

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ABRAHAM SOLTZ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Abraham Soltz on February 9, 1996, at Ventnor, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Brian Oaks: ... Brian Oaks.

KP: I would like to begin by asking about how your parents came to Atlantic City.

Abraham Soltz: How my parents came to Atlantic City--well, I'll tell you, my father came to this country, I guess, [in] 1890 or sometime around then, with his father. They were refugees from Russia. They moved here--I can't tell you why they came to Atlantic City, but I guess that there may have been some of their relatives here or something. I have no idea exactly why they came here, this area. My paternal grandfather had sort of a haberdashery business. They used to sell all kinds of equipment, or all kinds of merchandise, clothing, etc., and most of the people in the neighborhood where they were were either Italian immigrants or Jewish immigrants. In fact, I was born in the back room of their house on Atlantic Avenue, right a stone's throw from the Atlantic City Convention Hall. My mother's father came here from, I guess, Lithuania or one of the other Balkan countries. He was a refugee also and they came to the Philadelphia area and they decided, actually, that the seashore was where they could see a future.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KP: You were saying that they came to the shore because they thought it would be better.

AS: Right. My grandfather came to the shore and he knew something about paints and he started in the paint business, selling paint, paint products and things like that. They had a little operation here. My mother and my father married there and my father went in the paint business. My grandfather, at that time, thought that the future of this area would be down in [the] Cape May area. So, he moved to Wildwood and my father kept the place here in Atlantic City and it evolved into a pretty good-sized business. Basically, I guess, the hotels and the rooming houses here, they used to paint up every year and that probably was why the business thrived. I would guess, probably in the early '20s and up to, oh, around maybe '27, they were quite busy. In '27, they started work on the Convention Hall here. My father supplied the paint for the Convention Hall, which was a tremendous thing. '27, I went to Atlantic City High School as a freshman. I'd just turned sixteen and, in 1931, I matriculated at Rutgers. Between '27 and '31, I used to work in the store, after hours. In the summertime, when I wasn't on the beach, I was working in the store. I was interested in boats and the regular activities of the young fellows, quite.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed growing up in Atlantic City.

AS: Oh, yes, this was the place to be. In the summertime, all the people who could afford it used to come down here and rent cottages for the whole summer. I met an awful lot of my good friends during the summertime and we still communicate with some of these same people, the ones that are still alive. I can remember going to Rutgers in '31, how great it was, how much we enjoyed it. It was a small school, a great atmosphere. I lived in Hegeman, Pell and Leupp, that was the three of them, and I think I lived in Leupp with a buddy of mine from Atlantic City. We

were freshman together and I joined SAM [Sigma Alpha Mu] fraternity and, in '32, we moved into the fraternity house, which was on Mine Street, 39 Mine Street. If you know, Mine Street goes like this and this and the other street that comes up this way and dead ends at Mine Street, the DUs [Delta Upsilon], I guess the DUs had a house there. The Betas had a house on College Avenue and Mine Street, I think. No, the Betas, that was College Avenue and the other street, whatever. The year after that, my fraternity bought the house at--oh, what's the street this way, after College Avenue?

KP: Easton?

AS: Easton.

KP: Easton Avenue.

AS: Easton and Hamilton, I think. Hamilton Street runs up to George Street?

KP: Yes, yes.

AS: We had bought the house there, which had been a sort of nightclub, or something like that, and they had a miniature golf course as part of that operation. I lived there for the two years. Incidentally, that house burned down later. When I was overseas, I read about it. After Rutgers, I came back and I became part of the family business. Oh, I must tell you, I think in 1932, I had come back to school with a check to pay my tuition, sometime in September or October. When I got back, there was a telegram there for me, which said, "Don't deposit the check." The banks had closed, meanwhile, and things were very difficult. [Editor's Note: Immediately after his inauguration in March 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a national bank holiday so that the nation's banking institutions could be reviewed by the Department of the Treasury.] That was the depth of the Depression and, in fact, we used to pay our tuition in scrip issued by the City of Atlantic City. My father would sell paint to the City of Atlantic City, they would give him scrip for it and the scrip was tender and, if you did business with local merchants, they accepted scrip or gave you scrip. That's a fascinating memory. I can remember, my freshman year, they dedicated the new gym, which is on College Avenue, across from the library. As part of the dedication ceremonies, they had a concert one evening and Paul Robeson was the principal entertainer that time. Of course, he was a great Rutgers man. I could still remember sitting on those seats they had in the gym and seeing this great, big, handsome guy, with a beautiful set of teeth and a magnificent voice, and a great message to give to the Rutgers boys. Of course, there weren't any girls there then. Of course, the Douglass girls were invited, I guess, [laughter] and that's one of the great memories. [Editor's Note: Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was an African-American singer, actor and Civil Rights activist. He was valedictorian of his class at Rutgers University in 1919.] Behind the gym, there was a lacrosse field and they played 150-pound football back there and softball and lacrosse. I don't know, I remember, [J. Wilder] Tasker was the football coach. They had a great lacrosse team. Freddie Fitch was the coach. He was an All-American. What else do you want to know? [laughter]

KP: Growing up, you said your neighborhood was heavily Jewish and heavily Italian.

AS: Right.

KP: How did the Jews and Italians get along?

AS: Pretty good, pretty good. We had no problems. In fact, our dwelling place, where we lived there, was right between the St. Michael's, that was the Italian Catholic church, and the [Our] Lady Star of the Sea, which was on the other side, which was the other faction of the Catholics there. They used to tease me about, "Which parish did I belong to?" [laughter] and, of course, there was some animosity or some rejection there, but not too bad. It wasn't too bad at all and, of course, Atlantic City itself, the hotels were owned and operated mostly by--I can't think of the right word there. [laughter]

KP: It will probably come to you in a minute, the right word.

AS: No, these were not the Amish, but the Christian Scientists--where did they spring from?

KP: From Boston, Christian Science?

AS: No, not Christian Science--Quakers.

KP: Oh, Quakers.

AS: The Quakers, couldn't think of the Quakers--the Chalfonte and Haddon Hall, the big operation here.

KP: It was owned by Quakers.

AS: Owned by Quakers, Leeds and Lippincott, and the Dennis Hotel was owned by the--oh, I'll think of their name in a minute. We used to supply all of them, and then, later, the Amish came in here from Upstate Pennsylvania. They used to run the second or third-class hotels.

KP: Would they cater to the Amish, the Amish hotelkeepers?

AS: Well, they came from that section, but I don't know, basically, whether they were Amish or not, but they used to operate--oh, let's see, the names just escape me right now. They came from around Lansdale, Bethlehem, up in that area. The hotel industry in Atlantic City was thriving for a long time. When--let's see, I don't want to get out of date here--I became pretty active in the family business, with my brother, my parents, they were both very active and we developed into a pretty decent, good-sized operation.

KP: During the 1920s and 1930s, how many people were in the family business, in the paint business? Did you employ many people? How many people did you employ?

AS: Yes, we had quite a few. I think we used to employ about, around, roughly twenty people. That was a pretty good-sized operation, basically, hotel and cottage supply and retail and the marine supply business. I can remember, when they built the Convention Hall, in about '27,

when they had the foundations dug out, the great, big cellars, I guess you would call them, we had a horrible northeast storm. The cellars all flooded, right up to above the ocean level. That was quite a mess, but they got it finished, basically on time, and it became quite an important aspect of what Atlantic City had to offer in the off-season. One of the other things at that time, when things were moving along better, later, they built a racetrack not too far from here. Of course, the pitch, at that time, for getting the racetrack and other things like that was that this was supposed to boost the economy of Atlantic City from a June-July-August business into more weeks before June and more weeks into September. These were some of the things that helped Atlantic City grow; whether they were plusses or minuses, that's something else, depending on what your outlook is.

KP: You mentioned at one point that your father told you not to cash the tuition check.

AS: Right.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your father's business? How tough did it get?

AS: Well, it got to be pretty tough. I'll give you a reasonable example--they had a safe deposit box in the bank. When the banks were closed, the safe deposit box was incarcerated, or whatever the right word was, and I think they were held that way for fifty years. After 1977, which would have been fifty years later, I couldn't give you the exact date, but I got a letter from a lawyer in Cincinnati or Cleveland or somewhere, saying that now that these vaults were released that they have some sort of an "in" there. If I wanted the contents of the vault, if I would send them ten dollars, they would give me the contents of the vault, etc., and so on, and so forth. Well, I called our attorney and he said, "Sure," he said, "send them the ten bucks." Anyway, the total contents of the vault, which was the business vault, were two promissory notes. One of them was for a hundred dollars from Frank Gravatt, who was running the Steel Pier at that time, and the other was from an attorney here who my father befriended and loaned him a hundred dollars to keep him afloat. That was all the contents of the vault. Now, this is so impressive, because the businesses in Atlantic City were conducted on--most, a lot of them--on faith and credit. Mr. Gravatt used to buy paint all winter long to refurbish and remodel and repaint the Steel Pier and he would pay us off in the summertime, if the receipts were enough, and, sometimes, instead of getting cash, we would get tickets for the pier or we would get a promissory note. Now, at that time, 1927, for what was left of the whole year, there was a note for a hundred dollars. Now, this didn't represent probably the whole year, but it reflects how important a hundred dollars was then. You fellows just don't appreciate that. You just don't imagine. When I was in school, I used to get six bucks a week from home, which was to pay for my board and incidental expenses, clothes and whatever else, and I was one of the lucky kids. My parents had a business where they could send me six dollars a week, and they never had enough money to send me twenty-four dollars for four weeks.

KP: Only six dollars a week.

AS: That's right. They would send me six dollars a week and you used to get a haircut back on Hamilton Street, I guess, or wherever it was. They had a little shop there, right across from Queens, that street that runs there. I think we'd get a haircut and a shave; see that truck there?

[Editor's Note: A truck comes within view of the interview site.] That's still one of the trucks that they operate there. I have nothing to do with the business now.

KP: It still has your name on it.

AS: It still has our name on it. We had a good name. I think we used to get a haircut for seventy-five cents and, if you wanted to get shaved, it was a quarter, something like that. You could go down to Doc (Robeck's?) or the other drug store on Easton Avenue, I can't think of the name of it now, get a Coke or a soda for ten cents, or something like that. All these were ridiculous numbers. At that time, you'd get a full meal--I remember going to Trenton, on the way home one time, and stopping in Childs Restaurant. There were four of us or five of us. You'd get all you can eat for sixty-nine cents, something like that. They were bad times, they were tough, but we got along great. I can remember living in the fraternity house and a lot of fellows went home Friday night, because they could get a good meal at home and you want to go home. [laughter] We would take a collection with all the boys that were not going home and, if we could get, like, two bucks from all of us, we would go and get a great, big rye bread and a salami and a lot of other food and we would eat. That was what we ate Saturday and Sunday.

KP: Your father was a Republican.

AS: Yes, he was. How did you ever figure that out?

KP: You wrote it on the survey.

AS: Oh. [laughter]

KP: Yes, otherwise, I would not have known. Was he active at all in local politics?

AS: Not too much, no, no. My father was dedicated to the business. He was a hard-working, good-natured guy and I suppose that, basically, the business growth was primarily because of his personality and his willingness to be available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. When you get involved with the construction trades, which we were, often, they work right around the clock, when they can, in order to get a job done, or so on, and so forth. They would think nothing of calling either him or me, three o'clock in the morning, "Bring me--oh, I need a forty-foot ladder," or something like that, and we were available. I think that was part of our success. We were a successful operation, without being an egotist or egotistical.

KP: A lot of businesses did not survive the Great Depression.

AS: Oh, no, a lot of them didn't. Our business was almost totally motivated by the family, or with the family. If the paycheck wasn't there, we did without it and we lived together, oh, for quite a while, the whole family. It was a big family, with grandmothers and grandfathers and aunts and brothers and sisters and cousins. They made do; you got along. There wasn't any griping or anything. Everybody accepted what there was and they were damn glad to get it, because they were still close enough to the *pogroms* abroad to know what a good thing we have here. [Editor's Note: *Pogroms* were violent assaults on Jewish communities in the Russian

Empire by neighboring populations and/or government forces, carried out from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.] I guess I'm a completely, maybe not outstanding, but I'm an excellent example of--I'm the third generation, grandfather, father, me, third generation--and I live in a nice house. I've been retired since '72 and I don't owe anybody any money. We eat regularly. The problem's, of course, that, in '72, nobody foretold or could forecast the inflation and the different lifestyles and what would happen now, because, if I could have, at that time, even dreamed that we would reach a situation like this, I probably would have worked several years longer, but I've got no complaints. [laughter] My education at Rutgers, if anybody else is ever going to listen to this, I've got to tell you this--as an undergraduate, I wasn't a bad student, but I never appreciated what marvelous opportunities you are presented with as an undergraduate and how much you could gain, and how much you would enjoy gaining it, from putting a lot more emphasis on studying and learning and listening, instead of having a good time.

KP: You had a good time in college.

AS: Oh, yes, we had a great time there [laughter] and that, probably, is my major regret about my four years at Rutgers, that I didn't take more advantage of it. I've got this to say to you--if I could do it all over again, I would still be in college studying, [laughter] because that ain't a bad life. That's great.

KP: Growing up, how observant was your family?

AS: How what?

KP: Observant, in terms of religion.

AS: Oh, they were religious. They were religious.

KP: You kept a kosher household.

AS: Yes, my mother had a kosher household and I was exposed--that's probably the right word--to, we used to call it, Talmud Torah, which is the school for the children to learn, classes, Sunday school, and so on. Really, I never took advantage of that, either, but I did learn a lot. I have, in the last ten or fifteen years, spent a lot of time learning more about my religion and studying the Hebrew language. I try to read the Old Testament in the original Hebrew, more as an intellectual challenge, to keep my mind alert, and, really, it's fascinating. It's like--maybe the comparison isn't good--but it's like doing a crossword puzzle. It stimulates it a little bit and, when I do it, I realize that I haven't yet reached the stage of being an Alzheimer's subject. [laughter] It still works. We don't keep a kosher house here, but I belong, still belong, to an Orthodox synagogue and a Reformed synagogue. My wife grew up in a Reformed atmosphere, and so, we still go to both of them.

KP: You wish you had taken more advantage of your college years, but what about going to the Atlantic City school system? How good was it and how well did it prepare you for Rutgers?

AS: At that time, the Atlantic City school system was as good as any in the nation. I had a marvelous high school education and that's something else again--if I hadn't learned so much in high school, I probably would have applied myself more in college. I'll tell you why. As a freshman, I took calculus. Rutgers, at that time, was largely an engineering school. That was required for the engineering students, calculus. College algebra, I had in high school. I was the only freshman in the calculus course and most of the engineering students absolutely had no idea of what was going on in the calculus class. Your mind has to work a certain way to absorb that or you have to be an excellent student, and so on. I had no trouble at all with it, calculus. I used to coach the captain of the basketball team in calculus, because--his name was Georgie Kramer, I think it was--they wanted him to pass the course. [laughter] So, they picked on me and I enjoyed doing it. My entire freshman year here, at Rutgers, was basically a review of my senior year in high school and I was a good student, but it was, more or less, not exactly boring but repetitive. It gave me, I think, the wrong idea about college. It meant that I could just coast through. I didn't have to do any studying. I don't think I ever studied as a freshman; I knew this stuff. We had an advanced chemistry course in high school; my freshman chemistry course at Rutgers was just a repetition of it. Algebra, what else did I take? English was interesting, but you didn't have to go to college to study English, really, and does that answer your question about [school]?

KP: Yes, in terms of Atlantic City.

AS: We had an excellent school system here, excellent, really.

KP: Why Rutgers? Had you considered other schools? It sounds like your parents had the vision that you would be going to college.

AS: Oh, yes, definitely. It was just so important, education, as part of not only our family, but the families of immigrants, which, basically, we were. My maternal grandfather was an immigrant, and so was my paternal grandfather--yes, they all were. My mother was the only one who was born here. She was born in Philadelphia. My father was born in Odessa, Russia, yes.

KP: Why did you choose Rutgers? Had you thought of other schools, say in Philadelphia, like Temple or Penn?

AS: Yes, a lot of my friends went to Penn. I wasn't interested in going to school in a metropolitan area, that was one [thing]. It may not have been the deciding factor, but I wasn't too happy with the Philadelphia scene at that time. I wanted to go to a college with a collegiate atmosphere and I had been up to Rutgers visiting some of my friends from Atlantic City who were students there. I met some people up there who were, to me, sort of worthwhile. They were the right kind of people and they all seemed to enjoy it. I went there, and another thing, it was the state university. The fees, at that time, were not too high and we didn't have that kind of money to spend on tuition and books and things like that. We weren't poor, I mean, we weren't "gutter poor," but we ...

KP: Money was not growing on trees.

AS: That's right. We certainly weren't upper class, upper cased or upper classed. I don't think I really considered very many other schools except Rutgers and schools in the Philadelphia area. I filled out an application and was accepted and that was it. Two of my real good friends did the same thing. They went to school with me and we went up together. Everything worked out well.

KP: Let me give Brian a chance to ask a question.

AS: Brian, what's your question?

BO: I had a question about your father. He lived in Russia.

AS: Odessa, yes.

BO: Yes. Why did he decide to leave? Was there any specific event that happened?

AS: [laughter] I don't know about any specific events, but the political situation in Russia and the fact that they were Jews there meant that they were subject to a lot of indignities and *pogroms* and, really, persecutions. My grandfather, his father, brought my--no, I think my grandfather came here first and sent over for my father and brought him here. My father came here when he was probably four or five or six, in that neighborhood. He came here, he used to peddle papers. [laughter] He'd get the great, big pile of newspapers. He was a pretty husky kid, a strong kid. They used to run up on the boardwalk and the kids that got there first used to get the gamblers [laughter] and the gamblers would give them a quarter or something like that for a newspaper. The papers then were, what? two cents, or something like that. They used to scoot up there and challenge each other to see who got there first, and then, they used to go around and peddle them in the saloons. He tells the story--at that time, in the saloons, if you went into a saloon and bought a beer for a nickel, you could eat [at] the free lunch counter. That was all they wanted from you--they wanted you to buy a beer or two. My father used to tell us about these great spreads and he was a great, big, husky kid, and how much he used to eat there when he was in there selling his newspapers. [laughter] I could tell you a lot of stories about when I was still a youngster and about this credit situation--there were a lot of whores' rooms, whorehouses, what we used to call gambling rooms, all around town. They all used to buy paint, [laughter] but nobody ever paid except it was all on credit. They used to send me around to collect the bills and the people were always very nice. There weren't any problems and they were glad to get the credit that my father extended to them. The girls in the whorehouses, they used to tease me. [laughter] God, I can still remember some of that.

BO: What was the Community Chest Fund of Absecon Island?

AS: The Community Chest Fund of Absecon Island?

BO: Yes, right.

AS: That is--I don't know what the heck they call it right today--but it's a fund that everybody contributed to, to help the poor and disadvantaged, and so on, and so forth. They still--United

Fund, it's the equivalent of the United Fund today. You're familiar with the United Fund, their requests for contributions? and most of them, they do good work.

BO: Did you do any work for them?

AS: I did, at one time. I don't now. I'm eighty years old and I did a good bit. I'd do the income tax returns for the poor and low income and elderly. That's interesting; it's valuable. Most of our clientele are people who need it. Some of them are the, we say "the needy and the greedy," but the greedy come up there to get something for nothing. Sometimes, when I'd look at their returns, I say, "Gee, you make so much money here, I feel that you should get a professional tax computer to do that, because I don't think I could get you enough credits," and so on, and so forth. I think I could, but I'd tell them that and it seems to work. [laughter] After all, there are still a lot of unfortunates here in this area and there's a lot of people who need help. The casinos do employ a heck of a lot of them. I can see it, because I get their W-2 forms and I can tell. We get some people who maybe have worked in six or eight casinos during the course of a year and they've worked here and made two hundred dollars gross and there, four hundred, and so, their total income might be, like, two or three or four thousand dollars. It's good. It's a healthy situation from that standpoint and, of course, there are a lot of minuses, but, by and large, it does a lot of good.

KP: Going to Rutgers, one question I always ask everyone is about Dean Metzger.

AS: Dean Metzger.

KP: Everyone seems to have a story about [Dean of Men] Dean Metzger. Do you have any stories about Dean Metzger and any dealings with him?

AS: Well, I remember Dean Metzger for a couple of things. First of all, he was a very impressive character, quiet, reserved, authoritarian. He had two sons, Karl and the other, I forget now. They were both undergraduates, I think, and good boys. I don't remember too many other things about him. I remember the Dean at the Ag School, his name was [Dr. Jacob G.] Lipman, and he had two sons. I think they're both fairly active in Rutgers alumni affairs today. I couldn't tell you too much about them, because I was in '35, I think they were in '31 or '32, and Metzger's sons, I think his sons were, I think so, I may be a little bit [off]. I was fortunate enough never to have been on any ...

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KP: You mentioned that you were fortunate enough not to be on any of his lists, Dean Metzger's lists. Your fraternity stayed out of trouble and you did, too.

AS: We had a good time at Rutgers. [laughter] We didn't miss anything. We used to have some of the greatest parties and we had a tremendous intramural program. I know our fraternity house, we used to play touch football, and tackle football, too, and we played basketball and softball and, I think, intramural swimming. It kind of got a lot more contact between the

fraternities, because the fraternities were a very important part of the undergraduate setup at that time. One of the debits I have about the fraternities is the fact that it tended to make you more clannish. The DUs didn't go with the Dekes and the SAMs didn't go with the Betas, and so on, and so forth. There wasn't any animosity there, but it didn't tend to bring the groups together. More to my way of thinking, that grouping, that mingling, I think, was probably due to the fact that each individual fraternity had their own activities, and so on, and so forth. I don't think the fraternities today are as an important factor there as they used to be.

KP: No, I have been told that the fraternities really dominated the campus. They held all the principal offices in the student government.

AS: That's right, yes.

KP: The newspaper.

AS: All the politics were fraternity dominated, I think, the appointments, like, the athletic teams had a manager and an assistant manager, and then, you had boys applying for it. It was--what's the right word about things that get handed down?

KP: Patronage?

AS: Patronage, the patronage. If a Deke was a manager of the team, then, you can bet that the next manager was going to be a Deke, [laughter] and so on, and so forth, and, like, these societies there, the Cap and Skull, that was more patronage, and the Inter-Fraternity Council, of course. The other things that politics had anything to do with, they were all dominated by fraternities. It's understandable, because the fraternities, I think, they had the pick of the athletes and the good-looking guys and the personality kids, and so on, and so forth. I guess that's as it should be--that's politics today. What else do you want to know?

BO: Why did you choose Sigma Alpha Mu?

AS: Well, basically, it was a Jewish-oriented fraternity and my friends, a good many of them, were all Sigma Alpha Mu. I guess they're the two main reasons, plus the fact that their membership, almost without exception, they were all people who appealed to me.

BO: Did you notice any anti-Semitic behavior at Rutgers while you were there?

AS: Some.

BO: Yes.

AS: Yes, some. A few of the things stick out in my mind. I remember, in one classroom, where we used to take assigned seats, I guess it was just axiomatic that you wrote your name or you cut your name initials in the bench or whatever. I remember my name in there one time and, underneath, somebody had written, "New York Jew," which wasn't a nice thing at that time. Some of the fraternity groups were anti-Semitic. It was more or less accepted that that was kind

of accepted behavior at the time and we learned to live with it. While we didn't cow to it, it just wasn't pleasant. I don't think the same situation exists today. To my recollection, most of the fraternities were religiously oriented, but, today, I think, universally, the regulations regarding fraternities, I think most of them state that membership is not predicated on religion, color, race, etc., and I think that's a good thing. I'm pretty sure that that might be a universal, or almost universal, set of rules today. I'm pretty sure I'm right about that. You want the stuff off the top of my head, that's what you get. [laughter]

KP: How did you feel about having to go to chapel?

AS: I relished it, I really did. We were always taught that religion is a great thing, no matter which one you choose. It's a privilege and that you should be allowed to worship as you see fit, as long as it doesn't interfere with the other person. As I told you before, I grew up between these two Catholic parishes and I would often go to Catholic services with some other boys, who we used to play ball together, get to be good friends. Some of the boys used to work for us, part-time, or, later on, full-time. I often, not often, but I went to Christmas midnight Mass many times and enjoyed the ceremony. I went to other--we used to go to some of the black services on the north side here and they'd be there, "Happy am I, my redeemer," [Mr. Soltz claps the tune of the song]. [laughter] They were more what you'd get today in some of your [music], oh, the songs they sing, the soul songs, etc. In fact, when I was in the Army, I don't ever remember my outfit having a Jewish chaplain, except maybe one time for one day, but we had Catholic chaplains, we had Methodist chaplains and they were all nice people. I used to go, whenever there was a service and I was free, I would go to one of their services, curiosity, and, actually, from a feeling that my religious background had given me about religion. I can remember one of the Catholic chaplains putting his arm around me one time, after I went to his service, he says, "Abe," he says, "you're the best Irishman we got in the outfit," because all the Catholic boys weren't religious. They all didn't go to services. Whenever I could, I would go.

KP: You liked chapel at Rutgers. It sounds like you enjoyed it.

AS: Oh, yes, yes. It was very impressive, beautiful. The organ, world-famous, I think, that organ, and the services were always beautifully connected and they weren't--I don't remember whether they were mandatory or not. I think, as a freshman, you were required to go to chapel, but, if you didn't want to go, you didn't have to. One of my good friends, who came to Rutgers later, was an accomplished organist and he was one of the few non-professional or non-licensed organists who was allowed to play on that organ there. He used to go there often. He was a Jewish boy from Atlantic City, a real character, a great guy.

KP: When you say he was a real character, why?

AS: He was a character, [laughter] very gifted, wasn't anything that he couldn't do, played on the water polo team, and you know you've got to be some kind of a nut to play water polo. [laughter] He flew an airplane when nobody flew airplanes, became very good at it.

KP: Do you remember his name, the organist?

AS: Yes, his name was Connie, (Konrad Wolf?), W-O-L-F, I think. His parents, I think, were pretty wealthy. He was in his family business. They made something that went into men's clothing. I forget whether it was haircloth or something like that, but all the clothing manufacturers used to use it and they had some sort of a monopoly on it and they were reasonably well-off. Well, here, you're bringing back a lot of memories now.

KP: Why did you major in economics in college?

AS: Well, to tell you the truth, I started out, I wanted to be a pre-med student, but, then, I sort of became disenchanted and I realized that perhaps the best direction for me to go in at the time was for me to get back in the family business. That's why I got involved in that.

KP: Why were you disenchanted with pre-med? Was it the subject matter?

AS: I honestly don't feel that I have, at my fingertips, the answer to that. I just don't know right now.

KP: Were you concerned about getting into medical school? Was that part of it?

AS: That may have been part of it. That may have been part of it, although, while I was a pre-med student, I had excellent grades.

KP: Were you concerned that, because of the quotas, you might not be able to get into med school?

AS: It could have been, very, very possibly, although some of my friends whose grades weren't as good as mine continued on and went and got into med school, and some of them before that, but I just don't ...

KP: You do not know why you made the switch.

AS: I don't want to mislead you.

KP: Okay.

AS: And I don't want to just guess.

KP: Yes.

AS: I just don't have the answer right now.

KP: You were not in ROTC.

AS: No, no.

KP: How did you get out? I am curious, because almost everyone was in ROTC for at least two years.

AS: That's right. That was very interesting. Number one, I played the clarinet in the high school band, and so, they had me down to play in the band in ROTC, or aside from ROTC. Number two, I had the flattest feet of anybody at Rutgers at the time. [laughter] So, I think that's why they excused me or didn't want me in there, whatever that was, while it had nothing to do with my acceptance into the Army--at the time I went in, as long as you could breathe, they took you, or it wasn't quite that bad when I went in.

KP: It was getting there. [laughter]

AS: Yes, maybe, maybe, yes. I went in the Army and my commission originated in August 1942 or July '42, sometime in that [period]--pre-Rutgers or pre-Army or what?

KP: One of my last questions on Rutgers is, you had a favorite professor, [Henry L.] Van Mater, who taught chemistry.

AS: Yes, he was a great guy, very, very down to earth, knew his stuff, and chemistry classes, for freshmen, I think the chemistry classes and the physics classes were enormous. I think we had, like, a hundred students in that and he knew how to relate to all of them and how to get his message across. I used to kibitz with him. We had a nice relationship, a nice feeling there, and I still remember him. There weren't that many professors that I do remember, but he was one of them.

KP: What about your classmates? You mentioned that it was rough going in the Depression. How many dropped out? Did you have any friends who just could not make it financially?

AS: I would guess quite a few. I don't know what percentage.

KP: Yes.

AS: And I have no data on it at all. I do remember, none of my close friends or none of the people I knew real well dropped out, but I think, at that time, too, unless it was a real bad situation back home, or something like that, that I think the school made it possible for some of those boys to continue. They found jobs or something like that. I don't have any authentic information about that.

KP: You do not have any percentage. When you were going college, there was a big peace movement on a lot of campuses. Do you remember any of that at Rutgers?

AS: A lot of what?

KP: Activism in peace movements?

AS: Peace movements on the campuses?

KP: Yes.

AS: No, I don't.

KP: Yes.

AS: I don't remember, because I got out in 1935. That horrible situation in Europe had not yet started to fester, I don't think. The German drive toward the East, I don't think that became really open until much later. I don't remember any peace movements there, not at that time. There may have been, but I don't remember any.

KP: Politically, how did most students feel about the New Deal and Roosevelt?

AS: Well, I, for one, was very pro Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He, to me, exemplified a lot of things that were important to us. I say us, I mean all of the country, and I registered to vote, I was twenty-one in 19--let's see, fifteen and twenty-one is thirty-six--I registered to vote in 1936, or did we vote earlier? No, I think it was 1936, I registered to vote. I registered as a Democrat, to be able to vote for Roosevelt, and don't you think my father wasn't contacted by the local Republicans about his son registering as a Democrat. [laughter] There weren't any repercussions about it, but ...

KP: It did raise some eyebrows.

AS: It raised eyebrows and it got a lot flak, believe me, [laughter] because politics played an important part in the awarding of contracts, and so on, and so forth. If you weren't registered right and you weren't voting right, you weren't getting the welcome mat. [laughter] I can still remember that. I changed, soon after, to register as a Republican, because, basically, I've always been a Republican in my political thinking.

KP: It sounds like you thought very highly of Roosevelt.

AS: Yes.

KP: And the New Deal?

AS: And the New Deal. I didn't have the same feeling about all the Kennedys. [laughter]

KP: Since we are on politics, what did you think of Harry Truman?

AS: Well, I'll tell you, at the time, we used to feel that Harry Truman was a horse's ass, [laughter] just in those terms, but, in retrospect and in reviewing history, he comes up with a much better impression, or our impression of him is much better. I've never really been politically active. I do insist on my franchise to vote. [laughter] That's a good question about Truman. My son is a Democrat and he was a Truman man. Where are we going?

KP: One of the things that Brian and the class has to study is *The Case of the Nazi Professor*.

AS: A case of?

KP: The Nazi professor who was at Douglass College, New Jersey College for Women, Hauptmann. Do you remember anything of Hauptmann?

AS: I missed what you said, a lot of it.

KP: One of the things that Brian and the history class are studying is the controversy between Hauptmann and Bergel of the Douglass German Department. Do you remember anything of that controversy from the 1930s?

AS: Not too much. I don't remember it as being a campus issue. I'm pretty sure it took place sometime while I was at Rutgers, the kidnapping. [Editor's Note: The trial of Bruno Hauptmann, accused (and subsequently found guilty) of kidnapping and murdering famed aviator Charles A. Lindbergh's son, took place amid unprecedented media coverage and public interest at the Hunterdon County Courthouse in Flemington, New Jersey, in January and February of 1935.]

KP: Not the kidnapping. There was the Hauptman who was in the Douglass College German Department.

AS: Oh, oh.

KP: Apparently, Bergel claimed he was fired because he was an anti-Nazi. Do you remember anything of that?

AS: I can't buy that. I remember taking a course in German and the German professor, I would say, was not really qualified as a good teacher, definitely not qualified. His name may have been Hauptmann or it may have--I'm pretty sure it probably was--but I can't honestly say that the anti-German feeling had anything to do with his firing. If it's the same professor that I remember, he would have been there in the year '32-'33. Is that right?

KP: I know it was in the mid-1930s that the controversy erupted.

AS: Right. Well, that would be in the early '30s. I think he was replaced shortly after '32 or '33 and, if it was, I would have to say that it was because he had outlived his usefulness. I think he was getting older, he couldn't project to the class, he used a set of notes which he had been using for all these years, and so on. He was just not the kind of professor who was college caliber. This is my impression, I may be completely wrong. That's about as much as I could say about it.

KP: As events were heating up in Europe, how did you or your family feel about what America should do about what was going on in Germany, and then, when World War II broke out?

AS: Well, we were really quite concerned, because all of us all still had family there. Oh, we used to contribute to all the funds and we used to go to lectures here. I remember going to a

lecture sponsored by one of our Jewish organizations here. Pierre van Paassen, does that name ring a bell to you? He was a Dutchman who, I think, was a lobbyist for the Jews in Europe, but he was so sincere and he was so well-informed and he was so able to communicate, to get across to an audience. He made the lecture tours all through the country. He wrote many books. The one that I think got me first interested in him was possibly one that we had as a textbook. It was called *Days of Our Years* [published in 1939], maybe. Pierre van Paassen was a German, or a Dutchman, not Jewish, I think he was maybe Lutheran [Unitarian], or so on, but he used to lobby for aid to the Europeans subject to these atrocities.

KP: How did you and your family feel about Palestine in the 1930s? Did you think that was a hope for European Jews?

AS: Yes, that was, Zionism was, it was sort of a dream at that time.

KP: You did not envision a State of Israel in the 1930s.

AS: Not as it is now, but, certainly, as a possibility. Of course, the politics over there, the English mandate--I can't think of the name of it right now--was not too well received here. There was still the bad odor of the treatment of the Jews and the other minority groups in Europe and, of course, certainly, we were not going to encourage that at all. It's too well documented, I mean, now, for me to comment on it much more than what I've just said.

KP: When did you think the United States might be going to war with Germany? Did you have a sense that we were destined for war and that that was a good thing, or would you have preferred to stay out in 1939, 1940 or 1941?

AS: No, in '39, '40, '41, the situation got to be so desperate over there that our feeling was that unless we joined with the Allies that it was hopeless, that unless we did join and do everything we could that the Germans would be able to conquer the whole world and, if they did, as such, you know what we Jews could expect. We'd wind up being a parchment lampshade.

KP: Do you have any recollections of when you sensed how bad German anti-Semitism was in the 1930s, that this was a departure?

AS: I think that the *Kristallnacht* was probably the crystallizer there. [Editor's Note: On the night of November 9-10, 1938, SA stormtroopers and German civilians, with the cooperation of the Nazi regime, carried out a series of attacks against Jewish communities throughout Germany and Austria known as *Kristallnacht*.]

KP: This was really different from ...

AS: That it was no longer--and, of course, the great propaganda carrier was the show, *Cabaret*, that I think that sort of woke everybody up. It became something that they saw, rather than something that they read about, and we didn't have television the way we have it today, but I think that helped a lot, and, of course, the propaganda of all the organizations, Jewish and other minority groups and those in favor there.

KP: A lot of people I have interviewed have very distinct memories of *Bund* activity in New Jersey and not too far from here is Lakehurst, where the *Hindenburg* blew up. [Editor's Note: The German-American *Bund* (based on the earlier Friends of New Germany) operated from 1936 until December 1941, when it was outlawed, as a pro-Nazi group. On May 6, 1937, the German airship *Hindenburg* caught fire while attempting to dock at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey.]

AS: I don't have too much recollection of that and I think the only--I don't remember, except that we were aware that these activities [took place], not only in Lakehurst. In Vineland, Bridgeton area, up around Salem, they had some Ku Klux Klan activities, but there wasn't too much overt Ku Klux Klan setup here. I don't remember too much about it. We knew that it existed and we were aware of it and probably did whatever we could about it. It made us, I think, a lot more belligerent individuals, rather than passive. It taught us that we were not to take any shit from anybody, in just those words, and I think it helped build our characters a lot. It was a horrible, nasty situation and we should all be dedicated to "never again."

KP: Were you surprised that war broke out in the Pacific? What did you know of Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s?

AS: We never expected anything like Pearl Harbor, never. In fact, Pearl Harbor, when they attacked Pearl Harbor, my family and my wife and my college buddy, Norman Kramer, who was the captain of the swimming team, Class of '33 at Rutgers, we were having dinner with my mother at our house, he and, I think, at that time, he was married, his wife. We just couldn't believe it. It's one of those real shocks. [Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.] Very shortly after that, he went in the Navy. He was a gunner in the North Atlantic on a DE [destroyer escort], I think, and that was rough duty and, later, he became a lighter-than-air balloon pilot. They used to fly those little zeppelins and he used to fly the kind that were self-propelled. We used to take, on our landing boats, we had the smaller ones, not self-propelled. We had them up on cables. We were trained to try to impose these in an area where the strafe bombers would have to fly over them or, if they flew into them, they were [damaged], but, of course, that part of our services never was utilized, because I don't think that turned out to be practical. That was December 1941 and that brings us up just about to where we want to go about the service, huh?

KP: What was your reaction to Pearl Harbor? Did you expect to be going to war right away? You had been out of college for a while, working in the family business for six years.

AS: Yes. Well, I was married and I had a daughter. My daughter was born in 1940 and, at that time, I don't remember when they initiated the draft, but I guess it was right after Pearl Harbor; I don't think it was before Pearl Harbor.

KP: There was a peacetime draft, but you were not called for that. [Editor's Note: The Selective Service Act of 1940 required all twenty-one to thirty-five-year-old males to register for the draft.

These age parameters were expanded to eighteen to forty-five years of age after the United States entered the war.]

AS: No, I was not called for that, but we were aware of the categories that they were calling and the timing, and so on, and so forth of it. I don't think I was eligible for the draft. I think I had registered for it and my brother had, too, but I don't recall exactly when we registered for the draft, whether it was right before Pearl Harbor or it probably was before Pearl Harbor, because the thinking, at that time, was that we were going to have to get involved some way or another with England, with the Allies.

KP: When did you enlist and why did you choose the Army?

AS: Let me get you some pretty authentic [information], our book, from my outfit in the Army. It's a beautifully done, complete record and you may want to look through it, maybe want to take some [copies]. Let me read you a couple things here.

KP: Okay.

AS: "In the darkest moments of World War II, the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff were nevertheless grimly preparing offensives to regain the ground lost and bring the Axis ultimately to abject surrender. One fact stood out--there was no land route of approach, and so, the British and American forces could come to grips with the Germans and the Japs only by amphibious attack. Not only would strong armies have to be raised, trained and equipped, but those armies would also have to be provided with ships and boats and trained beach parties in order to assault the fortresses of Europe and the vast island empire of Japan. The British and American Navies were doing all they could to prepare, to procure ships and small landing craft and to train crews for them, but the US Navy in particular were necessarily preoccupied with meeting the menace of German submarines in the Atlantic and the threat of the now superior Japanese naval forces in Central Pacific. In order to better distribute the burden of preparing the amphibious forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned to the Army the task of creating a major amphibious training center and of recruiting and training specialized units capable of operating landing craft and handling the engineering work on the beachheads. They established an amphibian training center at a camp in Massachusetts, in Camp Edwards in Massachusetts, to procure equipment and personnel for specialized amphibian units. To procure personnel with appropriate civilian background as officers and noncommissioned officers, an intensive recruiting program was inaugurated with headquarters in Washington, employing extensive publicity and cooperating with the US Power Squadrons, yacht clubs, other organizations concerned with maritime activities. This drive resulted in many hundreds of civilians being enlisted or commissioned during the Summer of '42." That's me. "Procurement of boats was handled through the Navy Bureau of Ships, so not to duplicate effort. In accordance with a decision, the Engineer Amphibian units were restricted to craft less than a hundred feet long, on the general theory that these would be adequate for the short distance across the English Channel, where brigades were initially expected to be employed. Every day brought a fresh influx of personnel and equipment, which included Coast Guard, Marine officers, battle-tested Britishers with experience in commando raids, experts in civil engineering, navigation, boat repair and communications. Camps were opened at Waquoit and Cotuit and docks were built to provide appropriate training

bases for the boat units." [Editor's Note: The US Army Amphibious Command opened several satellite camps of Camp Edwards along the Cape Cod shoreline, including Camp Washburn on Washburn Island, Falmouth (Waquoit), Camp Havedoneit in Osterville and Camp Candoit in Cotuit.] That probably is where maybe I want to start here with you and we can proceed from there. Am I running out of time?

KP: No, take your time.

AS: Am I giving it to you the way you want it?

KP: Yes.

AS: You're accomplishing what you want to accomplish?

KP: Yes.

AS: Okay. Now, as a kid, I spent a lot of time on the beach. We learned to handle these lifeguard boats. We used to fish out of them, kibitz with them. We'd take our girlfriends out riding, and so on, and I was always interested in boats. I joined the Power Squadron. They mention that in here. I was pretty knowledgeable in paints as used for maintaining and camouflaging boats. I had a real good background in that. I had a college education, if you want to assume that Rutgers is a college. [laughter] I had a college education. I had been the contact man for our firm with many international construction outfits who were building power plants here and doing other things, had beautiful recommendations.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----  
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KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Abraham Soltz on February 9, 1996, in Ventnor, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

BO: ... Brain Oaks.

KP: You were saying how you developed an expertise about painting and boats. You were a member of the Power Squadron.

AS: Right, and I had quite a bit of liaison with the engineers and the construction men, with the people who were building power plants and doing things locally here. One of the companies, they built the big power plant over in, right across the river, Great Egg Harbor River and they remodeled the Atlantic City Electric Company. They knew, at that time ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

AS: I was very *gung ho* at this time. We were all pretty well charged up about the war and what it would mean to us, as Americans and us as Jews, and I really wanted to get in to do my share. My wife and baby were not very happy about that.

Mia Soltz: And who answered the door when the telegram came? [laughter]

AS: I went for several interviews. I was interviewed by the Coast Guard, I was interviewed by the Navy and I was interviewed by the Army, because I had learned about this Amphibian Command operation. I filled out the applications, but, with this one here, that was the one that, basically, I was really interested in. First of all, with my flat feet, I didn't want to get any part of the service where I would have to walk or march. [laughter] I always liked the boats and I knew something about it. I felt qualified to get in it and the Engineer Amphibian Command just seemed to be, from what I've already read to you, just seemed to me where I was best suited. I don't remember when I sent my application in, but, in I guess June or July '42, I got a telegram, which my mother or you ...

SS: Your mother; I knew.

AS: My mother answered and it was addressed to me, telling me that I am now a second lieutenant in the United States Army Corps of Engineers. My mother was very, very, very unhappy. [laughter] I was her baby boy and she certainly didn't want me in the service, but that's the way it started. I knew absolutely nothing about military discipline, military service.

KP: You had not had ROTC.

AS: I had not had ROTC and, in fact, all that information, I just wasn't interested in it.

KP: How much did you know about the Army before that, from movies or from reading or anything? What was your image of the Army? Does any memory stick out, especially since you mentioned you did not know anything?

AS: My memories of the Army are probably from George M. Cohan's, [Irving Berlin's], *This is the Army, Mr. Jones*, [laughter] and almost nothing. You see, in 1919, I was only four years old and my father was not in the Army. I don't remember exactly, I don't think he was old enough at that time--well, no, he had to be, I don't remember. I think he may have been involved in a later draft or some military whatever. I don't remember about that, but I don't have very many recollections of World War I.

KP: You were not in ROTC. You were a second lieutenant. [laughter]

AS: I was commissioned directly as a civilian, primarily because of my background with boats, my membership in the United States Power Squadron, I had a college education and the letters of recommendation that I had from these different people in construction companies. I was ordered to report to Camp Edwards in Massachusetts. I went up there [laughter] and I had absolutely no idea of what was to be expected of me, or so on, and so forth. When I got there, I had to report to whatever office and they gave me some papers and told me to report to a lieutenant sergeant. Now, with my brilliant background in the Army, I'm trying to figure out, "What the hell is a lieutenant sergeant?" I know about a lieutenant colonel, I've read the officers' book when I got the papers, but I couldn't figure out what a lieutenant sergeant was. When I finally got to where

this guy was, here's a lieutenant whose last name is Sergeant. [laughter] So, that's Lieutenant Sergeant. I remember, later, a captain whose name was Captain and he was Captain Captain, [laughter] but, by that time, I had figured this out. So, that's one of the things. I got there and, of course, we went through some basic training and it was all along an accelerated basis. They went through, I think it was six weeks of training. If you got there in the third week, you went through three, four, five and six, and then, back in one and two, or maybe just three, four, five and six. I think I got there in three or four. They issued you uniforms. I remember when they issued me shoes. You stand on a platform with a piece of paper on it and they gave you a bucket of sand to hold in each hand. You're barefoot and they draw a line around your feet and that line has the length and width of your shoes. They issued you shoes and, with the bucket of sand, it spread your feet out. [laughter] I remember telling the guy who was issuing the shoes, "Hey, I can't wear those shoes." I said, "I'm flatfooted. I never wore anything but orthopedic corrective shoes in my life." He said to me, "You'll wear those goddamn shoes," [laughter] and I put them on and, the next day, we went on a five-mile hike. I wore those boots. We trudged through mud and water and everything else and I can remember getting back, finally, and my feet were all stained with that tannic acid stain that looks like you've been painted with iodine or something like that, but I got along. We went from the basic training at Camp Edwards, where you were supposed to learn everything you had to know, we're put right into one of these brigades. I think, first, it was the Engineer Amphibian Command. There were supposed to be eight regiments or eight brigades, I forget now; get some of this, which is so well-written.

KP: You were sent to Harvard, too.

AS: Yes.

KP: That came after you were first put in the brigade. You were first put into the brigade before you were sent to Harvard.

AS: Right, right.

SS: I'll tell you one thing. We were on the Cape in the summer and we were in Florida in the winter, not saying where in Florida.

KP: You followed your husband.

SS: No, we just used to visit. I took my daughter. We'd stay a month or two months. It was very hard to get housing. They stuck you in a room, and then, everybody cooked together, you know that setup. The only good thing about the Army was that he made such wonderful contacts. Now, this week, we had somebody coming down for the sailing convention and he was with my husband. He came to visit, he stayed all afternoon. So, we made beautiful contacts.

AS: That's how I got all the books out.

SS: So, we don't see them often, but we do know them, and there's another one, his name was Tex. You've got to tell them that story about Tex. That's the best story.

AS: [laughter] We'll get to that later.

SS: You must listen to that one.

AS: Oh, here, "The Engineer Amphibian Command was activated June 1942 with a mission of organizing, equipping and training eight Engineer Amphibian brigades, each capable of transporting and supporting a reinforced infantry division in a shore-to-shore amphibious attack." Now, that shore-to-shore is a key for our operations right on through, because the Navy handled all of these operations that originated on a ship. Where it was ship-to-shore, they handled that, but where the initial embarkation of the troops, and so on, was on a friendly shore, we handled that. "First Engineer Amphibian Brigade was activated using two engineer combat regiments as its nucleus. Five days later, the Second Brigade came into being. During June and July 1942, the Allied situation throughout the world grew more perilous. The Afrika Korps routed the British Eighth Army and reached striking distance of the Nile. [German Field Marshal Fedor] von Bock's great group of armies started its one-thousand-mile-plunge from Orel to Stalingrad and the Japanese, despite the naval battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, still threatened Australia. To the Combined Chiefs of Staff, meeting in London in July, the most serious danger appeared to be that the German summer offensive would succeed in knocking Russia out of the war. In order to do what little they could to relieve the pressure on the hard-pressed Red Armies, they agreed to launch a cross-Channel invasion of France, even though the forces at their disposal were pitifully small. To do this, they would need more landing craft and crews than were available in the British Isles. So, the First Brigade, in July, was ordered to England as fast as it could be moved. This brigade was in sad state of confusion, with almost no equipment and all ranks barely oriented as to their technical missions and training objectives." That was one great plus that we had, because we had a couple more months of training and orientation and getting used to it and getting more supplies, although we were awfully inadequately supplied. "Nevertheless, equipment was rushed from all parts of the country and it was brought to full strength and sailed from New York in August. Hardly had it debarked in England when it became apparent that the German drive was slowing down in the Caucasus and was being brought to a standstill at Stalingrad and it would not be necessary to launch the major attack across the Channel during that year. Given this breathing spell, the Navies of Great Britain and the US set about reversing the decision made in May to have the Army run small landing craft and, in England, they actually took away our First Brigade's boats. Back in the United States, confusion, understandably inexperienced performance of some of the engineer boatmen in their first maneuvers in England, led to the Navy's argument that only the boys in blue," meaning Navy, "could satisfactorily handle the boats. Colonel [Arthur G.] Trudeau, Army Engineer Amphibian Command Chief of Staff, made a flying trip to visit MacArthur in Australia to see if MacArthur was interested in continuing the development of the amphibian brigades. At this time, MacArthur was engaged in his Battle of the Marne in the Owen Stanley Mountains and in the steaming jungles and plantations of Milne Bay. Though he had been successful in driving the Japanese back toward their bases on the northeast coast of New Guinea, lack of waterborne transportation had caused him to rely almost exclusively on his pitifully few airplanes and he was necessarily in a very receptive mood." Now, waterborne transportation, as we mentioned there, that's us. "He promptly informed the War Department he would like one Engineer Amphibian brigade immediately, to be followed in '43 by a second one," and the second one was the one I was in. "The War Department reduced the number of

brigades to be created to three from eight. Thus, the Navy's campaign to keep the Army out of the boat business succeeded to the extent that the amphibians in the European Theater were henceforth to be nothing more than shore party engineers." That's Europe. "While in the Pacific, under Nimitz, there would be no specialized amphibian engineers at all. Only in the Southwest Pacific were the engineers, the amphibian engineers, given a chance to operate in the manner originally contemplated in the dark days of 1942 May." Now, that brings you up-to-date about the formation of our outfit, our training, and where we went and what we did over there.

KP: You were really trained to be both Army and Navy, in a sense, in many naval skills.

AS: Most of us had more sea time in our outfit than the Navy personnel had in their outfit and we used to bitch about it, because, in the Navy, when you have a certain period of sea time, you get--what do they call it?--a fogy, which is an extra five percent pay. We had all this sea time, we never got a fogy for that and that was a sore point, but we didn't have time to argue about that at that time. Now, that brings you up-to-date, basically, to our outfit getting activated. Of course, the First Brigade went to England. The Second Brigade was shipped to the Southwest Pacific quickly, in a hurry. They really didn't have the time to get the training that we got. In fact, Joe (Bartlet's?) son, who lived right across the street from me, went to the Southwest Pacific with the Second Brigade and I have some data about him. He was not a Rutgers man. He got pretty well shot up over there. I don't know whether he's still around or not, but, basically, they did not have as much training as we had. Now, we started out, we went from Camp Edwards, up in the Cape of Massachusetts, a boat outfit went to Cotuit, which is about fifteen miles, I guess, from Camp Edwards, but right on the Cape, the town of Cotuit, near Falmouth, and so on, and so forth. We had to build a bivouac area there. We lived there, no hot water--they were sort of indoctrinating us to what we were going to have to put up with. Initially, we were training in boats which had been donated by, I think, the Coast Guard. These were little cabin cruisers, thirty-five, forty-foot, something like that, twenty-five-footers, and we got our basic training, or initial training, in those boats. We used to go from Falmouth to Popponesset to Martha's Vineyard, and so on, and so forth.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed this part of the trip.

AS: We did. That was great. We knew where every gin mill was between--what's the name of the northernmost part of it?--all the way down to, I forget the names of the [Prince] Edward Islands. We used to visit them regularly and they knew us, too, and, very shortly thereafter, we got a few landing craft, which were in horrible condition, but these were the kind of boats that we were going to be using. We were there, oh, I don't know, from--well, we're there a couple months--and, as you say, enjoying it. We really did have a great time. This was something I loved to do, run boats, and so on, and so forth. Then, they sent us in groups to Harvard, for celestial navigation and piloting seamanship. They sent some of the boys to New Orleans to work with the people who were turning out the Higgins landing boats [LCVPs] and they sent some of them--where else?--I forget now where else. I've got it in here. Anyway, I went to Harvard and we took a course in celestial navigation under Dr. Bok, who became the chief astronomer for the country of Australia later. He's a brilliant man and this was his assistant there. She did most of the teaching and she was a great person and she was so sincere. This, she sent me, I forget now, June 1943 ...

KP: Her name was Frances.

AS: Frances Wright.

KP: She actually did most of the teaching.

AS: She did, always waiting to help with problems, etc. "Wish I could go along. Meantime, best wishes from Frances." Now, she used to keep in touch. I think I've got some other pictures in there of the class. Now, while we were up taking this course, our outfit moved to Camp Gordon Johnston, which is in Carrabelle, Florida. This is on the Gulf Coast, the northern Gulf Coast--they've got a special name for it--but it's like halfway between Tallahassee and Pensacola.

KP: The Panhandle?

AS: The Panhandle, that's what I'm trying to think of. Well, to make a long story short, they moved, our outfit moved, to Carrabelle while we were still at Harvard. From Harvard, we came home. They gave us enough time to drive from Boston to Atlantic City, and then, take a plane and get down there. When we got there, we were shocked, because Camp Gordon Johnston was back in the swamps, not too far from the coast, but it was just a horrible place and cold down there in the wintertime. It was colder there than it is here, and we had to build everything. You couldn't dig down there to make latrines and things, because, after you went this much below, it was all swamp. We built the bivouac areas down there and our boats were out that little creek, I forget now, but we used to go around Dog Island and train. Our mission down there, primarily, was to acquaint ourselves with the equipment and, also, to train infantry troops in loading and unloading and in getting them familiar with riding in a boat. Now, we used to take out, like, twenty of these landing craft, filled with infantry troops, and, if the weather was real flat, we would just let them drift in a circle like. We'd run around them in our faster boats to create waves, to get these guys used to the motion. These guys used to get so seasick; the seagulls used to come to feed on that stuff. [laughter] They used to come from miles and miles and miles around. It was a riot. To us, it was funny, but this was our job and we were learning how to do it, because, after all, very few of our personnel, even though we were supposed to have a pretty vast background in boats and marine work, a lot of them were rookies and a lot of the enlisted personnel were the rejects from any outfit. They put out a call through personnel that they wanted so many privates. What would happen was, the outfit that had nineteen privates, that wanted to unload them, they used to send them to us. [laughter] We had these guys, most of them were rebels, and we had to train them in how to run a boat and what to do. A lot of these guys never saw a boat before and a lot of the guys who were engineers never saw a motor before--I'm talking about mechanics for the boats--but we did a marvelous job, I think, in getting these guys acquainted with the equipment and getting ourselves oriented.

KP: Where were you in the chain of command? You were a lieutenant.

AS: I was a lieutenant. I became a navigation officer. In the chain of command there, you had a company commander, you had an adjutant and you had a navigation officer, I guess, and the lieutenants were boat unit, boat convoy, personnel. Each guy would have, like, eight or ten boats

and I was the fellow who would have to take them where they would go, teach them how to handle the equipment, teach them how to plot a course and show them what was emergency navigation, and so on, and so forth. I had to get them there--that was my job. The guy who was the lieutenant who was in charge of a group of boats, he had to orient these guys and teach them how to handle the boats, and so on, and so forth.

KP: In a sense, you were on one boat, directing the whole group of boats.

AS: That's right, yes.

KP: Did you supervise any of the enlisted men directly?

AS: Yes. My boat, which was always the lead boat, I had a radioman ...

KP: You had your own boat.

AS: Oh, yes, that's right.

KP: You had responsibilities for all the boats.

AS: For the convoy, that's right, yes. I had a radioman, I had an engineer, a mechanic, and I had--what the heck we used to call them?--just a mate. I don't even remember what we used to call them, "Hey, you," you know. [laughter] His job was to be a mate, like, on the boat. I think, in addition to that, we had a coxswain, a guy who actually did the steering of the boat and the handling and he had to know his stuff. Each fellow was a specialist and we were training them to be that good a person in their particular job.

SS: Don't forget to tell them about when we got to Florida. This is the best story.

AS: When we got what?

SS: When you got to Florida. This is a good story.

AS: [laughter] These are some of the boats that we used and this is actually part of the training down in--well, this is Martha's Vineyard.

KP: You mentioned you got some misfits. Did you get a bunch of guys who said, "I joined the Army, I did not expect to be on boats?"

AS: That's right. You know what the answer there is, "Tough shit." [laughter] Now, see, our outfit was, our regiment was, a boat battalion and a shore battalion. The shore battalions were the engineers. Our job was to put them ashore with the first wave in any assault landing or any dock building program. They had to set up the stations on the beach, ammunition, medical supplies, gasoline, whatever, food, so on, and so forth, evacuation of the wounded. They had to build roads, or they had to lay down that kind of equipment, that a truck could run over without

getting bogged down in the sand. They had to eliminate any hazards, like coral reefs or things like that. That was the engineer's job, the shore battalion's job.

KP: You were strictly to stay with the boats.

AS: Our job was the boats. We had to get the boats, we had to see that the boats did what they were supposed to do--load personnel, load equipment, load ammunition, load this, whatever--and we had to get that to where it would be usable.

KP: As part of your original mission, were you also to evacuate the wounded?

AS: Evacuate the wounded, absolutely, yes. That's a very important part, because the casualties in an actual operation were sometimes so serious that the faster you got the wounded to someplace where they could be transported, by helicopter or airplane or whatever, or to a base hospital somewhere, where they could get the kind of treatment that they deserved, that was all part of it.

SS: You're not telling him that good story.

AS: Ah, I'll get to that. [laughter]

KP: Had you traveled much outside of New Jersey before the war?

AS: Yes, I had been around. I used to get around before I got married.

KP: Had you been to Florida or New England before the war?

AS: Yes, I'd been all through New England as a young buck. We'd get a car, a couple guys, and we'd go all up through New England. I went to New Orleans. A fellow I'd met from Tulane, who was in my fraternity, was a captain of the football team in New Orleans, a captain of the Tulane team, and he invited me down there. I went down there. This was in, like, the middle '30s; an airplane ride down there, I think, like, eight hours or ten hours to get there. It was all different then.

KP: Florida was not a shock to you, in the sense that you had been to the South.

AS: Yes, I'd been to Florida a few times.

SS: But, this place in Florida was the worst.

AS: But, never to anyplace like Carrabelle. See these pictures here? This is Carrabelle, actually, and our base was, oh, I don't know, five minutes by jeep from where we used to keep the boats. Here's some of the boats we used and the personnel. I'm going to let you take this book with you if you want.

KP: No, we can get it through interlibrary loan.

AS: Oh.

KP: I do not want to risk losing it.

AS: Right.

KP: Unless someone is going to give it to us for good, I try not to take anything.

AS: Right. See, here's a map, Camp Gordon Johnston, this is Dog Island here. We used to take our boats--I forget the name of this little creek here--but we used to keep them over here on the beach, run out here, around here, go out and this is the Gulf of Mexico. At the end of [training], when we were ready to leave Camp Gordon Johnston, we took all the boats that we had and we took them across the Gulf of Mexico, to--oh, I forget the name of the little place on the west coast--and, on the east coast, we went through the canal and across Lake Okeechobee, and then, through the other side and came out at Fort Pierce. There, we turned over all of our boats to the Navy--I think we turned them over to the Navy, it may have been the Army--and then, we went to California. I was talking about the balloon up here--this is how we had them rigged up, with these cables.

KP: You never did that in combat.

AS: We never did that in combat. It would've been useless and we'd have to get those darn things over there. These were set up so that they would be used on the East Coast here, because they felt that the Germans might try to strafe our beaches here and this might help prevent it, but here are some of the actual pictures of us in training. I don't know if any of this is what you're looking for or not.

KP: It sounds like you took very well to all of the training, despite your lack of Army background. Were there any problems that you ran into, besides the march that was not too good on your feet? Did you make any mistakes with celestial navigation, which is not an easy thing to do?

AS: I'll tell you, the biggest problem, the biggest SNAFU I got involved with in the Army, was trying to find out where Lieutenant Sergeant was. [laughter] The rest of it, you've got to picture the situation--I would say, ballpark figures, at least ninety percent of the people in the Army didn't know right foot from the left foot, as far as, "Which way I'm going to start to march." Most of us were civilians. If you tried to keep your mind open and tried to stay alert, you were better off than ninety percent of the people. Ten percent of the guys would look down their nose at you, because you were a rookie, you didn't know from anything, but we got along all right and we did our job. We were in there to do certain things and we learned how to do it and we did it. The fact that this was almost my second love, the boats and the training, celestial navigation, geez, that, to me, was just the most marvelous thing that could've happened, send me to Harvard University.

KP: It sounds like you also enjoyed your months at Harvard.

AS: I did, I did. We had a great [time] and we had a nice bunch of guys. Whenever we had a chance, we'd raise hell and we had a lot of fun.

SS: Well, the one that came the other day, he was in the service with you.

AS: Yes. That's right.

SS: A lot of them were married with kids and they were really a nice bunch of boys. We've kept in contact with a few of them. I just want him to tell you this story. This is really a good story.

AS: [laughter] Mom loves this story.

SS: I love this story.

AS: We're down in Camp Gordon Johnston, Carrabelle. We're there, we're working. I mean, we're putting our time in and we're working seven days a week for a good, long time, because we know that we're going to be sent over damn quick. It's imminent. We're just awaiting our orders and we work hard and we're trying to learn as much as we can. We finally get a weekend pass. Now, there's six or eight or ten of us, get in a command car and we go to Tallahassee. We're looking forward to hot water. We get a room in a hotel, the only one hotel in Carrabelle. We were lucky enough to get it. We got a great, big room with those fans on the ceiling [laughter] and I think each one of us must've taken a dozen hot showers. We hadn't had any hot water for weeks. Now, we also got all the whiskey we could buy and we got as much ice as we could get and we're sitting around, drinking, telling stories and having a reasonably good time. Now, these guys are starting to feel their oats. They're saying, "We've got to get dates. We've got to get some girls. How are we going to get girls here?" "Don't worry, fellows, I'll get you dates," you know me and my big mouth. Now, I know we're in Tallahassee, Tallahassee is the home of the Florida State Teachers College, I think. I get the phonebook; I go down the Greek letters until I come across a name which I know is a sorority. I call up the sorority [laughter] and I say, "You girls invited us over for lunch." I said, "How do we get there?" She says, "Who is this?" "Lieutenant Soltz." She said, "How many of there are you?" I forget, I said eight or something like that. She says, "Wait a minute." [laughter] She comes back on the phone; she gives us complete detailed instructions, like I gave you, how to get to where their sorority house is. We go over there and there's a bunch of really nice looking girls over there and they're very friendly and we have a great time. [laughter] We spend the afternoon with them, we take them out to dinner and some of the fellows stayed there overnight, I guess. I don't know.

SS: He was married at this point.

AS: I went back to camp, but, to make a long story short, three or four of these girls married the same number of guys that I had taken over there with us that day and they went right out to California.

SS: They left school and went to California.

AS: Left school and went to California with us. That's the story she loves.

SS: Is that a story?

KP: That is a story.

SS: They didn't know these boys.

KP: You had just simply randomly picked this sorority.

SS: He picked the name.

AS: That's right. I picked the name which I knew was a sorority. I know that Sigma Alpha Mu is a fraternity, but I remembered that the Zeta something or other was a sorority, and so on, and so forth.

KP: These guys and these girls just got married.

AS: They got married.

SS: Yes, and a few of them really worked out very well.

AS: We were there about, I don't know, three or four or five more weeks and, in that time, the girls just moved right out to California with us.

SS: One was his good friend that married, (Scales?), that married that girl. They were very happy.

KP: The marriage endured.

SS: Well, some of them did. I don't know what happened.

AS: One of them did. Now, I'm not ...

KP: Not sure about the others?

AS: Not sure about the others. I knew one of them didn't.

KP: Yes.

AS: The others, I can't vouch for.

SS: Did you ever hear of such a thing? The girls just left with the boys. This was wartime, things were different then. Things were different, even the stories.

AS: Now, I've got to tell you this story.

KP: Let me actually pause.

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

KP: You have been doing fine.

AS: [laughter] Anyway, we completed our training there and we're sent to California to be sent overseas. We're stationed at Fort Ord--this is where we get stationed--and Fort Ord, our barracks are up on top of a cliff like and as far as you can see from the edge of this cliff is fields of flowers and vegetables. The Burpee seed place was right there and I forget the name of the farm group there--it's not important--but they raised lettuce, carrots, what kind of crops? I forget what you call them, all food. They had top priority, because they were feeding the Army. Our boats were moored at Monterey, right out on the Monterey Peninsula, where the Pebble Beach Racquet Club is and where Carmel is, and so on, and so forth. At the Presidio at Monterey, we had our boats tied up there and our training continued there until we got ready to go overseas. We used to go out into the Pacific. Now, the Pacific is a completely different ocean than the Atlantic. The main thing, as far as we're concerned, is that there's a lot of fog out there. There's a lot of fog here, too, but the swells are much bigger out there than they are here, because the swells come across from Japan, New Guinea and China. They go across all that water and they build up and build up and they're great, big swells. Our guys really have to get used to, again, that motion, because it's so much different and, believe me, it gets to you. Anyway, we are in training there and here's a lovely picture, if I can show it to you. This is the Pebble Beach Racquet Club, where, if you're golfers, you know they play the [National] Pro-Am there every year. It used to be the Bing Crosby ranch. This is, I forget now, the tenth hole or the ninth--it's not the eighteenth, the eighteenth is over here--but these things here are our tents. We lived on this beach here and we practiced--here, you can see some of the boats getting ready to land, right there on these beaches. In fact, I wrote them a letter and sent them these pictures, got a Photostat of them. They wrote me the nicest letter. They were so happy to have it. Anyway, in California, we picked the three nicest spots in the country for boating, Cape Cod ...

KP: Florida.

AS: The Panhandle in Florida and Monterey, Pebble Beach, Carmel. Sona and I and our little girl had a cottage in Carmel and I forget now, we used to pay something like ten dollars a month for rent, or whatever it was.

SS: It was a long time ago.

AS: Long time.

SS: Peggy was only about three-and-a-half or four.

AS: Our little girl, who now is fifty-six.

SS: She'll be fifty-six.

AS: Anyway, we had just a great time out there, too, the weather and the conditions, plus the fact that we were training and most of us knew what was in store for us or we could guess what was in store for us. We were there, I don't know, about four or five months, I guess.

SS: At least, yes.

AS: About four or five months. Then, we were sent up to Pittsburg, California, which is up the river. It's a big embarkation point and we got on the, not the *QE II*, but the *SS America*, I think, and we went overseas. Now, this is a troopship. I think we were, I can't remember, at least fifteen thousand of personnel on there, with equipment. We went underneath the Golden Gate to go out there. We're not too far out at sea, there was a school of whales went by, I still remember, and, as we went across the Pacific, we zig-zagged all the way across. We used to listen to Tokyo Rose. Tokyo Rose used to tell the listeners that they are going to bomb this, our ship--she named it by name--that was going across the Pacific with so many onboard on it and that they had the information, somehow or another, but they did not have the ability to do it.

KP: You must have gotten a little concerned at the time.

AS: Well, what the heck? We're there [laughter] and there isn't anything you can do about it. You've just got to roll with the punches. Anyway, our outfit, the 533rd Engineer Boat Battalion, I don't remember whether the shore battalion was with us at that time or not, but our mission was to go to Cairns, Australia. Now, that's a long way from here. Cairns, Australia, had a boat assembly plant, in which they were putting these boats together, assembling these boats together. We were going over there to take them across to Milne Bay in New Guinea, which I think was 250, or I forget now how many miles, on their own bottom. We were supposed to run them across there.

KP: Which is a long journey for a small boat.

AS: You're damn right it is, [laughter] particularly in an area that, at that time, was domineered by Japanese aircraft and by some of the Japanese. We weren't too happy about it, but, as it happened, when we were off of New Guinea, they got requests for three navigation officers to go to New Guinea, because the Second Brigade Boat Battalion was there and they didn't have the personnel. They needed people to run boats on these little island-hopping missions. So, I was one, (Palmer?), my friend who was here the other day, was the other and I think (Beach?) was the other; I don't remember now. They put us off in Milne Bay. We were off loaded there and we were assigned to--I forget who right now--but, then, the three of us were separated. Each one went a different way. Now, when I got there, I was attached to, I think, the 592nd, which was a boat battalion, and they were running what we used to call "milk runs" [easy missions] from Milne Bay up to the D'Entrecasteaux Group, which was Normanby, Ferguson and [the] Goodenough Islands. They may not mean anything to you, but, if you can picture the situation, we had Army units at all these different places and we had to supply them and they didn't have--the aircraft were busy, something else. We had to get the stuff over to them in boats. Now, the equipment that we had, number one, the boats themselves were rejects. They were held together

with bailing wire, etc., and they were not fit actually to be used the way we were using them. Plus, the personnel that were operating these boats, they didn't leave any of our personnel with them, they had their personnel. They had guys who'd never saw a boat before who were trying to steer them and run them, and the engine men never saw an engine before. These guys were doing their damndest, and they did a great job, to get these boats moving and going to where they were going. That's that part of it. My part of it, I had to take them there. The charts we got were hundreds of years old, inaccurate. The aerial reconnaissance, they weren't that well organized to be able to give us maps, aerial maps, and so on, and so forth. So, what they used to tell us--they'd show us as near as they could on these old, outdated maps--they'd say, "This is where you want to go." We'd say, "Well, what's the coordinates? What's this, what's that, what's the other thing?" They don't know, "You just go," and you've got to go. There ain't no way you can say, "I can't go there." [laughter] You've just got to go. So, we did reasonably well. My first trip, I took about twenty boats, loaded with gear, equipment and stuff, about, I guess, thirty miles away with no exact knowledge of how to get there, and so on. We knew what was between these islands. These islands had high mountains on them and it used to lightning and thunder and rain over there all night long. We had to run at night. How we got there, I couldn't tell you, but we got there and, later on, it became almost a milk run. I think I ran that three or four times a week for four or five weeks or so, until that place was reasonably well stabilized or they had a different mission. Then, there were other places where they had, like, you've seen pictures about a radio station that was hidden up there in the mountains and operated by an Australian [Coastwatcher] who would send information over about airplanes and whatever? These guys had to be supplied, too, not necessarily with food, because most of them had New Guinea natives with them and these guys were marvelous. They could get food and fish, and so on, and so forth, but they needed batteries and they needed gasoline and they needed this and that and the other thing. They were in places that were practically inaccessible and we would take one or two or three boats and go up there and find them, or at least rendezvous with somebody up there, get the stuff to them. We'd often wind up with some New Guinea natives and we'd go--when they saw us, we were the greatest people in the world--they would always put a feast on for us and dance. Most of them, or a good many of them, had been to camps in Australia and they all spoke Pidgin English. Pidgin English is almost a separate language, but you get to know certain things that they were saying that they couldn't pronounce. Now, one guy I had, I remember, he was a marvelous person, his name was Sully and we finally found out that his name was Charles, Charlie, but they can't pronounce that "Ch." That school, the mission school that they went to, his name was Sully. Instead of Charlie, it was Sully; that's just an interesting aside. We used to take Rangers, our guys, and put them up somewhere at night, put them on an island, and then, come back days and days later, trying to find them again to bring them back with their information. That was all part of our duties, in addition to supplying all up the coast of New Guinea, from Lae-Salamaua, Wewak, Aitape, all up these little places, and we would make assault landings. I remember one in particular on New Britain, which is a good-sized island on the west side of New Guinea, and the Japs had a pretty well-established camp up there with a goodly number of soldiers and a lot of equipment and ammunition and guns, and so on, and so forth. They were on the west side of the island. There was a little mountain, and then, there was a beach on the east side. Now, they had all of their guns trained to repel a landing on the west side and our intelligence knew that. We had an Australian guy over there who was sending back information and we established that the sensible thing for us to do--we wanted to neutralize this place, because they could, from where they were located, they could

keep pretty well track of our airplanes, of our ships out that way--and we wanted to neutralize that. So, our intelligence set up a landing on the opposite shore and we made that landing. We left, I guess it was forty miles or more, from one beach; at night, we came up on the other side. It was my job to get them to exactly the spot where we were going to beach. We put them ashore there, got there just right on time. The Navy was with us on that one, too. They had, I forget now, I think they had a couple PTs that went with us to help. When we landed there, it was, I guess, early in the morning, I dispatched all those boats. They went, hit the beach, set up all these stations. By that time, they had a few Jap mortars that they had cutting across and one of the mortar shells broke right near one of my good friends, Joe (Gannon?). He got hit, a piece of shrapnel in his groin, and there were quite a few casualties there, but I remember Joe very well. I'll tell you about that in a minute. That became a very successful operation, because the troops we put ashore there, they neutralized that outfit on the other side. That was quite good. Now, while all this is going on, I had taken a group of boats back to resupply and, while I was back getting the boats together to come back again, we got a radio that one of our boats, which was evacuating the wounded, was on the way back, but they were lost. This is in the middle of the night. Now, I've got to go out and find those boats. [laughter] Well, how am I going to do it? I don't know, but we found them and I got aboard this boat, talked to the doctor, and he showed me my friend there. He was all coked up--they give them morphine or whatever--and I'll never forget, he said to me, "Abe," he says, "they didn't shoot off my pecker, did they?" He was worried. He was all bandaged up down here. Poor guy, he's dead now, but his wife still comes to our reunions and they had either one or two kids. At Camp Edwards, when we were there, we all used to be pretty friendly. We continued to do these things all up the coast of New Guinea, as far as Hollandia. This is my part of it. My outfit that went to Cairns, Australia, they spent six months there drinking beer, raising hell and training. They used to get up in the morning, they'd go down to the beach, they'd load a bunch of infantrymen aboard, they'd take them around this big jetty, bring them back and teach them how to get off again. No, I think they'd put them on the ship, too, made them climb up this landing ladder, and so on. That's all they did for about six months and they had a ball down there and my outfit was the kind of guys who really knew how to take advantage of it. Anyway, they got back. They came back to New Guinea after, oh, I don't know how many months they were down there, but, instead of running the boats across on their own bottom, by this time, they had enough ships to load them on the ship, and then, offload them over here, where they could be used. That saved a lot of time, etc.

KP: Did you ever rejoin your old unit?

AS: Yes, yes. I got my unit--when I left, I was a company navigation officer--when I got back, I became the battalion navigation officer. I was in charge of all the boats in the whole battalion and, oh, we had a lot of interesting experiences. I think we were in New Britain. There was a big island over there where there was a naval base. I was over there, too, and then, came back to New Britain. I took a bunch of Seabees, all black, I forget how many boatloads of them I had. I took them from a place on Goodenough Island up to the Trobriands, two islands there, Kiriwina and Kitava, just two little flecks in there. Boy, when I left, I had no idea of how I was going to get there or find them, but we got there, we found them. I offloaded these guys that were going to build the dock up there. Up there, while they were building docks, we ran into a pretty bad storm. I was supposed to bring my boats back to Goodenough. The weather report was so threatening and they ordered me to take the boats back and I refused. That's the only time I ever

refused, because of the weather report, and the General, his aide came over to me and he says, "The General insists that you do it." I said, "Okay, I'll go, but I want an order, in writing, from the General that he's ordered me to do this," and they wouldn't give it to me.

KP: They would not give you a written order.

AS: And I wouldn't go. Well, what the hell? if you've ever been in a bad storm on the water.

KP: Have you been in bad storms on the water?

AS: I've been in bad storms on the water.

KP: How frightening was it? How frightening were the bad storms?

AS: Well, they're so damn bad that you don't have time, really, to be frightened until it's all over. Down in Carrabelle, we got in our training boats--this is before we really knew as much about the boats as we did--we had one of those freak, not a hurricane, but, oh, one of these little things that goes through there, raises so much hell. The weather boys didn't pick it up, nobody knew about it, and we were, at that time, involved in a training landing, which was to show the commanding generals here how good our outfit was. We got involved in that storm, we lost thirteen boys, drowned. That was horrible. We lost a good many boats. My captain put a boat so far up on the beach during the height of this storm, with the water raising that high, that his nickname in our outfit from then on was "Sandbar Harris." [laughter] He really put it up there and, of course, in a storm like that, I can remember some of the things that happened to me during it. I had a little thirty-six-footer with a 160-horsepower Buda diesel engine in [it] and we were up to our hips in water in the boat and bailing with five-gallon paint cans to get it out, but that damn Buda motor just kept going, going and going. We got through, we got out. We got back exactly whenever we were supposed to and, the next day, we were out there looking for boats, stranded boats, and so on. That was a horror. I've been in a couple bad storms in other places.

KP: It sounds like you feared the weather almost as much as the enemy.

AS: Oh, absolutely. The enemy--we were pretty cocky--we always felt that we could handle the situation, but the weather, you can't. The enemy, we had pretty good control after a couple of those big naval battles over there and, of course, the main reason why we proved to be so able was because of the units like ours, which could take and bring these troops up around. We would cut off the Japs here and cut them off here and cut them off--if they can't resupply and if they can't move, they're dead. We wouldn't want that to happen to us, but these were the things that did happen. We just kept doing it, and the fact that we could get enough equipment and enough boats--look, it's the manufacturing end that won the war--and a few crazy people like me, who got this stuff to where it was going and a lot of our guys. I've got to read you something, if I can put my finger on it. [laughter] Our outfit still keeps in touch with each other and they put a bulletin out and have a reunion every year or two. This is 1993. It says, "Letter from Abe Soltz. Abe writes that some previously uncharted islands off New Guinea owe their present name to his quick thinking. Abe was, as our navigation officer, guiding the Colonel and some intelligent

officers--intelligence officers," I don't know how intelligent they were, but they were intelligence officers, "through reef-infested waters. When the intelligence officers asked, 'Where the hell are we?' Abe pointed out some flyspecks on the chart in front of him and, without hesitation, replied, 'We're just off these Hell-Are-We Islands,' and, since then, they're known as the Hell-Are-We Islands. [laughter] Anyway, he further writes," this is what I've been getting to you, "'Thinking back to the accomplishments of our boat battalion, we actually performed miracles, with less than necessary and suitable equipment. We kept the boats running, we got to our destinations, we did everything we were supposed to do, even the seemingly impossible. (Palmer Langdon?)," that's the guy who was here the other day, "'with his sailing background, was probably the only one with civilian experiences in his specialty as a navigation officer. He and others performed admirably, all without dependable charts, with only compasses and watches, no radar, no direction finders, none of today's sophisticated aids. All of the boat battalion had Yankee ingenuity when needed. We worked together and got the job done. I salute all of them--coxswains and crew, engine mechanics, radio operators, officers, all other personnel, including the great 533rd Shore Battalion. Bless them all,'" and all he writes is, "We've got to say amen to that. Thanks, Abe." That's, in a nutshell, actually why we won the war. It wasn't just our outfit, it was our outfit and every other outfit, with guys like MacArthur and Halsey and the other ones directing and planning and plotting and thinking, and the people back home who were sending through the equipment, the manufacturers who sent us the boats and the spare parts and the food, the whole thing.

KP: Where would you get your food and your other needs? When you were ferrying, both the first time, then, with your unit, how long would you be on water? Would you ever dock and be land based?

AS: We were moving all the time, but we had--as indicated, our bases weren't really that far apart. I don't think, ever, we were more than let's say two days, at the most, from a place where we could get supplies. Also, all these big supply ships were over there and, if there was ever any one that we saw, we were never turned down. We said, "We need milk," or whatever, and whatever you could get. I can remember, one time, coming back late at night, completing one mission, bringing the boys back and being told that I had to leave within a couple hours. There was only one supply depot around and they didn't have any food. We got a jeep or something and went over there and we found the storage where they had, oh, just piles of canned fruit salad. Did you ever eat canned fruit salad, the kind they served in the Army?

KP: Not the kind they served in the Army.

AS: They diced all kinds of fruits and vegetables in pieces that were like a quarter of an inch cubed in the juice and they canned it. The only other thing they had was peanuts, these kind of things, dried peanuts in some kind of containers. Of course, we could get some water. We'd fill up our water tanks and, I think, for two or three weeks, we had nothing to eat except those canned fruit dices and peanuts, and we got along. I think we also had some dried cereal, dehydrated dried cereal. That was all that was in this dump. We just grabbed as much as we could. We had to go. "You've got to go," no problems, "Go, go, go."

KP: How varied was your diet? Especially with supply ships, could you ever get ice cream from Navy supply ships?

AS: When we got to a place--oh, in a place called Aitape, I think it was, it's on the west coast of New Guinea, about halfway up--there was a naval base there. I think they had a PT base and they had what we used to call "reefers," refrigerator ships. On the bases, I think the guys, most of them, lived on their boats, but there was a headquarters on the beach. One time, when we were going into headquarters, in our boat, the guy on the reefer hailed us and we stopped. He wanted to go ashore and we took him ashore and we told him, "We'll be going back in an hour or two," or whatever it was and he said, "Could he go back with us?" I said, "Sure," glad to have him. Now, when we got back to his reefer, it was a great, big barge. I guess, oh, I don't know, it could've been a hundred-foot long, with maybe forty-foot wide, with all kinds of refrigeration equipment on it and food stores. He had all kinds of food. I'll tell you about it in a minute, and he says, "Come on aboard. Tie up, come on aboard." He said, "I'll fix you a meal." He gave us steaks, made us a steak meal, fresh eggs, steak and eggs. You can imagine, with tears in our eyes, eating that kind of stuff. We hadn't seen anything like that, and ice cream, man, oh, man, that's just like finding the Garden of Eden. We were there for three or four days. We ate meals on his boat three times a day. I think we gained twenty pounds each, but that's the rare exception. Once in a while, if we'd run across some of our friends who were officers in the Air Force, or something like that, we could get food, because the Air Force, they had food. They'd bring it in in the planes. They used to have whiskey, too, in the Air Force. [laughter] We weren't allowed to have whiskey in MacArthur's theater, weren't allowed to have any, no beer. It wasn't until practically the end of the war when they started to issue us beer. They'd bring a whole Liberty ship over full of beer and we would offload it.

KP: What did you think of MacArthur at the time?

AS: Greatest man in the world--that was our thinking. You read a lot of flak about him, and so on, and so forth, but they had the right idea. They knew the geography of it over there and they knew exactly what the Japs would have to do to conquer. The Japs got there and they chased [the US Army]--MacArthur got out of Corregidor and Manila, luckily. I think a PT boat evacuated him and some of the other guys, but they had enough knowledge there to realize that the strategy that our forces exercised was the right one. We just denied these people, denied the enemy, the ability to move, the ability to attack us. Of course, when we defeated their Air Force and defeated their fleet, that was curtains for them. Of course, they practically had taken over Australia and New Guinea and the rest of the places over there. They were on the move, anyway. Okay, what else you want to know? [laughter]

KP: How much hostile fire did you see during beach landings? Did you have any rough spots? You mentioned one friend who was wounded with the mortar.

AS: Well, I remember one landing we made--oh, see, we used to get to a place where we were going to make a landing and my boat would anchor, maybe, or keep its position. Sometimes, we couldn't anchor, but we would be, I forget now, a mile, roughly a mile to two miles, off the beach. I would dispatch the boats, because you couldn't have them going in there all at once--there wasn't room for them--and you couldn't have the boat that had to have the prior equipment

in there after the boat that had the secondary or the tertiary equipment in there. So, we were pretty well organized and I can remember a boat that I had dispatched--oh, it couldn't have been more than five hundred yards in front of me--taking a direct hit in the well of the boat, with the boat loaded with soldiers, and just looked like you'd explode a bomb in a meat factory. It's just pieces of people all over and a mortar hit a boat that was not too far behind me, too. I remember, one night, going on a mission with a PT boat captain. I forget exactly where we were, I think it could've been in Aitape, too, in a PT base. Our boats, my boat was sixty-five-foot air-sea rescue boat, which is basically the same kind of a boat as a PT, almost exactly, a little bit less power. The PTs, I think, started around seventy-seven, eighty-eight [feet long], and so on, up. The PTs, most of them had three 1500 Packard engines in them; we had two 650 Hall-Scotts or something like that. We were there refueling and we were going to be there overnight. The PT boys were going out on a mission. I asked permission to go along with them, to sort of find out exactly what they did that I could learn from. Now, the PT mission, at that time, was to go from where they were stationed, at night, run down the coast of New Guinea to a place somewhere off of Wewak, where the Japs were, and their mission was to get in there and kick up enough fuss so that they would draw enemy fire. They would plot the position, and then, the next morning, the planes would go back and bomb that particular spot. That was their mission that night and, of course, I'd never been on one exactly like that. Now, they're very nice to me, glad to have me, and so on, and so forth. They give me a place on the afterdeck of the PT. There's a quadruple fifty-caliber machine-gun, two of them, on the back, the aft deck there, and that's pointed, they're swiveled, point them anywhere, but, basically, they shoot back. A fifty-caliber machine-gun shoots 750 shells a minute. You've got a quadruple one, that's three thousand shells a minute for each one, that's six thousand shells a minute vomiting out of this thing. I'm laying on the deck there and these things are hot. They're red-hot when they come out. There's no gunnels on the boats, so that they keep rolling over the side. Well, anyway, they were nice enough to me to let me stay on this deck here and, when they get to [the place], I had fallen asleep, for a while, anyway, catnapping, and they wake me and they have located a place. I'm on this back deck and they're shooting tracer bullets at us from shore. Now, a tracer bullet, you know what they are and every one of them looks like it's going to go right down your throat. [laughter] They're coming this way, these guys are shooting from this double fifty-caliber machine-gun thing--what is it?--six thousand shells a minute coming out. Boy, there's pandemonium breaking out.

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO-----  
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KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Abraham Soltz on February 9, 1996, with Kurt Piehler and ...

BO: ... Brian Oaks.

KP: In Ventnor, New Jersey. You mentioned this mission where you went along with this PT boat and its captain. It sounds like you had quite a bit of cooperation with the Navy.

AS: Oh, yes.

KP: Particularly when you were actually in New Guinea.

AS: Yes. It wasn't anything where there was any antagonism between the forces. Once in a while, we'd run into a problem. I remember, our boat had a good-sized generator on it and one of the gadgets on the generator didn't work. We had to get a replacement. Now, the only other boats that had this type of generator were Navy PT boats and we found a place where they had a supply dump for PT boats, a mechanical supply place. I'm trying to think of the name of the island, but it's not important. I had the papers to draw it from the Army--they give you papers, you're supposed to have papers for everything. Manus Island, I think it was, Manus. We got there, I forget how exactly, but we went to this Navy depot to get this part for the generator. The generator itself is as big as this table and maybe weighs, I don't know, three, four, five hundred pounds. This thing, this size, it's nothing really, and they would not give me this part, as much as we needed it, until I got the proper papers from the Navy; mine were Army. Well, we really got pissed off [laughter]--oh, and they wouldn't give me a place to sleep either, over there on Manus Island, with the Navy. I had to go with the Army. I was Army personnel and the guy at Army personnel was real nice to me and he gave me a jeep, or, no, a command car and a driver, and somebody else, who was quite knowledgeable. In the course of trying to figure out how to get the papers, this one guy said to me, he says, "I know where there's a piece of equipment that you want. I know where it is," he says, "but I don't know how to get the part off." [laughter] So, we went over in the command car and we took the whole damn thing--nobody asked us for any papers or anything. It was laying there, we took it and we went with it, back to where my boat was, I think. There, my mechanic took the part off that we needed [laughter] and we sent the whole damn--I think we left it on the command car or whatever it was, the weapons carrier--but we got the part. Now, that's not the usual thing.

KP: However, it did happen.

AS: It did. Things like that happened and there's jealousy between--a lot of times, the enlisted men would get involved in fighting. The paratroopers wore the same kind of boots as we wore. Why? I don't know. [laughter] I can remember one of them. We had a little, scrappy sergeant. Man, this kid was something else, only a little kid, but he was a horror, a terror. One of the paratroopers said to him, [laughter] he says, "You guys can't wear our boots," and the guy says, "The hell we can't," or something like that. He says, "I'm going to take them off you," or he says, "Give them to me." He says, "If you want them, you've got to take them off me." This guy bent down to take this kid's boots off and this kid kicked him and broke his collarbone and a few other things. [laughter] This kid was a terror--nicest kid in the world, but this comes under the heading of "juvenile enthusiasm." I guess that's as good a classification as any, right?

KP: I had asked you about food. How about other creature comforts, showers, clean laundry?

AS: Anybody who's a boatman, particularly if you travel in the Tropics, you know that water is a tremendous problem. We never had enough water, never, and I remember ...

KP: Even in built-up bases, you would not.

AS: In built-up bases, you could draw whatever water you could carry, whatever you could hold, but that wasn't all--you never had enough capacity.

KP: Yes.

AS: If you're going to be gone two weeks without a place where you could resupply your water, you're in trouble. You have to start to ration it after a while. I can remember, many times, down there in the Tropics, you could sometimes see a rainstorm coming. We'd see a rainstorm coming, we'd take our clothes off, what few we wore on the boat, rush up on deck with soap. Just as soon as it started to rain, you'd soap yourself up and, sometimes, before you could get the soap washed off, the shower would be gone, but it was better than nothing. We used salt water. To do our laundry, you'd take your clothes that you wanted washed and tie them at the end of a long string and drag them behind the boat for several hours.

[TAPE PAUSED]

AS: Anyway, that would get the sweat and things out, some of the mud, sometimes, but water was always a problem and hot water, almost an unheard of item. I remember, once, we were in an area which, on the chart, showed underground springs in the ocean that would be up maybe as high as a hundred degrees. We had a base there, near there or somewhere, or, no, just a temporary stopover, but the engineers, some of our shore engineers, rigged up showers from these hot underground springs, to pipe them up into something up top, take a can, punch a bunch of holes in the bottom and put a string on it, so that you could pull it and get hot water, get a hot shower. They're rarities. We didn't have anything like stills, not for water, anyway. [laughter] Today, they have some things that make fresh water from ocean water.

KP: Yes. Some of the larger ships have them.

AS: Yes, some of the larger ships have them. We never had anything like that and, if we were ever near anyplace where we knew there was going to be water, we would make it our business to fill up all the tanks we had. Food? I don't think we ever ran completely out of food. Palatable food? I don't think we ever had much palatable food here. [laughter]

KP: What about mail? How often would you get mail?

AS: Not on a regular basis, wasn't too bad, though. We used to get mail probably once a month, anyway, or once in six weeks, or something like that. The letters you would write home, they always made arrangements for somebody who was in contact with a ship or something that was going back to the States to take your mail and your rendezvous with the Air Force, certainly, were very valuable that way, so on, and so forth.

SS: Tell them how I used to send you--you wanted a bottle of liquor for the boys.

AS: [laughter] My uncles used to send me a bottle of whiskey, once in a while. They would take a loaf of soft white bread ... [laughter]

SS: Did you ever in your life?

AS: ... Cut it open, put the bottle of whiskey inside, and then, tie it up again and soak it in salt water. Now, the salt water, when it dried, would be hard. That was as good as any of these packings that you get today, any of the insulation. Once in a while, we used to get them. Sometimes, if the mail clerks knew what the heck was in it, [laughter] you might not get it.

SS: We had a lot of the soldiers down here, because we had the hospital here.

KP: Yes, and you also had the Air Force people who were stationed in the hotels.

SS: Oh, the hotels, yes. I would go uptown with my daughter and there was a soldier standing on the corner. You'd just pick them up. Today, you'd never do it, but we did all that. Then, when the holidays came, my in-laws always had them. They would just call someplace or other, one of the hotels, and they would send guys down, because Mother always used to have them for dinner, which made it very nice. Everybody had something interesting to say and they appreciated it. It was very nice. They were different days, though. Today, you don't pick up anybody. Now, what are you going to do with all this information?

KP: First, it will be transcribed.

SS: And then, what will you do with it?

KP: Then, eventually, I will read it, and then, give it back to you to go over.

SS: Well, who's interested in it?

KP: Historians and students will use it.

SS: I bet this is, what, three hours? How long you been here?

AS: Well, it's five o'clock now. You got here a little after one, so, it's almost four hours. I can just kind of sum it up a little bit. We made most of the campaigns up the coast of New Guinea, as far as Hollandia. The Hollandia operation, I didn't get there. Well, I think it was pretty well secured there. Up in Hollandia, they had a base hospital and that was just exactly at the time, when I was there, when they were making the invasion of the Philippines. They were evacuating the most urgent cases to Hollandia for immediate hospitalization. When I got to Hollandia, pretty sure, yes, we got to Hollandia, we were going to a group to go to the Philippines. I found out that the number of the base hospital there was the one where my friend was and I went up there to visit with him. Now, this hospital was nothing but a tremendous tent and nothing like air conditioning. It was just a tremendous tent that the engineers had erected, with a lot of cots in there. My friend, the doctor, was a plastic surgeon and I asked for him. They said, "Oh, he's over there," and they pointed out someplace where [he was] and I went to see him. Now, inside of this tent, underneath the covering, got to be at least 110 degrees. It's unbearable and it's filled with "basket cases," guys that are really hurt. When I finally caught up to my friend, he was reconstructing a guy's face that had been partially blown off and he's talking to me and working on this guy's face and I'm sick. I'm nauseous. I just can't--this is not for me. It's hot and this kind of stuff would turn my stomach anyway.

KP: It also sounds like you were probably glad you did not go to med school.

AS: But, these guys were just the most marvelous people, to be able to do that kind of stuff and go through with it and retain their sanity, because this is the horrors of war. That was Dr. Dave (Meyers?), Mother.

KP: It sounds like you were quite impressed with the military medical care, that there was a real effort to try to take care of people if they were wounded.

AS: They had really great doctors, and I guess they had some not-so-great doctors, too, and dentists. I know the dentists in our part of the country--over there, I'm talking about--they had drills that they operated with their feet, like the old-fashioned sewing machines, to rotate the drill. They had meager equipment, but they did what had to be done. You didn't go there for a set of beautiful new teeth or anything like that. [laughter] You went there when there was a problem and I think most every outfit had a dentist and a doctor. Some of them had more than one doctor.

KP: What about tropical diseases? Did you or any of your men ever come down with something?

AS: We started taking Atabrine, which is the prophylactic for malaria, I would guess three months before we left the States, because the areas that we were going to be in were infested with malaria. I took mine conscientiously until at least six months after I was discharged from the service, here in the States, because I was advised to do it. I had seen some of the cases where my buddies did not do it and they got pretty sick. Malaria was a problem. We had all the shots before we went overseas. I had tropical dysentery once in the Philippine Islands. I was in the Philippines, not too far from Manila, I think, and they put me in the hospital and they gave me sulfa pills, which I don't think they even use anymore, to take. I think I was supposed to drink, like, two or three gallons of water a day with these pills. The pills were bad to take, but, drinking all that water, couldn't handle it and I guess I was sick for three or four weeks, two or three weeks, anyway. I also was in the hospital once for--our work, we were out in the sun all the time. We wore a hat, a pair of glasses, generally, if we had it. After being exposed to that for, I guess, more than a year, I developed some sties, or something similar to that, and they put me in the hospital in New Guinea for that. I don't know what the correct word is--they operated and took some of these growths out and that was like a vacation for me, to be flat on my back for, I guess, two, three, four weeks, I don't remember, but the treatment, their attention, everything else, was really worthwhile.

KP: Did you ever see any USO shows?

AS: Yes. [laughter] I think there might be one in here about Joe E. Brown, but I remember, in the Philippines, they brought a roadshow in for *Oklahoma*, with the dancing girls. You talk about being homesick--we hadn't seen any women for years, it seems like centuries. They came out there with a whole roadshow. Our engineers built a little amphitheater in the side of a little cliff and they set up a stage with seats. Just about as the show was getting ready to start, we had

one of those tropical downpours. Now, they put up a canopy or something over the stage, but, as far as we were concerned, we were all sitting out there in the rain. They asked us if we wanted to call it off or would we sit out there in the rain and see the show. You never heard such a clamor in your life. "We want the show," and we saw that and it was a marvelous performance, with the girls doing the dances and everything else. That was great. I think there was something in here, Joe E. Brown; here's my class from Harvard.

KP: You got a whole Army group taking celestial navigation.

AS: Yes, that was the group of them.

SS: They had their Army reunions over the years, but the boys are starting to get lesser and lesser.

AS: That's a picture of the inside working room of one of the boats we were using to train in and this guy here, let's see which one--oh, this one here--that's me. So, I just want you to know, I was once a handsome character. [laughter] Oh, here.

KP: "(Abe Sims?), Special Services, present personal appearance Joe Brown with Bobby Gilbert and Val Setz, juggler, Tito, the accordist."

SS: The juggler, that's all you needed was the juggler. [laughter]

AS: I don't know whether this was USO or not.

KP: Did you ever fire a weapon in hostility?

AS: Actually, almost never, myself.

KP: It sounds like there were a lot of people taking aim at you at times, during invasions, but you, in fact, were really navigating.

AS: Yes, my job was not [that]; I didn't handle the artillery. The guys on the boat did.

KP: What kind of weaponry did you have on your boat?

AS: We had a pair of twin caliber fifties and that was just useful against something small, but, against anything big, it was just like nothing, really.

KP: You never encountered any hostile Japanese ships in all your ferrying between islands, particularly in New Guinea.

AS: Not really, when we weren't protected by somebody else.

KP: Yes.

AS: No, I can't remember that.

KP: Before the dropping of the atomic bomb, did you expect your unit would be taking part in the invasion of Japan?

AS: Yes.

KP: You expected to be in there for the long haul.

AS: Actually, when the war was over, we were sent home, or allowed to go home, based on points, a point system. The point system was based on your length of time in service, your length of overseas service, your ribbons, decorations, things like that, your family situation and whatever other things they used. You had to have a certain number of points to be allowed to go home. Sometime, well after the war was over, I had enough points. So, I was on the list to go home and I was sent out of my outfit to Manila, to be attached to the number one engineer general, the general of the engineer corps, and for, I don't know, two, three, maybe, two, three months, my job was to pick out the units, the engineer units, to be sent to whatever was needed. I had a list of the ones that were here and a list of the places that they wanted to go and I did that. That was basically bookwork for a short period of time, and then, I was sent to an R&R place in Manila. I was there, I don't know, about a month or two before it was time for me to be sent home. Now, when you went to the R&R, or whatever the name was, you got a number, which was based on the chronological time you got there, supposedly. I think when I got there, my number was up [around] a thousand, or something like that, and whenever any available transportation came up, they would pick out the lowest number and that would go. It went down, gradually, and, when I got to where it was my turn to go, they told me that if I went in an airplane, I would be in the United States in three or four or five days. If I went on a boat, it would be anywhere from thirty days to six months, depending on how they got through there. Fortunately for me, at the time that my name was practically up, my father was critically ill here and the Red Cross sent a request expediting my transportation home and they put me on an airplane. Now, I left Manila in an airplane. I think it was those cargo planes, the C-54s or whatever they were. They had all bucket seats in them, no heat. I had khakis and a blanket. That's all I had. Of course, it was hot there. We got up in the air, I can still remember, not fifteen or twenty minutes, the temperature drops down. They didn't have anything like heating then. I wrapped myself up in the blanket and laid down on the floor and laid there. We flew from Manila to Wake to Guam to Kwajalein, Johnston Island, Honolulu and San Francisco. I think the planes were flying roughly two hundred miles an hour. So, that meant that most of the flights, most of the legs, were twelve hours, and, boy, they were twelve long hours, but we wouldn't have traded them for anything. Well, I got home in, oh, four, five, six days, something like that. In San Francisco, I had to wait to go through all the processing and I think I flew to Kansas City, from San Francisco, Kansas City, I forget now, and I think the last stop was in Baltimore, Maryland. From Baltimore, Maryland, I got a lift with a general, I think, who had a command car there who was going to Philadelphia and, from Baltimore, I got to Philadelphia. Philadelphia, I got a train home. I came home.

SS: Skinny, yellow.

AS: Yes, after taking all that Atabrine, it makes you yellow. My eyeballs were yellow, like you have, what?

SS: I think you talked enough already.

AS: Yes.

SS: That will be it for the day. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

AS: All of these books here and all of my papers from the Army are in this thing. Do I have anything in here? I don't think so. This is my Rutgers yearbook.

KP: You seemed to have enjoyed the military a lot.

AS: I did.

KP: Had you thought of staying in?

AS: No, sir, no, sir, [laughter] I couldn't get out fast enough.

SS: Listen, some people never leave the States. They're just lucky. Some are.

AS: This is my picture when I had hair. I marked down, I went to the reunions, the twentieth, the twenty-fifth, the thirtieth, thirty-fifth, forty. I didn't get forty-five, but I get fifty, fifty-five and sixty.

SS: Yes, we get to Rutgers.

AS: I don't know, are there any of these papers that you want?

KP: Only if you want us to put it in Special Collections and University Archives permanently.

SS: You can think it over and send it to him.

AS: This book here is my outfit's record. These books here are books that I've come across. This one here is about the Second Brigade. We were in the Third Brigade, and this book here was written by General Heavey [*Down Ramp! The Story of the Army Amphibian Engineers* (1947) by Brigadier General William F. Heavey]. It's the story of the Army Amphibian Engineers and it tells [it] somewhat, in many stories. This book here is a book, I don't know why I ever got it, but, when I started to read it, there's a lot of very interesting interviews with people who were involved, lieutenants. They tell you some of the incidents and it gets to be absorbing, fascinating.

KP: *The United States Navy in World War II.*

AS: Yes, and it tells about some of the operations; that's good.

KP: Did any movie or novel that you have read recapture any of your experiences?

AS: Oh, yes, a lot of the World War II South Pacific pictures, very nostalgic. Actually, I was involved in a lot of these things, but you see them on TV and I sit there and watch them take the troops in. I know exactly what's going on and it brings back a lot of memories.

KP: What did you think of the Japanese? They were the enemy when you were fighting them. Did you ever see any Japanese prisoners of war or have any contact, besides them trying to shoot at you?

AS: Well, I was never face-to-face, actually, with any Japanese. I never got to talk to any of them. We were in places where we were--when we would be on the beach, for example--where we'd be sleeping overnight on shore and we would be attacked at night, some of our units, by the Japanese. They were stealthy and not too--I can't think of them ever being too aggressive. It was a hit-and-run operation with most everything that we were attached to, but, normally, our outfits were in such small units that I don't think we were ever main targets for big operations. If I had twelve boats, I might have maybe fifty to sixty personnel or less in my outfit, plus whatever troops or whatever supplies we were involved with.

KP: You mentioned that you have gone to a lot of reunions of your Army group. When did you start going to reunions?

AS: My twentieth, which would be '55. I think that's the first one.

KP: That was the first one you went to.

AS: We may have gone to one earlier. I may have gone to the tenth. I don't really remember.

KP: You were a very close group, it sounds like.

SS: Well, they were all married with kids, most of them. So, we just have contact with still a few of them that are alive. After all, you know how old we are. So, I mean, a lot of them aren't here.

KP: I know, a lot of units, they just left in September.

SS: Well, they had one--you remember when Peggy moved to New York, we went to a reunion?

AS: A reunion.

SS: Yes.

AS: For the Army.

SS: Yes, and Peggy wasn't married then. That's when she got a job in New York, after she graduated college.

AS: I think that could've been the tenth or something like that.

KP: Did you ever join any other veterans' organizations?

AS: I never did. I can't give you a lot of reasons right now, but I think the main thing was that, when I got back home, I had so many things that I wanted to get caught up with, I didn't want to have any influences. I had had enough of the Army, believe me. Four years in the service, I didn't want any parts of it.

KP: You did not join the Reserves, for example.

AS: No, I didn't join the Reserves. I didn't join the Reserves, I didn't enjoy the Reserves. [laughter] I got a certificate, or a citation or whatever, which says that I am commissioned as a captain in the Corps of Engineers in the Inactive Reserves and that I can be called at the pleasure of the President or the commanding chief at any time. That's about it. I may even have a copy of that right here, but that's enough. No, as you probably noted, I enjoyed my stay in the service. I would never want to go through it again, not ever, but, while I was there, I made the most of it and it was a great experience.

KP: Have you ever been back to the places you served in?

AS: [laughter] We've been back up in New England, looked around.

SS: We went to Carmel, remember? We looked at the little house.

AS: Yes. Up in New England, when we were up there, we used to carouse at the Coonamessett Club. [laughter] That was, I guess, a very posh country club up there and we were always welcomed there, and our boys used to go there at night whenever we could. I've been back there a couple times. It's different today. We went back to Carmel. We had a little cottage right across the street from the post office in Carmel. When we got back, what, twenty years ago?

SS: Oh, I don't know, around there.

AS: About that. The house that we had rented was not there. I don't even think the post office was in the same place.

SS: I don't remember; it was a while. Well, Peg was a little girl. My daughter, how old is Peggy? She's going to be, what, fifty-six?

AS: Yes.

SS: Fifty-six, my daughter's going to be. So, when she was, like, two or three ...

AS: Fifty years ago, then.

SS: We have a picture of her in Carmel. It was hilly and she always fell and she had Band-Aids on her knees, you remember? Yes, there's an eleven-and-a-half [year] difference between our two kids. Then, we have a grandson. Josh is, what? twenty-four.

KP: Your son never served in the military.

AS: No.

SS: They didn't need him, I guess. They never called him.

AS: He's a civilian employee and his unit is attached to Fort Monroe, is it, or what? in Norfolk, Virginia, in that area. His responsibilities are to track all foreign military personnel that are in this country for any reason at all. In other words, you know all these training programs we have for the Israelis and the English? They go to indoctrination courses for Air Force and ordnance, and so on. They try to keep each other up-to-date, new developments, etc., and his unit keeps track. They know where every single person is who is in a foreign military that is in this country and what they're doing here. That may be why he's not in the service, because his job is service related.

SS: He's too old to get in the service, anyway.

AS: But, that means Army, Navy, Air Force, and I guess the Coast Guard and the Marines and the rest of them.

SS: Now, what's his name, your friend's son that was at where Jimmy was, what is he, a commander? What is he?

AS: He's a major general now.

SS: Major general, yes.

AS: My buddy, who we talked to the other night, who is in Texas, he was a character. He used to swear that if a kid of his ever stepped off on his left foot, he says he'd shoot him. Well, you know what that means, in Army talk--when you're in the Army and they say, "March," you step off on your left foot. That's how they keep everybody in step and that was his way of saying, "No part of that." Well, he stayed in the Army himself. He's a retired, either colonel, full colonel, or general. His son, two of them, went to West Point. [laughter] The one son is now at Fort Monroe. He's a major general now and that one son, he was saddled with making a complete record of the Gulf War. That was his job and he's a goer, a giver and a doer. He's a character.

SS: Well, I'll tell you one thing, he's ...

AS: What else can we do for you?

KP: How did you two meet initially?

AS: Yes, we two meet, originally? She went to Atlantic City High School and so did I.

KP: You have known each other for ...

AS: We've known each other for a long time.

KP: Did you date while he was at Rutgers?

SS: No.

AS: No, we didn't get together until after we got out of college, I guess. She came down here for a weekend to visit one of her friends and that's where we got together, you lucky thing, you.

KP: You have been married since 1936.

SS: Sixty, coming up.

AS: Sixty years.

SS: That's a long time. Well, our kids are old, too, already. We're in this house, I guess, is it fifty years? This is our first house.

KP: Really?

SS: Yes, because when we got married, we didn't have any money. So, we moved in with his folks and he said, "We'll stay a year." We stayed eleven-and-a-half, [laughter] because that's when he went in the service. This house, we got after the war. This was it.

KP: Did you get this house on the GI Bill? [Editor's Note: The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill of Rights, offered funding for college or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment and loans to buy homes, to returning World War II veterans.]

AS: No, I didn't get any advantages from the GI Bill, and I didn't want any. I didn't want any part of the Army.

SS: Well, when we bought this house, things were, compared [with] today, they were really cheap. What was this house, like, thirteen-five, or something like that?

AS: Very cheap, yes. When I got out of the service, I think I weighed about 120 pounds. I'd been over in the Tropics for two years and been under a lot of stress and duress. They wouldn't let me go to work for about six or eight months and I just ate, slept, enjoyed myself, got back in shape, and then, I went to work.

KP: Who was this, your family?

AS: My family. I worked in the family business until 1972, when I retired.

KP: Thank you. Is there anything we forgot to ask?

SS: I don't think so. [laughter] He wants you to know about my grandson, that's all. He's the pride of the family. They live in New York. Nobody lives here.

AS: My grandson went to Harvard, played on that championship squash team for four years, and then, when he got out of school, he was a coach at Dartmouth for two years. Now, he's looking for a position in something that he would want to do and he's a good kid. We'll keep him.  
[laughter]

KP: That is a good note to end on.

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

Reviewed by Sydney Rhodes 1/12/15

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 2/12/15

Reviewed by Molly Graham 6/25/2015