation cadet program for communications, because I knew that that's a field that I wanted to get into, or would like to get into, in the military.

KP: Did you have any problems getting into that branch?

WR: No, no.

KP: You finished out the school year.

WR: We graduated in June of 1942.

KP: When were you inducted?

WR: I was home for about six months before they finally called me. It was a very popular program. There were a lot of people that had enrolled. ... So, I guess, six months after I graduated.  
...

KP: You went back home for six months.

WR: Yes, I lived home, then, I worked ... in a plant that was making electronic radio equipment for the military.

KP: In Newark?

WR: In Newark.

KP: When you were working in this plant, did you see a lot of people going off to the war?

WR: Some of the people left. ... Most of the men that I worked with were older, and, because the job that they had was critical at home and the fact that they may have had children at home, that eliminated them from the draft. So, they ... didn't go, but, the younger fellows went.

KP: Did more women begin working in the plant as the men left?

WR: Yes, [it was] mostly women.

KP: Was it mostly women before you got there?

WR: Well, at the time I got there, there were mostly women, yes. Well, the assembly was done by women in the plants.

KP: Was it always like that?

WR: ... I don't think it always was, but, ... I hadn't had much experience with electronic manufacturing, or electronic equipment manufacturing, but, I knew, at the time that I got there, most of the assemblers were women.

KP: Newark took a lot of precautions against air raids, such as hiring air raid warden and holding air raid drills. What do you remember of these preparations?

WR: I remember my father was an air raid warden, and he had a white helmet, and I don't know how many nights a week he had to go out and walk up and down the street. [laughter]

KP: Is there anything else that you remember about Newark while you were waiting to be inducted?

WR: Well, I was sort of sensitive, and I felt very uncomfortable being a civilian when all of my friends had gone into the service, by that time, and, if you went out at night, to a bar or something, with a date, and all the guys that were there were in uniform, you sort of felt like you had to make an explanation to somebody.

KP: As to why you were not in the service?

WR: ... Why you weren't in the service, right. ... You either knew somebody or you were ...

KP: A slacker.

WR: Yes.

KP: You did eventually get inducted.

WR: Yes.

KP: Where did you enter the military?

WR: I went to Boca Raton, Florida.

KP: Immediately?

WR: Immediately.

KP: Did you report to Fort Dix first?

WR: Nope, got on a train, ... there were a few other fellows that I met on the train who were going to the same place from around the Newark area, and we got down [to Florida], and did our basic training at Boca Raton, and took some of ... the communications courses there. Then, we went to Yale University for three months.

KP: You were in Boca Raton during the winter months.

WR: Yes, I was ... there in the winter and in the summer, because, after I finished and got my commission at Yale, we got our commissions at Yale University, then, I qualified to get into radar school, which was, again, at Boca Raton. So, I was back down there all through the winter ... and part of the summer, and I finished that, and then, I qualified to get into this radar countermeasures course, which was at Eglin Field. That was over in the Panhandle area of Florida, near Pensacola, a place called Fort Walton Beach, a beautiful part of Florida, and I was there for about another three or four months before I got assigned to a crew and went overseas.

KP: Boca Raton is now a very popular place to live. What was Boca Raton like when you arrived on the train?

WR: There was nothing right around the train station, except for the gate and the road that led to this big hotel, which ... still exists, this big, beautiful hotel. ... The hotel and the golf course was all that there was at Boca Raton, other than on US 1, which was called the Federal Highway, there were, ... maybe, two or three gas stations, and a restaurant, and some souvenir shops that catered to

the military. You know, they sold old uniforms and things the military, people from the base, would buy. That's all there was, very few private homes.

KP: When you were in training, were you billeted in barracks or in tents?

WR: I lived at the hotel.

KP: Okay.

WR: ... That hotel was taken over by the military and we lived right in the hotel rooms. Of course, we had fourteen guys in a room that was made for two, [laughter] but, [it was] very comfortable, not like living in a tent in the field.

KP: How long was basic training?

WR: I think, three months.

KP: Did you complete the whole standard army course?

WR: ... I [had] never been in the standard army, but, ... it seemed to be similar to what you saw that they do at West Point, and, you know, they had the same kind of harassment of ... new recruits, and a lot of physical exercise, a lot of marching, hiking, running, and it got us into shape fast.

KP: Did you drill with rifles?

WR: Yes.

KP: You learned how to use a weapon.

WR: We had close order drill. We had to hike it down to the rifle range and learn how to shoot a rifle and a pistol.

KP: After you completed basic training, you went to Yale, where you were commissioned as an officer.

WR: Right.

KP: Where did your classmates in officers' training hail from?

WR: All over the country. In our little group, we had Southerners, Midwesterners, Californians, just in ... the fourteen guys that lived [in the one hotel room]. ...

KP: In your own little group.

WR: In our own little group, and you did everything in groups. You know, you were assigned [to a group]. I think it was probably alphabetical. We had one fellow that I went all through training with, my name is R-E-I-C-H and his was Reid, R-E-I-D, so, he sat next to me all the time, and he was a math professor at the University of Kansas, someplace.

KP: How many cadets washed out of training?

WR: Maybe a couple of percentage.

KP: What about in your group?

WR: No, I don't remember any friends of mine that got washed out. ...

KP: You then went to Yale.

WR: It was a beautiful school. We lived in one of the old quadrangles, in an old dorm. ... Of course, we had the same kind of [schedule]. ... We went to classes on three shifts. You went from eight to noon, one to six, ... or seven to twelve, or whatever it was, you know. The school went twenty-four hours a day.

KP: Were you taught by Yale professors?

WR: No, no, they were civilians, for the most part. Some classes had army officers, but, most of them had civilian instructors, ... not Yale people.

KP: Not Yale people, just other civilians.

WR: Yes. They were on contract, especially the electronics courses. ... At Yale, we started with basic electricity and electronics and went through the same courses that they taught at Rutgers Engineering College.

KP: How well-prepared were you for this training?

WR: I was pretty well-prepared, because, while I was waiting to go in, a friend of mine was an instructor at one of the radio [schools]. There were a lot of radio schools that sprang up in Newark, because people would go, take a course, then, be able to get into the Signal Corps, which was better than being in the infantry, and a friend of mine was a teacher at one of the places, and they needed a teacher for nights, and I used to teach there at night. ... It became RETS, R-E-T-S. Maybe you heard that name, Radio Electronics Training School?

KP: Yes, I have.

WR: Yes

KP: A lot of people did not want to be in the infantry. Why do you think that was?

WR: Well, I think you had the greatest chance of getting killed, number one, and then, the living conditions were pretty bad, even if you didn't get killed. [laughter] ... Well, of course, the Navy was the first choice, because, ... you know, you lived on board a ship and it was pretty comfortable, compared to living in a foxhole. The Air Force, I thought, was the second choice, as far as living goes. ... You know, if you happened to be in an airplane and it got shot down, well, that's it, but, until that time happened, at least you lived in a bare, clean tent. You weren't living in a foxhole.

KP: How did you know that the infantry would be so bad?

WR: ... We heard the stories.

KP: Really?

WR: Yes, just word of mouth, or the movies that ... we had seen of World War I. ...

KP: Such as *All Quiet On The Western Front*?

WR: Yes, movies like that, ... showing people in trenches and mud flying all around. [laughter]

KP: Do you think most people thought this way?

WR: ... I think most of the people that I knew, except for some that were gung-ho, avoided the infantry.

KP: You credit their aversion to the movies.

WR: Well, I think that's probably what influenced them, yes.

KP: Did your experience in the ROTC affect your way of thinking at all?

WR: Can't say that that influenced me at all.

KP: After you were commissioned at Yale, you returned to Boca Raton for further training.

WR: Radar training.

KP: At that time, radar training was classified.

WR: Yes.

KP: How much had you known about radar before you went into the Air Force?

WR: Well, I had heard, you know, that ... radar was discovered by the British. I had read reports and read ... how it worked. The technological aspects of it were available in a lot of books, even though it was considered to be classified.

KP: How did your prior knowledge stack up against your initial radar training?

WR: Well, ... when we started, we worked with pretty crude equipment and you had to be a very skilled operator to interpret what you were seeing in the scope. ... My first impression was that it was not very effective, because there were not enough really well-trained operators. I'm talking about airborne radar. ... I don't know too much about ground radar, or what they called early warning radar, but, airborne radar was pretty difficult ... to operate, and, ... while I was in the service and going through school, they made great advances in radar, and they changed the presentation from what it was in the early days to something ... that didn't require as much skill to ... discern what was a target and what wasn't a target.

KP: You witnessed the evolution of radar from its crude beginnings.

WR: Yes. Radar was the forerunner of computers, because the radar set itself ... had the basic counting circuits that were used in the early computers and [are] still used today. Basically, it's the same thing. So, we had ... the first computer, although we didn't call them that.

KP: You also trained near Pensacola.

WR: At Eglin Field.

KP: What were you being trained in?

WR: In radar countermeasures, and we learned to operate and maintain equipment that detected, and located, and plotted positions of ... enemy radar. That's what I did when I went overseas, over Japan.

KP: The Japanese also used radar technology.

WR: Oh, yes. ... Their anti-aircraft radar was German and their early warning radar was patterned after ours, very similar to ours.

KP: Where did you go after your training was completed?

WR: We got assigned to flight crews, and the ships that we had were modified B-24s, and it took a little bit of time. ... We got our crew assembled right at Eglin Field, and we flew this new airplane

to Dayton, Ohio, where we had all the equipment installed, and my job, at that time, was to supervise the installation of the equipment, although the people who were doing it there knew a hell of a lot more than I did, but, at least I knew where they were putting everything, and, well, if we ever had to do any tracing of faulty cables or anything, I knew where all the cables were going through the airplane, etc. So, I stayed with the airplane while they were installing the equipment and the rest of the guys on the crew went out on the town for three weeks. [laughter] ... Since this was a very new [thing], we were about the third or the fourth plane that ... had this equipment installed, it was called a ferret, that was the nickname of it, ... we flew down to Washington, DC, so [that] the big wigs could look over the plane, and I explained the equipment to these generals, ... etc., and then, we flew out to Long Beach, California, that's where the plane was made, and they just went over the engines and everything again. ... We flew from there to Honolulu on ... one leg of the flight, then, to Johnston Island, and then, Kwajalein, and then, Guam. That's where we were stationed, on Guam.

KP: How big was your crew and who made up the crew?

WR: The pilot, the co-pilot, navigator, flight engineer, two waist-gunners, and a tail-gunner

KP: Who was your captain?

WR: His name was Jordan. He was married and had six kids. He was from California [laughter] and our co-pilot, we called him Junior. I think he lied about his age to get into the Air Force, 'cause I don't think he was more than fourteen or fifteen. [laughter]

KP: It was really that obvious?

WR: [laughter] Yes. ... He was a kid and our navigator was a wonderful guy. His name was Neil Tanner, from Pocatello, Idaho, I don't know how I remember all of these things all of a sudden, very bright guy, and I can't remember the name of the flight engineer or the waist-gunners.

KP: How close was the crew?

WR: We lived together. We were in a tent. Well, the officers lived together and the enlisted men lived together, but, the officers were in the same tent. We lived together for two years.

KP: Your gunners were enlisted men.

WR: Yes.

KP: The rest of the crew were officers.

WR: Pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and myself were [all] officers. ... On a crew like that, we were very close. We spent most of the time on the airplane, or hanging around, or fixing something. ... So, it

was not the same kind of distinction, I don't think, between officers and enlisted men that there were in other branches of the service.

KP: Was your crew made up of mostly inductees? Was anyone a regular Army man?

WR: ... I think Jordan, our pilot, may have been regular Army.

KP: Otherwise, you were all ...

WR: ... All in the same boat.

KP: How effective of a leader was your pilot, Jordan?

WR: Well, he didn't have to be much of a leader. ... Everybody had a job to do, and they knew how to do it, and they did it, and we never were in a situation, you know. Of course, if we were shot down or ... had a crash landing, then, somebody would have to be the leader, and he probably would have been a good leader, but, he just never was put to the test, I don't think.

KP: Because you had a routine and did not suffer any crises, he did not need to prove himself as a leader, correct?

WR: Well, we had a few crises, but, he didn't have to be a leader during those. Everybody prayed a little bit. [laughter]

KP: How much training did you do as a crew?

WR: Well, we really didn't [need to]. You know, the flight crew, they knew how to fly that airplane. They had flown B-24s before, so, they really didn't need much and we really didn't train. ... I had to coordinate with the navigator very closely on missions, because ... we took fixes, directional fixes, on enemy radar. ... For a fix to be effective, you had to know where you were as precisely as possible, so, the navigator and I worked closely together, but, we really didn't do any training until we flew our first mission.

KP: You really never went out on training flights?

WR: No. ... We never operated the equipment until we operated it for real.

KP: Against the enemy?

WR: Yes.

KP: What did you think of Hawaii?

WR: ... It was an experience, to go to Hawaii. We stayed there for a few days. We tried to stay longer, but, they kicked us out. [laughter]

KP: I have been told that it was an incredible place, particularly because of the number of GIs and sailors stationed there and passing through during the war.

WR: Oh, yes. It was ... just one great, big Army, Navy, and Air Force base, but, it was beautiful. We went to the beach and did all the things that you do in Hawaii.

KP: Your plane did not carry any bombs.

WR: No, no.

KP: What was your primary mission?

WR: Reconnaissance.

KP: Did you feel more vulnerable in that capacity?

WR: ... Well, I had to think a little bit about it, but, what happened, as the Japanese ...

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

WR: ... Got tighter and tighter on aviation fuel, ... they'd send fighters up, and, when they could see that we weren't on a bombing mission, ... they'd just leave us alone. The first five or six missions that we flew, they'd come in and attack, and we'd fend them off, but, ... they were not persistent, because they knew that we were not going to do any damage.

KP: Did you fly in a formation?

WR: No, we flew alone. We flew ... several miles off the coast of Japan.

KP: You flew off of Japan.

WR: Yes. We'd pick a segment, you know, [related to] the particular mission, a segment. We'd fly back and forth along that coast, just plotting the position and the characteristics of the radar that was there.

KP: If the Japanese had known what you were doing, they probably would have ...

WR: If they knew what we were doing, they would have shot us down right away. ...

KP: You were fairly vulnerable.

WR: Well, if we flew in close, ... we would be subject to anti-aircraft fire, but, we'd just fly out, you know. If they'd get close, we'd move away.

KP: You were not a part of a squadron.

WR: No, we were part of a squadron, a photo reconnaissance squadron. ... We were part of a squadron. We just flew solo missions, but, ... everybody in that squadron, all the planes in that squadron, when they flew a photographic reconnaissance mission, they flew alone. They were more vulnerable than we were, because they flew right over the targets.

KP: How many planes did not make it?

WR: Maybe we lost three or four planes.

KP: At the time, Japan was executing downed flyers. Did you ever give any thought to what would happen if your plane crashed and you were captured?

WR: I never thought about that. The only thought that I had, ... we had to put on a parachute, you know. You had to fly with a parachute on, that was your seat, but, when I used to look down, I'd say, "I'm never gonna jump. [laughter] No matter what happens, I'm going down with the plane and take my chances," and that's as far as I thought about it. It's funny, you just didn't think [about that]. Maybe other people did, but, you just didn't think what the consequences could be. ... You know, you knew that you were in danger, and the first mission we flew, we under estimated ... on gasoline, and we were sure we were not going to make it back to Guam. ... We came in at Tinian and we ran out of gas before we got to the end of the runway. So, we could have been in the drink on the first mission, and then, another mission we flew, we stayed longer than we should have, and we got back as far as Iwo Jima, and we landed on Iwo Jima just after [the invasion]. They were still fighting on Iwo Jima, but, we landed. They had a fuel depot. They had an airfield and a fuel depot, because the B-29s that were crippled were coming in and landing there, and they would refuel them and get them back to the Marianas, which was Guam, or Tinian, or Saipan.

KP: When did you arrive at Guam?

WR: ... I don't even remember whether it was '43 or '44, probably '44.

KP: You said that, initially, the Japanese would attack you, but, over time, they stopped attacking you because they realized you were not on a bombing mission.

WR: Right, and ... they were low on aviation fuel. ...

KP: As a result, you were much safer than if you had been on photographic reconnaissance missions.

WR: And, much safer than a bombing mission, too. We felt that we were much safer.

KP: You mentioned some close calls, such as running out of gas. Were there any others?

WR: ... That's all, other than fighters coming in and trying to hit us, but, we'd use our waist-guns and fended them off on a few occasions.

KP: Did your gunners ever successfully shoot a fighter down?

WR: No, no, we never ... shot one down.

KP: Your plane had no kills?

WR: No.

KP: Did you realize, at the time, how effective your missions were?

WR: Oh, we knew that we were effective. ... I have, personally, had a great sense of accomplishment in the fact that we plotted the positions of the enemy radar, and plotted where the blind spots were, and we probably saved a lot of lives on the bombing missions. They would go fly in underneath the radar or behind the hills, so that they couldn't spot them until they were over the coastline. By that time, it was too late.

KP: Earlier, you mentioned that the radar technology improved during the course of the war. What improvements did you see?

WR: While I was overseas?

KP: Yes.

WR: No, I didn't see any.

KP: You used the same equipment for the duration.

WR: Yes. ... The equipment that we installed when we left the States we used all the time that we were there. We had ... one piece of equipment that some engineers from IBM came over to Guam and installed on our [plane]. It was an automatic flight path recorder, and I remember, two of these engineers flew with us, to try to get it to work, but, it never worked properly, [laughter] and then, we had Japanese-Americans flying in the nose of our plane for awhile, ... about four or five missions. They were called Nisei, Japanese-Americans, and ... they were monitoring the communications on radio, monitoring the Japanese communications, and they used to squeeze them in the nose of the plane with radio receivers.

KP: In your plane?

WR: In our plane. Yes, they flew with us.

KP: Not many Nisei were allowed in the Pacific Theater.

WR: I know, but, there were ... a group of them that were recruited for this purpose. I think some of them were on naval vessels, and we had ... two of these ferrets in our squadron, and each one had two Nisei ... there [for] radio monitoring. You know, they didn't have recording equipment that was reliable then, so, they had to remember what they heard, or jot it down, make notes, and translate it, and bring it in. ...

KP: You occasionally flew with these, what you called, ferrets.

WR: Yes. We only flew one at a time. One was always back ... at the base. ... [We were handling] the radar reconnaissance, they were monitoring the communications.

KP: Did you have much contact with them?

WR: None, not at all.

KP: Where did they live?

WR: I don't even know where they lived, and then, they'd come out to the airfield, get in a plane, and we'd try to strike up a conversation, but, they were not, I wouldn't say aloof, but, they just stayed with each other. ...

KP: You never really got to know them.

WR: Don't know where they lived. [I'm] sure they must have come from California. They spoke English very [well]. You know, they were native-born Americans, I think, and they spoke English just the way any other Californian would speak, but, they just stayed to themselves. We used to have a lot of volleyball games going, but, they never joined in.

KP: Given that there was a great deal of animosity towards the Japanese, how did your crew feel about having the Nisei there, at the time?

WR: Well, we felt that they were doing a job that was helping us, so, we didn't feel any animosity. At least I didn't feel any animosity toward them.

KP: Do you think any other crew members felt it was strange or did not trust them?

WR: Possibly, they never expressed it.

KP: What did you think of the Japanese as an enemy?

WR: ... Well, I wouldn't buy a Japanese product for a long time. I still don't, [laughter] and I've gone to Japan on, you know, pleasure trips, ... after the war, but, ... I don't have any love for the Japanese, but, it's sort of foolish, because the Japanese people are not the ones that started the war.  
...

KP: However, you did feel ...

WR: ... Animosity towards the Japanese.

KP: Did you feel this way because of Pearl Harbor, or because of the theater you were in, or both?

WR: Well, it started with Pearl Harbor, and then, of course, it was amplified because of the theater that I was in, and then, after the war, I was never really conscious of it, but, I just didn't feel that I wanted to buy a Japanese car. I'd never buy a German car, so, same kind of feeling.

KP: What were your living conditions like on Guam?

WR: We had tents that ... we kept as clean as we could, and we had iceboxes in the tents, to keep our beer cold, and it was really pretty comfortable living. It really was not bad. Guam, the climate ... on Guam is beautiful. There's always tradewinds blowing. There were a couple of showers every day and we planted a garden. ... Tomatoes would grow in three weeks, almost. [laughter]

KP: You planted a garden.

WR: Yes, everybody had a garden outside of their tent with either flowers, or vegetables, or both.

KP: As an officer, was your food ration better than an enlisted man's food ration?

WR: ... Probably a little bit better, but, food, everybody ate the same food. They imported a bunch of, I guess, lamb hearts from Australia and we had that for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for about three weeks in a row. [laughter] That's what I ate. ... One thing, we got a ration of whiskey every week, for some reason. ... An officer got a bottle of whiskey every week, and, if you didn't drink a lot, you always ended up with a spare bottle of whiskey, so, we used to get in the jeep, and go down to where the Navy ships were, and ... trade 'em whiskey for steaks, and then, we'd grill the steaks, right outside of our tent. [laughter]

KP: A number of Navy veterans have recalled how they acquired jeeps from Army and Air Force units through the barter system. Did you do any trading like that?

WR: No, just whiskey ... for steaks.

KP: In between missions, you played a lot of volleyball.

WR: And, go to a beach. We were right near a beautiful beach and we'd swim all day, play volleyball. It was a very easy kind of life, a very relaxed kind of life. We had a great, big officers' club where, ... you know, they had parties every night.

KP: What kind of interaction was there between the base personnel and the inhabitants of Guam?

WR: Well, the inhabitants of Guam were very kind, mild people and very religious and they kept their daughters under cover. ... I had a woman that I used to take my laundry over to, you know. They had little villages around, but, as soon as I walked in with my [laundry], or any of the guys walked in with their laundry, she would shoo the daughters in[to] their house. They were very concerned about their daughters getting mixed up with GIs. I don't blame them. They were pretty girls. [laughter] After you were there for awhile, they looked even better. [laughter]

KP: Did you ever get to go on leave from Guam?

WR: No, no. ... When you finished fifteen missions, you were supposed to go to Australia for what they called R&R, rest and recreation, and the fellas that came back from Australia used to tell us how great it was, and, when we finished our fifteenth mission, the war ended, so, all R&R was canceled. We never ... made it to Australia.

KP: You flew missions against Japan in 1944 and 1945. Could you gauge how the air war against Japan was progressing? Did you know how effective the Allied raids were?

WR: Well, we knew. ... Being a fellow reconnaissance squadron [member], I used to see the pictures after they were developed, you know, the posts on the bulletin board at the officers' club, and we could see that we were really bombing the cities. ... We knew that the cities were devastated. It was surprising to me that they held out as long as they did.

KP: You felt this way at the time?

WR: Oh, yes. Tokyo, after four or five raids, Tokyo was demolished. ... I just could never understand how the people could survive all that and support the war effort.

KP: Many of the people I have interviewed said that they had no sense of when the war was going to end. However, you had a pretty good notion.

WR: Well, [between] that and the reports that they were running out of aviation fuel, I didn't think that they could [last]. ... I was really surprised when [the atomic bomb was dropped]. We knew, you know. There was rumors about this great bomb that they were going to drop and we knew that

the Enola Gay had come over to Tinian. In fact, there were two airplanes, or maybe even three, that were equipped to drop ... the atomic bomb, and there's a rumor that this was going to happen any day now, and I was surprised that they were going to do it.

KP: Most people have said that they were glad the atomic bomb was dropped, that they thought it ended the war.

WR: Well, it did, I guess it did, and, ... you know, it saved a lot of American lives, surely, but, I think the war would have ended without it in a reasonable amount of time. I think the Japanese were finished, except that, ... and this, I don't know very much about, but, they say that they were built up in Okinawa, and they were going to continue the war there, and that ... would have been a devastating land offensive.

KP: However, you felt confident in the effectiveness of the Air Force.

WR: ... We could fly over and bomb any city we wanted to.

KP: How did you feel about the bombing campaign?

WR: It was so remote that you never thought of it as people ... being killed and maimed and lives devastated.

KP: Of course, with your mission, you were removed even ...

WR: Further. ... I was one step further away, ... right.

KP: Did you think any of the other crews had reservations about the bombings?

WR: No. ... The bombing crews, I don't think, felt that they were killing people. You have to remember, when you are in the military, your frame of reference gets changed a little bit. You know that you're trained to do a job, and you do it, and you don't think so much of the consequences, I don't think. We never thought that there were people dying down there, but, they were.

KP: What did your parents think of your going into the service? For example, how scared was your mother that something might happen to you?

WR: Well, I think she was concerned. My brother was wounded three times in the European Theater, so, they knew that ... people could get hurt. I think she was worried, although, she never expressed it to me and always wrote cheerful letters. ...

KP: Did you save them?

WR: No.

KP: How did you meet your first wife?

WR: I met her at Rutgers. I'd invited a girl down for a weekend dance, and she had a car, and she drove my wife down from Jersey City. Now, my wife ... was invited by a fellow from another fraternity, and, on a Sunday afternoon, when ... the girls were ready to go home, my date picked up my wife, her name was Charlotte, and ... stopped by my fraternity house to say good-bye, and I saw them. She introduced me to Charlotte and I said to myself, "Gee, that's a nice girl. I'd like to date her," and then, I never did, and the war came along, and I went away, and, one day, I was driving along a road in Guam in a jeep, and there were a few Marines walking along the road, and I looked over, and one of them was a fraternity brother of mine from Rutgers, and I said, "Norman, come on, get in. Where the hell are you going?" He said, "We're just walking down the road." ... He had just come back from some campaign someplace, and we sat in my tent and had a few drinks, and we got around to discussing girls, and I said, "Gee, I'd like to date that Charlotte Grotsky. You live in Jersey City, so does she. Do you know her?" He said, "Sure, I know her. I'm engaged to her." [laughter] He pulls out a clipping from the *Jersey Journal*, shows [it to me. It reads], "Norman," his name is Norman Ginsberg, "And Charlotte Grotsky Are Engaged." So, I got back, and I said, "Well, forget about that," and then, I was out on a double date with another friend of mine, after we got back from the war, and here's Charlotte with this other guy, and I danced with her, and I said, "I thought you were engaged to Norman." She said, "Well, he thought we were engaged, but, I never thought so," and ... I started to date her, and we fell in love, and I married her. Poor girl, she died about five years ago, six years ago.

KP: I guess you never wrote to her during the war.

WR: Didn't even know her during the war. ... I didn't know her until after I got back. Well, I knew that she existed, but, ... she wouldn't have known me from Adam.

KP: What a great story.

WR: Yes.

KP: Did you encounter any other Rutgers people overseas?

WR: Oh, yes. I encountered several during the training period at Boca. There were a couple of them that were there, ... and I think, when we landed ... on Saipan, that's where most of the B-29s were, ... I saw a couple of Rutgers guys that were in different flight crews. I don't remember exactly who, but, I know that I saw Rutgers people overseas.

KP: Had you thought at all about making the military your career?

WR: Well, I did give it one thought. ... [There was] a notice on the bulletin board that, if you wanted to sign up for another four years, ... for people in the field that I was in, electronics, you could get into a special training program to become a technical attaché at a foreign embassy, especially in Japan, and I investigated [that option]. It sounded like it was a good opportunity, but, you had to sign up first, and then, apply, and, if you didn't get into this program, you had already signed up. You had to stay in the service for another four years, and I didn't like the odds, so, I forgot about it, but, that was the only thought I had of staying in.

KP: If you could be a technical attaché.

WR: Yes, but, then, I did stay in the reserve, and I had just put a deposit down on a house, on a Sunday afternoon, and I went to my office on Monday, and my wife calls me, and she says, "There's a big special delivery letter here for you from Marsh Air Force Base." I said, "Where the hell is Marsh Air Force Base?" and I rushed home, and it was orders to report, first to McGuire Air Force Base, and then, to Marsh Air Force Base, it was the Korean War, to go over to Korea, and I got down to McGuire Air Force Base, and there were five or six guys that I had been overseas with. They were all laying in their bunks, reading comic books, happy as larks, because they were unhappy with their marriages, or things were not going so great, and they were glad to get back in the service. [laughter] Anyway, I had taken the physical, and didn't pass the physical, and they said, "Well, when you're called back, even though you're not going to be in the military occupational specialty that you're called back for, you're in," and it didn't seem right to me, and there was another fellow, who lived in Connecticut, that I had known while I was in service, who had the same situation. ... Together, we went to everybody we could see at McGuire Air Force Base and we couldn't get anywhere. We decided to get in my car and drive over to First Air Force Headquarters ... in Garden City, New York, ... Mitchell Field I think it was called, and we went into one officer's office after another, and we were not getting anyplace. They all said, "Well, you're in, you're in," and we were walking in the hallway, and a guy was walking down the hallway in the opposite direction without a jacket on. [He was] obviously a military person and he said, "What are you civilians doing here?" So, you know, it was like a last ditch effort and we said, "Well, we've told everybody else and we can't get anywhere, we'll tell you," we didn't know who he was, and he says, "Come on into my office." We go into the office and ... on the back of his chair was his jacket, with three stars. He was a three-star general. He was the commanding general of the First Air Force, and he listened to us, and he said, "Well, you guys are right," and he called this sergeant in, and he said, "Look, send a (TWIX?) down to McGuire Air Force Base releasing these men." He said, "You guys give him your name and home address and go on home," which we did, you know, never heard anything else. I just dropped out of the reserve and that was the end of that.

KP: Why had you joined the reserves?

WR: Well, I did it ... as a patriotic gesture, I guess, not thinking very much about ever getting called back to active duty. If I had gone to some once a month training, I was willing to do that, but, they never called me for any kind of training, and the first thing I ever heard from them was the

Korean War, “Come back for the Korean War,” and, anyway, by that time, I had a family started, and I was not too eager to leave. ... [I also had] a business just starting. I didn’t want to go.

KP: You mentioned that some of your World War II buddies were eager to go back.

WR: They were. [laughter]

KP: Did they admit to this?

WR: [laughter] Well, they admitted it when we saw them. ...

KP: Even though they had served in World War II, they wanted to go to Korea.

WR: Yes. ... They just liked the life and, ... I guess, they weren’t doing too well at home, in civilian life. It was another chance for a vacation. [laughter]

KP: Had you considered using your GI Bill benefits to go back to school?

WR: Well, I was going ... to come back to Rutgers. ... I never had a degree in electrical engineering, and I was gonna come back, but, I got involved in business. ... I got out of the service in April. I had that whole summer to find something to do before I went back to Rutgers, and I got involved in a little business, and I stayed with it, never thought about going back after that.

KP: So, if the school year had started in May ...

WR: Then, I might have come back and gotten a degree in engineering.

KP: That was your plan.

WR: Exactly, that was my plan, yes.

KP: How did you get into your business?

WR: Well, when we started, we were buying what they called war surplus, my brother and I. In fact, my brother was doing that, and I got out of the service, and I had nothing to do. He saw me sitting around the house, he said, “Why don’t you come with me and I’ll introduce you to a few people tomorrow?” So, I went and we were in a fella’s office, ... just sitting around, talking, like I’m talking to you. He said, “[Do] you know something about electronics?” I said, “Well, I’ve been doing it all my life.” He said, “I’m going to take you someplace tomorrow where they’re selling a lot of electronic stuff, and I know the people, I know that I can buy it right, but, I don’t know anything about it.” So, I said, “Well, I know a little about it, but, I don’t know what, “buy it right,” would mean,” because I had no commercial experience at all. So, anyway, he said, “If you have a little bit of money, come on over with me.” So, we went, and it was the Western Electric

plant in Bayonne, and I said, “Those things look good, those things look good, and they look good,” and we bought a truck load of stuff, and, the next week, I went over to New York, where all the radio stores were in those days, and I’d see an item in a store window for a dollar, and I went in, and I offered the guy a couple of hundred of them for fifty cents a piece, and he said, “Well, you can’t get fifty cents a piece, but, I’ll give you thirty-five cents.” ... After a week, I began to establish a little knowledge of the prices, and I’d say, [in] the first month that I worked with my brother, my brother and I were partners and we worked with this other guy, I made more than I would make if I worked as an engineer for two years. So, I said, “I might as well just stay in this business [laughter] and not go back to school.” It didn’t last that way forever, you know, for all the time we were in business, but, I learned a lot and I stayed with it.

KP: Even though you chose not to further your education, were you still able to keep up with the technological changes?

WR: Oh, yes, as much as I had to.

KP: How were you able to do that?

WR: Just by reading and learning about products, reading manufacturers’ literature about products.

KP: How did your business grow?

WR: ... It grew very slowly, but, we just kept at it, and, finally, we became distributors for various products, and one of the manufacturers whose product we distributed made us an offer to buy our business, this is about fifteen years ago, and, when we sat down to negotiate, we found out that we should be buying his business. [laughter] Anyway, after a couple of years, they got really big, and they did buy us out, and we worked for them for many years, and then, about five years ago, maybe seven years ago, ... that company was sold to some other investors, and they were going to force my brother and I to retire. ... We had built up certain retirement benefits, and we traded our retirement benefits for a small part of the business, but, we had four key employees, and we would only do it if they were going to stay with us. ... We said, “If you guys stay with us, we’ll make sure that, when we retire, which is not going to be very far from now, a few years from now, we’ll make it easy for you to buy the business,” and that’s what we did. ... Two of them dropped out, but, two of them are in the process of buying the business and paying us off right now.

KP: What made these employees “key employees?”

WR: Well, they had started with us from [the beginning], working in our warehouse, and working in our lab, where we reconditioned and tested equipment, and learned the equipment, and they worked in the office as salespeople.

KP: They basically knew the entire business.

WR: ... They knew the whole thing. One of them was the son of my first secretary. ... In other words, ... I guess, [at] the time his mother came to work for us, he was, maybe, eight or nine years old. I saw him go all through high school, and he used to work for us when he had time in the summers, when he was going to high school, and, after he finished, he came to work for us. We sent him to that same school, RETS, where I used to teach, and he learned electronics, and, now, he's going to own our business.

KP: How big was your business when you left?

WR: You mean in sales?

KP: Yes.

WR: Well, ... of course, we had gone into another field. ... When I say we bought part of the business, we bought the original electronic part of the business, electronic components, but, we had gone into importing ball bearings and that became very big. We were doing as much as twenty million a year in business at one point, but, the company that we had sold out to still owns that [ball] bearing business, and we just bought out [the electronic components part], ... and we do four million a year.

KP: How many employees do you have?

WR: Sixteen.

KP: You had a son who would have been of draft age during the Vietnam War. Did you want him to serve? How did you feel about the Vietnam War?

WR: Well, I felt that it was his patriotic duty to serve and we were just lucky that his number was never called. He was going to go to Canada if he had to serve.

KP: You believed he should have served.

WR: I tried to convince him that, if his number was called up, he should serve, so, it never got to that point, because his number was not called, and then, my other two sons were too young. ...

KP: Did you support the Vietnam War at the time?

WR: At the beginning, I supported it, but, then, when I read a little about what was going on and what our objectives were or weren't, I became opposed to it. I thought we should have pulled out long before we did.

KP: Did you ever become active in any veterans' organizations?

WR: No, no. I'm a member of the Jewish War Veterans, but, I don't think I ever went to a meeting. I send them my five or six dollars a year. ...

KP: Did you talk often about the war after you got back?

WR: Maybe twice a year, we'd get in a discussion about it, something like we're doing now, you know. Something would come up and make a stink about where we were.

KP: Your brother was also a veteran. He had been wounded.

WR: Yes, my brother is a retired officer ... with a disability.

KP: What was his war like?

WR: ... He was a bomb disposal officer, which was a very dangerous kind of a job, and he was wounded three times in Africa and the European Theater, and he kept going back for more. ...

KP: Did you compare notes?

WR: ... We really didn't compare notes too much, no. Every once in awhile, we'd talk a little bit about it, but, not in very much detail. I know that he still has shrapnel in his body. He can't go through an airport metal detector without making it go off, so, they tell him to take his keys out of his pocket. He says, "You know, if you're going to get rid of the metal, just slice my arm off."  
[laughter]

KP: Did your brother go to Rutgers?

WR: No, he went to the University of Pennsylvania.

KP: Before or after the war?

WR: He graduated four years before I did, so, the war was over, but, ... I think he volunteered to go to ... some officers' training program. I don't think he was drafted.

KP: He volunteered?

WR: Yes.

KP: Did he volunteer for bomb disposal?

WR: No, he volunteered ... for the ordnance, and then, got involved with bomb disposal.

KP: Is there anything that I forgot to ask about the war or your experiences at Rutgers?

WR: I don't think so. I think I've talked more about it than I have in a long time, or maybe even ever. [laughter]

KP: I just thought of a question. How often did you or the other men in your unit attend religious services?

WR: During training and the times I was in school, I don't think we ever went. I think, on Guam, they had high holy day services. ... I don't know if it was a rabbi that conducted them or some layperson, but, they did get together for high holy day services, and I heard about it and went, but, while I was in the States, I don't think I ever went, other than if I was home, you know. I'd come home on leave and I'd go at home with my parents, but, I never went to a service in any of the bases, no.

KP: You mentioned that, occasionally, in a close call, men would suddenly find religion.

WR: Yes, some more than others, you know. ... I think everyone does it in his own way, but, some were much more obvious, looking for help from somebody or someplace. [laughter]

KP: Your crew stayed together for all fifteen missions.

WR: Yes.

KP: They all made it.

WR: Right.

KP: Did you ever stay in touch with any of the members of your crew?

WR: One of them. I used to see one of the fellas. ... He came from Texas, originally, but, he married a nurse, an Air Force nurse, and she was stationed at a place up in Connecticut, at a hospital in Connecticut. So, while ... they were stationed there, we would get together, occasionally, and then, he got a job with one of the companies down in ... what was Cape Canaveral then, you know, in Florida, and, if I was going down to Florida, I think on a couple of occasions, I'd stop in to see him, but, then, slowly, we ...

KP: Drifted apart. Were there any crew reunions?

WR: ... No, no reunion. We used to correspond for awhile. ... We'd exchange cards at Christmas time, but, I don't even do that anymore. I don't even know if he's still alive, to tell you the truth.

KP: Was there much gambling in your squadron?

WR: ... Not right in our squadron, but, when [the] guys all came back from missions, a lot of times, if you landed ... at Saipan, especially, that's where most of the B-29s were, they always had a big poker game going, and I'd get in there, a crap game. I was never a big gambler, but, as a diversion, we'd get in a game, occasionally, but, we never gambled amongst ourselves. In fact, I don't think we ever played cards.

KP: You played volleyball.

WR: Yes. Most of the time, we were outside, either volleyball or the beach.

KP: Have you ever been back to Guam or any of the places where you were stationed during the war?

WR: ... No. ... I took a trip to Australia ... about a year ago.

KP: You finally got your R&R. [laughter]

WR: Yes, I got my R&R, and ... I investigated a side trip to Guam, but, it was so expensive, I couldn't afford it. Just to go for a couple of days would have cost \$5000, between plane fares and hotels. It was beyond my [means]. [laughter] ... I couldn't convince my wife that it was worth it.

KP: Thank you very much.

WR: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/1/00

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/6/00

Reviewed by Dorothea L. Reichman 4/20/00