

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRY L. RUNYAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Mary Lou Strahlendorff: This begins an interview with Harry L. Runyan on March 30, 2006, in Newport News, Virginia. Mr. Runyan, thank you very much for inviting us into your home and allowing us to interview you. My name is Mary Lou Strahlendorff.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This is Sandra Stewart Holyoak; my thanks as well.

MLS: Mr. Runyan, would you begin by telling us where and when you were born?

Harry L. Runyan: March the 13th, 1918, wow. [laughter]

SSH: Where were you born?

HLR: Trenton, New Jersey, 470 West Hanover Street.

MLS: Runyan is an old family name in New Jersey.

HLR: They got there in 1665.

MLS: Is that part of your ancestral history?

HLR: Yes, yes. They were French Huguenots.

MLS: That is wonderful.

HLR: They were Protestants that got driven out of France. They went to the Isle of Jersey and, from there, to New Jersey. The family stayed there in New Jersey two hundred years, I guess, within twenty miles. The first Runyan-owned property [was] 170-some acres on the Raritan River, somewhere in the vicinity of Rutgers, I think.

MLS: That is wonderful.

HLR: But, he didn't hold it very long. He sold it, but the family stayed there in that area the whole time. My father was born in Princeton. My mother came from Indiana. I have no idea how he met her. [laughter]

MLS: What did your father do for an occupation?

HLR: He was a civil engineer.

MLS: I was fortunate enough to have the benefit of reading the history that you prepared. He had the same job for forty years?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you tell us a little bit about his company?

HLR: He worked for the American Bridge Company, which is in Trenton, and was part of the U.S. Steel Corporation.

MLS: Was that related to the Roebling Steel Company or was that separate?

HLR: No.

MLS: It was separate. Did he design bridges?

HLR: Yes, he designed bridges and also, I think, in the '20s, he worked on the New York subways.

MLS: He did? I bet he has stories.

HLR: You've been in the New York subways, I guess, and you see a column every two feet or so? [laughter] In those days, I think, they would make complete drawings of what the column looked like. Nowadays, they just draw lines, say, "It's such-and-such a size."

MLS: I commuted to New York for many years, so I am intimately familiar with the New York subway system.

HLR: So am I. [laughter] I commuted to Brooklyn Poly from Trenton. I was working on a master's degree. I could get on a train in Trenton, ride to the Penn Station, walk through it, get on a subway, and [it] went right to an outlet right outside of Brooklyn Poly. [laughter] I was never outdoors, hardly, just to get out and walk a few feet to get in the building.

MLS: What was your father's education?

HLR: High school.

MLS: High school?

HLR: Eighth grade.

MLS: He became an engineer with just a high-school degree?

HLR: He worked there for forty years.

MLS: Was he an apprentice? Was it on the job training?

HLR: Oh, yes, he was a blueprint boy to start with.

MLS: What would a blueprint boy do? Do you have any idea?

HLR: In those days, they did blueprints. I guess he just carried them around. I don't know whether he made them or not.

MLS: Your mother, did you say she was born in Indiana?

HLR: Indiana. Akron, Indiana: That's a dinky little town, not like Akron, Ohio. [laughter]

MLS: You don't know how they met?

HLR: No. My only suspicion of that is that my aunt worked for the Strawbridge and Clothier department store in Philadelphia and she was the head of the book department for years and years. See those books on the top shelf, by that funny looking mug? They're all books she gave me. [laughter] I saved them.

MLS: They are worth saving.

SSH: Was that aunt the only one of your mother's family who wound up moving to the East Coast?

HLR: Yes, that was her family. There were just two girls, no brothers or anything. They lived in Collingswood. You know where Collingswood is?

SSH: Yes.

MLS: On your mother's side, what about her parents?

HLR: His [her father's] name was Swartz, S-W-A-R-T-Z.

MLS: Were they born here in the United States?

HLR: Yes, yes, but I assume they were German. I don't know. I never heard anybody say anything about it. That was in Indiana.

SSH: Did you meet them as a young man? Did you meet your grandparents?

HLR: This one, yes. The other one, my father's father, he died in 1902 and his wife died, too. I mean, I never met them. Of course, these other two, they lived in Collingswood, New Jersey, with my aunt and two cousins, and we lived there for a while. In the Depression, we moved every year. My father was out of a job. The company he worked for just shut down, period.

MLS: That was the American Bridge Company?

HLR: Yes, American Bridge Company, part of U.S. Steel. They just went [out of business].

MLS: So, the forty-year period that he worked for American Bridge, was it broken up?

HLR: No, just that was the end of it. He was born in 1876. I only remember it because of the '76.

MLS: So, after American Bridge Company, after that shut down, what did he do? You said you moved every year.

HLR: Yes. I don't know. We were moving from relative to relative, to save money, and then, he died in [the] middle of my sophomore year at Rutgers. I was a pre-med student. That was their idea. It wasn't mine.

SSH: Really? [laughter]

MLS: If we can back up just a little bit, you were born and raised in Trenton.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you tell us a little bit about Trenton during that period? What was it like to live there as a child and as a boy?

HLR: Well, as I said, I was born and raised on Hanover Street. You know where that is, West Hanover?

MLS: I don't know much about Trenton. Did you like living there?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Or did you not think about it very much?

HLR: No, I was kind of young, and then, we moved out. He bought a real nice house, a stone house. I mean, it was stone. It wasn't fake stone. It wasn't on the river, but it was up a ways towards Lambertville. It was a brand-new development and that was 102 School Lane.

MLS: What period was that, that he bought the stone house?

HLR: While I was in junior high. I went to Junior Number Three. Are you familiar with Junior Number Three?

MLS: I am not, I'm sorry to say. [laughter]

HLR: [laughter] Yes, they didn't give names to the schools; they were numbered, the junior high schools. Trenton, at that time, only had one high school.

SSH: Really?

HLR: I don't know. Do they still have one high school?

SSH: No, there's more now, I think.

MLS: Another question about growing up in Trenton: Do you remember anything about the ethnic mix? Were there different enclaves where people of different backgrounds tended to congregate? Who did you associate with?

HLR: Well, we went to church, the Prospect Street Presbyterian Church, and I belonged to the Boy Scouts there. That was a big deal in my life.

MLS: How old were you when you entered the Boy Scouts?

HLR: Oh, ten. Actually, I was a Cub Scout.

SSH: Really?

MLS: What was it about being a Cub Scout that was a big deal?

HLR: I don't know. I liked to go with the gang and I went to camp, two years, as a Cub Scout, Camp Pahaquarra. [Editor's Note: The "flair" on the Pahaquarra pennant indicates he went to the camp as a Cub Scout and later as a Boy Scout.]

MLS: That was a summer camp?

HLR: Yes, it was up on the Delaware River, past the Delaware Water Gap, on the New Jersey side, but you had to go on the Pennsylvania side to get to it. There was no road along the Delaware River and you had to go through the Water Gap.

MLS: These were boys from your neighborhood who went with you who were fellow Scouts?

HLR: Yes, yes.

SSH: Do you remember how to spell that?

HLR: Pahaquarra?

[Tape Paused]

MLS: Mr. Runyan has just brought into the room a pennant, is that what it is?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Tell us a little bit about this pennant.

HLR: Well, it's just a Camp Pahaquarra pennant, or whatever you call it, and it has a whole bunch of badges on it.

MLS: Tell us about the badges.

HLR: Well, this was a Cub Commonwealth, Camp Pahaquarra, and I was the chairman of the commonwealth.

MLS: That's quite a big deal.

HLR: Well, we had about twelve or thirteen kids there. [laughter]

MLS: Well, when you're a boy.

HLR: Anyway, I was a judge, too, once. I don't know what that was about. I don't think that one did anything. Then I got one here Scout Citizen, 1929. What's this? I can't read it.

SSH: "The Hairdressers of Philadelphia Exhibitor, A Trades' Display."

MLS: Was someone a barber that you knew?

SSH: That's a Republican, careful. [laughter]

HLR: Yes, there's a Republican thing, a little button.

SSH: Landon.

HLR: Oh, Landon, is that what it says? [laughter]

SSH: "Landon and Knox," and here is, "For Governor, Foster M. Voorhees," and there are American flags. What is this one? This is a treasure chest all on a pennant.

HLR: There's an American flag, and what does that say? I can't read it, yes.

SSH: It says, "American Legion Endowment," yes, yes. [laughter]

HLR: This is all old stuff. It isn't any new stuff. [laughter]

SSH: This is super.

MLS: That is fascinating. What a time capsule.

SSH: There's a Hoover pin.

HLR: Yes. We're Republicans. [laughter]

SSH: I can tell.

MLS: What is this red and black badge? It looks like a military badge of some sort.

HLR: Yes, it does. I don't know what it is.

SSH: You went to CMTC?

HLR: No, my brother did. You know what that means?

SSH: Tell the tape for us please.

HLR: CMTC means Citizens' Military Training Camp.

MLS: What exactly was that?

HLR: It was Army training for kids. The camp was up at Plattsburg, New York.

MLS: What period would this have been? Would this have been after the war started?

HLR: Oh, no. This is in the '20s. This is my brother; he was nine years older than I was.

SSH: The one thing that's tacked on here is "Harry Runyan, Class of '39," a Rutgers badge.

HLR: [laughter]

SSH: There are a couple of gold stars. What are these from?

HLR: I don't know what that's from.

MLS: So your scouting activities were obviously very important to you.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Were there any skills or values that you learned that you feel you've used in your later life?

HLR: On my honor, [laughter] I will do my best to do my duty, etcetera, etcetera. [laughter]

SSH: You have a New York American pin that says, "Buy American Products."

HLR: Good. [laughter] I wonder what that one is.

MLS: My husband, the word he would use for that is ribbon. It looks like a military ribbon.

HLR: Yes, some kind.

SSH: There's another ribbon-style pin here, so it may have had something to do with the camp.

HLR: What does that say?

SSH: It says Pahaquarra, the same as this.

HLR: I just found this thing the other day.

SSH: Did you? I'm so thankful. I should also tell the tape that he has found his blouse. We would call it a jacket, those of us who are not in the know.

HLR: It's a blouse.

MLS: That was your World War II blouse. Did you actually wear that when you were over in Europe?

HLR: Yes, now and then, not much, just when you went on leave to Paris or London or someplace. It was the 9th Air Force. It's got that 9th-Air-Force patch on it, but my captain's bars aren't on it. I don't know what happened to them.

SSH: Oh, no. Maybe you put them in another drawer somewhere.

HLR: Yes. [laughter]

MLS: You were eleven years old, is that correct, in 1929 when the Great Depression began? Do I have the timeline correct?

HLR: Well, I was born in 1918, March.

MLS: Okay, so that would have made you eleven. My question is: What do you remember about the Great Depression?

HLR: Well, it was rough on the family. We started moving.

MLS: Your father lost his job, his plant shut down.

HLR: Yes, I think it killed him, eventually.

SSH: Was he able to find any work, any kind of piecework at all?

HLR: No, I think he found a little job once.

MLS: Do you remember doing what?

HLR: He found a job once that only lasted a couple of months, I think. Then he had to commute to it or stay there or something. It was in Pennsylvania somewhere, quite a ways from Trenton.

MLS: Did that happen in 1929, the losing of the job?

HLR: Around there, yes.

MLS: So how many years after that were you moving?

HLR: Almost each year. We lived--and I don't remember the order-- in Collingswood, New Jersey, Trenton, New York, Brooklyn, a year there. That was a terrible year for me.

MLS: In Brooklyn? What was terrible about it?

HLR: Well, first of all, the classrooms were jammed in school, which was called Bushwick High School. I don't know who Bushwick was, [laughter] but I had to sit--you know these little seats you got that fold down from the desk?--two of us, and the guy I was sitting with stunk like mad. He was Italian and he smelled of garlic or something. Anyway, besides that, the fact I had to sit with somebody. That was the worst year.

MLS: Whom had you been living with in Brooklyn?

HLR: My aunt, I think.

SSH: Was it your father's sister?

HLR: Yes, she had been a successful clothier, I guess, you'd call it. Back in the '20s, I think, she had a very successful lady's store, [a] dress shop, on Fulton Street in Brooklyn and Fulton Street went down the drain. She didn't move and her business went down the drain. Then she had a Jewish friend who was in the clothing business and he offered her a job in California. She went out there and ran a store for him. My father had died, and so my mother goes out and she worked in the store with her for a while, not too long, only a couple of years.

MLS: Now you showed us some of your Republican pins. Did your parents discuss politics? Was it a topic that the family was interested in at all?

HLR: Well, I know they were violently Republican. [laughter]

MLS: Did they talk about President Roosevelt at all? Did they have any opinions?

HLR: Oh, they didn't like him. Neither did I. [laughter] One of the reasons they didn't like him was because, in the Depression, the American Bridge Company got a contract and [my father] was all ready to go to work and Roosevelt interceded and moved the contract to some other place and they didn't get anything. Oh, man, was he mad. [laughter]

SSH: Now, when you were in high school you spent one year in Brooklyn? Where else did you go to high school?

HLR: Collingswood, Brooklyn, Trenton; well, Trenton twice, I guess. I went to ninth grade at Junior Number Three in Trenton, so that's only three years left, and that was it, Collingswood, Brooklyn. What was the other place I mentioned?

SSH: You came back to Trenton.

HLR: That's right. I graduated from Trenton High.

SSH: Now did you qualify for a scholarship to be able to go to college?

HLR: No, I never tried. They didn't have them in those days, anyway.

MLS: Did you always expect to go to college?

HLR: No.

MLS: How was it that you decided to?

HLR: I didn't decide.

MLS: What decided for you?

HLR: Actually, I had a friend whose parents had a real estate company. ... He was working in it, and I was going to go become a real estate man.

MLS: Salesman?

HLR: In Trenton. Without me knowing it, my father drives up to New Brunswick and enrolls me in school. [laughter] I didn't even know it was going on--in pre-medicine.

MLS: This was before or after the company went out of business?

HLR: This is after.

MLS: This was after? He was still--?

HLR: Oh, he was going to send me to school.

MLS: Did he talk to you about his hopes for you? What was the conversation?

HLR: No, I don't think so. He just told me, [laughter] and I wasn't too enamored of being a medical doctor.

MLS: Had you discussed medicine at all in the family?

HLR: No.

MLS: Why would he have chosen that?

HLR: I don't know. Then he died in the middle of my sophomore year when I was in pre-med at Rutgers, so that January I changed over to engineering. [laughter]

MLS: You had such a difficult situation financially. How did you afford the tuition?

HLR: I don't know. After he died, my mother had enough money. I commuted the first two years. The second two, this was after he died, my mother insisted I go and stay in the dorm. Is there a dorm called Wessels or something like that?

SSH: Yes.

HLR: Is that right? That's where I stayed.

MLS: You have no idea how they were able to get the money together to pay your tuition?

HLR: Well, he'd saved. [Editor's (Son) Note: Speculation, but I know Harry, Sr., had life insurance policies. This could be the source of much of the funds.]

MLS: He did save.

HLR: Then he played the stock market and I think he was successful. He walked to work everyday.

MLS: He was a very frugal man.

HLR: It was three miles. Yes, but he always was well dressed. He was tall and skinny, not like me. I'm built more like my mother. He was so skinny, he couldn't buy store-made clothes; they had to be tailored. When he was a kid, they called him "Needles" because his elbows were so sharp. [laughter]

SSH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HLR: I had a brother.

SSH: You said he was older.

HLR: Yes, seven years. He died about seven years ago. He was here in Newport News.

SSH: Was he really? Now, did he go to college as well?

HLR: Yes, he went to New Mexico School of Mines, which is now, I think, the University of New Mexico. [Editor's Note: The New Mexico School of Mines was founded in 1889 and changed its name to New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in 1951.]

MLS: Was that related to engineering as well or was he a geologist?

HLR: Yes, yes.

SSH: Was he able to find work during the Depression, your brother?

HLR: Yes, but then he quit it, which was dumb. He was in South America, Venezuela, working for Standard Oil and they had oil wells out in the--Maracaibo, is it?--in the bay. He'd ride boats around to the things all the time. He was there a couple of years. He got tired of that and he quit and he came back.

MLS: Was it living in Venezuela?

HLR: I don't know what it was.

SSH: Was he a geologist?

HLR: No, he was a mining engineer. Well, that had geology in it; yes, he had taken courses in geology. He came back in the middle of the Depression and he couldn't get a job.

SSH: So, did he move with all of you to the different places that you moved?

HLR: Well, he was going to school a lot of time, New Mexico or some place.

MLS: What did he continue to study? Was it engineering related topics?

HLR: No.

MLS: Because you commuted to Rutgers for your first two years, can you tell us: Were you able to participate in any social life at campus? What was life like for you as a commuter?

HLR: Very dull; I'd go there, go to school, come home, do my homework and go to bed. I didn't have any social life.

MLS: You took the train?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: Were there other students commuting with you?

HLR: There were quite a number of them, yes. It was Depression time.

MLS: Initially, as a pre-med student, was the workload very heavy? Was it a very intense course of study?

HLR: When I changed to engineering my marks went from A and Bs, to Bs and Cs. It was a heck of a lot harder than the pre-med. That was easy.

MLS: Really? What was harder about it?

HLR: Well, the math, you know. [laughter] I liked it.

MLS: Did you have to do physics?

HLR: Oh, yes. Well, I kind of cheated there. They had two physics courses, one for engineers and one for art students, and I took, of course, the one (for) art students, but I finished it up when I quit. So, I had the easier physics course than the engineering guy. [laughter]

SSH: Just take it right?

HLR: Yes, but then I had to go to summer school twice. Well, I missed some courses in engineering. They're actually freshman courses. That's when I went to Brooklyn Poly to take a course that I had missed and that was the only place I could find the darned course. Then I went to summer school at Rutgers. Oh, that was terrible. The summertime, I had to take drafting, engineering, drafting. I hated that. The drafting room was right smack on top of the engineering building with skylights to give you a lot of light, but no air conditioning in the summertime.

MLS: My goodness.

HLR: You'd sit and start drawing and your sweat would start falling on the paper. [laughter] Anyway, I got by it.

SSH: Now, did you continue to live at Wessels over the summer or did you commute for summer school?

HLR: I was commuting then. I was home.

MLS: Your said your mother insisted that you move on campus. Did your life change? How did that affect the quality of your student life?

HLR: Well, you know, it was a lot more fun. [laughter]

MLS: Tell us about the fun.

HLR: Oh, well, sitting around in the dorm room, chewing the fat.

MLS: What do you remember about your roommate or roommates?

HLR: I had one that I can remember, almost. I don't remember his name.

MLS: Was he fun to be with?

HLR: Oh, yes, they all were.

MLS: Being on campus, did you find yourself participating in any activities? Did you attend sporting events?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Could you tell us a little bit about that?

HLR: I had a bad knee by then. I had a knee knocked out of joint in high school. I was on the football team and, before the season started, they sent some of us up to [the] Peddie [School]. Have you ever heard of Peddie?

MLS: Yes, of course.

HLR: Well, we were having a scrub match--just a scrimmage--and some guy hit me in the knee, right here, with his shoulder and my leg just collapsed over to this one. I could hardly walk and the darn coach, he didn't even bother to take me home. I had to bum a quarter to get the bus to go home. I didn't have any money.

MLS: How terrible.

HLR: Anyway, I walked to high school with this bum knee, three miles for a while, and then my father finally took pity on me and started driving me to school. [laughter] I got to show you. See the scar? I had that operated on down here fifty years after that over at Riverside Hospital. That fixed it up. [laughter]

MLS: That's great.

SSH: I guess your bum knee got good enough to be able to get into the military. [laughter]

HLR: They didn't know about it.

SSH: When you were in school the new stadium was built.

HLR: Yes.

SSH: Tell us a little bit about that.

HLR: Oh, I don't know.

SSH: Was that exciting, that there was going to be a new stadium?

HLR: Oh yes, we went to the game and tore the goal post down.

SSH: What was so good about that game?

HLR: Well, we beat Princeton. [laughter] First time in how many years? Fifty?

SSH: Fifty, yes. [laughter]

MLS: Do you remember what the score was?

HLR: No, thirty-eight to thirty-nine, or something like that.

MLS: So, it was a nail biter.

HLR: Do you know what it was?

MLS: I don't know, no. Was that right?

HLR: It was close, but I don't know what the score was.

SSH: You're right. Thirty-eight to thirty-nine

HLR: Was it? That was a guess.

MLS: Can you describe the scene when the game was over and Rutgers had won?

HLR: Yes, everybody went out in the field and started tearing the goal post down. [laughter]

MLS: Do you imagine these were the Rutgers people who were doing this?

HLR: Yes, sure.

MLS: What was Princeton doing?

HLR: I don't know, I don't think they were there. [laughter] I think they left, I don't know.

SSH: There was always a tradition of competition between Rutgers and Princeton on many levels.

HLR: Yes, is it still that way?

SSH: There were some incidents that you're well aware of when you went down to Princeton to help relieve them of a few items?

HLR: Yes, well, I did one of them.

SSH: I know, but can you discuss it?

HLR: Yes, well, there was a tradition of going down there and swiping the cannon, but we didn't do that.

MLS: What did you do?

HLR: We went down to the bar there in Palmer Square and swiped a bunch of mugs that were hanging up. Then the next day, we brought them all back.

SSH: Mostly to show them that you could just do it, right?

HLR: Yes, we felt guilty or something. [laughter]

MLS: Oh my goodness, you're very nice. [laughter] One thing about your history that caught my eye: you said that your favorite professor was someone called Powerhouse Bailey?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Tell us about Powerhouse Bailey.

HLR: I wouldn't say he was my favorite professor. Did I say that? I remember him, yes, that's right, Powerhouse Bailey.

MLS: How did he get that name?

HLR: He was an expert on powerhouses. I mean, real powerhouses that developed electricity, yes. He designed a bunch, I think. No, my favorite professor was somebody else, and I can't remember his name.

MLS: Do you remember the topic, subject?

HLR: He had a course, a special course in mathematics that he developed just for the engineering students. He was red-haired and he had a mustache.

MLS: Do you remember what it was about him that made him your favorite professor, what the qualities were?

HLR: Well, he had a sense of humor, could joke around, and I liked the subject even though it was hard. Another thing, since I changed to engineering I said, "I have missed some courses," and he allowed me to take a course at Brooklyn Poly in differential equations instead of taking his specialized course he had developed. I'd had some other courses with him and he allowed me to do that. That allowed me to graduate on time.

MLS: That's important.

HLR: Yes, I didn't screw around another year. I know there was one kid in our class: We had a class of thirteen mechanical engineers and, right at the end of the course, we were taking an exam and [the professor] was writing the questions on the blackboard. There was one guy that was always cheating; everybody knew it, but nobody ever said anything, and the professor suddenly turned around and he finds this guy like this.

MLS: How did he cheat?

SSH: What happened?

HLR: He didn't report it to anybody, he just flunked him, and since he had to have that course to graduate, he didn't graduate. So, I don't know what happened to him after that, but it didn't get on his record, the record was he flunked the course.

MLS: Do you remember how he was cheating? He had material written down or notes?

HLR: I don't know. He was looking over at somebody.

MLS: He was taking answers from other people?

HLR: Yes, he was looking at their answers.

SSH: Scoping it out.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Do you remember anything about the college administration in those days? Did you have any contacts with the college administration?

HLR: I don't think so.

SSH: You talked to President Clothier?

HLR: I think it was that, you could check that, I guess.

SSH: Yes, I think that's right. Do you remember who was the dean of men or the provost?

HLR: No, I don't even remember who was the dean of engineering. I can picture his face. I forget.

MLS: ROTC was mandatory.

HLR: Two years.

SSH: How does that work for someone who is commuting? Do you still take it?

HLR: Yes, you took it.

MLS: What were the ROTC courses like? Can you talk to us about it?

HLR: I don't know. All I remember was they were so simple they were boring, but then you had to--how often was it, once a week?--you had to go out and drill. You had to put your uniform on. It was summertime, and these uniforms were solid wool, thick. You get out there and you sweat like mad. I remember one time we were standing at attention with a gun here and all of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a movement and then one of the guys fainted. I can just see him going back. I could see it now. He was still at attention, holding his gun, and he just went down and his head sounded like a watermelon hitting the pavement.

MLS: Yikes, and you were on grass?

HLR: No, this was on pavement right alongside of the gym. [laughter] Is that gym still there that old [one]?

SSH: It is, it is.

HLR: Well, there was a street alongside of it.

SSH: College Avenue and Senior Street.

HLR: It wasn't in the front.

SSH: Well, there's Senior Street on the side, College Avenue and then Sicard?

HLR: I don't remember the name.

MLS: You chose not to remain in ROTC after sophomore year, why was that?

HLR: I don't know. It was too much trouble. [laughter]

MLS: There was mandatory chapel. Do you remember mandatory chapel?

HLR: Oh, yes, sure. You had to go and sign in. You could go to half of them. That's right.

MLS: Who was the person who signed you in? Was it a different person?

HLR: You signed a piece of paper and turned it in when they passed the plate around.

MLS: What do you remember about the experience of mandatory chapel?

HLR: Boring. [laughter]

SSH: No good speakers?

HLR: Oh, I guess they had some, I don't know. I can't remember them.

SSH: Was Dr. William H.S. Demarest still there?

HLR: That name is very familiar.

SSH: I think he had a nickname, Whistling Willie?

HLR: I don't know. [laughter]

SSH: Whistling-something.

HLR: What was he?

SSH: I think he was the dean of men. [Editor's Note: The Reverend Dr. William H. S. Demarest was the first alumnus to become President of Rutgers College (1906-1924). He continued to be very active within the University while serving as President of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary.]

HLR: Yes, I think so, yes.

SSH: Or the provost. I don't remember which title. But he had a lisp, I think, that sounded like he whistled when he spoke, so everybody talks about the nickname that he had.

MLS: What about the women of NJC [New Jersey College for Women]? Did you have any contact with them?

HLR: Zero: I went to dances, about the only social activity. I'd have to run around and try and find some girl to take. Whoever I took, it never ended up with anything. [It was] the only date I had with them. Maybe I stunk or something, I don't know. [laughter]

MLS: Oh, I don't believe that. [laughter] Where were the dances? Were they on College Avenue or were they up at Douglass?

HLR: They were in the gym.

SSH: Like the Military Ball and the Junior-Senior Prom?

HLR: Yes, that's right. I forgot that.

SSH: Junior-Senior Prom?

HLR: Yes, I went to all of them.

SSH: So, did you like to dance?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Did your knee bother you? Did your knee keep you from dancing at all?

HLR: No.

MLS: Do you remember anything about the student body in terms of were they politically aware? Were they interested in politics?

HLR: I don't remember talking any politics to anybody. It might have been. I don't remember.

MLS: Looking back at your time at Rutgers, how do you feel about it? Do you have a fondness for it?

HLR: Well, the final two years, yes, not the first two. [laughter] I had to walk three miles to the train, walk three miles back. I had to do that walk until I hurt my knee. No, my knee was hurt before that. I was still walking it.

MLS: You graduated from Rutgers in 1939, the year that Hitler invaded Poland. Was that something that you were well aware of?

HLR: Oh, yes, sure.

MLS: Tell me about that. What were you thinking, what were you hearing?

SSH: He invades Poland the fall after your graduation is that correct?

HLR: I guess so. [laughter]

MLS: What were you thinking in terms of the United States or yourself?

HLR: Well, I was hoping the United States wasn't going to get into it.

MLS: You were?

HLR: Yes, but I felt like we should.

MLS: Why did you feel that we should?

HLR: Because I didn't think England could beat up Germany, period. [laughter]

SSH: Were there any members of your class, before World War II began for the United States, who went to England or maybe went to Canada to fly with the Canadian Air Force?

HLR: I don't remember. I have a lousy memory. [laughter]

SSH: [laughter] That's quite okay.

MLS: Well, you're doing really well. From your history that I've read, we see you at Rutgers and then the next time we see you, you're out at the West Coast, you were at Hancock Field. How did you get out to the West Coast?

HLR: Well, I worked at Pratt and Whitney for five months. That wasn't in there?

MLS: It may have been.

SSH: This was after your graduation in May of 1939 that you went to work for Pratt and Whitney?

HLR: Well, first I went to work for a dinky little company in Trenton--I couldn't get a job. They [were] called (Parlac Appliers?) or something. They put roofs on, including flat roofs, where you'd take tar and take a mop. It's all they did. They had a big fifty-five-gallon drum. They'd drive to the site and they'd look around for a hunk of wood and some bricks. They'd fire this thing up and after an hour or so, the stuff was hot enough and they take a mop and mop the floor where they were supposed to waterproof it, over the roof. [laughter]

MLS: This was because it was still the Depression?

HLR: Yes. Well, I was supposed to be an estimator. I wasn't doing that.

SSH: Oh, okay, good.

HLR: I'd go around to these contractors. They got word a contractor was putting out a bid sheet or something [and] I'd have to go around there. [I] went as far as Philadelphia and all around New Jersey. I'd have to read the thing and figure out the number of square feet that they wanted waterproofed and estimate a price. That's where I met my wife.

SSH: Really? Tell us how you met your wife.

HLR: She was the secretary there. [laughter]

MLS: Was it love at first sight? Tell us about that.

HLR: Well, I don't know. I just asked her for a date.

MLS: Right off the bat?

HLR: No, no, it was a while, and we started going out.

SSH: Now, did the company provide you with a car or did you have your own?

HLR: No, I had to supply my own car. It was a terrible job.

MLS: Did they pay for your gas?

HLR: Yes, they had a gas pump. You'd pull up and they would figure out how many gallons it would take to do what you had to do and then they'd just squirt four and a half gallons in it, whatever it was. No, they weren't giving you any gas.

SSH: Nothing extra?

HLR: Yes. After being there, I think that's when I went to Pratt and Whitney. I stayed there five months.

MLS: Tell us exactly what you did there?

HLR: Engine tester. The production line was here and they had a whole bunch of test cells like this. Out here was where they made the engines and each one had a stand, had great big doors on the end, and when the engine was finished manufacture, they [would] push it up to this door and then we'd go out and open our doors and pull it in and put on a hoist, pull it up.

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

MLS: This is tape one, side two.

SSH: Okay, tell us please, where was Pratt and Whitney?

HLR: East Harford, Connecticut.

SSH: So, you moved up there?

HLR: Yes, I did, yes.

SSH: Did you bring Mrs. Runyan?

HLR: No, I wasn't married then.

SSH: Okay, not yet, okay. We just want to make sure. [laughter]

Doris Runyan: You weren't married yet when?

HLR: When I went to work for Pratt and Whitney.

DR: Gosh, that was in the Dark Ages. [laughter]

MLS: So, you're working for Pratt and Whitney and at some point you decide to enter the Civil Service. What happened? How do you get to California?

HLR: Well, to back up on that, they were going three shifts at Pratt and Whitney, but they were going three shifts on making engines for France.

MLS: For France?

HLR: This is before France fell. They'd gotten a big order from France for aircraft engines. Well, of course, it wasn't long before France fell, and the United States Air Force simply took over the order. [laughter] Nothing changed.

MLS: That was fortunate.

HLR: That was kind of dangerous work. There was a guy killed in there.

MLS: Really? In what way was it dangerous?

HLR: He walked into a propeller.

MLS: Oh, my goodness.

HLR: See, we put propellers on the front of the engines and ran them. The engines all had to be tested before they put them on an airplane and, well, this guy just accidentally walked into a propeller and it whacked him. That was it for him.

MLS: Was that unusual or were there a lot of accidents?

HLR: No, there weren't a lot of accidents, but that one happened. I hung around there five months and it stunk, you know. There were fumes that came out into the test houses, exhaust fumes, and I was going to quit. Well, at that time, the draft was on and if I quit, I was going to get drafted into the Army. Well, I had no intention of getting drafted. When I went in the Army I was going to pick my place. Well, I went to the post office, I think it was, where they had all these jobs listed. They had a job offer for people in California, Santa Maria, California, at Hancock Field. [George Allen] Hancock was a billionaire, or a millionaire anyway. He owned [a] huge plot of land out there in Santa Maria and it was all agriculture and the workers were all Japanese. So, here are these Japanese all over the place and the war starts. [laughter]

MLS: What type of agriculture was it? Do you remember what they grew?

HLR: No, I think it was vegetables and stuff. I don't know.

MLS: Did you actually have the job before you went out to California?

HLR: Yes, it was the Civil Service.

MLS: On the East Coast you were actually hired?

HLR: Yes, yes.

SSH: So they paid for your transportation?

HLR: No.

MLS: Again, reading your history, you mentioned that you and one of your co-workers had fifty planes to inspect once a month.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Each inspection took about an hour.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Did you have time on your hands?

HLR: I'll say. We sat around telling stories, the two of us. [laughter]

MLS: How did that change after Pearl Harbor? Did it change?

HLR: Well, I know the first night, or first couple of nights, yes. I had to go out and stand guard around the airfield. All the employees, civilian employees, had to go out and stand guard. As I mentioned, there were Japanese all over the place and we were afraid they were going to come in and sabotage the airplanes. We had about eighty airplanes, I think it was.

MLS: So, were these actually American citizens, these Japanese people?

HLR: I don't know.

MLS: You don't know.

HLR: I don't imagine they were, but after a couple of days, they finally brought the National Guard in to guard the place.

SSH: Did you have a weapon?

HLR: Yes, they gave me a gun, but there wasn't any ammunition in it and I didn't know how to shoot it anyway.

MLS: Back up just a little bit. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was actually attacked? Do you remember that day?

HLR: Out there. I was there.

MLS: What were you doing?

HLR: Playing tennis. It was on Sunday. Yes, I remember that now.

MLS: How long after the attack did it take for the news to reach you? Do you have a recollection of that?

HLR: It was pretty fast, I think.

MLS: Do you remember how the news reached you? Did a person just come yelling the news?

HLR: I don't remember.

MLS: You don't remember, but you were actually on the tennis field?

HLR: I was playing on a tennis court.

MLS: Somehow the news came?

HLR: Oh, yes, we got it somehow. I don't know how.

SSH: The game ended?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Then what did you do, immediately?

HLR: Nothing.

MLS: Nothing. Do you remember buying a pistol? No? Did you live near the airfield? How close was your home from the airfield?

HLR: Right close, I was renting a room. It was just a block over.

MLS: So, there was concern about sabotage to the airfield.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Other than the airfield, what was the atmosphere like? Were people afraid?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you talk about that?

HLR: Well, all I know is they were afraid the Japs were going to invade. You know, who knows what they were going to do? They did actually, I think, shell part of the California coast, didn't they? They lobbed a couple of shells in from a submarine.

SSH: They did. What about the reaction to the people since there were so many Japanese workers in that area? Did people start treating them differently?

HLR: I haven't the slightest idea. I don't know how Mr. Hancock worked it. He owned the darned railroad line that ran down to the main railroad line to take all his vegetables and stuff down there. He owned the airfield. [laughter] He owned the town, almost.

SSH: Really?

HLR: Yes, he was really a big shot there.

MLS: Did you personally know any Japanese people?

HLR: No.

MLS: No.

SSH: Did you see them being taken away?

HLR: No. They criticized Roosevelt for putting them in jail; they carted them up. If these people who were criticizing him had been out in California and seen the hundreds of these Japanese running around there; [laughter] I sure didn't criticize. I wasn't any fan of Roosevelt, but that's the one thing I thought he did right. [laughter]

MLS: So, you felt that it was necessary for security?

HLR: Yes, yes.

MLS: Was that the general feeling in that area, that part of California?

HLR: Yes, oh, yes, but not around the country, I don't think, at least at that time. I don't know about that time, but later on, I know they paid money to them. It was a pile of baloney. They should have paid us money. They didn't pay any of our prisoners money.

MLS: That's true.

HLR: They treated them pretty horribly, too.

MLS: Do you remember what sorts of things people did to deal with their fear? You know, after September 11, people went out and bought supplies and water and duct tape. Do you remember what sort of things people did?

HLR: I don't think anybody did that. If they did, I didn't hear about it. Of course, you know, I'm sitting there living in a rented room.

MLS: [laughter] At your work you had the National Guard. Did you feel safe or unsafe because you were in a strategic area?

HLR: Well, we didn't feel unsafe, but you felt kind of, "Hmm, I wonder what's going to happen next," and "What are the Japs going to do?" We called them Japs all the time. That isn't nice, I guess. It's not politically correct.

MLS: You mentioned that the cadets at the airfield were involved in a lot of crashes and some of them were even killed. Was that before or after the war? Do you remember that?

HLR: No, just during. The war didn't influence that, I think.

MLS: Do you have any idea why the crashes happened?

HLR: Yes, these were student pilots. They didn't know how to fly them. There was no maintenance problem. [laughter]

SSH: Spoken like a true engineer.

HLR: Well, actually, we did have a few that the engines stopped on them, but most of the time, they could land them. There was so much land, flat land around there, all of Hancock's fields. [laughter] I know one guy ran into a power line. The guys were always out buzzing.

MLS: What do you mean by buzzing?

HLR: The students getting real low.

MLS: What was the purpose of that?

HLR: Just fun; they were students and they weren't supposed to do that.

SSH: Now, were the pilots being trained by civilians?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: Were they the former barnstormers? Was that the term?

HLR: I don't know who they were. They were guys that knew how to fly them. They were PT-13s.

MLS: Once the war started, you talked about "getting the bug" so you enlisted. Can you talk about getting the bug, what that was?

HLR: Well, I was there. They were training these pilots and the war started. I couldn't sit around there. I had an exemption. I could have sat the whole war out right there.

MLS: Was it because of your knee?

HLR: No, it didn't have anything to do with it.

MLS: Because of your essential service?

HLR: No, they didn't know. [The] Army never found anything about my knee until I was in the Army. We had a squadron doctor. I even remember his name, Patrick (Humphries?), and he stayed with the squadron the whole time. He claimed he was a doctor to movie stars in Hollywood and the only movie star I can remember he mentioned was Charlie Chaplin. [laughter] He was Charlie Chaplin's doctor, but he was funny, I liked him. He was always complaining about--whenever we moved around--we'd have a slit trench, you know what for, and they were never deep enough--

MLS: Well, that's a problem.

HLR: --for him. He had a certain thing he called a fly level and they never got deep enough. [laughter] Of course, they were dug by our GIs. Well, one day when the war was all over, we were down, I think it was called Camp Lucky Strike, waiting to get on a boat. Well, actually, the boat was going to go to the CBI [] instead of bringing us home, that's the China-Burma-India [Theater]. Well, the war ended before we left, so the boat came to Newport News.

SSH: How nice. [laughter]

MLS: Going back--

SSH: He was going to tell us what the doctor said in Camp Lucky Strike.

MLS: That's toward the end of the war.

HLR: Yes. Well, what I remember is that the guys were playing softball, our mechanics and the rest of the squadron, and one guy twisted his ankle. I mean it was really bad. I was there and I saw it. His ankle was just turned around and they went and called the doc. Well, he claimed he was off duty. He was drunk. [laughter] He comes out all pissed off, all mad--pardon me. [laughter] You can erase stuff here?

SSH: That's okay; not to worry.

HLR: Because they dragged him out of his tent and he set the guy's foot back, straightened it up and put a bandage on it. All the time he's moaning, claiming he was off duty. [laughter]

SSH: At this point, right?

HLR: Yes, and one other thing about him. The guys were always running around with the girls from Paris [and] they'd get venereal disease. I guess it was penicillin they were shooting in them, which was working, and he got tired of doing so many of them. He told them he was going to take a syringe and start using [it as] a dart on the wall. He was going to bend the point around, [laughter] but he didn't.

MLS: That will teach them a lesson. [laughter]

HLR: He was funny.

SSH: We need to go back now and talk about your enlistment.

MLS: You wanted to be a pilot, so what happened?

HLR: I didn't.

MLS: Why not?

HLR: They didn't induce me. I mean, I just wasn't interested, period. I was more interested in aircraft design. Well, I ended up in maintenance rather than designing anything, but, anyway, there was this job opening in California, so I went out there. I stayed there a year, I think. That's when Pearl Harbor [occurred], when I was there, but I don't remember much about what happened.

MLS: Do you remember when you were inducted? You were inducted by a major.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Do you remember the induction ceremony and what you said to him?

HLR: See you in Tokyo.

MLS: What was his reaction? [laughter]

HLR: Yes, he didn't say anything you know [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan drops his jaw to indicate the major's reaction.]

SSH: His jaw just dropped, right?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Why do you think he reacted that way?

HLR: Because he wasn't about to go to Tokyo, I think. [laughter]

MLS: He'd let you go to Tokyo, right?

HLR: Instead of that, I went the other direction. [laughter] Should have said, "See you in Berlin."

MLS: After training you went to Chanute Field.

HLR: Yes, Chanute.

MLS: In Illinois. Can you talk about your experiences and training?

HLR: Well, it was engineering officer training. I had a degree in mechanical engineering. I'd worked at Pratt and Whitney putting engines on a stand and running them. I spent a year inspecting airplanes. So now they sent me to a school that I'm going to learn how to be an engineering officer. I could have taught the darned thing better than they did. Well, that's my only comment about the school. [laughter] It didn't amount to much for me.

MLS: What did they have you do in terms of training?

HLR: Well, they gave us lectures on engines and they had one engine that we had to tear apart and put back together. [It] took four months, I think. It was at Chanute Field, Illinois.

MLS: Did they have you participate in anything that resembled basic training, marching or anything like that?

HLR: No, I never had any to speak of. We were lousy marchers. I mean terrible.

MLS: Why were you lousy marchers?

HLR: In keeping step. [laughter] The four months there, we would assemble in the morning and we'd be read the orders of the day or whatever the heck it was, and then we'd stumble down to breakfast, supposedly in formation. Then we'd "march back," in quotations. [laughter] That's the only marching that we did.

MLS: Do remember a practice called square meals? Do you remember that? Could you tell us about that?

HLR: Oh yes, yes. Well, the first month you were there you [only] could look straight ahead and you had to do pick your fork up and go like this. [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan demonstrates the technique.]

SSH: Ninety-degree angle?

HLR: Yes, and you couldn't look down.

MLS: What was the purpose of that?

HLR: Oh, just hazing, but the funny part about it was once a week, they brought a great big jug of beer for each table. Did I mention that in there?

MLS: Friday night, yes? So, what were Friday night beer nights like?

HLR: Oh singing, ruckus, and the rest of the time everything was like this [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan sits with his hands folded], but they let us have our hair down once a week.

SSH: Did you get off base often?

HLR: No, no. We got married there, you know.

SSH: No, I don't. Tell us about it.

HLR: Well, we got married in Champagne, Illinois. That's where the school was. You couldn't be married to get into the cadet corps. Well, they wouldn't let you get married while you're in it, except the weekend before graduation, they said you could get married.

MLS: Why do you think they suddenly changed?

HLR: I don't know. They just did it. When I learned that I called my bride up and, "Hey," and she came.

SSH: Really?

HLR: We got married.

SSH: She came with her parents or by herself?

HLR: Her mother.

SSH: Really?

HLR: No, the old man, her father, he was old. I liked him. He was an old grouch. [laughter]

MLS: Had the two of you been planning to get married? Had you discussed it?

HLR: Well, I'd asked her before that, and she wouldn't come to California.

MLS: Why did she feel differently now?

HLR: I don't know. Well, I was in the Army now. Before, I wasn't.

SSH: Was she waiting to see if this job worked out?

HLR: I don't know what it was, anyway. Well, I'm in the Army now and, the week before we graduated engineering school, she came out and we got married. We had two nights together and then I had to go back to the barracks [laughter] for the rest of the week. Then the next weekend, we took off for Colorado Springs.

SSH: Her mom came back to Trenton?

HLR: Yes, I think we rode with some guy that had a car, and he was also assigned. You see, we were assigned all over the country.

MLS: So your assignment was Colorado Springs.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: What was that?

HLR: Photoreconnaissance.

MLS: The 11th Combat Mapping Station, was that it?

HLR: Yes, yes.

MLS: So you're in Colorado Springs and, originally, you're the assistant engineering officer?

HLR: Yes, for a short time.

MLS: Can you tell us about how you became the engineering officer?

HLR: Yes, it's real easy. I'd only been there about a week and, one day, the commanding officer of the whole base, he's going down to each squadron. You had a big blackboard on each office, engineering office, which was just an office inside of a hangar. All airplanes are listed and there was a column for the condition of the airplane. If it had a red X that meant it was grounded. If it had just a red line that meant there was some tech order that hadn't been complied [with], but the airplane could fly. If were just initials there that meant there was nothing wrong with it, everything was perfect. Well, we never had that. [laughter] It was either a red X or a red line. Anyway, the commanding officer came by and every airplane was grounded for one reason or another and he blew his stack. I'm sitting there and he says, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm the assistant engineering officer." "You're the new engineering officer." Well, first he asked me what my experience was. Then I told him. He says, "You're the engineering officer." Well, the thing is, [it] wasn't the other guy's fault. He was a pilot. He was never around, he was out flying and I didn't have any authority to do anything.

MLS: How did you feel about being handed this responsibility?

HLR: It felt great, but the guys were goofing off, the mechanics.

MLS: Tell us about that. Tell us about the situation you inherited.

HLR: There was supposed to be a night shift and I went down there about twelve o'clock, left my wife back in the hotel, and there wasn't anybody doing anything. They were just sitting around doing nothing, not fixing the airplanes or getting them ready or anything. Well, I didn't

say anything then. I waited until the next evening, I guess. I had mostly mechanics, that's what I'm getting at, and I chewed them out. I mean, I really chewed them out [laughter] [for] being un-American and all sort of nasty things, using swear words, [laughter] words that they understood. I learned all that bad language from them, of course. I didn't learn it at Rutgers.

MLS: Do you remember one incident finding the mechanics in bed when they were supposed to be on duty?

HLR: Yes, I went up to where they were staying, the barracks and turned over a couple of beds. [laughter]

MLS: Did that get their attention?

HLR: It did. The whole barracks then jumped up, wondering what's going on and they see me standing there glaring at them. It didn't happen again. They showed up.

MLS: So, you were extremely conscientious to the point where, initially, you were a micro-manager?

HLR: Yes, yes, that's right.

MLS: Can you tell us a story about getting a call from the supply clerk?

HLR: In the middle of the night I got a call from the supply [officer]. We had a little room with all the nuts and bolts in it and we had a supply sergeant and an assistant one. I got a call one night from, I guess, it was the assistant one, asking where a certain nut was. It was a nut for the starter. When they had to change a starter, they had to get a bunch of nuts off. Well, there was one on the bottom that you couldn't hardly touch. You had to almost put the thing on like this [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan demonstrates installing a starter nut.] and hardly touched the thing, going around. And they were always dropping the nuts. Well, we were always running out of those nuts. So, I [came] down there and I chewed [them] out and got them up there working again. *C'est la guerre.*

SSH: Did the red lines become initials at some point? Did you get the planes off the ground?

HLR: Oh yes, yes. Well, I'd say it took about half a week, or a week maybe, to get half the airplanes in the air.

MLS: How did you reorganize, restructure? Put that in perspective: You're the engineering officer and people are calling you in the middle of the night saying, "Where are the nuts?"

HLR: Yes. In that meeting I said I'd called, I told them that I didn't want to talk to anybody about the engineering part. I wanted to talk to the line chief; he was the master sergeant and chief of all the mechanics. I would talk to him and that's all, but if they wanted to tell me a dirty joke or tell me about their wife or something that's fine, or if they had a baby. If they're getting married or had a baby or something, they always come to my office and put a box of cigars on

my desk. Sometimes I'd have two or three boxes of cigars on the desk and my office would get so smoky, I couldn't even see out of the darned thing. [laughter]

MLS: So there was camaraderie, it was congenial?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Can you talk a little bit about photo reconnaissance? Who were the different types of people who comprised photo reconnaissance? You were the engineering officer. There were pilots. Who were the other people?

HLR: Well, of course, we had the squadron doctor, there was [a] supply officer, and we had a photo officer. Then we had a camera-repair department. Well, this photo outfit, they had about eighty technicians in it. That's the same number of mechanics I had. See, our squadron was bigger than almost any other squadron because of [these] eighty extra photo guys; yes, the bomb and the fighter squadrons, they didn't have [these] eighty people. They had some armament people, I think, who were extra, but nothing like we did. We had almost three hundred, I think, in the squadron. The first squadron commander was a pain in the butt. His name was Captain Leghorn.

MLS: I actually have brought you forward too quickly. You had not yet gone to the 30th Photo Recon, you were transitioning. You started on B-25s. Can you talk about the transition from B-25s to B-17s, anything to discuss?

HLR: Well, the only thing was that we had these B-25s we were flying and we'd learn how to take care of them and one day I was outside and I saw a B-17 coming in. "Hmm, wonder where that's going?" The darn guy taxis right up in front of my hangar. It's my airplane. I'd never seen a B-17 before and I went around the engineering department [and] asked [if] any mechanics ever worked on a B-17. There was only one guy and he was a big goof-off. We had one guy that was really a goof-off. We tried to get rid of him.

MLS: Did you get rid of him?

HLR: We did, but he bounced back, yes. [laughter] You know, they reassigned him to us, anyway.

MLS: Who trained you to deal with this? Was this the new technology, the B-17. Was this the latest technology?

HLR: Well, no. I mean the engines were the same. All the instruments were the same.

MLS: Would someone come and train you?

HLR: No, nobody.

MLS: So what did you do? How did you deal with that?

HLR: They have what they called tech manuals on every airplane. They're about that thick.

SSH: About two inches thick?

HLR: Yes. Well, we were already working on airplanes, and we knew the general system of airplanes. Of course, the engines were the same as a B-25, so that's the main thing is the darn engine, but, of course we had to learn all the flight controls, where the wires went and where all the electrical stuff was, where the fuses [were], but that was self-training.

SSH: How close were you with any of the flight crews?

HLR: Flight crews? Not too close.

SSH: Any interaction?

HLR: No, I mean, I knew them all, but we didn't go out drinking together.

MLS: You tell a story that one day you had a plane with a blown tire and no spare parts and your commanding officer said he wanted it flying the next day. How do you do that? What did you do?

HLR: Didn't I write it in there? Yeah, we went down and stole a tire. [laughter] I remember that distinctly. We drove down there and the supply department was all closed, but here was a nice, beautiful B-17 sitting in the hangar. Even the tail was jacked up and the tail wheel is nice and fully blown up. So, we took it off and put our flat tire on and came back and got the thing flying the next day. [laughter]

MLS: It seems amazing you were often left to, basically, your own resources.

HLR: Oh yes, yes. That's the wartime stuff, not now. I don't think you couldn't do anything like that now.

SSH: Yes, but this was in the States that you had to do this.

HLR: Oh, yes, yes.

SSH: Does it get worst once you get overseas?

HLR: Yes, more or less.

MLS: So, after the B-17s?

HLR: I had P-38s then.

MLS: After the B-17s, the B-24s came. Is there anything you want to remark about the B-24s?

HLR: I didn't like to fly in it.

MLS: You didn't? Why not?

HLR: It never felt safe to me. They had a lot of crashes.

MLS: Did they?

HLR: Whereas the B-17, I felt, boy, it's like standing here.

SSH: What about the B-25?

HLR: I didn't go up too much in that. It was too tight a squeeze. You know, you go on a B-17 or a B-24, you can walk around in the whole thing.

MLS: Now, were the B-25s and B-17s used at the same time, or did the B-17 replace the B-25?

HLR: [It] replaced it.

MLS: Because it was a larger plane?

HLR: Oh, yes, four engines. Yes, it's much larger.

SSH: How often does the engineering officer have to go up in the plane? Do you have to go up and check the plane?

HLR: [I] didn't have to go up at all.

SSH: Really?

HLR: No, but I was happy to go up. It was fun, you know, especially out in Colorado there's a lot of beautiful views. I remember one time, one of the pilots wanted to go over the Royal Gorge Bridge and take a picture. So, we took off and they found it. His co-pilot, he got out of his seat. He went to the back of the airplane where the big window, where the machine-gun window [was]. There was never any glass or anything in it, it's just a big hole and that's where the machine gunner used to shoot. So, I slipped into the seat and sat there. The pilot flew over and did a lot of turns and stuff around the Royal Gorge Bridge and this guy took his pictures. When he got finished he asked me if I wanted to fly the airplane. "Sure," [I said]. They were easy to fly. You didn't have to be a pilot; you just grab the stick and the darn airplane would fly itself, almost. If you want to turn, you just pushed your pedals a little bit and turned the wheel, and the airplane will go around real nice. This is a B-17 I'm talking about, not the 24. I don't think I ever flew that one, but I flew the 17 quite a bit.

MLS: Was there an occasion when the engines went out?

HLR: Well, there was one where the pilot did it on purpose while I was doing the flying.  
[laughter]

MLS: Were you aware that he was doing it on purpose?

HLR: Well, I could see his hands. [laughter] You know, the throttle is right here, and I saw his hand pull the throttle back and he shut the engine off. Well, it would fly all right on one engine on one side and two on the other. ... You had to turn the stick over this way and move your feet, the pedals, but then he goes and does the second engine on that side and that was impossible. I couldn't hold that wing up. We started spiraling down.

MLS: I guess they didn't like that either.

HLR: No, I guess not.

MLS: Did they not think it was funny?

HLR: Yes, yes, he was laughing back there, having a great time with this engineering officer that was screwing the works up or something. Anyway, he finally starts the engine up and I get the heck out of the seat. I'd had enough. [laughter]

MLS: What were the pilots like? Did the pilots like to do things like that?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Like to scare people?

HLR: Yes, especially the engineering officer. [laughter]

MLS: How did your wife pass the time?

HLR: Boy, I don't know. [laughter]

MLS: What did she say to you?

HLR: You have to ask her.

SSH: Was she in any base housing or was she still in the hotel?

HLR: There wasn't any base housing.

MLS: You had talked about renting a house.

HLR: When we were at Pratt and Whitney we rented a house. That's before we got married.

MLS: So, how did you come to go into the 30th Photo Recon?

HLR: I was assigned to it.

MLS: How did that happen?

HLR: I don't know.

SSH: You talked about some of the training accidents. How often was weather a factor in Colorado Springs?

HLR: Quite a bit, I think. I know one guy one night--I can't remember--I think it was a B-17. Some guy comes down. It was terrible weather. There [were] thunderstorms around, the clouds were real low, and he comes down with a co-pilot and he's got a couple of Army nurses with him. He wanted to give them a night flight. Well, he gave them a flight, all right; he killed them all, including himself. He ran into a field shortly after take off. You could see the propeller marks. He came in at a shallow angle. I think he just ran into it, I don't think there was anything wrong with the airplane. It was just a terrible night and he didn't see it.

SSH: When there would be a crash like that, would there be an investigation that included your department?

HLR: I never had anybody investigate any accident of an airplane. I bet you if you have one now, there [are] twenty-five investigations. There was never, not even a question, from anybody, not even the commanding officer.

MLS: So, when you're assigned to the 30th Photo Recon, you start working with a different type of plane, P-38s? Can you talk a little bit about P-38s?

HLR: Well, it had inline, water-cooled engine, which I had never seen before. [laughter] These others all were air-cooled radial engines, you know what I mean? Most mechanics had never played with it either. So, there we are.

MLS: There you are. Again, did anyone come as to instruct you how to care for these planes?

HLR: No.

MLS: They gave you a booklet?

HLR: Oh, yes, we always had these big, thick things. Oh, yes, we poured over those things and the line chief--he was the chief mechanic--and he was reading them too. Of course, I was never out there changing spark plugs or anything.

MLS: The person you reported to was Captain Leghorn?

HLR: He was my commanding officer to start with, yes.

MLS: He remained your commanding officer?

HLR: For a while.

MLS: For a while. Can you tell us about him? Do you have any opinions or recollections of him?

HLR: Well, somebody started to call him Rapid Richard.

MLS: Rapid Richard?

HLR: Everything had to be done yesterday. He was from Boston and they claim he came from a very highfalutin Boston family. Somebody claims they saw his mother seeing him off to the races or something and she had a great big mink stole on. So, the word was that he was from highfalutin Boston society, I don't know. He had a little tiny mustache.

MLS: You said, initially, there were a lot of problems with the P-38s. There were a lot of planes and pilots being lost. Can you talk about that?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: Now this is still in Colorado Springs?

HLR: Yes, one of the things was the propeller. There was something wrong with the propeller and it would do something they called runaway. The propeller has to be at a certain angle to develop lift. Well, you can feather it, which means turning it this way, so it doesn't have any lift at all. Well, suddenly the P-38s, the thing at takeoff would do this and the guy would just run right off the end of the runway and get killed.

MLS: How did you resolve that?

HLR: I didn't, the company did. There was another problem, too, with the P-38. Whenever a plane went on single engine, that is when one of engines stopped, the pilots would try to get out and most of the time they didn't, they'd hit the tail. ... Remember a P-38 has this tail? They'd hit the tail. Well, one day some guy from Lockheed shows up. This is before I got into the P-38s. I still had the B-17s. ... named (La Rosa?) or (La Rue?), something like that.

MLS: He was an engineer from Lockheed?

HLR: He was a pilot from Lockheed. Well, before he came--as I said, if the plane went on single engine, the pilot was practically dead. He didn't know how to get out of the airplane, nothing. Well, here he comes in and he flew over the airfield. I saw the whole thing. I happened to be standing out. He circles around and all of a sudden I see his engine stop, one engine, and he comes over and he buzzes the field with one engine. He pulls up and goes around in a circle, a tight circle, comes around and lands. Here he is on single engine doing all this maneuvering and the other guys have been trying to get out of an airplane when it went on single

engine [and] are getting killed. [laughter] So, that one thing saved all kind of lives, just him coming in. Well, he gave the pilots lectures, but it was just that one thing that he told them how to fly the airplane. When you went on single engine, it's absolutely no problem at all.

MLS: You next went to Will Rogers Field, is that correct?

HLR: In Oklahoma, yes. That's where we left from.

MLS: That's where you did your training to go overseas?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you talk about that training, what it was like?

HLR: Well, we were already trained. The only thing they did there was they made us go down to an airfield in Oklahoma. I don't know how far it was away.

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

MLS: This continues our interview with Harry L. Runyan. This is tape two, side one.

SSH: Please continue. We're talking about going down to Oklahoma.

HLR: Well, of course, my wife, we were married then, and she went with me of course. This is getting ready to go overseas. We had to go down and operate off a field that had absolutely nothing there, which meant we had to bring water tanks in, all [of] our tents, all cooking facilities, dig latrines, the whole works, and we had to stay there a week. That was training to go overseas.

SSH: Where would your wife go? What was the name of the field?

HLR: Okmulgee. She was in town, I think.

SSH: So there was a town there?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Was there any essential difference in the training, now that you were training specifically to go overseas?

HLR: No, they just dumped us out in the middle of nowhere. [laughter] We had to figure out how to get along.

MLS: I don't think we talked about the fact that the P-38 was a single seater, but, on occasion, you were invited to go for rides.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: How could you fit inside a plane with the pilot when it was only a single seater?

HLR: Well, right behind the pilot was a great big radio and we'd take the radio out. I don't know what they did, but I think they put it in the nose somewhere. [There is] a lot of the room in the nose. You see, the nose was originally built to take a whole raft of machine guns plus a cannon. Well, these airplanes were completely unarmed and they're loaded with cameras. Well, there's plenty of space left. So, they put this radio up there and you'd sit like this. [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan demonstrates squeezing in the space behind the pilot.] We mounted a seat belt here and there is the pilot's head right there.

MLS: You have your face pressed up against the back of his head?

HLR: Yes, it will be more like that, yes. [laughter]

MLS: What would you do with your legs?

HLR: They're right here like this. The seat was here. They went on each side of the seat.

SSH: That couldn't have been too comfortable.

HLR: No, it wasn't.

MLS: Was it sort of like sleigh riding when you're a kid with multiple people on a sleigh? Did you ever do that?

HLR: I don't know. They tried to get me sick.

MLS: They tried to get you sick. Again, the pilots were being--

HLR: No, they're a bunch of wise guys. That bunch of wise guys.

MLS: [laughter] Right before you went overseas, you had monumental personal event. Can you talk about that, the birth of Gerry?

HLR: Oh, yes, [laughter] in Oklahoma City.

MLS: Tell us about the birth of Gerry.

HLR: The main thing I remember is I had to leave. I forget exactly when.

MLS: Did you get to spend any time with your wife? Did you get leave to go with her?

HLR: No, well, we'd been together the whole time she was pregnant. Where is she? [laughter] She can tell you more about that than I can, I'm sure.

MLS: So you had regular contact with her up until that time.

HLR: Oh, yes. We rented a house with a couple of other guys and their wives. Yes, I think that's where she got to know a couple of them. One of them, we kept in contact for many years; I don't think we have recently. They were from Texas. You know Texas? [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan imitates a Texas drawl.]

MLS: How soon after Gerry was born did you have to go overseas?

HLR: I left her in the hospital.

SSH: Oh, my word, that soon?

MLS: What did she say about that? [laughter] So, you went to Camp Kilmer?

HLR: Yes, that's in New Jersey. New Jersey is up the coast away.

MLS: Can you talk about one of the requirements before you went overseas?

HLR: Take a five-mile hike or something.

MLS: Tell us about that.

HLR: Well, all I can remember about that was that we did it, and then all the guys, the GIs, they all stuffed their bags with paper [laughter] instead of putting all their stuff in.

MLS: Now these are the Air Corps men?

HLR: Yes, yes, these are mechanics, my mechanics.

MLS: Who encouraged them to do that?

HLR: I don't know they figured that out themselves. I mean these mechanics are smart guys. [laughter]

MLS: At this point at Camp Kilmer you were intermingled with other branches of the service. You saw the Infantry there?

HLR: Well, yes, yes, it was funny. We had to take this five-mile march and we were going along the road there, all straggling and having a terrible time and all of a sudden from behind I hear, "Thump, thump, thump, thump." [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan pounds his hand to simulate marching.] I looked around, "My God, here comes the Infantry." They had great big boots on, you know, like paratrooper boots. I don't know; they might have been paratroopers for all I know. They go flying past us, all in perfect alignment, all looking straight ahead, great big packs on their back. And here's the Air Force, straggling along not keeping in line, nobody in step.

MLS: Was there any kind of interaction between the two groups?

HLR: No.

MLS: No? No comments going back and forth?

HLR: Well, if there was, I didn't hear it. [laughter] I was straggling along too. I was on the outside, you know, supposedly in command.

MLS: Did you have any idea of the purpose for the Air Corps of this five-mile march?

HLR: Well, you know, just training. Who knows? [laughter]

MLS: So, next you're crossing the mid Atlantic in January.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you talk about that?

HLR: I can't remember the name of the ship.

MLS: The *Columbine*?

HLR: Yes, French.

MLS: Yes, tell us about the *Columbine*.

HLR: Big. [laughter]

MLS: Do you remember the history of the *Columbine*, what it had been?

HLR: No, I think it had been a cruise ship, French. That's about all I remember.

MLS: Do you remember that it had been under water?

HLR: Well, yes, now that you mention it, I think it hadn't gone very far down. It settled, and they just turned the valves and pumped it out and fixed it up in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, I think.

MLS: Did you have any concern about that? Did it strike you as cause for alarm?

HLR: No, nobody thought about it.

SSH: Did you go over in convoy or singly?

HLR: A convoy, but it was a lousy convoy. I went over the Mariner's Museum one time and they had this picture of a convoy, all the ships located and here they got all the passenger troop ships in the center and other ships on the outside. Uh-uh. [laughter] Our ship was right smack on the outside. We weren't in the center, we were right out here. [laughter]

MLS: So, what did that mean? What effect did it have on your ship?

SSH: Were there any U-boat sightings?

HLR: No, I don't think so. We went the North-Atlantic route, way up. It was cold and we landed in Glasgow, Scotland. [In] the officer's mess, [laughter] we sat down at tables with tablecloths.

SSH: Did you now?

MLS: Now, this is on the ship?

HLR: Yes, and we were served by French waiters. We sat at our table and they brought stuff out and then when it was bad weather, they wet the tablecloths so the silverware and the bowls wouldn't slide around. [laughter]

MLS: That's very clever.

HLR: The poor GIs. Of course, they had to line up with their mess kit to get their food down there.

MLS: It was a chow line?

HLR: Yes, yes, but that's not the worst part. Our CO made us, the officers, go down--one officer, go down and stay with the men for three or four hours and our guys were right in the bowels of the boat. The ventilation was terrible and it stunk to high heavens--body odor and all that. You could [only] take a shower in the cold Atlantic salt water.

MLS: Did you opt to do that ever?

HLR: I took a kind of a spit bath once. We must all [have] been stinking to high heavens too, I don't know.

SSH: Now did you rotate who went down to stay with the men?

HLR: Oh, yes, yes.

SSH: Now was this Captain Leghorn?

HLR: Leghorn.

SSH: He was the one that went over with you?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Was that unusual for this officer rotation to take place?

HLR: I think that was standard. Later on, he got promoted. He became group commander, a colonel. I ran into him once after the war at Wright Field. I stayed in the Reserves for a while and, being an engineering officer, I was sent to Wright Field for two weeks. They didn't know what to do with me. I didn't do anything there. Then I ran into Leghorn.

SSH: Did he recognize you?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Did you have a nice reunion?

HLR: Oh, about ten minutes. [laughter] He was there advising the Army on reconnaissance or something. He was a graduate of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and, before the war, he was working at Eastman Kodak so, you see, that's how he got into photo recon. He was really a camera guy, an expert in cameras. So, he was at Wright Field advising them on cameras for photo recon. This is well after the war.

MLS: So crossing the Atlantic--

HLR: Cold.

MLS: The 30th went over as a unit, is that correct?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: How would you describe the relationship between the officers and the enlisted personnel? Was there a lot of hierarchy and a lot of formalities?

HLR: Well, there wasn't much mixing, actually. I know there was one officer who was buddied-up with the GIs all the time. I never went out drinking with them or anything like that. I was an officer. [laughter]

SSH: Before we get to Europe, what happened to Mrs. Runyan and the new baby? How long did they stay in Oklahoma?

HLR: A couple of weeks and then they went back to New Jersey.

SSH: Did she have someone help her?

HLR: No.

SSH: Did she just go by herself?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: What a woman.

HLR: With a baby that's only a week or so old.

MLS: Did she go to live with her family?

HLR: Yes, on (Egger's) Road in Trenton, New Jersey.

SSH: Phenomenal memory.

MLS: So your point of arrival is Glasgow?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: What was your ultimate destination, your first destination after Glasgow?

HLR: They put us on a train and, I think, they took us right to our airfield.

MLS: Do you remember where that was?

HLR: Yes, it's in England.

MLS: Chalgrove, was that the name of it? Do you remember Chalgrove?

HLR: Chalgrove. Yes, yes, Chalgrove. I remember it. [laughter]

SSH: Now which part of England is Chalgrove?

HLR: It's about fifty miles from London I think, south of it.

SSH: Southwest, southeast?

HLR: I don't know; south, somewhere.

SSH: I think it's southeast.

MLS: What were the living conditions like there, do you remember?

HLR: Nissen huts.

SSH: Quonset?

HLR: Yes, with the bunks just lined up like that. I mean, they were pushed together.

SSH: Head to toe.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Can you talk about general living, the food?

HLR: It wasn't very good. When we first got there for about two weeks we were on English rations. I don't remember what it was; [laughter] it was terrible, geez--until we started our own rations. Well, our own rations had a lot of canned stuff you know, C rations they called the cans.

MLS: What about the weather? Was it warm?

SSH: Do you remember which year and which month this was? We know it's before D-Day.

HLR: We went across the North Atlantic in the wintertime.

SSH: So, perhaps, January of '44?

HLR: Yes, something like that.

MLS: One thing that stood out in my mind, you talked about washing your clothes in aviation gas because they were wool.

HRL: Yes.

MLS: Weren't you afraid you would blow up?

HLR: No, we had wool shirts. Your neck would get black. Well, a lot of times when we got to Belgium and settled down, then we started sending our clothes out to the Belgian ladies. They were delighted because, well, they wouldn't do it without us the providing soap. They were out of soap. Well, you gave them some money but the main [reason] they were doing it was to get the soap. [laughter] So, from then on, we were kind of clean, but up to that point--

SSH: You smelled better.

MLS: I hope nobody lit a match. You talked about being without fresh eggs or without fresh produce.

HLR: Oh, yes, the whole time we were there.

MLS: The pilots had them.

HLR: Oh, yes, they got eggs.

MLS: Talk about that.

HLR: Well, they got eggs and they got orange juice and they got pineapple.

MLS: Why?

HLR: Well, they had to keep their eyesight up, their reflexes, and they didn't care about us, so we didn't get anything.

MLS: So there was concern about the physical performance of the pilots?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: What do you remember when you first got to England? Did you have any contacts with the local people or did you observe how they were living or what their conditions were?

HLR: No, we stayed on the boat for about three days while they made up a train. We were already hanging in Glasgow, [then we] got on a train and went straight down to our airfield.

MLS: We've heard something about a manual that gave directions about interacting with the local population. Do you remember seeing anything like that, what rules you should follow and what was allowed and what was not allowed? Did you have such a manual?

HLR: If we did, I forget it. If we'd had a manual I would suppose it was in France.

SSH: In England, did they want you to go into local restaurants?

HLR: Oh, no, not any place.

MLS: Why was that?

HLR: They were short of food, the English, and they didn't want us in there. I remember--where was it? I think it was in Belgium, we hadn't had any eggs and we went down a little narrow alley and into a restaurant. They had eggs. So, we had eggs. [laughter] The only time I had eggs when I was overseas [laughter] was that illegal thing in Brussels.

SSH: Of all places, right?

MLS: So you get to your first airfield and you set up. What is your day like? What do you do, what are your responsibilities?

HLR: Well, I was the engineering officer. I just sat in my office and chewed at the mechanics for not getting the airplanes out. I'd go out, I'd get the line chief, he was a master sergeant, and we'd walk around the airplanes and see what's wrong with them and so on. Then I'd go back in my office and put my feet on the desk. [laughter] Later on, my main job was a supply sergeant.

A captain could go into supply places and get stuff that the sergeants couldn't get. So, I was running all over England looking for parts for the airplane[s]. I remember one time, one of our airplanes crashed, bellied in. It wasn't damaged very much, so I went up there. We were always having trouble with some of the instruments. I took a mechanic with me. He did it all, took a whole bunch of instruments out, your regulator for the--they had turbos on them, the P-38 did, and I think we took a regulator out and some other stuff and came back. About a month later, I get a letter sent through channels and it was from the command at supply stuff. It went up to their headquarters, to 9th Headquarters, and then came on down through group and the squadron and finally to me, chewing me out for going up there without permission. Well, the funny part about it was when Captain, I think it was Captain Leghorn, read the thing, he brought it down, he shook my hand and congratulated me for keeping the airplanes flying. [laughter] So, I didn't get chewed out.

SSH: You were a captain by this time?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: How soon after crossing the Atlantic did you become attached to the First Division?

HLR: It was First Army, which meant, essentially, it was the First Division.

MLS: Did that happen right away?

HLR: I don't know. I don't remember that.

MLS: When you went out on photoreconnaissance missions, who was it that told you what you needed to photograph?

HLR: That's a good question. One of our officers was stationed with First Army intelligence people and he got the word every night what they wanted the next day and he would somehow get it back to us to our operations officer. They'd be working all night figuring out the missions for the next day and then pilots would do it.

MLS: How early in the morning, generally, did the mission start or would it vary?

HLR: Well it was a single-engine, single-airplane missions.

MLS: So, there was only one plane going out to do a particular assignment.

HLR: For a given mission. Well, we could have a whole bunch of them going out, but they were going different places, all over France.

MLS: What types of communications were being used from your officer who was with First Army to relay what the assignment was?

HLR: For the most part, he came down. See, the First Army tried to drag us along and keep us as close as possible, geographically, just mainly for that, I guess. Well, I guess he could call up, but I used to see him a lot down at the airfield.

SSH: Do you remember what his name was?

HLR: No, but I can picture him.

MLS: Your airfield where the 30th Photo Recon was, were there other types of planes there?

HLR: Now when is this?

SSH: In England.

HLR: Oh, yes. See, we were part of a group, but we never had anything to do with group headquarters and the other planes were P-47s, but some of those had cameras on them.

MLS: Were there bombers mixed in with you as well or no?

HLR: Well, they were fighter-bombers. They'd dropped a lot of bombs, but they could fight. No, we were mixed up with them, but we never had anything to do with them.

SSH: They weren't escorting the recon planes?

HLR: Nobody escorted them.

SSH: I know they're unarmed, totally unarmed.

HLR: Yes, well, when we were in England and they're operating in France, our pilots would take off and do all their climbing over England to thirty-thousand feet, and then they go over to France. They didn't go over there and then started climbing.

MLS: So, the missions were to photograph the various parts of France.

HLR: All over, then eventually, Germany and Belgium.

MLS: How isolated was your base in England? Were you out in the middle of nowhere?

HLR: No, we were near that little town. Well, we were about fifty miles from Oxford and you could drive up to Oxford and have a beer.

MLS: Did you do that?

HLR: Well, yes. We had time off.

SSH: Now did you have a jeep at your disposal?

HLR: Well, I had a jeep for the engineering department, but whenever we moved, it became my jeep. So, I had all my junk in the back. It looked like moving day when I had it, because I had a mattress, a real mattress, a small one and I'd put that in the back. Here's this mattress sticking up in the back of the jeep while I'm riding down the road in the middle of a war. [laughter]

MLS: You've got to do what you got to do. Do you have any idea how the planes that you used got to you? How did they get to you?

HLR: I don't know. I often wondered that myself because, whenever we lost an airplane, gosh, the next day or so we'd have another one. They sure were making them back at Lockheed. We went through fifty airplanes during the war.

SSH: Now did they come by ship to Northern Ireland and then fly them in?

HLR: No, they flew them. I think to Iceland or someplace.

SSH: Really, they had that range?

HLR: Yes. See, they had tanks on the wing, wing tanks we called them. They were great big--I guess they were fifty-five-gallon tanks, I think, and they put one under each wing. When they went on economy-mission control, they could fly them a long distance.

MLS: It was really difficult to get spare parts.

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Did you ever feel that the safety was compromised because of this?

HLR: Sure.

MLS: You just did the best that you could.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Did you ever feel that you had to send a plane up not completely safe?

HLR: Well, no. I mean, we did the best we could and, for the most part, we didn't send them up unless we felt like they were okay.

MLS: There was no pressure to send the planes up if they weren't confident?

HLR: Oh, no. Nobody gave us any pressure.

SSH: Now when a plane would go up, there's just the pilot, he's also the photographer?

HLR: Yes, he's got to push the buttons to take the pictures. What got me was, and I don't understand this, he didn't have a [device to] find a point. He just had to look out the side of the darn airplane to find an airfield or some point, some oil factory.

SSH: From thirty thousand?

HLR: Yes, and they did it. Wait a minute. I got something here.

[Tape Paused]

MLS: Okay, your next assignment was a place called Middle Wallop. Can you tell us about Middle Wallop? You got some really interesting news. Do you remember the day when your CO told you to go to a certain building where a major had some instructions for you?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Can you tell us about that?

HLR: Well, that's what happened. I went to this place and there was a whole bunch of engineer officers there. [laughter] They were wondering what the heck's going on. They were telling us the airplanes were painted with black and white stripes. Well, each airplane, each different type, had different widths and different locations [of these stripes].

MLS: How did they present this to you? Did they have an illustration?

HLR: Yes, but they wouldn't let us write it down. We had to remember it. So, I kept remembering it and went back to squadron and got the master sergeant out and told him what I wanted. They even told us where to go get the paint, black and white paint.

MLS: So there were engineering officers from different types--

HLR: From different squadrons, all over.

MLS: So they were representing different types of planes?

HLR: Oh yes, yes.

SSH: Did you understand the significance of that?

HLR: Well, yes, because a piece of paper slipped over. [The major] had this page with a piece of paper on it so you couldn't read it.

MLS: The text was obscured, is that what had happened?

HLR: Yes, yes. Well, it had slipped a little bit, and I read on the thing--one line [that] said that the day before D-Day, this would be painted. So, I knew when they told me to do that, this was it.

MLS: How did you feel? Was it like a lighting bolt going through you? Were you excited?

HLR: Yes, yes, but I never told anybody.

MLS: Were you dying to run out and say, "I know, I know."? [laughter]

HLR: No, but then they put it off a day. [laughter] We had the airplanes all painted. The day before the invasion, the whole Allied force went out with our planes painted.

MLS: Now each type of plane had different types of markings, was that it?

HLR: Well, they were all the black and white stripes, so it was just the width and the location and on the tail.

MLS: It was interesting because, as Sandra was saying, we had a gentleman who was involved in the D-Day invasion and one of the things that he remembered was this blanket of planes in the sky.

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: He said that he was alarmed when he saw the markings because, apparently, not everyone knew what those markings were and he didn't know if they were friendly planes, but, obviously, someone knew.

HLR: Well, when they sent a thousand airplanes over, it was like the Flying Fortresses. They made a cloud, a great big wide cloud behind them, and it would stay around for quite a while. [laughter]

MLS: You knew that D-Day, everyone knew that there was going to be an invasion.

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: Did you have certain expectations, what it would be or what it would entail or what your role would be?

HLR: Well, I don't remember when we were told where to go. I don't remember that. Somewhere along the line, we got on trucks and got on a boat.

SSH: Did you go down out of Southampton?

HLR: Yes, I think it was.

MLS: When you told the men to paint the markings on the planes, did they know why they were doing that?

HLR: I don't know. They were guessing, like I was, more or less.

MLS: Were you able to observe any sort of feelings among the men? Was there an excitement level that changed?

HLR: I don't know. I wasn't that close to them.

SSH: Did you write any special letters at that point?

HLR: No.

MLS: Were you getting correspondence from home?

HLR: Not very much.

DR: Well, I wrote things. It's not like today.

MLS: It's not like today; it's not like instant messaging. [laughter]

DR: Now everything's instant. You know where your husband is and he calls you, e-mails you.

HLR: You had to use that flimsy paper. What'd they call it?

SSH: You did V-mail?

HLR: No.

SSH: You didn't use V-mail? The Photostat, the thin paper?

HLR: No, it was sent by ship, I think.

DR: It would be ten days after he wrote something that I'd get it.

MLS: When D-Day was put off a day, did you understand why?

HLR: Yes, it was lousy weather. [laughter]

MLS: That was evident from where you were?

HLR: Oh, yes.

MLS: One thing that I remember reading from your history was that you said when D-Day arrived, it was the only time during the entire war that every plane was operational.

HLR: That's exactly right.

MLS: Did you think that was an omen?

HLR: No, I just thought it was great. [laughter]

MLS: Speaking of omens, did you or the other men in the 30th have any sort of good-luck rituals or lucky objects. Were there any lucky tokens that they hung in the planes or that you know about? Nothing?

HLR: No, well you see, in our case, I don't think the pilot was assigned a given airplane. When he went out for a mission, he just went out and climbed in an airplane, [laughter] so they weren't all painting their names on [the planes]. The fighter pilots, [however], it seemed to me they had their individual planes because you'd see their names painted on the side.

MLS: Do you have any lasting impression or recollection of D-Day or was there anything that you want to go on record commenting about this?

HLR: The airplanes kept us awake that night. [laughter] They were making a racket and there was an awful lot of them.

MLS: Other than painting the stripes on the planes, did the preparations for D-Day change your routine at all or was there anything different?

HLR: Oh, we'd been packing up for a while. As I said, our commanding officer's nickname was Rapid Richard, and he had the whole darned squadron--he was always doing it. [laughter] You had to pack up and he made us do it a couple of times when we weren't going to move.

SSH: Was he the typical hurry-up-and-wait type?

HLR: Well, yes, more or less. He wasn't waiting. He didn't want to wait.

SSH: So how many hours into D-Day did you disembark?

HLR: Oh, we didn't go over until a month later.

MLS: So the first of July you moved to France?

HLR: Something like that, around that. But the strange part about it is, the frontline was only about six miles from the coast. When our ship pulled up to unload, it was around midnight or something. It was noises, cannons shooting, and you could see flashes of light on the horizon.

MLS: What was your destination when you got to France?

HLR: Omaha Beach.

MLS: Can you talk a little bit about the scene when you arrived? What was the atmosphere, what was the scene, what was going on?

HLR: Well, the British beach, which was north of us a few miles, [was] getting bombed by the Germans; we weren't. [laughter] So, we got through that night without anything happening. The next day we started unloading. Did I write in there about getting stuck in the sand?

MLS: Yes you did. Do you want to talk about that?

HLR: Well, we had gotten two English trucks. One truck became just a supply truck, but we built a bunch of cabinets inside, or my mechanics did. So, they had all the nuts and bolts and the generators and all that stuff in different slots. The other truck had a workbench in it and anvils and stuff and you could pound stuff in there. They were English trucks and they had the darnedest characteristic. If you're driving one of our cars and you take your hand off the wheel, the wheel will start to turn. These would do just the opposite. I had my clerk driving. I couldn't drive [that type of vehicle].

SSH: Where was your jeep with the mattress?

HLR: Well, that was somewhere. [laughter] That was later on.

MLS: One thing I remember is you said some pictures painted on your truck. Do you remember that?

HLR: Oh, yes, yes. There was the one truck that was always getting in accidents so one of the artists there, he painted little figures of trucks that this truck had run into.

MLS: So, those were the victims he had demolished.

HLR: Yes, yes. Like the pilots, they would paint Swastikas on the side of their airplane [indicating] the number airplanes they'd shot down. This guy was painting little pictures.

SSH: How did you get out of the sand?

HLR: Oh, I think it was the captain of the boat or some higher Naval officer. He comes flying down because here's this darn truck. [laughter] As soon as we hit the sand, the wheels just went this way [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan indicates that the wheels are crooked.], and we couldn't back it up, didn't have enough power. So, somehow or another, he finds a tractor of some kind and he got them right away. They hook a big old chain on the front and they just drag it away with the wheels like this, and they did, they went under the truck like this. He gets them out of the way and they start unloading. Well, I thought, "Oh, boy." All of my mechanics' tools are in one, a lot of the supplies are in the other one, we're going to be without anything. So, I told the driver to back it up, and he backed it up and the wheel straightened out nice and straight and away we went. Well, by this time the whole squadron was gone.

MLS: They just abandoned you?

HLR: Yes. [laughter]

MLS: That wasn't nice.

HLR: Well, there was a cliff there, and to get up the top of the cliff, they had cut roads in like this. There was one on each side and they met at the top.

MLS: This is the cliff above Omaha Beach?

HLR: Yes. Well, we get up to the very top and [we're] just about ready to turn and here comes a tank. [It] comes flying up, the darned thing, and gets in the way, and we had to stop. Well, it turned out the truck had another gear on it. You could pull a gear back and it made it even lower. With the engine wide open and in this lower gear, we finally managed to get around and get it up on top, but the squadron's gone. "Where are they?" Nobody would give me a map or any instructions. So, we go down the road away and we ran into an MP and I said, "Where's the 30th Photographic Squadron?" "I don't know," [he said]. "Go in there." So, we pulled into this parking place with a lot of trucks and stuff around. It was raining. We climbed underneath the truck and went to sleep. Next morning, we woke up.

MLS: You actually managed to sleep?

HLR: Yes, [laughter] [and it turned out we were] right in the middle of our squadron.

SSH: You were? [laughter]

HLR: Yes.

MLS: How is that for luck? [laughter]

SSH: The planes flew--

MLS: So you were headed to your new airfield at Le Molay?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: How close to the action were you?

HLR: That field was about six miles from the frontline. I mean it was close, and this is a month later.

MLS: So tell us about the environment. What was daily life for you?

HLR: Oh, I don't know. We got used to hearing the firing, the shooting and everything.

MLS: Was it frightening?

HLR: No.

SSH: Were the German planes ever able to make it back?

HLR: No, we had complete command of the air. I only saw one German airplane and that was [when] the war was over. We were at Eschwege in Germany, and some German airplane comes flying over our airfield--the war is over--shooting his gun. Well, he put a little crease on the side of one of our airplanes; it didn't amount to anything. [However], there was a beautiful little black biplane, fabric German, sitting on the field and, boy, our pilots were just dying to get and fly that thing. He cut the tail off of that one. [laughter] That's the only damage he did. That's the only time during the whole war where we had any German [planes attack us]. We had no bombs dropped on us.

MLS: When you look back at the training that you had both in the United States and when you first came over to Europe, do you feel that your training prepared you for the reality of what you encountered?

HLR: Nobody trained us for our combat. You know, the mechanics learned how to do the engines, I learned how to organize them, and away we went. [laughter]

MLS: Can you talk about the living arrangements at Le Molay? For the enlisted men, were they different from the officers?

HLR: No, I think they were in those Nissen Huts, too, I think.

MLS: Where did you live in a chateau? Was it at Le Molay?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: There was a couple living in the basement of the chateau?

HLR: Yes, the French owner and his wife. He was an old guy.

MLS: It was. It wasn't servants who were left behind? It was the owner.

HLR: No, no, the owner.

MLS: Did you have interaction with them? Did they speak to you? How did they feel?

HLR: No, I never saw them, except when we first got there.

MLS: Was there any contact at all with French civilians?

HLR: Not much.

MLS: So now you have complete command of the air, the United States does. Are you still going out on daily missions?

HLR: Oh, yes. We're over Germany now.

SSH: The G2 from First is coming back to talk to you? Is that who was giving you your orders for the next day?

HLR: Oh, yes, same guy, I think. Captain somebody.

MLS: I remember you talking about being shown maps of where you needed to go in terms of the missions. Do you feel that, while the war was going on, you really had an overview of the campaign of the war?

HLR: Yes, I think so. The only maps we had were aviation maps. They showed all the railroads, very faint lines for roads. They showed railroad stations, things you could see, and manufacturing plants, but normal roads were kind of hard to see.

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

MLS: This continues our interview with Mr. Runyan. This is tape two, side two. Mr. Runyan, were the men in pretty good health? Were there any health issues, any major problems?

HLR: Well, some of them got venereal diseases, but our squadron doctor took care of that with a needle.

SSH: Now, is this when you were in France?

HLR: Yes, well, in England, too. You know, the whores in England around Piccadilly Circus were called Piccadilly commandos. [laughter]

MLS: Why are they called Piccadilly commandos?

HLR: I don't know. [laughter]

SSH: How often did you get into London? Was that something that you were allowed to do often?

HLR: Not too often. See, we were working seven days a week.

MLS: The First Army is moving and as they move, you move. Your next stop was an airfield near Versailles?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: This question relates to what you were just saying. How frantic were the days or did they vary? You said you were working seven days a week.

HLR: Oh, yes, they were work.

MLS: Once you were over, once the invasion started, did you get to see anything of France?

HLR: Well, we did get into Paris a couple of times when we were at Versailles. [We] went to the Palace of Versailles or part of it anyway, the gardens.

MLS: You had mentioned the chaplain that you met and initially you didn't realize he was a chaplain.

HLR: No.

MLS: Can you talk about that a little bit?

HLR: I shouldn't. [laughter]

SSH: Please do.

MLS: He asked to give a Sunday service in the hangar and what was the topic of his sermon, do you remember?

HLR: Yes, I remember. Officers shouldn't swear, and I was the only officer in the audience. [laughter]

SSH: I'm going to just guess that perhaps you had sworn in his presence.

HLR: Yes, I didn't know he was a chaplain until the coat moved a little bit and I saw the cross.

MLS: Now do you think that the behavior of the men in the service during wartime was different than your behavior back home at the corner drugstore?

HLR: Oh, I don't know. I think it was more wild, yes.

MLS: You had mentioned the Army running out of gas.

HLR: Yes, the whole Army ran out of gas.

MLS: That's not good, but you always had fuel for the planes?

HLR: Well yes, we always had aviation fuel. Well, we didn't run out of gas because we put one hundred octane in our jeeps and stuff. It was the other people that ran out of gas. We always had gas. I mean, we were washing our clothes in the gas. [laughter]

MLS: So, you had special access to fuel.

HLR: I don't know where it came from, but the aviation gas came. I think by this time they'd thrown a pipe across the English Channel, didn't they?

MLS: I don't know. Gosselie, is that the pronunciation?

HLR: Gosselie [in Belgium], yes.

MLS: You moved again.

HLR: [It was] full of cobblestones.

MLS: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like to execute moving from airfield to airfield?

HLR: It was a pain in the butt. Well, you had to pack up and we'd always have to leave a contingent: half the airplanes behind, half the mechanics behind. [Also], half the pilots, they would go out on a mission, but the other half would fly to the next airfield. So, while they were doing the mission, we were doing this.

SSH: Moving forward.

HLR: There was a bunch back here that, when they finished and came back, they developed the pictures right away. Then, finally, they would catch up with us.

MLS: So you were split into two sections?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Here, the officers did not have a chateau to stay in.

HLR: Now, where are we?

MLS: At Gosselie.

HLR: The men stayed in a convent. We stayed in a chateau across the street from it.

MLS: I remember a story about the officers having to stay in tents. Do you remember that at all?

HLR: Yes, it might have been when we first got to Gosselie, I don't know. I forget.

MLS: You were not used to pitching a tent camp, the officers.

HLR: That's right. We didn't put the trench around them and it rained.

MLS: So, what happened?

HLR: The water came right through our tents.

MLS: What did the enlisted men think about that?

HLR: Well, they got a big kick out of that. I had to reach over and get my boots that were on the floor and put them on top of my [trunk]. The officers were authorized a trunk. I still got it in the attic. It's about that long and that deep, plus a duffle bag.

MLS: Was it about three feet by two feet?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: At this point you began receiving "jerry" gasoline. Were these captured German supplies?

HLR: We started getting what?

MLS: Jerry gasoline? Do you remember anything about that?

HLR: No, but jerry is what they call those cans.

MLS: Oh, they were not German supplies.

HLR: No, they're jerrycans.

SSH: This is in Belgium?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: What about the Battle of the Bulge? How did that affect you?

HLR: It scared the hell out of us. It scared us. [laughter] It came right towards us and got within twenty miles. Our planes were going out taking pictures trying to figure out where it was. I mean, we had better information than anybody as to where the Bulge was, but it still scared us.

...

SSH: Was your brother-in-law involved?

HLR: Yes, he was on the northern edge of the Bulge. It was like this, and it was his outfit, I think, it stopped it up here. [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan indicates the layout of the battle.]

SSH: He was with?

HLR: 102nd Mechanized Cavalry, New Jersey National Guard.

SSH: You got to see him several times.

HLR: Oh, yes That's the only time I got into danger is when I went up to see him. Well, no, there was another time; I forgot to tell you about this one. We were on our first airfield, I think, in France and I was told that a P-38 went down near Sainte-Mère-Église. Do you remember that name?

MLS: Yes.

HLR: It's where the 101st or 82nd landed and I was given permission to go out up strip this thing. So, I got a mechanic and we went up there and we found it. It was in the churchyard right behind the Sainte-Mère-Église church and it was in good condition, the guy just bellied it in, and we stripped the thing and [took] all kinds of junk and put it in the back and we leave. We're going down the road. It's raining and it didn't look very familiar. Finally, we get up to a place where we see a couple of small anti-tank guns pointed up the road. They were in a ditch and the water was running [in] there and the poor guys were standing in the ditch. So, we go a little bit further and we see an orchard. So, we pulled into the orchard, didn't I have this in the thing?

MLS: I don't remember this particular incident, but you may have.

HLR: We pulled into the orchard and I see a helmet sticking out of a foxhole and I yelled at the guy, [a] GI, "Where are we?" I had a map in my hand. He says, "I don't know where we are, but there's .88s coming in here all the time." You know what an .88 is? It was a German super gun. We had a .75-caliber gun; it was lousy compared to the .88. The .88 was so far superior. It was in their tanks and they had it mounted on cannon wheels and every place. It was a versatile gun. We had .75 millimeters. The .88, when it hit the side of a tank, American tank, would go right through and explode. When a .75-millimeter shell hit the side of a German tank, it just put a dent in it; it wouldn't go through. The only reason we were able to beat them is we had so many tanks. I mean, there is a funny part about it. They had this big industrial place on the Ruhr or something, building tanks. Here we are three thousand miles away and you got to bring it across this ocean, and we just engulfed them with tanks. I mean the production differential was tremendous. They just couldn't produce them at all, hardly, but they produced superior tanks.

SSH: So you're stuck in this orchard with the .88s coming in.

HLR: Well, I got out of there--in a hurry. [laughter] We spun the wheels, backed up, and blasted back down to where we got on the other road again. I was always going up to see my brother-in-law. That was my worst time though, almost ran right smack into the German lines. That was the point of my story. If I'd gone past these guys I'd have been in it. [laughter]

MLS: I remember once when you were officer of the day you received a call that your men had captured a German prisoner. Do you remember that scene?

HLR: Yes. Oh, yes, distinctly.

MLS: Could you tell us this?

HLR: Well, they called up. See, I was officer of the day. You always had some officer sitting up all night and you had a GI with you and one of the MPs. So, we had a jeep and we go flying downtown. We were in a headquarters building. They were in a big convent. They'd caught him in the third floor, I think. They'd been developing pictures all night, practically, and they had come back and they find this guy [laughter] going through their stuff. He had his pockets full of K rations. Remember, that was just a box. So, they bring him downstairs and called me. I get down there and here's about thirty guys surrounding this poor guy that's up against the wall, every one of them had a gun pointed at him. [laughter]

MLS: They weren't taking any chances.

HLR: No. [laughter] So, I get him, and I had what you'd call a weapon's carrier. That's a small truck that had a canvas top and seats along the side. So, I put the prisoner over here, and I had the sergeant with me, the MP, sit here with his .45 out, pointing it at him. I sat on the other side with my .45 pointed at him with my finger on the trigger. [laughter] He was a young kid and he was from the *Luftwaffe*, he was a German Air Force mechanic. [laughter]

MLS: Now it's interesting, because earlier you were talking about feelings toward the Japanese when you were on the West Coast after Pearl Harbor. Coming into the European Theater, what were your feelings toward the Germans?

HLR: I didn't like them. "Kill 'em!"

MLS: Did you have the same sort of animosity toward the Germans?

HLR: I had kind of forgotten about the Japs by that time. We were worrying about other things.

MLS: You had mentioned, related to this incident with the capture of the prisoner, the Malmédy Massacre had just occurred. [Editor's Note: Soldiers of the First Panzer SS Division summarily executed eighty-four American prisoners of war on December 17, 1944, near the Belgian village of Malmedy.]

SSH: When did you find out about that?

HLR: In *Stars and Stripes* that had just come out and they had a picture on the front page.

MLS: How long between the massacre and the reporting?

HLR: I don't know. All I know is that I first learned about it from *The Stars and Stripes*. They had a picture of all these dead guys on the front of it. They explained what happened.

MLS: You showed your captured German a photo?

HLR: Well, I showed him this *Stars and Stripes*.

MLS: How did he react?

HLR: He didn't react.

MLS: Do you think he understood what it was?

HLR: I don't know. See, I didn't speak German and he didn't speak English, so I don't know whether he understood it or not, but he saw a bunch of dead Americans, and he must have figured out something.

MLS: Did you feel personal anger at this person?

HLR: Yes. Well, yes, kind of. I had my finger on the trigger [laughter] while we went down the Belgian roads, which are all cobblestones. They were, anyway.

MLS: We talked about the Battle of the Bulge.

HLR: My brother-in-law was there.

MLS: Later, you had to cross the Rhine at Remagen?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Are there any comments, recollections?

SSH: By the time you got to the bridge, was the pontoon bridge across already in place?

HLR: Yes, yes. I have a friend in town here who was in some Infantry outfit. His name is (John Sewell?). He crossed the Remagen Bridge before it was blown up. He was in the Infantry. [laughter]

SSH: That must have been a shock to look back over your shoulder.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Next was Vogelsang?

HLR: I showed you a picture of that. We didn't stay there very long. I don't know how long it was.

MLS: Again, it was crossing another river, the Ruhr? How do you pronounce that?

HLR: Yes, Ruhr.

MLS: Did you actually cross a bridge?

HLR: I don't remember. Oh yes, the Rhine River crossing. That was a mess.

MLS: Why?

HLR: Well, I had a captured a French trailer, but the Germans had painted their insignia on it. The tread of a vehicle's the distance between the wheels. Well, all the American cars, [the treads are] a certain distance apart, but this thing was a little bit in. When I got to the Rhine River, it wouldn't go. There were the pontoons and then just these two rails, little U-shaped things.

SSH: Like treads.

HLR: It wasn't wide enough for my old [trailer] to go through. I got about fifty feet out on it before the thing seemed to move out and it stuck; this is where my mattress is and all my junk is. There's a sergeant in charge of the bridge. He comes flying out and he wants to know what the hell is going on, pardon me. He's ready to throw all the stuff out of my [trailer], and I tell him, "You better not or ... you're not going to be a sergeant." Well, I had no authority to do that, but I said it anyway. So, he finally made everybody back up that was behind me, and they told me that if I went up about ten miles towards Berlin or some place, wherever it was, there was a bridge that you could drive across. They put a bunch of boats across and put planks down so there weren't these rails. Well, that's what I did. I had my trucks that I was taking over to the next field go across and stop. Then I went up and back, picked up my trucks and merrily went on my way to the next field. [laughter] That son of a gun was going to throw off my mattress. Imagine that. [laughter]

SSH: Never mind all your tools or whatever. [laughter]

MLS: The next stop was Limburg, the site of a former POW camp. Do you remember anything about that?

HLR: I remember, first of all, when we got to Germany, they had a thing called the non-fraternization ban. We were not allowed to talk to any Germans and we never did. We were prisoners. You couldn't get off the base without a pass and you had to have a real legitimate reason to get off. So, the whole time we were in Germany we were prisoners—in Germany, of all places. [laughter]

SSH: They really enforced it for you.

HLR: I'll say. Anyway, they were a bunch of Russians, I think they were, prisoners. They had been prisoners. They had a big D on the back or something, which meant displaced person, or something.

MLS: Was that Eschwege?

HLR: Eschwege.

MLS: That was the displaced persons camp.

HLR: Yes.

SSH: What did you do?

HLR: We didn't do anything.

MLS: What do you remember? Were the displaced people actually still there?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Who were they? Where did they come from?

HLR: I think they were Russians, mainly.

SSH: Who was taking care of them or feeding them there?

HLR: I guess the United States Army was, I don't know.

MLS: Do you remember their condition, their appearance?

HLR: Well, they had been given coveralls or something so they didn't have [to walk] around in torn clothes or anything.

MLS: Did they look like they had been fed or had been well cared for?

HLR: Well, they didn't look very good, like our guys [who had] plenty of food.

MLS: The war, by this time, was coming to a close and the request for missions was decreasing.

HLR: Oh, yes, yes.

MLS: How did your daily routine change?

HLR: Well, we weren't flying many missions.

MLS: What was the emotional mood? How was morale?

HLR: Oh, it was good. [We] won the war--by ourselves!

SSH: What do you remember about the day they declared victory in Europe?

HLR: Yes, everybody got drunk.

MLS: What did you get drunk on? What was available?

HLR: Champagne.

MLS: Champagne, that's the way to go.

HLR: And Scotch.

MLS: Champagne and Scotch.

SSH: Where had you liberated that from?

HLR: We didn't. Oh, the Champagne we did, yes. The officers were authorized a bottle of Scotch and a half a bottle of gin. You had to split one bottle between two officers a month. The GIs weren't given anything. They got beer, I guess. Well, I didn't participate in all this stuff. I think I had a couple of drinks. I went to bed, but they had a real nice officers' club on this base, it was German, and all of a sudden I heard smashing of glass. They had doors that were all full of glass. Somebody fell through one of the doors. I went over there the next day and the place was a wreck. There was a big mirror behind the bar and that was completely broken, the bar was in sad shape, and there [were] beer cans over the floor and everything, it was a mess. This was the GIs doing this.

SSH: This wasn't the officers doing this.

HLR: Oh, no. No, I was in bed.

MLS: Just before the end of the war, you lost two planes on the same day. Do you remember that?

HLR: Yes.

SSH: What happened?

HLR: I think they were due to German jets. I must have said that in there, didn't I?

MLS: You talked about the downed pilots.

HLR: Well, one of them got out. The other one, we never knew what happened. That guy that we never found out what happened to him, he was a character. Who the hell was it? He should never have been a pilot. He had something to do with the movie industry in Hollywood. I forget. Something funny.

MLS: The pilot who was able to make his way back, you talked about him coming to a house that was being trashed by US Airborne. Was this just gratuitous vandalism? What was going on? This was a German house.

HLR: They were in there. They took a car, too, a Mercedes or something.

MLS: How did they get it home?

HLR: They didn't. They started driving down the road and they didn't get very far before an MP stops them. Well, here's these GI driving a German Mercedes, but they didn't take the box of silver from him. He took that home. Oh, and another thing, I don't know whether I mentioned this in there or not. At this last airfield, we're at--

MLS: Was that Eschwege?

HLR: Yes, there was a German airplane, the cutest little thing you ever saw, it was a low-wing monoplane, two engines, and it was small. It only took two people, a little tiny thing, but with two engines. They were the cutest little engines you ever saw. So, one of the mechanics, he takes them off and he takes them apart. I asked him, "What are you going to do with this?" He says, "I'm going to send them home." The guy was from Maine or someplace. He says, "I'm going to put them on an ice boat in Maine." [laughter]

SSH: Did he do it?

HLR: I don't know. He tried to send them home. I don't know whether they got home or not.

SSH: What was the reaction to the death of Franklin Roosevelt?

HLR: I didn't have any. I didn't like the guy. I don't know.

MLS: What about Camp Lucky Strike?

HLR: That's on the way home, yes. We're in France, yes. The Japanese war ended, I think, when we were there and that's when I got plastered.

MLS: On V-J Day?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: You felt it was worth indulging on V-J Day?

HLR: Yes, and I tried to get back to my tent and I kept falling over the ropes, the ropes that hold the tents up? I finally got back, but I was falling over those darned ropes. There were tents all over the place. I finally made it.

SSH: You'd gone all across Europe and back and now you're falling over tent ropes.

HLR: Yes. [laughter]

MLS: So you remained in Europe well after the war in Europe had ended?

HLR: I don't know how long it was. It was a while.

MLS: Do you remember when you came home?

HLR: I don't know the date. I'm lousy on dates.

MLS: What do you remember about the trip home? Do you have any recollections of what it was like?

HLR: Well, it was [a] pretty good trip, enjoyable. I remember the first radio broadcast we heard from an American station. What was the tune? Anyway, it was good to hear American music coming out through the radio on the boat. "Sentimental Journey".

SSH: Really? Perfect. [laughter]

HLR: Yes, it was. [laughter]

SSH: Now talk about when you came across. Where were you supposed to land?

HLR: New York.

SSH: Then what happened?

HLR: They diverted us here to Newport News. [laughter]

SSH: How did they send you up to Fort Dix to be discharged?

HLR: My wife was up there. They sent you wherever your family was.

SSH: So they put you on a train to Fort Dix.

HLR: It took about three days, I think.

SSH: Did it? Wow.

HLR: These these are people who were all going north. There a lot of people going to New York and so on, but they dumped me out in Trenton, I think.

MLS: What was life like back in the United States? How was it to adjust? Did you find that there was an adjustment period?

HLR: Oh, yes: the gas shortage. [laughter] That was soon lifted, I think, but they were still short of gas. [During the war] we had all the gas we wanted. We washed our clothes in it. [laughter]

MLS: How did the people at home react to the returning servicemen?

HLR: I don't remember one way or the other. Well, of course, my folks were glad to see me.

MLS: You come home. How old is Gerry now?

HLR: Two; well, almost two.

MLS: What did he think of you coming home?

HLR: I don't think he remembers me. I've asked him.

MLS: How did he react to you at the time?

HLR: Well, I was afraid of him.

MLS: You were afraid of him?

HLR: Yes.

MLS: Why were you afraid of him?

HLR: I don't know; [he was a] little kid. I've been telling all these tough mechanics what to do and here I get little Gerry: "You, you go over there." Well, he didn't. [laughter] "I'm the commanding officer. You go over there."

MLS: What was it like suddenly being a father again?

HLR: Well, it took a while. [laughter]

MLS: Did he embrace you? Was he afraid of you? What happened?

HLR: I don't remember.

MLS: So what do you do after the war? How does life progress once the war ends and you're back in the States? What did you do for your living?

HLR: Well, I came down in Langley, NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. [Editor's Note: It was NACA (National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics) at that time and changed to NASA in 1958.]

SSH: You said something about a desk with a man that was enlisting.

HLR: Yes, at Fort Dix, when I was discharged. It was about two weeks, I think, after I got home. I'd gotten orders to go to Fort Dix and get discharged, which I did. You had to take a physical. Well, the physical when you went in was pretty tough. They gave you a pretty good exam. The physical on the way out: If you could walk in the door and walk the other door, that

was it. [laughter] The doctor listened to your heart. That was it. They didn't do anything. [laughter]

SSH: Did you think about how you would use or if you would use the GI Bill?

HLR: I did use it later on, I think. I got a master's degree, and I think I got it on the GI Bill.

MLS: Where did you get your master's degree?

HLR: From [the] University of Virginia. That's up the road away.

MLS: What was the subject?

HLR: Aeronautical engineering. Then I got a PhD later on.

MLS: So, does that make you a rocket scientist?

HLR: Yes, I'm a rocket scientist. [laughter] You didn't know that? Yes, people are always saying, "I'm not a rocket scientist." I'm a rocket scientist. [laughter]

MLS: Tell us about your professional life after the Army. What was it like?

HLR: Well, it was great. I mean, working on new ideas and developing new theories. Everything we did at NASA, at least what I was involved in, had to do with safety. I became a flutter expert. You probably never heard of flutter.

MLS: I never did.

HLR: That's when an airplane wing, it goes too fast, it starts vibrating like this and it'll tear off. [Editor's Note: Mr. Runyan shakes his hand to demonstrate flutter.] [It happened to] a lot of [planes] in the '20s and early '30s. Well, the fellow that was head of the division that hired me--Langley had a bunch of divisions with different specialties--he was a Swede or Norwegian, and he was the first one in 1935 who developed a theory for flutter. He was at Langley then. Theodorsen was his name, Theodore Theodorsen, doctor. I think he was the only doctor at Langley at that time. He had developed this flutter theory and from that, the thing started to grow. I mean, his was an elementary one, but it was still correct. The whole idea was to make it more general, applicable to high speeds, so on and so on. I did a lot of work taking it to the next step. I liked to do the analytical stuff rather than experimental.

MLS: How long were you at NASA?

HLR: Thirty years, I think.

MLS: That was during the heyday of the space race.

HLR: Yes, yes. We were right in the middle of it to start with. Now they're out there having a hard time, I think. I don't know what they're doing out there. I wrote sixty reports. I averaged two a year, which is pretty good. I'll say that because I went to a retirement party for a friend of mine who had become an associate director out there and I had only become an assistant division chief. They were bragging about his work and they said he had written ten--ten--research reports, and I had sixty. I got them in there. I would show it to [you] except my room is too messed up. [laughter]

SSH: Spring cleaning is coming up right?

HLR: No. [laughter]

MLS: What were your favorite projects at NASA, if there were any?

HLR: Well it was flutter and dynamics. Then later on, I got involved in the rockets. Of course, we didn't call them rockets.

MLS: What did you call them?

HLR: Launch vehicles; rockets are wartime things. So, whenever you hear anything getting launched, it's via launch vehicle, not a rocket.

SSH: I'll try to remember that.

HLR: I even got chewed out by [Wernher] von Braun once.

MLS: Were there other children, other than Gerry, after you came home?

HLR: A daughter.

MLS: What is her name?

HLR: Susan.

MLS: Grandchildren?

HLR: Five. She's out in Oregon, but she's divorced. Gerry lives here in town. He's got three kids, but a whole bunch of grandchildren and they're great grandchildren to me, I guess. Gerry has a son that lives in South Carolina.

MLS: Looking back at your time during the war, how do you view your years in the war in the context of your life? Is it something that you were glad you did?

HLR: Yes, I think I grew. I think before that I was kind of timid and afraid. People could push me around.

MLS: Not you. [laughter]

HLR: After the war: "Ain't nobody gonna do that to me." [laughter]

SSH: What are you most proud of, either your military career or your time at NASA?

HLR: Some of the research work I did at Langley. I mean, there were breakthroughs.

SSH: Do you still follow what's going on?

HLR: No, I haven't been out there. I don't know what's going on and I don't know whether there's anything going on in my specialty because I think we did it all. [laughter] That's not bragging.

SSH: No, no. I'm giving you the opportunity to brag on tape because this is part of Rutgers' legacy. I mean, hopefully, some of what you learned at Rutgers kept you in good stead. Did you ever run into anybody from Rutgers in any of your work?

HLR: One guy out at Langley, I don't remember his name. He was an engineer. The only thing I remember about him--he was kind of a big guy--was that he was here and he left. He didn't stay very long. He had three kids, and I ran into him at a conference somewhere a few years later, and I asked him if he had any more kids. He said no. I finally learned where they came from. [laughter]

MLS: You had talked about, earlier, your Army Air Corps uniform, your blouse. Can you tell us about the souvenirs that you brought back, the German artifacts?

HLR: Well there's a German helmet.

MLS: Should I bring that over?

HLR: Yes, it's heavy.

SSH: It's amazing.

HLR: Yes. Now how can a person wear that thing?

MLS: How did you come to have this helmet?

HLR: In that last dormitory at Eschwege, I found this. I found that belt over there, the German belt, and the flag. I found them all there.

MLS: Now this German belt, can you talk about the imagery?

HLR: It says, "God with us."

MLS: Can you discuss the eagle on top of the Swastika?

HLR: Well, no, that's about all I know. [Those are] the only words on it.

MLS: What type of German serviceman would have worn it?

HLR: I think they all wore them.

MLS: They all wore these?

HLR: I think so.

SSH: I have one question that we had read with interest in your memoir: You were late to a wedding in Europe?

HLR: Yes. [laughter] That bag's got a Nazi flag in it.

MLS: Where did you find the Nazi flag?

HLR: Same place.

SSH: It's quite ornate. It's got all sorts of strings on it. It's silk

MLS: Were all the servicemen just coming home with bags full of souvenirs?

HLR: Yes. Well, I said one guy brought home a couple of engines.

SSH: Now you have a picture in your collection of a jet engine that you found.

HLR: Yes.

MLS: You were talking about your brother-in-law's wedding.

HLR: He was marrying an English girl.

MLS: You were supposed to be the best man?

HLR: Yes, in Bristol, and Bristol is right on the south coast of England, and I was up, you know, about fifty miles from London. So, I got permission from the boss to get an airplane. We always had a passenger airplane. It was a five seater. It was an English airplane. It was for passengers and I lined up a pilot. So, we're going to leave about eight o'clock and the wedding was at twelve. We get lined up to go the day before. So, we get down to the operation place and the fog was right on the ground. The operations officer, weatherman, wouldn't give us the clearance. You had to get a clearance signed by several people. We already had it from the operations officer who was in charge of the airplane, but we had to get this second one. He wouldn't do it. Well, it turned out there was some officer standing there with a trench coat on and he said,

"Where do you want to go?" I said, "We want to go to Bristol." He says, "That's where I want to go." He says, "I'm a weather officer. I'll sign it." [laughter] So he did, and away we went. I'm not kidding you, the darned fog or clouds were almost on the ground, and we were following the railroad tracks. We were up about a half an hour, I guess, and suddenly the pilot says, "I don't know where I am." [laughter] So he turns around, follows the tracks back, and, finally, we find the mainline and then we see where he pulled off. So, we get on the proper tracks. So, we're flying along with this fog and stuff almost on the ground and we get down to Bristol. Well, it turns out that there was a small range of hills around Bristol and the fog and stuff was right up to the top of the thing; you couldn't see over them. So, he suddenly finds out when he pulls up into the mist, he had never turned on the gyroscope or any of the other instruments, the bank-and-turn instruments.

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

MLS: This continues our interview with Mr. Harry Runyan. This is tape three, side one.

HLR: Oh, boy. [laughter]

MLS: You were talking about the trip to your brother-in-law's wedding.

HLR: Yes, when we got down to Bristol, the pilot finds out he hadn't turned the bank-and-turn instruments on, so we flop around in the air and finally get where he thinks we're over the mountains. They're just little low hills, but the clouds were up to them. Then we come down and there's Bristol right in front of us and we land at an airfield there. I was all dressed up with my blouse, [laughter] the same one, and pink pants. We called them pink; they were kind of beige. I don't know whether you remember that. I think that combination was the best-looking uniform of anybody in the world, including the one they got now. The Air Force, they had on some old blue thing. They were two-toned. Anyway, when I jump out of the airplane, I land in a mud puddle and it splashes mud all over my pants and my shoes are full of mud. The pilot, [it] happens to him too. So, [my brother-in-law] said he'd have somebody meet us at the airfield. Well, we were an hour late and there wasn't anybody there. Well, where's the wedding? So, we get a taxi and go down to Main Street and all of a sudden here comes the wedding procession the other way. So, we turned around and joined that and get in line and they'd been married already. [She] was an English girl. We go to the reception. Well, by this time it's two o'clock in the afternoon or something. We hadn't had anything to eat. We start drinking the punch, [from a] big punch bowl. Well, they really had that thing loaded and I got crocked.

MLS: Did you have fun?

HLR: Oh, yes. [laughter]

SSH: How difficult was it for someone to marry an English girl before?

HLR: I don't know, I don't think it was any difficulty at all. I don't know, never heard of anything. Well, that only lasted a couple of years and they got a divorce. I don't know who divorced whom. He's up in New Jersey. He married somebody else, and I think he divorced her

later on. He's quite a character. [Editor's Note: His brother-in-law Bill stayed in the Army after the war and became a major general (two-star).]

SSH: Well you've stuck to it, it looks like.

HLR: I think so.

MLS: How many years have you been married?

HLR: Over fifty, yes.

MLS: How have you made it work all of these years?

HLR: I guess both of us, when one wants to do something, we do that what they want. If she wants to go out and eat, we go out and eat where she wants to go. If I want to go out and eat, it's mutual. I don't think we've ever had an argument, believe it or not.

MLS: Really?

SSH: Congratulations.

MLS: That's very exceptional.

SSH: That's amazing. Well, we thank you so much for taking time talking to us and for the lovely lunch. We look forward to getting more information from you. You have this fabulous photo collection. So, with that we will say, until next time, thank you.

MLS: Thank you, Mr. Runyan. Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Mary Lou Strahlendorff 8/1/06

Reviewed by Molly Graham 6/11/2017

Reviewed by Gerald L. Runyan 8/1/2017