

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD J. COBIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Richard J. Cobin on February 4, 2019, in Freehold, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Richard Cobin: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

RC: October 20, '46, in Newark.

SI: Okay. Please tell me your parents' names.

RC: Ruth and David.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, can you tell me if you know anything about the family background, how the family came to the United States?

RC: Father's side is a little sketchy. Father was an only child. He was abandoned (him and his mother were abandoned) by his father when he was, like, five or six years old. Since he was born in 1906, you're talking 1910, 1911, he just disappeared, never to be held to it. There was no credit cards, no E-Z Pass, no Social Security number. He was an only child, brought up by his mother. His parents were both born in Russia. He was born in Brooklyn.

SI: Do you know anything about his early life?

RC: Not as much as I would like. My brother and I always had this conversation--why, all the years, we never asked? I always say to everybody, "If you have older relatives, ask questions," because, once the generation goes away, there's nobody to ask. So, [we] don't really know much about my dad's younger years, yes.

SI: What about your mother's side?

RC: Oh, my mother's side got [well-documented]. [laughter] My mother was the second of four children, born in Newark. She had all four of her grandparents up until she was in her mid-twenties and her parents both had brothers and sisters. So, she had a lot of cousins. Again, she was the second of four children, so, she had a good central family growing up in Newark.

She was born in 1912. Her mother was born in Newark. Her father was born in Austria or Hungary. It depends upon where the country lines were in 1885 in Europe. Europe's borders were always changing. After World War I, they changed more and, after World War II, they changed again.

My maternal grandmother's parents also came from the same region of Austria and Hungary. So, both of my mom's parents actually had somewhat of the same backgrounds of Eastern European, if it means anything to you, Ashkenazi Jews. I don't know if you've heard the phrase.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, which they all were; both sides of the family were.

SI: Do you know which ward she grew up in in Newark?

RC: She grew up mostly in the Central Ward of Newark, because she went to Central High School in Newark, which still exists. Neither of my parents graduated high school. They were children of the Depression era. I guess it was more important to work and get things done versus getting an education. I always say I think they were both intelligent, but they didn't have a lot of education. They both did [well]. They managed to have two children.

SI: Do you know how far your father went in school?

RC: I believe he only went to the tenth grade.

SI: Okay.

RC: And my mom about the same, yes.

SI: Do you know what they did once they left school?

RC: Again, I don't know a lot [about] what my father did through the '20s and '30s. I knew he worked. My mom's family, my grandfather always had a small business. They owned several different, old-type diners in Newark. So, I know my mom helped in them growing up. So, my grandparents were always in some kind of business.

My dad's parents, obviously, we have no knowledge of his father. His mother died a year before I was born. So, I never knew either of my dad's parents. So, if I say anything about my grandparents, I'm talking about my mom's parents, who lived until I was, like, twenty-five and thirty-seven or thirty-eight, when they both passed away. So, I had grandparents well into my early years. Let's see, Grandma didn't die--I think I was almost thirty-seven or thirty-eight when my grandmother passed away--and she was a pistol.

SI: Yes. [laughter]

RC: She was a pistol.

SI: Do you remember her telling you any stories about her life?

RC: No, she really didn't. She didn't say a lot. She came from an old Newark family. My grandmother's maiden name was Lehrhoff. It was an old Newark family that had been in the bakery businesses and things, but Grandma never said much. I don't even know what her education was. If I could say, she probably didn't have a lot of formal education.

She was the oldest of five children. So, again, that's why my mom had a whole bunch of cousins. My father basically had no family. He had a couple of relatives and that was about it. My mother had plenty of relatives and many of them are still around.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

RC: They met in Coney Island. My mom went over there for some reason. (These are questions you should've always asked and you didn't.) My mom met my dad in Coney Island. Why she went to Coney Island, I'm not really sure, but they met there.

They were married in May of '37. They never lived in New York; they always lived in New Jersey. So, obviously, I always say my dad probably--I always theorized that, because my mom had much more of a family and parents and two sisters and a brother and many cousins, that I think my father probably said, "This is a good family network," where he barely had anything.

I'm not even sure what his relationship with his mother was [like]. My brother and I often said that our grandmother died when my brother was about three-and-a-half, yet, we have no pictures of him with her. Now, you don't have all the technology of today, but, if you had one grandchild, you would think you would take a picture with your grandchild. There's no pictures of my brother with my dad's mom. Again, transportation was a little harder, but you still could get from New York to New Jersey. So, we think it might have been a strained relationship, but never asked questions, always wish you had. Later on, it's easy, but never did.

SI: Let me pause.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about how your parents got together.

RC: Yes.

SI: Your father moved to the Newark area.

RC: To Newark, period, not Newark area, Newark.

SI: Yes. Do you know if they started the diner right away or were they doing other things?

RC: They both worked. During World War II, I know my father worked in, it was called Celanese [a chemical company], in Newark during the war. When World War II started, my father was already in his late thirties. So, yes, he was already over the draft age and he also had a child, not me. So, he was probably exempt from the draft for that, excuse the phrase, unless they get really desperate and wanted to start drafting thirty-five-year olds, because he was already thirty-five when the war started.

No, actually, my grandparents (again, referring to my mom's parents), at that time, owned a diner in Linden. My grandparents had moved to Linden. I'm not exactly sure when, but I know we

used to visit them from Newark when I was a little kid living in Newark. My father, at some point, and I don't know the exact time, started working in the diner in Linden for my grandparents. So, he worked for his mother-in-law and father-in-law, which also kept their daughter and their two [grand]sons fed and with income.

In 1955, late '55, I think it was, my grandparents decided to retire and move to Florida. They were ahead of their time. At that point, again, my father was already an employee of my grandparents. My mom and dad bought the business from my grandparents. So, my mom and dad became the owner of the diner that my grandparents had previously owned and my dad was an employee. So, they now were the owners of the business.

At that point, in 1956, we moved from Newark to Linden. We moved to Linden in 1956. I was ten years old. My brother was fourteen. So, that's why we left Newark, was to be near the business. It was easier living a mile-and-a-half away from the diner for getting to the business.

It was just easier commuting and everything, because, previously to that, my dad, before they bought a car--I remember, they bought a '55 Chevy--before that, he used to take the bus from Newark to Linden. He probably took two buses to get to work and back and forth. So, that's how we wound up in Linden.

SI: You said earlier he worked for Celanese.

RC: Celanese, during World War II.

SI: What did he do there?

RC: I really don't know. It's not a vague answer, I really don't know. He was a factory worker. During the war, you needed [workers]. Now, it affected me later, I could say, in the type of job I wound up in the Army. I always tell everybody, "Whenever you're at war, if you think a hundred percent of people are in combat, the answer is no. You always need support people behind." By support, I also mean manufacturing and all kinds of things.

Ironically, in Linden, there was a General Motors plant. Across from the General Motors plant in Linden on Route 1 was a small airport, Linden Airport. Okay, during World War II, that's how they got things in and out of the GM plant that needed quick parts and things. You built a small airport right across the street from [it], one side of Route 1 and the other side of Route 1 in Linden.

I don't know if you've ever gone up that way, but that's how Linden Airport came about, was because of World War II, of shipping things and parts in and out. I'm sure a lot of the things that were built at the plant weren't shipped by Linden Airport, because you're talking larger vehicles, but certain things, or if somebody needed to come to the airport, that's how Linden Airport came about.

SI: Did your mother work outside of the home during World War II?

RC: My mom actually worked, when I was real little in Newark, in a couple of different bakeries. Again, her parents' family had owned bakeries and diners, so, she was familiar with it, but, when we moved to Linden, my mom and dad worked in the diner. They just weren't co-owners of the place; they were co-workers in the diner. So, that's where my mom worked. That's where her two sons also worked. [laughter]

SI: Yes, I am definitely going to ask you about that later. Before we leave Newark, any memories of when you grew up there?

RC: Absolutely, went to Peshine Avenue School in Newark, which, if you're ever on Route 78, okay, traveling from Newark Airport, you can actually see the school at a certain point, when the leaves are down during the winter. You can see the school from Route 78 as you pass through Newark. Actually, you have to be going west to see it, because, if you're going east, it's like right above you and you really can't see it.

I always tell everybody I have nothing but fond memories of Newark. I only lived there until I was ten. It was a pleasant, little neighborhood. It was called the Weequahic section of Newark, which was primarily a Jewish neighborhood of Newark. Newark, like a lot of [cities]--I always say Newark was like Brooklyn, but much smaller--you had your microcosms of ethnic neighborhoods. Actually, today, in Newark, there still are some ethnic neighborhoods, okay, but I have nothing but fond memories.

We were only a couple blocks from what was called Weequahic Park. If you've ever driven down Route 22, going towards Newark Airport, through Hillside, as soon as you hit the Newark border, you're going through Weequahic Park. We used to play there and sled there, nothing but fond memories, cannot ever remember any violence or anything in Newark. Of course, I was a small child.

It was a three-story apartment building across the street from a four-story apartment building. Everybody in the neighborhood knew everybody's child and everybody played. There was the stoop in front of the house. I have pictures of the place. It was pleasant memories. I was one month into the fifth grade when we left Newark, but, again, it was an enjoyable childhood there. Newark today is a different place, yes.

SI: Since we mentioned your brother a few times, can you say his name for the record?

RC: Jack.

SI: Okay. He was born in 1942.

RC: He was born in July of '42.

SI: Okay.

RC: And he's a Rutgers grad also.

SI: Okay.

RC: Pharmacy.

SI: Great. Growing up in Newark, you said it was a primarily Jewish neighborhood, area.

RC: Yes.

SI: Did religion play a role in your life growing up?

RC: Absolutely. My parents, especially much more with my dad, but my mom always said she was a mother and a wife. She knew her religion, but I don't think she was, when I say deeply religious, I don't mean in an Orthodox sense, but just the values and everything. My dad, it was an absolute in his life. Okay, it was an absolute in his life, of what he believed in and what he thought of and everything there. He was proud.

SI: Would you go to services each week and that sort of thing?

RC: Yes, there was a little synagogue [on] the next block from us. In that era, there was probably a synagogue in Newark every five or six blocks. There just was. That's why I say it's just like being in Brooklyn, except it was maybe one-fifth the size, the same type of people that lived there.

SI: Was it a big change moving to Linden, or was it a similar type of area?

RC: No, I don't think [so], no. It was a little different change, but I was only ten years old. So, I think we moved, like, two weeks after my tenth birthday. When you're ten years old, [what do you recall]?

No, Linden was a little different, okay, not as concentrated, because Linden was primarily all single-family homes, okay, versus having a neighborhood with little, small apartment buildings. Linden was different in that respect, but, compared to Newark, it was almost rural, even though it wasn't rural, okay. I enjoyed living in Linden also.

SI: Was the neighborhood you moved to more of a diverse, melting pot area?

RC: Absolutely diverse.

SI: Yes.

RC: Childhood friend who lived across the street from me was Polish, friend on the next block was Italian. It was definitely more of a diverse [place], Linden, and, to this day, I think, still is. Linden was a very high percentage of Polish and Slavic backgrounds.

Again, if you're going back into the '60s, a lot of the kids that I knew growing up, many of their parents were born on the other side. They weren't necessarily born in the United States, but

came here as children themselves. Again, my parents were both born here. Today, it's fifty-five and sixty years later, so, things change, but, yes, Linden was good in that respect.

SI: Would you say that most of the people you knew, their fathers (or maybe mothers) worked at GM? Was it tied to the factories there?

RC: Some of their parents did. I remember the Italian friend's father worked at the Singer Sewing Machine in Elizabeth. A friend across the street, his father actually worked at a bakery in Elizabeth as a deliveryman. The fathers of my friends were all also blue-collar, Depression-era people.

Ironically, everybody I'm talking about, we all went to college and got degrees, but I always say to people, "If you're my age, the chances are your parents grew up and lived through the Depression and, also, World War II." It's just like Brokaw's book about "The Greatest Generation." They were part of that Greatest Generation.

A number of my friends growing up--I didn't think of it [in my] childhood--some of their fathers were World War II veterans. You didn't even really [think of it]. The friend across the street, his father was an infantryman in World War II. Growing up, I didn't realize that. He was just Ronnie's father. [laughter]

[Editor's Note: Tom Brokaw, the anchor of *NBC Nightly News* from 1982 to 2004, published *The Greatest Generation* in 1998, which tells the story of the American generation that grew up during the Great Depression, and then, lived through World War II.]

SI: Was there a synagogue in Linden at the time?

RC: There were two of them.

SI: Okay.

RC: Okay, of which we joined one of them. It was just about a mile from the house. Actually, it was diagonally across the street from Linden High School. Of course, I wasn't in Linden High yet.

SI: Probably more from your mother's side, were there traditions kept up, either in general or in religious practice?

RC: Well, we attended services. I always say we didn't keep a kosher home. My mother always said that kosher means to keep clean and she always said, "My husband and my sons are clean." Again, an Orthodox rabbi wouldn't take that as a definition of kosher, okay, but, no, there were traditions kept up.

We were always a member of a synagogue, an active religious organization. If you look at the people in the picture over there, that's not who we are. Yes, we weren't Orthodox in that respect.

[Editor's Note: Here and throughout the interview, Mr. Cobin refers to photos, documents and art on the walls and on the table used for the interview.]

SI: Yes.

RC: Yes, but there's Moses. That's a needlepoint Bev did.

SI: Very nice.

RC: Yes, she does a lot on that.

SI: Let's talk about your schooling.

RC: Yes.

SI: You were going to Peshine Avenue School in Newark. Then, where did you go in Linden?

RC: In Linden, Linden had ten elementary schools, two junior highs and one high school. So, each one fed into the other. So, when we moved to Linden, I ironically went--and the schools were numbered in the order that they were built, okay--to School 1. So, that was the first school in Linden. I think it was built, like, in 1912. I joined there in the fifth grade, okay, and did the rest of the fifth grade and the sixth grade there. It was about five blocks from the house.

Linden knew--Social Security should know this much--the Baby Boomers were coming along. They knew that kids born in '46 were a much larger class than kids born in '45 and '44. The reason I'm mentioning this is, when we got to Linden, my brother was in the ninth grade. He immediately went to Linden High, because he was in the ninth grade. I did not go to the ninth grade in Linden High.

By the time I got to junior high school, Linden moved the ninth grade to the two junior high schools. The way you went to the junior high school, there was just one street in Linden--if you lived on one side of it, you went to one junior high, if you lived on the other side, you went to the other junior high. So, by the time I got to junior high school, Linden had moved the ninth grade to the junior high.

They expanded the junior highs a little bit. By the time I got to the high school, they had expanded the high school. So, I did seventh, eighth and ninth at the junior high, which was three blocks in another direction from school. So, I always say--and Linden High was a mile away--I saved a mile walking for one year in the ninth grade. I only had to walk three blocks instead of a mile, never was bussed to school in my entire life, rarely got a ride, so, walked everywhere.

Okay, so, I did the seventh, eighth, and ninth at Joseph E. Soehl Junior High School. That was S-O-E-H-L. I know it may sound corny, but there were four entrances to the school. I don't remember exactly what I did in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, but every entrance had a saying and a plaque over the entrance to the school.

The entrance that I walked in to the school [through] had a saying that said, "The wealth of the mind is the only wealth." Like I say, I don't remember now what I did in the seventh, eighth and ninth grade, but I always remembered that saying over the door, that, "The wealth of the mind is the only wealth." I just loved it. It was just a great little saying, which really says, "If you have a good head, you can do anything."

SI: What did you think of the quality of the education you got, say before high school and junior high?

RC: I guess it was good. Yes, I don't know. When you're that young, can you really evaluate the teachers? passed all the subjects, except one in high school, passed all the subjects, did well in them. So, I guess the quality [was good].

I read all the time in the papers now about, in the inner cities, like in Asbury Park and Newark, the quality of education--I never had any complaints on Linden or my parents had any complaints, so, I guess the education [was good]. You didn't evaluate it, I think, that much as a child. There were a couple of teachers I could've done without, but they probably could've done without me as a student also, okay, for not particularly [doing well].

I always say I wasn't a great student, so, it was probably more my issue than it was [theirs]. The teachers tried, I'm sure. Even though, back then, the English teachers all thought that Shakespeare was a god, I never considered Shakespeare a god. When we watch *Jeopardy*, I rarely can answer a question about Shakespeare, but I can on a lot of other subjects.

SI: Was there any particular subject that you favored over others?

RC: Oh, I always loved math.

SI: Okay.

RC: I thought it was logical. I just always felt math was logical.

SI: Okay.

RC: Yes, I didn't necessarily think grammar was logical. Even to this day, I don't think grammar is necessarily logical. We always joke about Bev, when I was in school, writing papers and I would mix up T-H-E-R-E and T-H-E-I-R. I would say, "They're both there." [laughter]

Beverley Cobin: And he still doesn't know it. [laughter]

RC: They're both there. They both sound the same. [laughter] So, that's why I say math is logical. Two times two is always four.

SI: Yes.

RC: Times two is always eight, yes, or whatever. [laughter]

SI: How old were you when you started helping out in the diner?

RC: Probably the day after we moved to Linden. [laughter] It might've been three days later. I was probably helping there at eleven or twelve, yes. I never had a job as a child. I never was a paperboy. There was always a job at the diner. There was always a job at the diner.

It was an old-time diner. Our business was primarily all the factory workers in the area. It wasn't a twenty-four-[hour diner]. At four-thirty or five in the afternoon, the business closed. When the factory workers went home, we went home. It wasn't a twenty-four-by-seven.

There was always floors to be swept. There was always an ice cooler to be filled with sodas or juices or whatever the case is there. Pre-packaging had not hit the world yet, so, there were salt and pepper shakers to fill, there were napkin folders to fill, there were sugar bowls to fill.

These are constants of things. There was always dishes to take off of the [tables]. I didn't take care of customers, okay, but, after somebody left and ate, the dish always had to be taken away and taken to be washed. After it was cleaned, it had to be returned to wherever you would access them. So, ironically, today, sometimes people ask me, "What do you do at the hospital?" I say, "Well, what do you do in the kitchen at your home with a family of four? Multiply that by feeding 250 people," and there's always something to do. [laughter]

In the diner, I swept the floors, I took out the garbage, I filled the sugar, any little thing that you could do, which always needs to be done. I actually did a little bit of cleaning. I don't think my mom or dad always thought that I did the cleaning that well, but floors could always be swept.

BC: Still don't.

RC: I still don't. [laughter]

SI: Yes. As you got older, you did not wait tables?

RC: Oh, no, as I got older, I did.

SI: Okay.

RC: I think when I was around fifteen, I started. I think Linden, back then, had something, they called it working papers. I don't know if that still exists today, where you were authorized [to work].

SI: Yes.

RC: I think you couldn't have working papers until you were sixteen, okay, but, in a small business owned by the family, you could push along a little faster. [laughter] Customers knew who I was, yes. The people that came in were mostly regulars. They knew I was the owners'

child. My brother is four years older. My brother was doing the same thing. He just got an earlier start because he was four years older than I am. He did the same thing.

We all helped out. Again, we never had little jobs. There was always a job at the diner. So, I never worked at Carvel or Dairy Queen or delivered newspapers or worked at a liquor store. I'm only saying those because these are some of the things my friends did. I never did any of those things. There was always a job. I didn't have to go looking for it--it was there.

SI: Did you have time for extracurricular activities? Particularly, as you got towards high school?

RC: Not a lot. My dad died the week before I entered high school.

SI: Oh.

RC: Okay, in 1960. So, my mom was forty-seven, I think, a widow with a fourteen-year-old and an eighteen-year-old. Actually, by my dad dying one week before school started, that was the week before I entered ninth grade--I can't say Linden High, because that was the junior high--and it was the week before my brother entered college.

So, I went to Saturday morning football games. I never played on a high school team. I didn't even really join too many clubs, because, after high school, on most days--if we lived here and the diner was here, the high school was here--so, after school many days, I just walked to the diner. The diner was a little over a mile from where we lived. From the high school, it was maybe two-thirds of a mile. So, after high school, many times, I just walked straight to the diner and started helping, doing things.

I really didn't join too many clubs. I did try out for the basketball team in the eighth grade. I was one of the last cuts, okay, but I never played any high school sports, because I was helping my mom. You've got to realize, the further along I was in high school, the further along my brother was in college. So, let's say when I was a sophomore in high school, my brother was a sophomore in college. When I was, obviously, a junior in high school, my brother was a junior in college. So, my brother was able to help less and less, okay, because he lived at home.

Rutgers Pharmacy was in Newark at that time, so, he just drove to Newark every day, just like it was a job, to go to college. So, he lived at home, but he could help less and less because of his college load. So, I didn't join, I was not on the football team, the basketball team, the baseball team. I may have been able to make one of them, I don't know, okay, but I didn't, because helping out was a higher priority. I'm not saying we were poor, but we weren't rich either. Owning a diner, we never went hungry. [laughter]

SI: Yes. It is really remarkable that, one, your mother was able to keep the business going.

RC: Well, she had no choice. You're a widow at forty-seven, you don't have any real profession except you own a small business. You do what you have to do.

SI: Yes.

RC: You've got two teenage boys. By the way, Bev's father also passed away young. So, her mother went through similar things and she has two older brothers. So, you did what you had to do. She had to run a business. She had no choice. Otherwise, how does she pay the rent, the mortgage? How does she run the business? She has to do it.

My mom had no choice. Again, two teenage sons and you're a widow, you have to do what you have to do. So, she continued to run the diner after my dad passed away. She continued to run [it]; she had to. It was a source of income, yes.

SI: Yes, but, also, it is remarkable that you and your brother were able to go to college, that she did not say, "One (or both) of you has to stay and help."

RC: No, she never [would], because I think every parent, they want to see their children [succeed]. Do you have children?

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay. How old?

SI: Seven and three.

RC: Okay, you've got little ones. Every parent wants that, but, today, we're much more educated in general. Remember, my parents weren't. Again, I'd say they were intelligent people, but they weren't well educated. Of my friends growing up, none of our parents were college graduates. A lot of them weren't even high school graduates, okay. They wanted their children to go on to be better educated.

So, my mom did what she had to do, but it didn't stop my brother from going to college. To tell you frankly, as my brother got further in college--and, as a pharmacist, he'll brag about it--but he'll say, when you're starting to take chemistry and biochemistry and all these things here, he needed to learn chemistry more than he needed to fry eggs on a grill or make an omelet.

Eventually, he would try to get some small jobs working in pharmacies. Even though he wasn't a pharmacist yet, he wanted to see the business. So, he started working in some pharmacies in Elizabeth as a little part-time employee. So, the diner, for him, had to start fading away, because it had to. There was no choice.

SI: What year did you graduate from Linden High School?

RC: June 17, 1964.

SI: Okay.

RC: How's that for an exact date?

SI: Very good. [laughter]

RC: The diploma is sitting somewhere around here.

SI: Yes.

RC: Not on the table.

SI: Oh, all right.

RC: Not the high school diploma. The Rutgers diploma is hanging in the hallway.

SI: Great.

RC: I didn't bring it here because it wasn't military related, but it was hanging.

SI: Sure.

RC: We have what we call "the halls of fame," if you can see the hallway leading to the bedrooms.

SI: Yes.

RC: One side is my wife's. That's my wife's. The other wall is my wall.

SI: Very good.

RC: Well, her family, my family. [laughter]

SI: So, at that point, had you decided on where you wanted to start college?

RC: I was a fairly poor student. Linden had three [tracks], allowed you to take what they called general courses, commercial courses and they had what they called college prep. I took all the college prep courses, okay, but I wasn't a great student. I was an indifferent student. That's the only way I could put it. I didn't have any great college aspirations. I was an indifferent student.

I passed everything. I almost failed one class, [laughter] but I passed everything. I just didn't have the drive or the ego that much for college. I always say, to this day, when people complain about things, "You have to be responsible for yourself." My mom didn't push me hard enough. My brother had already been pushed by my father at an early [age]. My brother also had a little bit more drive, I guess.

Off to the side for a second, we had three family members [in pharmacy]--two of my mother's cousins were married to pharmacists and one of her first cousins was a pharmacist. So, my brother knew three pharmacists while growing up, because they were all my mother's relatives.

So, somehow, at some early age, he liked pharmacy. He will tell you, I think even as a freshman in high school, he thought he wanted to be a pharmacist.

I didn't have that drive. I just didn't have it. I passed everything, but I didn't love schooling. I studied enough to pass classes and that was about it.

SI: How did you decide on what you wound up doing after graduation?

RC: Well, after graduation, I went straight to working for my mother. I worked in the diner full-time from the time I graduated high school until February 2nd of 1966, which is the day I got drafted.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay. I worked in the diner for about that year and three-quarters, just working full-time, forty hours a week, for my mother, living with my mother. I was taking a few classes at Newark State Teachers College in Union. You've got to realize, I got my degree, I never went to college one day during the day. My entire college degree is a night-time degree. I don't know if you were aware of that or not.

[Editor's Note: Kean University traces its existence to 1855 with the founding of Newark Normal School. In 1937, it became New Jersey State Teachers' College, and then, in 1958, it was renamed Newark State College. In 1973, it was renamed Kean College and obtained university status in 1997.]

SI: No, well, I assumed.

RC: I never went to college full-time.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, I was usually taking two classes. When I graduated high school, I probably took two classes every semester at Newark State Teacher's College. I just went there at night, took classes. I did apply to go to Newark State Teacher's College full-time for the spring semester of 1966, but Uncle Sam came calling a little before that. I asked for a deferment from the draft board as a student deferment. I was rejected because I wasn't taking enough credits to get a student deferment.

I also said that I was accepted to go to college full-time in February or whenever the semester begins, the end of January. Somebody asked me a question which had a simple "yes" or "no" answer, "Are you a full-time college student today?" The answer was, "No." That made me draft eligible. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

RC: That made me draft eligible. So, on February 2nd of '66, Uncle Sam said, "I want you." You want to pause it for a second maybe.

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RC: Okay.

SI: All right.

RC: Remember, I was just going to school at nights at Newark State.

SI: Yes.

RC: But, "Son, come in for a physical."

SI: Yes. We are looking at your order to report for the Armed Forces physical examination.

RC: Yes, that's a physical. This is not a draft notice. This is just coming in for a physical.

SI: November 23, 1965.

RC: '65. "Just come in for a physical. Let's see if you're in good shape or not." They couldn't find anything wrong with me.

SI: Yes. I am curious--I would guess, by 1965, Vietnam would have been on your radar. Most people your age would have thought going in the service meant going to Vietnam.

RC: Absolutely.

SI: Yes. Had you followed the developments in Vietnam?

RC: I was following it some. I guess I had a chance to join the National Guard or Reserves, but, again, I was applying to Newark State to go full-time. So, I guess (in my brain at that time) that overrode to say, "Hey, I'm going to be a full-time student in February, okay, of the following year." You can ask a lot of guys today, my age--I'm seventy-two--a lot of them joined the Reserves and National Guard, did their six months of active duty. Then, they went into the Reserve or National Guard status for another five years, because you usually put in six years.

I had every opportunity to do that and I never did it, because I thought I would be [exempt]. I thought wrong. [laughter] So, yes, in February 2nd of '66, I went to Newark and got inducted.

SI: What was that experience like, both the physical, and then, getting inducted?

RC: Well, the physical was no big deal.

SI: Okay.

RC: Yes, it was just two hours. You took the physical and you went back home. The induction was weird. One day, you're a civilian and, all of a sudden, [you are in the military]. If you joined the service voluntarily, it's one thing, but, all of a sudden--sometimes, I hear people say, "Oh, my kid's going away to college," but the kid can come home on the weekends and visit, depending upon where they live. Here, all of a sudden--I want to be nice now--you're just snatched away. You can't just turn around and say, "I want to go home for the weekend," or something. You can't do it.

So, it was weird in that respect. You didn't know what to expect, okay, except you knew Vietnam was in the news at that time. I don't have the figures, but I'm sure they could be found, if you see the figures of the draft from, like, let's say, November '65 through '66 and '67, they were drafting thirty, forty thousand people a month at times. It wasn't just [a few].

If you were male and not in college full-time, unless you were running to Canada, okay--actually, back then, I had some animosity for people like that. Today, I realize how unpopular Vietnam was, so, I don't feel as bad. Yes, I have little feelings for those people, okay, but I didn't do it because I thought I was going to be in college full-time.

SI: Yes. Did you see anybody at the physical or induction trying to get out of it?

RC: No, because they were in.

SI: Okay, yes.

RC: I do always say, I found one thing, how life sometimes [presents] things that you don't control, how fate brings you in different directions. You may think this is silly, but I'm going to give you some numbers. The numbers are not accurate; the thought is accurate. We're inducted. We take the pledge to go in. Let's say there was two hundred of us; there could've been 150. Let's say there were two hundred. It'll make numbers easier.

A staff sergeant walks into the room, gives us an orientation. He says, "The Marines are drafting fifteen percent this month." "Okay, so, from this group," I'll say two hundred, "I need thirty Marines." Fifteen percent of the group had to become Marines, because that was the Marine quota. "Do I have any volunteers?" This actually happened. [whispers] One person raises their hand.

So, he's got one out of thirty now. He doesn't say another word, okay, but he needs twenty-nine more Marines. We go take our [physical]. Now, we're taking another physical, because they give you a physical on induction. We were in a room with chairs, or, actually, benches, about five rows of benches.

My last name begins with "C." They start the physicals in alphabetical order. So, I was one of the early ones. After the physicals are over, we return to the same little auditorium type of room.

Now, when a room is empty (or somewhat empty), where do most people tend to sit, in lots of cases?

SI: Towards the front? Towards the back?

RC: Towards the back.

SI: Okay.

RC: Towards the back. So, when the physicals are over--two hours later, whatever it was, the time's insignificant--everybody in the room is back in the room. Everybody higher in the alphabet is sitting in the first couple of rows, because this is going to have a bearing on my next statement. It's going to have a bearing on this.

The same sergeant walks in again, "I need twenty-nine Marines." Now, I still remember, I had a high school classmate named Calvin Wheeler. He's higher in the alphabet. All of the people higher in the alphabet were in the first couple of rows, because those were the only seats that were open.

The guy comes along--you're going to love this, this is how life [goes]--he goes to the first person in the first row, he says, "You're a Marine." He then goes to the second person in the second row and says, "You're a Marine." He then goes to the third person in the first row--in other words, he did the first two rows and he did every other person. That's how he picked the other twenty-nine Marines.

SI: Oh, wow.

RC: Those guys became Marines that day because they were higher in the alphabet and they were sitting in the first two rows and they were the every other person. Now, I always think, "How much [of a role does fate play]?" That's so weird a feeling, how you were selected for something on something so random. I was further back in the room, so, I never got selected as a Marine. [laughter]

SI: Wow. Yes, it is incredible how fate works.

RC: Yes, it was so random to say those guys were Marines. Calvin's name was not on the Vietnam Wall, so, I know he survived.

SI: Wow.

RC: I just found that so random. That's how they picked Marines that day, every other one, "You're a Marine. Leave, go. You're off to Parris Island, South Carolina. The rest of you are going to Fort Dix."

SI: Wow. Tell me about arriving for basic training.

RC: We went to Fort Dix for about a week, where it snowed the night we left. They told us, "Don't bring much clothing, because you won't need it." So, everybody was damp, cold and we're trudging around in the snow. Over the next couple of days, we got Army fatigues. They orientated and they gave you [training], marched around and everything.

What happened was, again, there were people at Dix not just from my induction, there were people from other induction centers all over the area, all at Dix. So, there were probably a couple hundred people all being inducted at relatively the same time. Fort Dix, we were told, basic training, because of the growth of Vietnam, that they did not have room for us to be trained at Fort Dix. So, myself and probably--there wound up being three companies of people, so, we're talking a little over three hundred people--they shipped us all to Fort Carson, Colorado, which is at Colorado Springs. We all thought we would be at Fort Dix, because we were all from the East Coast.

So, about six days later, after the orientations were all done, they drove us down to Philadelphia, got on a four-engine prop. I still remember, it was about a six-hour flight on a four-engine prop, to Denver. Of course, we arrived in a snowstorm. Then, we drove the seventy or eighty miles on buses to Colorado Springs, which today is where the Air Force Academy was. It didn't exist back then. Then, we took basic training at Fort Carson, Colorado, at six thousand feet above sea level. I don't know if you've ever [been that high].

SI: No, I have never been that high up.

RC: Okay. Well, guess what? it's different. It's different. The climate is different. The altitude, you feel the lower oxygen. The air is extremely dry. I always say your main weapon in basic training was a chapstick and hand lotion, because your hands got very dry, your lips. You ever ski?

SI: No.

RC: Skiers always wear chapstick, because when you're out in that kind of weather, your skin gets very, very dry. So, I took basic training at Fort Carson, Colorado, six thousand feet above sea level. We could see Pikes Peak, which was, like, about twenty miles away from the post, because that was like fourteen thousand. So, you could see it and everything. So, I wound up getting shipped to Colorado Springs, which meant I didn't come home on weekend leaves. [laughter]

SI: Yes, wow.

RC: That was basic training.

SI: Was it preparing you to be in the infantry or was it more general?

RC: The answer to that question, Shaun, is a little bit of both. Basic training is just what it's called. It's basic, it's an orientation, even though it's eight weeks. It's getting used to military life, but it is aimed a lot at infantry, okay, because that's the biggest section of the military,

especially then, is infantry. So, it was aimed at infantry, absolutely aimed at it, but it was also just general, getting used to weapons.

I had never fired a weapon in my life, except at a shooting gallery in Asbury Park and those were just .22s. There were people there that hunted. They were used to weapons. I'd never fired a weapon in my entire life before I went in the Army--and haven't fired one since I left the Army, okay--but, yes, that's what basic training is. It's eight weeks.

SI: Does anything stand out about the men you were with then?

[TAPE PAUSED]

RC: I didn't really. You got to know the guys in your basic training company, but there's no lifelong relationships from that. We were all in the same situations. We have friends, our own children, our son and daughter--when you go to college, all of a sudden, you have a roommate. Is the roommate compatible with you? Do you like to sleep the same hours? Does one smoke? Does the other not smoke? All of a sudden, you're living in a barracks with forty other guys. You've got all kinds of diverse things going on. You tried to make the best of it and tried to stay a little low key.

Basic training, they got you up at five-thirty in the morning. They ran you all day long. So, at night, when training was over, there was no social [time]. The biggest thing was, we played a little bit of cards in the barracks. I used to play cards with guys and they always played for a little bit of money.

I would join the penny, nickel, dime games, but guys who played for larger stakes, I would never--not because the amount of money, but because I found out, when people make mistakes in dealing and everything, guys get PO-ed, okay. So, if you play for lower stakes, if something wrong happens, unintentionally wrong, people don't get as annoyed, when, all of a sudden, the pot's wrong or something. So, I only played in the penny, nickel, dime games. I'm serious. You're throwing five, ten dollars ...

SI: Yes.

RC: You've got to remember, this is 1966. If you're playing for hands using a couple dollars, that was a decent amount of money, especially for the money we were making as privates. So, guys could get annoyed and PO-ed. So, I stayed out of those games. You won a few, you lost a few. I never smoked, so, I stayed away from the smokers.

SI: After the eight weeks of basic training, by this point (you obviously take a lot of tests when you first go in during induction), had you already been selected for anything like OCS or artillery?

RC: Yes. Well, the order is OCS first and artillery second.

SI: Okay.

RC: Okay. Somewhere, maybe the fifth week of basic training, I get called down to the company orderly room (as they would call it) to see the First Sergeant. So, I get there. The First Sergeant says, "The Executive Officer," who's a second lieutenant, "wants to see you." Of course, human nature says, "What did I do wrong? Why do they want to see me?" I have no idea of what's going on. That's the inclination we all have, "Did I do something wrong? Why do they want to see me?" I had no earthly idea.

The Second Lieutenant sits me down and says, "We gave a lot of aptitude tests and things and you scored quite high on a bunch of the tests. You may qualify to go to OCS," and my brain is saying, "What's OCS?" I really didn't know what it was. Then, he said, "Officer Candidate School." He says, "You may be a qualifier for it." He says, "I want you to think about it a day or two, and then, you'll come back here," and he says a few things.

When I get back to the barracks, maybe an hour or two later, the sergeant in charge of our company [talked to me]. He knew I had been there and he knew the reason I was there. It wasn't said to people in general, but the Sergeant knew. He pulled me aside. I still remember, he had joined the Army in Korea. Remember, Korea, at that point, was only fifteen years earlier [1950-1953]. So, he, himself, was probably in his mid to late thirties.

Sergeant Robinson, I always remember him, he says to me, "You know what? The opportunity for extra training, being a little more specialized, potentially becoming an officer," he says, "you may want to think about it and be worthwhile thinking about it." The lieutenant I spoke to never said any of those things about it, but the Sergeant said that to me.

So, that gave an impression to me, to think, "Maybe I should consider this." I also knew that I was destined to be an infantryman and probably destined for Vietnam as an infantryman. So, there was a little motivation to say, "You know what? Extra training, extra time, delaying, it might be worth it."

So, I finally went back, and then, I had an interview. I went before an interview panel of, I think, a major, a lieutenant colonel. Before the interview, they're telling me, the lieutenant from our company says, "Well, you might want to brush up on current events, doing things." I'm thinking, "Current events? I never see a newspaper. We barely ever hear or read [news]." We did have radios that we could listen to news [on]. I didn't know what was going on in the world. I wouldn't even have known what the stock market was doing, not that I was in it at the time, but I didn't know.

I always say you were like in jail, but you really weren't in jail. We weren't exposed to any outside elements to really know what was happening in the world and he's going to ask me things about current events? I don't know what the hell's happening in the world, but the interview was more general in nature, of asking thoughts and feelings of things. Then, they say, "We'll get back to you."

Maybe a week or so before basic training ended, they said, "You've been [selected]," that you qualify. You've passed the interview process and you've passed the tests and everything. So, you are potentially headed to OCS.

Basic training ended. I went home on leave, back to New Jersey, returned to Fort Carson for what they called advanced infantry training, okay, because nothing had happened yet, for advanced infantry training. Now, you're really becoming an infantryman.

About three weeks into advanced training, I again get called down to the orderly room. They say, "We are shipping you out to go to a specialized training," like a pre-training, "before you go to OCS." So, I leave Fort Carson and I go to Fort Ord, California, which is on the Monterey Peninsula. I was told I was going to specialized training before OCS.

Lo and behold, I get there and I'm just in another infantry advanced training. So, I had just done three weeks of infantry training at Fort Carson and, now, I'm repeating the same thing at Fort Ord. I'm thinking, "What's specialized here? I'm just doing the same thing all over again." I always loved, from Tennyson, a little bit, "Mine is not to reason why, but to do or die." You familiar with those lines?

SI: Yes.

RC: From "The Charge of the Light Brigade." Okay, this is the guy who didn't like literature in high school.

[Editor's Note: Lord Alfred Tennyson, a nineteenth-century British poet, wrote "Charge of the Light Brigade" in 1854, which describes a cavalry charge at the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War.]

So, I do their training. I'm, in essence, repeating the first three weeks. So, now, I become a full-fledged infantry trainee, person being trained in infantry. During the course of the advanced infantry training at Fort Ord, again, you start filling out forms for OCS. They ask, on the form, "Which OCS would you like to go to?"

So, I'm a little smart aleck, I put down, "Well, first choice would be the Finance Corps. Second choice would be the Signal Corps. Let's say third choice would be the Ordnance Corps." Now, you notice I didn't put any ...

SI: Combat branches. [laughter]

RC: Exactly, [laughter] I didn't put any combat branches.

SI: Yes.

RC: So, I fill out all my forms. Then, I get called back to the form people again, who said, "Your form's okay, except for one thing. In your three choices, you have to choose at least one combat arm." So, whatever I wrote for number three, I wrote down artillery. I crossed it out and

I put artillery as my third choice. Well, guess what? I got my third choice. [laughter] I got my third choice.

After I finished the advanced training at Fort Ord, the advanced infantry training, they had no orders for me. "What am I doing? Where am I going?" I've now finished basic training. I've finished your advanced infantry training. Now, any logical person in the military would now get shipped out to a unit or to other specialized training that they may [require], whether you're becoming a radioman or whatever you were doing. They had no orders for me.

So, I sat at Fort Ord for almost two months, but the nice part was, it was summertime. Fort Ord borders on the ocean at the Monterey Peninsula and it was summertime. So, I became an "odd job." I was a sergeant's helper for two months. I would work a half a day. That's all they wanted me to do, because they had other guys in the same situation who worked the other half a day.

In the afternoon, I might go out to Route 1 in California, stuck out my thumb. I would go over to Monterey or Carmel Beach, which was there, if you've ever heard of Carmel, and I'd go swimming. It was summertime. It was the ocean. So, I had a beautiful two months of the Summer of '66. Finally, in late summer, orders finally come through and you are headed to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to Artillery OCS.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You went from Fort Ord to Fort Sill. Since you spent a lot of time going around, seeing the different areas, did you sense any hostility towards people in uniform at that time?

RC: No, I didn't.

SI: Okay.

RC: But, then, again, I wasn't really exposed. Well, maybe that's not the best word. At Fort Carson, in basic training, you didn't go anywhere anyway. So, you didn't meet anybody; you just didn't meet anybody. At Fort Ord, they let us off post a little bit, but, by the time I got to Fort Ord in advanced training, I could have civvies. So, if I went off post and had a pass, I didn't have to be in uniform. I just didn't need to be in uniform.

After you're sitting there in uniform all the time, every second of the day, there's a point where sometimes you say, "I'd like to take the uniform off," okay. So, no, I didn't have any issues with that. I was going to say, the picture of me, sitting on the railcar in San Francisco, obviously, I'm not ...

SI: Yes, I do not think you were.

RC: Yes, I was not in uniform. I was wearing a sweater. No, so, I didn't have any real things there that I thought [about]. Here, I'm sitting on a railcar, I'm just wearing a pair of pants and a sweater here, San Francisco, 1966.

SI: Okay.

RC: No, I didn't have any issues, but, then, again, when you're near military bases, the local people, you're part of their economy. No, you truly are part of their economy. So, they don't [bother you]. They like [the money]. When they closed down Fort Monmouth, a lot of places in Eatontown took hits, okay, because you're part of the local economy. [Editor's Note: Fort Monmouth, New Jersey was an Army post that established in 1917. It was closed in 2005.]

SI: Yes.

RC: So, didn't have any real issues there.

SI: All right.

RC: I was joking before [about] my "fun job." When I went to OCS, I was at Fort Ord, California. This is being silly--I had an ordeal that I would not want to put anybody through. Okay, I'm at Fort Ord, California, I've got two weeks before I'm going to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I want to get home to New Jersey. There's a national airline strike. I'm serious, Summer of '66, there's a national airline strike. How do I get from California to New Jersey?

[Editor's Note: In the Summer of 1966, members of the International Association of Machinists, working for five US airlines, went on strike for forty-three days. The strike involved about thirty-five thousand workers.]

Now, there's things called military lifts, okay, where if you go to a military post, like an Air Force Base, and if there's planes, [you can fly], but it's based upon priorities and a lot of it had to do with rank. I had no priority and I had no rank. So, there was no use doing that.

So, I took a local bus from Fort Ord to San Francisco and I got on a Greyhound bus. Three-and-a-half days later, I wind up in New Jersey. I took a bus across the country. It was horrible. How would you like to be on a bus for three-and-a-half days? [laughter]

SI: Yes.

RC: It did stop occasionally. That's how I got back to New Jersey. I eventually got a plane to go back to Oklahoma, to get there, but three-and-a-half days on a bus, oh, God, I wouldn't want to put anybody through that. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

RC: Okay, and I was in uniform during that, because, during travel, you wore your uniform.

SI: Tell me about getting to Fort Sill and starting OCS.

RC: You just said it. In the Fall of '66, I wind up at Fort Sill. I will jokingly tell everybody--and I always have my brother, who says to me how hard pharmacy school was, okay, which it was, with all the sciences and everything--OCS was the hardest seven months of my life. What they put you through in OCS, it basically amounted to (and I'm being a little funny), in quote marks here, Shaun, "You lost all civil liberties, but you were there voluntarily." I wasn't in the Army voluntarily, but I was at OCS voluntarily. You could quit at any time.

They harassed you. They did everything in the world [to you]. Their whole essence was to break you down, to build you back up in the image of what they wanted as a young officer. They harassed the hell out of us. They woke us up in the middle of the night, sleeping. They did everything in the world to [make things] go wrong. They punished you by doing extra laps around buildings. They punished you with push-ups--when I say punished, no physical violence to you, but just the absolute [control].

When you hear somebody's being bullied, we were bullied every second of OCS, because that's the way OCS [worked]. Now, when I say every second, the further along you got in OCS, they did what they called lower-class, middle-class and upper-class. So, when you were two-thirds of the way through OCS, you became an upper-classman--harassment started going away.

Actually, you became the harasser of the lower-classmen, because the older kids--when I say older, I mean time there--the older became the harasser of the younger, because it was done to them by upperclassmen. Now that you're an upperclassman, you get to harass. I always felt sorry for lowerclassmen. I never really harassed them that much, okay, but some guys took full advantage of it.

That was seven months of training. A lot of it, at the beginning, was all based upon physical and endurance. Then, little by little, we started getting more and more into [class work]. The first month-and-a-half or about six weeks of OCS had nothing to do with artillery. It was just all [physical]. It was almost like basic training all over again, but advanced basic training, in other words, to a higher degree of pushing you, to see what you could take. Then, you started merging into the artillery portion of it.

Once you started getting into the artillery portion, we actually sat in classrooms and had classes, which amounted to taking trigonometry, okay, because it's all about angles and arcs and parabolas and charges. That's what artillery's about. It's just not putting a projectile in and shooting it and saying, "Oh, I hope it lands somewhere." [laughter] You had to know the difference between if you were shooting at somewhere at a terrain [on a] different level than you. Are you shooting at something where there's a forest between you? So, you have to shoot over it. So, it has all to do with angles.

I always tell people, "A tank is a direct. A tank only shoots at something it can see, because it's what you call a direct fire thing. Artillery is indirect. Artillery, many times, shoots at something it can't see." So, you have to go in through arcs and parabolas, and that all is all mathematics. It's all math, which is probably why I wound up there, because I know I did well in math. That was my theory, anyway, I think--or was it just my third choice? [laughter]

SI: Tell me a little bit about the type of equipment you were training to use. What was the state-of-the-art then for artillery?

RC: Well, we were being trained on 105 and 155, which are called howitzers. I actually have pictures and a lot of things of all the guns, if you wanted to see some. Want to pause for a second?

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RC: Between the weapons of fifty years ago and today, believe it or not, in many cases, more sophistication in certain respects, but a 105 howitzer is still a 105 howitzer. The Army trained you. That little weapon, that's an old style--that was a gift on leaving from my department--that's a Civil War era type of cannon.

SI: Yes.

RC: But, we were being trained on 105, 155 howitzers, okay, whether they're called towed, where you put them in position, or where they're self-propelled, where they're on tracks. That's what we were being trained on.

Let me see some good pictures, probably.

SI: These are from reunions.

RC: Yes, I've gone to reunions, a whole bunch of them. This is one of Geronimo's children. Geronimo's buried at Fort Sill. Here's a lot of pictures of guys; thought there would be more weaponry.

[Editor's Note: Apache warrior and leader Geronimo (1829-1909) died as a prisoner-of-war at Fort Sill, where his grave remains.]

Yes, the Army, you were being trained to become an artilleryman, to know how to use the cannon, do all the things, but, in essence, as a second lieutenant (and maybe, eventually, a first lieutenant) in the artillery, you weren't trained to use the cannon itself. You were being trained to be a forward observer. Are you familiar with that phrase?

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, you were being trained to be a forward observer. I wasn't being trained to man the guns, okay, but you had to know how to use the guns. So, in your training, you were totally shown how to use the guns, okay, but your eventual training was to be the forward observer.

In combat, the two officers that are in combat the most as officers are lieutenants in the infantry and lieutenants in the artillery. Generally, a forward observer accompanies [infantry]. (This is a

155 howitzer here, okay; I can tell by the size of the tube. I know you wouldn't know, but I could tell by the size of the tube.)

You were being trained. (Oh, that's when we went to the *New Jersey* [museum battleship docked in Camden, New Jersey]. That's got guns, okay), but you were being trained to be a forward observer, which means, in combat, you would go out. (That's the inside of the weaponry. That's the breech, where they would go.) You were being trained to go out with infantry contingents. As part of the infantry, you would accompany infantry companies out in combat, because, when they needed artillery fire, you were the guy that was calling in for the fire. As the forward observer, that's what you [did]. (Here's another cannon here. There's cannons all over the place.)

SI: Wow, yes.

RC: Yes, so, you were being trained as a forward observer, okay, not to be the actual cannoneer, but, again, you have to still know what the cannon does. So, we were totally trained on cannon crews to know every position, because, besides being a forward observer, if, one day, you became a battery commander or a battery executive officer, you're in charge of the people who were on the guns. So, you had to know everything about the gun, forward and backwards. You had to know all the angles and all the things. There was a lot to learn, which is why it was seven months.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay. [laughter]

SI: Does anything stand out? I have heard that OCS companies, maybe, form more of a bond. Does anything stand out from the men you met there? [Editor's Note: Mr. Cobin shows reunion pictures.] Yes, the same guys, yes.

RC: Same guys, forty-five years later. He's going to be here tomorrow. We met in OCS and we've been friends for fifty-three years. He lives in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Actually, tomorrow, we're going to Harold's in Edison, if you know the deli.

SI: Oh, yes, absolutely.

RC: Yes. Here's a good shot of a good howitzer here. That's Bob and I together.

SI: Yes.

RC: After OCS, we roomed together. So, we've been friends for fifty-three years. We probably gravitated to each other because we had a lot in common. I don't want to bring this back to a religious standpoint, but we were the only two Jewish guys in our battery of a little over a hundred at OCS. Somehow, we found each other, okay. We became instant buddies, because we had cultural backgrounds and things in common, which I didn't have with a lot of other people, okay, and everything.

SI: I was going to ask, did you ever face any anti-Semitism in the military?

RC: Not that I thought about. We were all just trying to survive each day. If there was, it was very subtle and I didn't notice it.

Bev and I just watched something a couple of weeks ago on PBS, of Jews in combat. They interviewed [comedic actor] Carl Reiner. This is going back some years ago. Reiner says, in basic training, somebody yells out to him, "Hey, Reiner, are you a Jew?" What did it matter? He says, "We're looking to fight the Nazis." Did it really matter? I guess, to some people, it mattered, okay, but, no, I can't note that I really saw any anti-Semitism that I saw, unless it was very subtle.

You ever heard the expression that [Green Bay Packers coach] Vince Lombardi treated all of his players equally--like dogs. Well, the people who were in charge of us, they treated us all equal--like dirt. [laughter] We became better dirt as time went on, but that's the way the training was. That's what the training was about. It was to weed out the good from the bad and who could survive. I always say OCS was more a test of endurance. It's like running a marathon. Okay, it was a test of endurance, in many respects, both mentally and physically, endurance. It was a hard seven months. [laughter]

SI: Was it a high washout rate?

RC: There was a decent washout rate.

SI: Yes.

RC: Absolutely, absolutely. I would say probably a quarter of the people who started never finished. My brother once told me, [in] his pharmacy class, I think, only a little over half that started actually finished. So, there's always a washout rate in everything.

Now, you've got to remember, people said to me, how did I get to OCS? Previous to me going to OCS, the Army sort of made OCS very elite in getting to and most people who went to OCS were college graduates who did not go to ROTC or people that had been in the service a couple of years, maybe four, three, four, five years and now decided they'd like to try to become an officer instead of enlisted man. I was neither of those situations.

So, I've had people say to me in the past that the Army lowered their standards, okay, in order [to fill the ranks]. By the way, my situation of getting in, not being a college graduate, I was not alone in that. There were many people like me. As a matter-of-fact, probably three-quarters of us were like that. So, I always said the Army didn't lower their standards, they waived things. In other words, they never waived the requirements of the intelligence on the tests, because that's what got me to OCS, was the test, was the test scores. They never lowered that.

Yes, I wasn't prior service and I wasn't a prior college graduate, okay. They never waived [the testing requirement], but they did waive requirements of certain things, because, again, you were having a buildup. They needed, excuse me, I always say "cannon fodder." They needed people.

The only way to get more people is, you've got to do something to change it. The best way to change it was to waive some of the requirements, but certain requirements were never waived, okay, and those were the test scores. So, I scored high enough on the test scores, just as if I had been a college graduate, okay, which I wasn't.

SI: After seven months, you earn your commission. What was that day like? Oh, we have it here?

RC: Yes, that's the commission there. OCS also gave us [this]; this is just saying that you graduated the Artillery [School]. It was a diploma. In essence, it's this in a different form, okay, but they wanted to show you that you graduated. So, they gave us a diploma for finishing of the Artillery and Missile School. These all hang on walls in different places and you saw the picture there. That's the same picture that's there, with everybody else I graduated with.

SI: What was that day like for you, that ceremony?

RC: They sat us in an auditorium, just like any college graduation. They called us up alphabetically and they pinned the bar on you. You shook hands with a colonel and you're now a second lieutenant. Then, when we left the stage, the first sergeant of the company saluted us. This is the guy who brutalized us for seven months while becoming officers, but the tradition in the Army was that you gave a dollar to the first person who saluted you.

So, the First Sergeant sat at the down steps of the stage and he saluted every person that came off the stage. So, that day, I think he made 112 dollars, okay, because everybody handed him a dollar because he was the first person. Hey, after all those months of training, he wasn't about to give up his 112 dollars. So, he sat there and he saluted every one of us as we walked off the stage, okay, and he got his one dollar.

SI: Wow.

RC: Yes, there he is, the Sergeant. He got his one dollar, okay, as he saluted every one of us. He wasn't about to give that money up. [laughter]

SI: Yes. Missile training was part of it--did you have any missile training?

RC: Absolutely none.

SI: None, okay.

RC: Absolutely none.

SI: Wow.

RC: Okay, absolutely none. Now, some guys went to missile units after we were assigned places and they got missile training, but our training was all field artillery. After we graduated OCS, okay, about a year-and-a-half after that, the Artillery School and the Missile School

separated from each other. So, it eventually became only the Field Artillery School and the Missile School went to Fort Bliss, Texas.

Actually, about three or four years ago, they came back to each other again, but, yes, I had no missile training, okay, none whatsoever, in any way whatsoever. We wore insignias, if you could see here.

SI: Yes, with the missile on front.

RC: Which was the crossed cannons with the missile up the middle, but, a year later, we had to change our things. I still have a couple of pieces. I have them back in the bedroom, okay, but I had no missile training, absolutely nothing. We had a couple classes, they showed us pictures and that was about it. No, they were looking to send people to Vietnam and they weren't using missiles there. So, I had no missile training. You know as much about missiles as I do.
[laughter]

SI: At that point, had you already been assigned to the school there?

RC: Well, upon graduation, everybody gets assigned somewhere. It's like you graduate college, and then, the college says to you, "Would you like a job here?" Okay, I was assigned. Now, the Field Artillery and Missile School, the Artillery School had departments. You had a gunnery department, you had an engineering department--you had different departments within the school. The OCS was, in essence, one department of the school.

I got assigned back to the OCS School. In other words, I just graduated and, when I came back, I got assigned back to the OCS School, like the pictures of these guys that were the officers of my OCS unit, these young guys over here.

SI: Yes.

RC: I got assigned back as one of them. I didn't ask for it. It's what I was assigned. I did that for a couple of months. I did not like it, to be very frank. I didn't like being in charge of the students when I was just one myself. You just finished school and you went through all this harassment and, now, you're the chief harasser? It just wasn't in my personality. I didn't really enjoy it.

I think my company commander knew it. I only did that for a couple of months, and then, they transferred me within the post to another department. That's where I eventually wound up. They sent me over to one of the training departments. So, on 2 October of '67, I joined the Artillery Transport Department at the United States Army Field Artillery School. I stayed there until the day I left active duty.

I became a trainer on artillery. Okay, how did I become a trainer? They gave me some extra training. No, I'm serious.

SI: Yes.

RC: How do you become an electrician? You go maybe take some courses, and then, you work as an apprentice. Then, you get trained, okay, and you become better and better. I became better and better and I became an instructor on artillery subjects. That became my job, as an instructor, and I never got shipped out. I stayed there the entire time, for the next year and three-quarters, as an instructor, okay, on artillery subjects. Why I was chosen?

SI: Yes.

RC: Again, random assignment. The only thing I could say is, I knew that what I was doing as what they called a TAC officer, I was not enjoying it. I think the Captain knew it and maybe a job opening came up. He didn't ask me. He just transferred my rear-end over to that other department. They never asked me. They just did it, okay, but I think he knew I was not enjoying what I was doing.

SI: Would you have to create punishments for people and stuff like that?

RC: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: Yes.

RC: Like I say, it's like you were the person being punished and, now, all of a sudden, two weeks later--you go home on leave and you come back--now, you're the "grand inquisitor." Is it inquisitor?

SI: Yes.

RC: Yes, you become [fifteenth-century Spanish Grand Inquisitor Tomás de] Torquemada.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, yourself--just, why? I just did not enjoy it. I also did not feel like I was learning anything, because I was not really doing artillery. When I got to the other department, I became artillery, because I was working with the weaponry. Working with the students, you were just bossing the students around. I wasn't learning artillery--because, if I ever thought I was going to Vietnam one day, I need to learn artillery even better and practice on it. I wasn't doing any of that.

If you're going to be going to combat, I wanted to know that I had even more training and actually went out and practically exercised with units and shot cannons and worked with them. I wasn't doing any of that. Here, at least, at the other department, I was working with the weaponry. I learned the weaponry. I knew how to take it apart and put it back together, with equipment. It's a little too heavy to handle by yourself. [laughter]

SI: Yes. What would a typically day look like when you were in the training department?

RC: Taught maybe about three or four classes every day to students coming in, okay, enlisted men. I emphasize I never trained officers, I only trained enlisted men. I was training people. You remember, if I go back, after basic training, then, I went to the advanced infantry training--I was working with people that were going through advanced artillery training as enlisted men. So, these were the guys who were going to be working on the gun crews. I helped training the gun crews, okay, and that's what I was doing. I was training the future gun crews, okay, of artillery.

I had to get some additional training myself, okay, not just surface training, but more in-depth training. I can turn that light switch on and off, but do I know how to go inside there and twist the wires and do other things? Well, artillery-wise, I learned how to do the twisting of the wires and everything. I didn't just do the outside shooting, I knew the intricacies of the gun. That took additional training.

During that additional training, I did some of the training myself. By the way, I was never trained by myself. Always, there were three or four others going through the same training. I don't want to make you think that this was just me and me alone. I was being trained a lot by senior enlisted men who were artillerymen for fifteen and twenty years. They were imbuing their knowledge upon a young officer, okay, who would be a trainer. These guys were very qualified to be the trainers themselves, but the military wanted trainers to be officers.

So, I got a lot of my training from them. Then, I would sit in on classrooms and watch other officers teach a class. After a while (in a while, I'm talking short periods of time), then, I would start teaching part of the class. Well, a guy maybe taught the first half of the class, and then, I would teach the second half of the class, just to get used to doing things. Then, eventually, you would take over the class and be the primary instructor of the class. In time, I became one of several primary instructors, teaching three, four, five classes a day.

You taught classroom instruction, and then, you took them out to the field and showed them how to use the stuff, real life. We gave tests. There were tests already there when I got there, but we always looked at the test, because, sometimes, questions would be ambiguous. So, you looked at the training materials. So, you became a teacher, in essence. You looked at training manuals, you looked at the teaching mechanisms, the way classes were taught and everything.

The Army also sent me to a week's class called an instructor's training class. They taught you how to be a presenter, okay, not just the teacher, but presenting skills, okay, because there are techniques of doing presentations before groups.

I've always got to laugh--one of the things the Army always did with us is, before any class, if you had any change in your pockets, if you had a pen on you and you were somebody who might sit there and click nonchalantly, all of that stuff came out of your pockets. If you were somebody who sat there and twirled his ring (people do that, if you ever notice), you took the ring. You took your watch off, because there was a clock in the room, because you weren't supposed to be looking down.

So, they took away everything because they didn't want you to do anything that was distracting students. It was a good [tactic] presentation-wise, because those were all things that distract. I sometimes go to presentations and I see people doing things. They're doing something that's distracting.

They taught us methods of asking questions. I always loved the Army--there's a thing called the armored personnel carrier, APC. Well, they always taught us a process called, "Ask, Pause, Call." Have you ever been in a class and the teacher asks a question, and then, they say, "Shaun, can you answer that?" Okay, what did all the other students do?

SI: They stop thinking about it.

RC: They stop thinking, exactly, very good, okay, "Ask, Pause, Call"--ask a question, pause, don't call on anybody, make everybody keep thinking. Then, you see if anybody raises their hand or, then, you call on somebody, but don't call on somebody immediately. I always remember, "Ask, Pause, Call," and it was a good technique. Even in presentations I did when I was working, after the Army, it's a good way of [presenting to] people. It was just good techniques and, again, abandon anything on your body that might distract students.

SI: I teach a little bit and it would be nice to be able to do that. We have some control, but we cannot take away rings and change.

RC: Okay. Well, no, that was for the instructor.

SI: Oh.

RC: Oh, I'm sorry. That was you, the instructor.

SI: Okay. I thought it was the students.

RC: No, I'm sorry.

SI: Yes.

RC: We didn't do that to the students. Well, frankly, the students rarely had very much on them anyway. Very few of them were married, because they were young kids. Sometimes, somebody had a watch. Okay, no, this was the instructor.

SI: Oh.

RC: They didn't want anybody--I have some change in my pocket--sitting up there jingling their change while giving a class.

SI: Rattle, yes.

RC: So, we emptied our pockets.

SI: Wow.

RC: You wouldn't have your chapstick, because [of the distraction]. Again, there were people, especially people with college rings, they'd be sitting there, sometimes, twisting them without even thinking. So, they wanted us to take away all things that would distract students. No, it was the instructor themselves I'm talking about, but these were things they taught us, okay, on presentation skills. It relates to any presentation. Sometimes, you see presenters doing things, "Why are they doing that? It's distracting," okay.

SI: Wow.

RC: They told us to keep a good voice level. Sometimes, you raise your voice, sometimes, you delay your voice. It was just a course on how to do presentations.

SI: As the war went on, did you notice any changes in your students, maybe their attitude towards military service?

RC: No, a lot of the students that we had were actually enlistees. There were draftees, but there were a lot of kids that had enlisted. So, there was always a mix of them. Students were brought to us by their sergeants that were in charge of their units. So, I always said we never really had any real discipline issues. Even though I was an officer, in the classroom, I tried not to play exalted, "I'm here as your teacher." If they're going to be punished or something afterwards, believe me, their sergeants would take care of them.

SI: Yes.

RC: So, we really rarely ever had any real disciplinary issues. Sometimes, if there was, and still, to this day, I always say, "You know what?" Sometimes, you just tell the kid, "Shut up," but, sometimes, you just waited for a break and you pulled the kid to the side. "Listen, you're being disruptive. You know what? Let's stop it, let's cut the crap." If the kid didn't do it, your sergeant's going to get you afterwards anyway. So, no, we didn't have too many, really, issues with that.

Sometimes, we had students that had more knowledge than us. On our tracked vehicles, I remember one time, I had a kid that worked as a diesel mechanic before coming in the Army. He knew more about the vehicle's insides than [I did], not the artillery portion, but he knew the mechanics of the vehicle, because he had worked as a diesel mechanic.

Sometimes, you got a kid like that and, again, you pull them aside, "Listen, you have knowledge there. We're not teaching you how to [fix engines]. This is not mechanics' school. This is artillery school. We're not teaching you how to take apart a diesel engine here. It's not part of the class. So, do not ask any questions related to the RPMs of the engine. That's not what our class is about."

That happened every once in a while, somebody had a mechanical background, but it wasn't [germane]. It didn't matter to our class whether it was a Cummins or an Allison diesel engine. "I'm not teaching diesel engines here--I'm teaching artillery. Mechanics are a different class."

SI: Your friend that you pointed out before...

RC: Yes.

SI: Was he also an instructor?

RC: No. We always laugh at this one--you talk about arbitrary assignments. Bob also had been assigned, just like me. We drove back to Oklahoma together from Philadelphia. He lived in Philly. I picked him up and we drove to Oklahoma together. Bob had dropped out of college. He had two-and-a-half years at Penn State. He was a zoology major.

So, we went back to Fort Sill. He also got assigned the same way I did, to an OCS detachment, to be what we called a TAC officer. About two or three months later, the same thing, he got assigned (we always love this) to the post's finance department, to the budget office. Now, what background Bob had in budgeting, we have no idea, but he got assigned to the budget office, okay, working with the people that ran the [budget]. There's still budgets; even though it's the Army, there were still budgets and things.

So, Bob got assigned to the budget office. Just like me, he stayed with the budget office for our full [tour]. He never got shipped out, either. He went and finished Penn State afterwards and he got his zoology degree. We always said, "What did zoology have to do with finance?" We have no idea in the world, but that's the way the Army works. You'd think you might've had a kid who went to accounting school, but, no, zoology?

SI: Wow.

RC: He wound up working at Wyeth Labs in cardiovascular research. [laughter]

SI: Did you have other duties at the base, outside your teaching duties?

RC: The answer is, yes, but to a very, very minor degree. No, I was an instructor. I was a teacher. As an officer, you got assigned to be what they called the duty officer, occasionally, but it wasn't anything. My job was an instructor-teacher. That was my job. You weren't assigned any other duties. There was none.

A couple of times during that time, I did, I searched--how can I say this? The Army sometimes would have things--like, I remember, one time, there was an accident on post. Besides the MPs' research, lots of times, the Army wants to inquire a little bit more. So, they would pluck an officer and say, "I want you to research something."

So, one time, I researched an accident for a couple of days of a military vehicle, not full-time, but I just read all the reports and gave what I thought my findings were, if they collaborated with the MPs' based upon [the available data], but those were just little, minor things.

One time, for a couple of days, I escorted a brigadier general around the post who was going to be going to Vietnam, because they wanted him to have an aide for a couple of days. I just got randomly selected to be that. We all had little things assigned to us occasionally, but, still, you had your job, was your job was your job. You didn't go moonlighting doing other things.

SI: Did you ever consider staying in the military?

RC: No, it wasn't my [thing]. No, I don't think [so]--as a career? No, it hadn't hit upon me that [way]. By the way, remember, I was a two-year draftee. I went in on February 2nd of '66, which means I would've left the Army on February 1st of '68. When I went to OCS, I was in the Army fifteen months when I finished OCS. Upon OCS graduation, you're obligated to...

SI: To do two more, yes.

RC: Two years. That's your obligation on accepting a commission, is a two-year assignment in the military. So, I already had fifteen months in the Army and my first fifteen months is now null. I don't want to call it null and void, but it meant nothing to my requirement. I now had a brand-new two-year requirement, fifteen months into the Army.

So, I extended myself voluntarily, if you think about it, because I could've been out in '68. I could've been wounded or dead--who knows? whatever. So, I actually stayed in longer than I anticipated. I wound up being on active duty for three-and-a-half years, okay, versus just two years. So, I did a decent amount of time, but, no, I didn't consider it as a career.

SI: Okay.

RC: No.

SI: You met your wife while you were in the service.

RC: Yes, once I was commissioned, you really had freedom, since I basically, very frankly, had a nine-to-five or nine-to-six job. Our teaching assignment, we taught courses and, every Saturday, we had tests when the courses were over with, okay, but the officers split [the] giving of the tests. So, I only had to give the tests about every three weeks, because we rotated. So, basically, out of every three weekends, I had two of the weekends totally free.

SI: Wow.

RC: When I left my assignment at five-thirty or six o'clock at night, I was done for the day. I had a nine-to-five job. Somebody once said to me they were going to go to Dallas. Dallas is 180 miles from Fort Sill. In Oklahoma, in Texas, you could drive that in about two hours and forty-five minutes. In New Jersey, that would take you four hours probably. It was wide-open spaces.

So, I went down to Dallas a couple of times with some of the guys. I eventually went to a dance at a Jewish educational center. I met a couple of girls and one of them was Bev.

SI: Wow.

RC: Met her and, again, so, I started going to Dallas on a lot of weekends. It was two hours and forty-five minutes to a three-hour drive. I had a car, so, I just left post. I did not leave in uniform. Once I left post, I left in my civilian clothes and I would go down to Dallas.

Every once in a while, we were given something called A&R, athletic and recreation, where you could get a half a day off a week, that the colonels [allowed]. So, I tried as best I could to do my A&R on Friday afternoons, which means, when I went to work, at twelve or one o'clock, whenever it is, I was finished for the day.

I would get in my car--I already had my clothes with me, I didn't go back to where I was living--and I just left Fort Sill. Let's say, if I left Fort Sill at one o'clock, I was in Dallas at four o'clock. I would stay until Sunday and, Sunday evening, I would drive back. I didn't have a lot of money and she lived with her mom in an apartment. Her brothers, older, were already married. Her dad had passed away.

She had a cousin that lived three blocks away from where her mom and her lived. They had a rec room and I slept in her cousin's rec room. It was cheap, didn't cost me anything. [laughter] I slept in her cousin's rec room for the evenings, and then, we would do things during the day. Then, I'd hustle back to Fort Sill. [laughter]

I think it only happened once, one time, there was a really, really bad storm at Dallas in the evening. It wasn't worth leaving, driving, torrential rains and everything. So, I just went to sleep and I got up at three o'clock in the morning, drove back to Fort Sill the three hours, got to my little apartment with my friend, Bob, changed clothes and went to work.

SI: Wow.

RC: I would never do that in this day and age.

SI: Yes.

RC: Not getting up at three in the morning and driving three hours.

SI: Was there much for you to do in the area, or did a lot of life center around the officers' club?

RC: Fort Sill had a fair amount of activities there. Actually, the officers' club, I didn't even want to join it. One time, then, we were having a party and I was forced to join it. The officers' club was, I thought, geared much more, excuse me, to drinking, which I wasn't into, and it was geared much more to people with families, which I didn't have.

Our own unit, we had a softball team, we had a basketball team. We just played other units. So, there were activities. There was a bowling alley on post and, again, there was a basketball court and there was a baseball field. So, you had activities. Sometimes, you just went home for the evening and just watched television and read.

We were two bachelors, Bob and I, living together. So, we cooked our own meals. We did our own wash. We had a washing machine and we just lived like two bachelors. That's why I say I didn't have a very glorious military career. I was working in an office as a teacher and I taught my classes.

When classes were over, you did some prep for the next day's classes or you observed other classes that you weren't teaching, okay, because, eventually, you wanted to teach that class. You would just sit-in as an observer, to see what the one person was teaching the class. You partook, in essence, in training. That's what I did a lot of.

SI: Particularly among the officers, but maybe with your students as well ...

RC: Yes.

SI: Did you discuss the war in Vietnam at all?

RC: Oh, it was always discussed, because we were always having people assigned to our section (I should say our department) that had just come back from Vietnam. So, it was always discussed. You had guys coming back. one of the sergeants that was my primary helper of me getting trained, I remember his name was Sergeant Naron, he had just come back from Vietnam. So, you saw guys. The Captain, the head of my little section, had just come back from Vietnam. So, we were always [aware].

It was always there, okay, and it was obvious where a lot of people were going. All this training wasn't going on because the Army just wanted artillerymen. You're being trained eventually [for war]. I'm sure some kids that I trained lost their lives. There's no doubt in my mind, okay, but I wouldn't know it, because once they left the unit, [contact was lost].

By the way, the Army was also selling weaponry to foreign countries. So, occasionally, I taught foreign students. I know I taught Canadian students several times. I taught students from Thailand a couple of times. I taught Vietnamese enlisted men, because the Army, they were selling military equipment to these countries. Where would you get the training? You come to Fort Sill. If you've got the weapon, you need to know about it, you come to the Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. So, you saw a wide variety of people.

Believe me, I may say I had a nine-to-five job, you kept busy. You kept occupied. You weren't sitting. I remember, somewhere, I have a picture of me, with my feet up on the desk, reading a book and somebody took a picture of me. It looked like I was just relaxing. I was actually reading classroom instruction booklets and reviewing them at the time, even though it looked like I was relaxed as could be. I was reviewing information, because we were always updating information.

Again, we were always looking at tests, because, every once in a while, we'd give a test and somebody would find a question that we didn't think was ambiguous, but it wound up it was a little bit ambiguous. So, we would throw the question out and come up with a question that [fit better]. We would test the question amongst our own peers and ask them, "What do you think of this question?" which any teacher would do on curricula, okay. When you know something so well, you don't see the ambiguity, sometimes, in something, but somebody who you're trying to teach says, "What do you mean there?"

Okay, so, this one picture, I'm actually working pretty hard, looking at classroom information, and, yet, I look like I'm just sitting there relaxing. We kept occupied. The Army didn't let us sit still--and neither did my mother or father when I was young in the diner, [laughter] didn't let any moss grow under you, whatever the phrase is.

SI: You and your wife got married just before you were released from active duty.

RC: Yes, we got married before being released from active duty, yes. She actually lived at Fort Sill for a couple of months.

SI: Okay.

RC: That's ...

SI: Oh, that is a painting of your wedding?

RC: Well, I look so much darker then. Each of our kids, at the local high school here, went to art classes. Our daughter surprised us. We didn't even realize it. Our daughter took one of the pictures out of our wedding album and Dawn did a picture. She drew that from the picture. That's not a picture. That's art.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, that's an art piece there, but she copied it from looking [at a picture]. The art teacher showed them how to sketch things, and I think our son did the other one. That's my wife's father and her oldest brother, when her oldest brother was, like, six or seven years old, done in black and white. So, both of those, obviously, we have the actual pictures.

The one of Bev and I, it was supposed to be a surprise. We never knew she was doing this. One night, we went to high school for, like, a parent-teacher meeting. They were displaying things in the hallways that the kids had done for artwork and that was hanging. Of course, we recognized the people in the picture.

We had no idea. Here, it's hanging in the high school, because the kids were displaying it to other students and we just happened to [see]. Nobody realized, "Oh, they're coming to a parent-teacher meeting and it's sitting there in the hallway." So, we actually saw it before. It lost the surprise on it. [laughter]

SI: It is very nice, both of them, very nice.

RC: Yes, the kids did them and some others. My son's got a [Dallas Cowboys quarterback] Roger Staubach one he did. He's a Cowboys fan, but that's another story.

SI: Did you decide to come back to New Jersey right away?

RC: Absolutely.

SI: Yes.

RC: And Bev still says, to this day, "If I'd have asked you to stay in Dallas, would you?" She never asked me. I guess, after being in the Army for three-and-a-half years, I just said I'd like to go back to New Jersey.

SI: You started working for Western Union at first.

RC: I started working. I have a cousin who worked for Western Union and he got me a job. He got me a job, yes. We needed some money coming in. [laughter] He got me a job. No, I did not deliver telegrams. It was still a telecommunications company. You did a lot of corporate communications. Back in those days, they called them Telexes and wires and everything there. So, I started working for them after I was released from active duty.

SI: Did you start at Rutgers right away?

RC: No, I went back to Newark State Teacher's College, but she was expecting. We didn't play that into the original plan. She was expecting. So, I couldn't go back to college. I still, at that time, thought I would be an algebra, geometry, trigonometry teacher. That was my brain thought there. So, I was working during the day and I was going to Newark State at night. I was usually taking three classes (or nine credits) a semester at night.

I can't remember the exact date, but, after two or two-and-a-half years at nights, because, don't forget, two or two-and-a-half years of nights only amounts to maybe one year of (I'll joke) "real college." Now, I got into sales at Western Union, having to do with their commercial communications and all kinds of private systems and everything. I realized that I was not going to become a teacher. That's when I--whether you use the word transfer or matriculate, okay--to Rutgers, and then, switched over to Rutgers. I am still very happy to this day that Rutgers accepted all of my classes.

SI: Wow.

RC: I didn't lose any credit. Well, they were all the early credits that you take in college. They weren't specific to a major. I still always remember, you had to have six credits in the fine arts, so, I took a music class and I took an art class. Of course, you took a basic English class and you had some basic math. So, when I got to Rutgers, they accepted all of my credits.

I even took a couple of classes in the [Army] (I was so busy in the Army), that there was a junior college in Lawton, Oklahoma, called Cameron Junior College. It's now Cameron University. I took, I think, two or three classes there in just general subjects. Rutgers also accepted the couple of credits I took when I was in the Army. I was able to go to school at night there. So, yes, I transferred. I think it was around '72, I transferred.

SI: Were you going to Newark or New Brunswick?

RC: No, I went to New Brunswick.

SI: Okay. Were you back living in Linden or were you living somewhere else?

RC: Well, originally, I was in Linden. We moved here in May of '72, to this house here.

SI: Oh.

RC: And I had a sales territory with Western Union, at the time, that was parts of Middlesex County. Even though our main office was in Newark, we had a little satellite office in New Brunswick, which was just what we call a public office, but I had a little desk there. So, it was nice and convenient. After whatever I did during the day working sales-wise, I could just hang out in New Brunswick on Church Street. It was 108 Church Street, I remember. I could hang out there, and then, literally drive three blocks over to Scott Hall. You know Scott Hall?

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, to go to Scott Hall. I used to park in a little parking lot diagonally across the street, behind a house, because I could get there earlier than a lot of students. Today, I believe, that's a small building, but, back in the '70s, there was a small parking lot there. I would just go there. I'd eat a sandwich while reading assignments in the car. I'd bring a sandwich with me and I started going to Rutgers at night. I'd start going at night.

I went to what they called University College, but it was all business courses, collective bargaining, management courses, psychology courses and, of course, eventually, advertising, marketing and sales technique courses and everything. That's when I transferred over to Rutgers. If you're going to ask me, "Did I do anything at Rutgers?" the answer was a hundred percent nothing. I did nothing.

[Editor's Note: University College at Rutgers, founded in 1934 to serve part-time students at Rutgers-New Brunswick, was merged into the School of Arts and Sciences in 2007.]

SI: Yes, I would imagine, yes.

RC: I did nothing. I worked during the day. I'm not complaining. I worked during the day, I went to classes at night. Okay, by the way, in-between there, I had joined a New Jersey Reserve unit. A couple months after I got out of the Army, I joined the Reserves.

I will tell you, frankly, I enjoyed the Reserves more because I could earn a couple of extra bucks. Every three months, I got about 350 dollars from the Reserves. I wasn't earning a lot of money and I was a new father. So, the Reserves put a couple of extra bucks in my pocket. For every meeting of four hours, I made a first lieutenant's pay. So, when I was in the Reserves, I was making, like, eleven or twelve dollars an hour, if you want to call it. So, I joined the Reserves.

So, the Reserve unit was in Edison, on Woodbridge Avenue, not far from Middlesex College. So, once we moved to Freehold, Edison was convenient to Rutgers and the New Brunswick office was convenient to Rutgers--but I didn't have any college life. The year when I finished college, Rutgers went to the NCAA Finals--I never went to a basketball game. I go to basketball games now.

[Editor's Note: The Rutgers Men's Basketball team played in the 1976 Final Four, losing to Michigan.]

SI: Yes.

RC: There was no time. As I like to say, by the time I finished college, I had a house, a wife, two children--extracurricular activities did not exist, yes. They just didn't, and neither did they for my brother, commuting to Newark from Linden.

SI: Yes.

RC: So, neither of us had college lives. We're not complaining, but, if you ask me, "Did I do anything in college?" I never went. When I finished classes at night, I went home, got up the next day and went to work, yes--unconventional.

SI: Yes, but a lot of veterans I interview do go that path.

RC: Yes.

SI: I was wondering, do any of your professors stand out in your memory?

RC: Getting through Rutgers, I relate it, in my brain, to the same as OCS. It was an endurance. Could you stick it? You've got to remember, I graduated high school in 1964, I got my BS in January of '77. That's twelve-and-a-half years. Of course, a few of them were in the Army, but it was just an endurance, that I said, "I want the degree, I'm going to keep going until I finish."

When you're going at nights and you're four or five years into going at nights and you look down at your credits and you say, "I really only have a year-and-a-half's worth of college," it takes a while. It wasn't until towards the end, "Hey, I've got enough credits that I look like I can graduate one day."

I should have graduated in the Spring of '76, but I was lacking one course that I needed for my major and it wasn't offered that semester. So, I had to go back for the Fall of '76. So, my degree

says I finished on January 25th of '77. Don't ask me where I was on that date, I have no [idea]. It probably was just the last day of class, that they arbitrarily picked it. So, I actually thought I would've graduated [in 1976].

I went to summer school, like, two times. I could've graduated sooner if I had gone to more summer school. If you're familiar, summer school, you went every night of the week for, like, two-and-a-half hours for three weeks. You could knock off a three-credit course, but I just wanted some [time away]. Between working full-time and a family and a house, I just wanted a little bit of time off. So, I didn't really go during the summers, where I could've finished earlier if I had, okay, but, sometimes, you just need a little time off.

Again, I was in the Reserves for a couple of years. I got promoted to captain while I was in the Reserves--it's one of the forms in here--but I gave up the Reserves. I didn't have a Reserve [requirement]. Most people, when they join the Reserves, would have the Reserve component. I had enough active-duty time that I had no Reserve obligation. In other words, I was in the Reserves because I walked into the unit and said, "Would you like a first lieutenant?" They look at me like, "God, we'd love to have a first lieutenant. We have so few officers."

I left voluntarily, because, after a while, between the Reserve meeting of every other week and going to school and buying the house, time was a crunch. So, I gave up the Reserves, which I really, in later years, say, "I wish I had stayed in, because I could've got a retirement out of the Reserves," if you did twenty years in the Reserves.

SI: Yes.

RC: But, I didn't think about it at that time. Now, I think about it, but it's too late. [laughter]

SI: Tell me a little more about your career after Western Union.

RC: Well, I worked for Western Union for eighteen years, until, one time, the company started having financial issues and things and they laid a bunch of us off, okay, including myself. They downgraded the company. So, at forty-two years of age, I was let go. They gave you six months of pay. It also was the same year that Dawn was graduating high school, so, it was a little bit of a pain, but I was only unemployed for--it was the only time in my life--six weeks.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about your career.

RC: Yes, I worked for the Western Union in telecommunications sales, dealing with corporations. People say, the old joke is, "Oh, what'd you do, deliver telegrams?" No, I didn't deliver telegrams.

I gave somebody, one time, an example of something that people didn't even realize. I said, "Do you watch ballgames, baseball games?" "Yes." "Okay, how do you think the baseball stadium gets the scores of other games?" "Well, the announcers announce them." "Okay, how does the

announcer get the scores?" Well, it turned out Western Union was one of the main components in Major League Baseball, where they had, if you were to look at it today, you would feed scores into a central computer, and then, it would disseminate it to everybody who's on the system. So, when the ballpark was getting scores, it was actually coming from Western Union.

SI: Oh.

RC: Okay, on what I call private [systems]. It delivered the message. It's almost like, today, on an e-mail, you could send an e-mail to twenty-seven people. Well, in a way, we had a private system, not a public. It was private in that you couldn't access it. E-mail is, like, almost public because anybody can get into it. These were private systems.

So, scores would be inputted into a computer, and then, disseminated to everybody on the system, which was every Major League park. That's how they got scores from other stadiums and everything. It's more sophisticated today.

So, there were a lot of private [systems]. What we were dealing with was private communications systems, a lot of corporations. One of them I always remember, a main company in Iselin named Siemens, which is a German-based company, they needed communications back and forth between them and Germany, okay, on what we call private lines, not just calling on a telephone.

So, that's what I was dealing with, was dealing with a lot of corporate communications. I was not delivering telegrams, okay, and did that for a number of years. Then, the company started having some financial issues. They merged with an ITT subsidiary and they laid us off, a bunch of us, in February of '88. So, I went job hunting.

I worked for a Sprint subsidiary for about a year-and-a-half called Telenet, okay; again, all dealing in corporate communications. I always say most people know something about a company because they make retail, public products, but there's so many things that are done in the world that are commercial, that are done between corporations. If you have a plastics company that makes something, Allied Chemical, they order products from other companies to make their products.

You might work for a chemical company. I remember, we had one customer, I always remember, was a fragrance company in Edison. What they did was, they had a laboratory and, if you made a product that was the greatest cleanser in the world, but it stunk terribly, they would make some fragrance that neutralized the smell. I'm only saying a lot of companies deal with things that most people don't have any idea what they deal with, and I dealt with a lot of those companies for communications purposes, end of story.

SI: Wow.

RC: Then, I went to Telenet. Okay, you want me to keep going?

SI: Yes, please.

RC: Okay, I was always involved in our company's 401(k) plans and, actually, my first IRA was at Western Union, just through a payroll deduction. One time, I saw something from Equitable and I thought this sounded interesting. I was up for a little bit of change in industry, but I was still in sales.

So, I joined Equitable, the best way to call it, as an insurance salesman, of which I did, on a scale of one to ten, I probably was a seven. I wasn't the best insurance salesman going, but I wasn't the worst. I made a living.

As part of the insurance selling, we were all securities licensed. I really enjoyed the investment and the business, you might want to call it. I eventually answered an ad (I'm really skipping time), believe it or not, in the Newark *Star-Ledger* for Prudential, was looking for marketing people who had licenses. I already had my licenses.

I joined Prudential, working for their mutual fund investment division, not as a salesman on the road, but as an inside support broker/customer service person. That's what I did for the last fourteen years of working. I always say I played with other people's money. I joined Prudential, taking care of, mostly, working with their customers on mutual funds and different things that needed to be done.

Again, just like with the artillery, as I became more senior and more in the job, I eventually was weaned off of, by management, the customers and, now, I was taking care of the salesmen and the brokers. By salesmen, I meant people that were Prudential employees selling their products. As brokers, I meant people who were selling Prudential products, but were not Prudential employees. Again, I'm talking investments only. I had nothing to do with insurance.

I spent years supporting people who wanted to sell our products. They needed to know about the products. They needed to know about the portfolios, the rates of returns. They needed literature. You just took care of them. That's what I wound up working [in] at Prudential for my last fourteen years of working. The last five years, I worked out of the backroom of the house here. It was great.

SI: Yes.

RC: Well, they had a number of issues, especially during wintertime, when storms [hit] and people didn't get to work and issues of things. So, they found out, one day, "If we can have some people working remotely, no matter what the weather is or road conditions in New Jersey, I have staff."

Since our children were both out of the house at that time, I had the perfect situation. I had no outside interference in the house. So, the last five years, I worked at the end of the hallway here. I got up in the morning, when work was over, sometimes, at six o'clock, I would yell to Bev, "Hi, Bev, I'm home." She said, "You already are home," and everything. [laughter] It was great working out of the house.

SI: Yes, great.

RC: That was a fast forward of things.

SI: Yes.

RC: And I finished working on December 31, 2010, voluntarily (with a little involuntary thrown in). [laughter]

SI: Do you think your education, particularly at Rutgers, but the total college experience, had an impact on your career?

RC: It had some impact. I think a lot of the impact, especially in sales and marketing, is the personality of the person themselves. I know somebody who was a fairly high sales manager in a company at one time--it's actually a relative--and he says, "You know what? Sometimes, I don't even care what the person's education is. It's the personality that means more to me." He says, "I can train you on a product, but I need people that can work with people, okay." So, actually, the Army presentation skills, believe it or not, helped an awful lot with that.

I think I had an outgoing personality. The education never hurt. Every time I ever put in a résumé, I always put Rutgers grad, I always put that I was an Army veteran and a captain in the artillery, military training always, indoctrination. So, I think it's a total package of it all helping.

I'm proud of my degree. I used the illustration earlier of endurance. I always felt that finishing college was like running a marathon--I don't have to win the marathon, I only need to finish the marathon, because it was a long endurance. Bev, the kids of today got it easy with computers. When I wrote term papers, I handwrote them out. She then corrected my grammar (and which "their" to use [laughter]) and took out redundancies, and then, sat down and did it on a typewriter. Kids today have it great. They do little word processors with spellchecks and everything.

Yes, the schooling, I think the schooling definitely helped. It took me years to realize how important it was to finish the school, and how proud I am to be a graduate. Last year, I saw a thing, the fortieth anniversary of the graduating Class of '77. Unfortunately, it was insignificant to me because I was with nighttime students.

SI: Yes.

RC: We came and we went. There was no college life. So, on one side, I'm proud of it and, the other side, just there was nothing; I had nothing to do with it. So, it's definitely a different era. By the way, both of our children went through college full-time, four years, and had college lives--probably did a little drinking that they didn't tell Mom and Dad about.

SI: Yes.

RC: But, definitely, graduating through a night program is an endurance and a different type of situation. So, it's hard sometimes for me to answer about your college life, because there wasn't.

SI: Yes.

RC: I came, I went. What is it, "*Veni, vidi, vici*?" "I came, I saw, I conquered."

[Editor's Note: The Latin phrase "*Veni, vidi, vici*," means, "I came, I saw, I conquered," and is attributed to Julius Caesar.]

SI: Oh, yes.

RC: I came, I saw, I conquered. I came to classes. I was sometimes in classes with some of the same people, okay, because they were taking [the same courses], but there was no great bonds, okay, because we all came and went. We didn't go to The Ledge [an on-campus recreation spot] after class to drink. We didn't go to football games on Saturday together. We didn't do any of that. You came, you did your classes, and you left. So, it's hard to answer some of the questions about a social life because there was no social life, didn't exist.

SI: You also maintain much community involvement. It looks like a lot of that came after you retired.

RC: Well, a lot of it was before, but it just more intensified after.

SI: Oh.

RC: Our synagogue here (that we're members of) is one of the supporters of a food pantry in Freehold, in Downtown Freehold. I helped in delivering and picking up things before I retired and I did things for that. I never worked at the food pantry, but, after I retired, I was able to (and still do) work at the food pantry. I'm at the hospital one day a week, usually. I've also started taking classes at Brookdale, which is the Monmouth County community [college].

[TAPE PAUSED]

RC: I was actually thinking of taking some courses at Rutgers. Then, I said, "If I'm only going to take one class, do I want to drive to New Brunswick and drive back to Freehold?" where Brookdale has an extension annex right here on Route 9 in Freehold. It's a four-mile roundtrip.

SI: Yes.

RC: Four mile round-trip versus driving twenty-two miles into New Brunswick.

SI: Yes.

RC: So, for the last four-and-a-half years, I've been taking one class every semester. This is actually the first semester I didn't sign up. My brother's had health issues with his heart bypass

stuff and I didn't, because I've been helping him do things. So, I didn't sign up for a class. This is the first time since the Spring of '14, so, the first time in five years, that I have not taken a class.

I never take them during the summer. I've taken every history class that Brookdale offers in Freehold, I've taken psychology, political science. Last year, I took a cinematography course. It's fun doing it and, since I'm sixty-five and over and a Monmouth County resident, they waive tuition.

SI: Great.

RC: They charge a student fee, but they waive tuition. So, I do that. I also play on two softball teams, but that's fair weather. I fish; that's fair weather. [laughter] I'm a fair-weather fisherman. I don't go out on the ocean when it's cold. [laughter]

I've always been involved in our synagogue. I was a trustee of the synagogue from 1990 to 2008, eighteen consecutive years of being a trustee of the organization, running about a million-and-a-half-dollar budget. As a trustee, you are responsible; you have a fiduciary [responsibility], I love that word. Well, I worked for investment; I had fiduciary responsibilities.

I am a trustee of the food pantry, okay, because, as the representative to the food pantry for the synagogue, along with the other churches and synagogues, I'm on their Board of Trustees. It's a very small, little board. We only run about a two-hundred-thousand-dollar annual budget, which is not a lot, but we still have to be cognizant of expenses and things.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record that we did not cover?

RC: I don't know. is there anything I wrote down here? I started scribbling things as I started remembering them.

SI: Yes.

RC: Oh, my brother and I have season football tickets.

SI: Okay.

RC: Okay. Do you ever go to any of the football games?

SI: Maybe one a year.

RC: One a year.

SI: Yes.

RC: Do you remember some of the on-field activities?

SI: Oh, you are on the cannon crew?

RC: I'm on the cannon crew.

SI: Yes, tell me about that.

RC: Oh, this is hysterical. Okay, pause that for a couple seconds.

SI: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

RC: Okay.

SI: You were just describing how you met John Nelson.

RC: Okay, so, we're walking through Sam's Club. Bob and I are walking through Sam's Club and he sees us. He sees our hats and he starts asking us some questions about artillery. He says, "I'm the chief cannoneer at the Rutgers games." Bob's a Penn Stater. I say, "And I'm a season ticket holder with my brother for the Rutgers games. Of course we know the cannon," okay, started talking to him a little bit. We have fun meeting him and everything. It wasn't even football season, whenever this was.

So, when the football season comes, I walk down from our seats, down to the edge of the stadium, to as close to the field as they're allowed to get. He goes by the nickname of Jack, same as--my brother's name is Jack, okay. I yell, "Jack." He doesn't hear me and somebody sees me waving. He tells Jack to turn around.

Jack Nelson walks over to the side, where the seats are, and he remembers me from Sam's Club. So, I start talking to him a little bit and everything. This happened over maybe two seasons. I would go down every other game, said hello to him, because I told him I was an artillery officer.

So, finally, one day, I said to him, "What do you got to do to get on the cannon crew?" He says, "Well, you've got to know certain things." I said, "Well, I'm an artillery officer, even though I haven't fired a cannon in forty years now." We came one day, he says, "You know what? Nobody leaves the cannon crew. They all love doing it. They all love doing it." It's just like the Scarlet Knight--you're a character on the field.

He says, "You know what? Give me your name and address and phone number and I'll put you on the waiting list." I said to him, "How long is the waiting list?" His answer to me was, "You are the waiting list." Probably another two years went by, and I would always go and say hello to him.

Last August, he calls me on the phone one day. He says, "Are you still interested in being on the cannon crew?" Bev says, "Why did I wait so long?" It probably took me about twenty seconds to answer him, rather than just saying, "Yes." "Okay, one of the guys on the cannon crew had a

stroke and is not coming back." He says, "Would you be interested?" Finally, after about twenty seconds, I said, "Yes."

Three weeks later, he comes to my house. Downstairs, I have a Revolutionary War jacket and a vest. In one of the rooms there, I have a three-cornered hat. You can see them if you want. This is the uniform of the [cannon crew].

He says, "Do you have white pants?" I said, "No, I don't have any white pants." Okay, he says, "You need to wear white pants." So, we ordered a pair. We bought a pair of pants online from Walmart. They said they were white, but they actually are a little khaki, but they were light enough. He says, "Back then, to dye pants cost money, because dyes cost money. So, your basic soldier wore just plain." So, I bought myself a pair of clear white, khaki-ish-looking pants and just the plainest shoe you could wear. That's the uniform.

I joined the cannon crew this year and I was on the field for every football game. I didn't actually fire the cannon once, okay, because there's, like, five different jobs and everybody's got to learn them and it's a little step process. My brother kept saying, "Push it to light the cannon." I said, "You know what? Let me ease into this." I turned out to be the powder carrier. I was the guy that held all the charges. When we fired the cannon, I got the next one ready. I didn't ram it down the barrel. Somebody else did that.

Now, you've got to remember, the cannoneering of shooting the cannon at the stadium, okay, which is loaded from the muzzle, is not the breech-loading that I learned. It's a different [method] and we don't shoot any projectiles.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay, so, I joined the cannon crew. For every game, I was on the field for the cannon crew. Let me tell you, before the games, if you walk around, just like the Scarlet Knight, everybody wants to take your picture. I never had to eat before going to a game, because everybody at almost every tailgate, "Oh, have something to eat." [laughter]

SI: Yes.

RC: And everything. So, never going to go hungry being a cannoneer and people took pictures with you and thanked you and everything. No pun intended, it was a real blast. So, I joined the cannon crew.

SI: Great, that is cool.

RC: Okay. Now, I don't have to buy a season ticket because I get in the game. They provide parking and press passes.

SI: Wow.

RC: So, I don't have to pay for parking.

SI: That is a sweet deal.

RC: Yes. Also, if they're losing 78-0, like they did against Michigan two years ago, I can't leave the game early. I've got to stay until the end.

SI: Yes.

RC: You know what? Everybody thinks you see the game really good because you're on the field.

SI: No?

RC: No.

SI: You are all the way at the end, in the corner, yes.

RC: We're all the way at the corner. The best viewing on any sporting event is usually to have some elevation. Where do all the sportscasters sit in any sport? They always have some elevation. When you're on the field at ground level, especially in football, it's mass confusion out there. It's twenty-two people running around, when they're at the opposite end of the field. When they're at the end of the field by you, you can see the plays better. Otherwise, I'm watching the game on the board and everything there.

One of the guys barely ever watches the game. I said, "Daryl, why don't you look at the games?" He says, "I don't really care about the football games that much." I said, "Then, why do you come here?" He says--what did he say? He said, "Where else can I shoot a cannon in public and not get arrested?" okay. He said, "I love shooting the cannon." So, he's not even interested in football, he just loves shooting the cannon.

Ironically, I am the only person on the cannon crew that actually has artillery experience and is actually a Rutgers graduate. The others are all reenactors, but, like this guy, John Nelson, he's been doing it for thirty-five years. So, just because he wasn't trained in artillery, he knows the stuff because he's been doing it so long and everything there. So, I'm the new guy, but it was a blast being the cannoneer on the field.

SI: Wow.

RC: Okay. Occasionally, you get your picture up on the screen there and everything. Everybody says hello to the cannon crew.

SI: That is great.

RC: Everybody loves [it] and we shock the hell out of a lot of people. I can't tell how many people say, "You know what? You shoot that thing, I jump out of my seat." [laughter]

SI: All right.

RC: But, that's how it started; it started at Sam's Club.

SI: That is a great note to end on.

RC: Can I add something else?

SI: Yes, of course, of course.

RC: In 2007, I got a letter in the mail, a formal looking letter, and said, "Are you ... " Our class was looking for people to come to reunions who graduated the Fort Sill school. Remember, I hadn't done anything in years with the artillery. I get a letter from a guy in Massachusetts who turned out to be one of my classmates.

He took the original list of people that were in our artillery class--we have a booklet that [was at] our graduation--and the cities we grew up in. He found out a lot of people live within forty or fifty miles of where they're born.

My listing says, "Linden, New Jersey." He knew all of our approximate ages, okay, because we were all nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old. He went to the White Pages and cross-referenced people's names. If you were Smith, it would've been harder, but I was the only [Cobin]. He found my name. Okay, he mails me a letter and says, "Are you Rich Cobin who graduated OCS in 1967? We're holding reunions at Fort Sill." So, he sent that to us.

So, I then contacted Bob, my friend, and we started going to reunions at Fort Sill. It's every late April or May and I've been going to the reunions. I became involved with the reunion organizers. I helped become one of the organizers of the reunions, believe it or not. I helped to become one of the organizers.

As of right now, for the last three years, I'm now a trustee, okay, with a budget, of the Field Artillery Association at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. So, I'm now involved, as a civilian, in the artillery education and school. They gave me an award called the Order of St. Barbara a couple years ago.

SI: Wow.

RC: Just showing that you're being involved, okay, because everybody in the reunion, we're all guys in our sixties and seventies. There's some guys that were active duty military and state career--a lot of them didn't--but we're all there for the goodness of the artillery in the long run. You notice it says, "Field artillery," so, it doesn't say missile.

SI: Yes.

RC: We go to reunions. These are pictures at the reunions. This guy passed away, but this guy was a World War II veteran. The reunion is for anybody that ever [served in artillery]. Notice, I have a shirt on that says, you could see, "Scarlet Knight" there.

SI: Yes, very good.

RC: Okay, the reunions are for anybody who ever went to the Artillery School. It's not by school year or class. It's just if you graduated the Artillery School, and this gentleman was one of the oldest people. He was a World War II veteran. He has since passed away and everything; started going to the reunions and the next reunion's in May.

One of the gentlemen that I just saw in a picture here, I was doing something one day--okay, it's this gentleman here. He's a retired colonel. This was the colonel of the unit there and this is me at one of the reunions. So, this gentleman, one day, at one of the reunions, saw--see, the artillery colors are red. Who else's colors are red?

SI: Rutgers.

RC: Rutgers. So, I was wearing a Rutgers shirt and he noticed it and he started talking to me. He grew up in New Brunswick.

SI: Oh.

RC: So, we became friends. He grew up in New Brunswick. He's four years older than me. He actually knew--my brother went to pharmacy school--my brother went to school with twin brothers who were from New Brunswick, but they had to go to Newark for college, even though they lived in New Brunswick. He was a high school classmate of twin brothers that my brother knew. So, we knew some of the same people. There's another artillery piece.

SI: Yes.

RC: So, he saw me with a Rutgers shirt. He doesn't live in New Jersey now, but he's a Rider graduate.

SI: Wow.

RC: So, you just meet people. These are just reunions of getting together. It's about having fun and being with people.

SI: It is interesting that there is still a lot of camaraderie.

RC: Absolutely, absolutely. Now that I'm one of the trustees, I'm more involved with it. I'll be going to Fort Sill in May, okay, for the reunion. It's a pain to get there.

SI: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This concludes the interview with Mr. Cobin. Thank you so much, I appreciate it.

RC: No, thank you.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/19/2024

Reviewed by Richard Cobin 4/2024