

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Ralph P. Stein

Conducted by Ms. Deb Barrett

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This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, May 17, 2011, with Mr. Ralph Stein at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Stein was born on July 29, 1923, in the Bronx, New York. He is a retired chemical engineer at Argonne National Laboratory and learned of the Veterans History Project through Joe Popowitch, reference librarian in charge of the project at this location. Mr. Stein has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

Life Before Entering Military Service

So Ralph, tell us a little about where you were living when you entered the service. What was your life like just before you went in?

I mentioned I was born in the Bronx. When I was eight years old we moved to Washington Heights in Manhattan. And I lived there almost my entire life until I moved away.

Just before you went into the service were you in high school, working?

I was in college at Pratt Institute. It's now known as Pratt University in Brooklyn. They had three major engineering courses: chemical, electrical and mechanical. They no longer have those.

So you were an undergraduate?

Yes. And I was drafted out of school. I had a deferment, but it lasted only a couple of months.

How old were you when you were drafted?

18.

Were you living at home at the time?

Yes, with my parents.

What was your family's reaction to your being drafted?

I can't recall any specific reaction. I think they were worried that I would end up in battle and come back either wounded or dead. But that didn't happen.

So you were 18 years old. That was 1941?

Yes.

Induction and Basic Training

Where were you inducted?

In New York City. And from New York City we went by either train or boat across the Hudson to go to Fort Lee.

I've got to tell you something that's kind of funny. I hope it won't offend you.

Everyone who went on that same route when they were drafted had the same story to tell about the sergeant. He would stand in front of us – there we were in our civil clothes. He'd look at us and say, "You think you're soldiers? You're not soldiers. You're shit!" So everybody knew him.

And that was ...

That was when I was drafted. I was in the Army at that time.

But you hadn't even got your military clothes yet, on your way to Fort Lee. So that was your first impression of what the Army was going to be like?

Yes.

When you got to Fort Lee what was the processing like?

I don't remember. Was it at Fort Lee? Probably – where we got our uniforms. We'd stand in line to go wherever they were handing out uniforms. And it was a bit difficult to get something that would fit. I don't remember any difficulties I had.

So it was just lines and they'd hand you things.

Yes. They'd ask your size and so forth. Which I could give.

What were your barracks like?

I draw a blank at the first barracks at Fort Lee. I don't remember anything. Maybe it was a bad experience. I don't know.

How long were you at Fort Lee?

I don't know. I don't remember.

Do you remember if it was a long or short time?

It was a relatively short time, compared to going on the train to Camp Pickett in the south for basic training.

Do you remember the state Camp Pickett was in?

One of the Carolina's.

So you went from Fort Lee to Camp Pickett by train. Was it a troop train or a passenger train?

It was a passenger train, but there were only soldiers on it. So it was a military train.

How long did it take you to make that trip? Was it an overnight trip?

Probably.

Do you remember what you did to pass the time?

No. I liked to smoke. I liked craps and poker.

So that's how you passed the time. Were any of your friends with you? Had any of your friends ...

You mean friends before the war? No. I was alone. I was lonely and scared.

You didn't know what to expect.

I don't remember if it was Fort Pickett or Camp Pickett – I don't remember if it was a fort or camp. There were at least two kinds of camps. One was a fort, which was older, and one was camp. This wasn't old. But there were barracks.

So when you got there and got off the train, were you right there at camp or did you have to be transported by bus?

I don't remember. I would guess we had to go by bus, but I don't remember.

What do you remember of the camp itself?

Much of the buildings, which were called barracks. I can visualize a little hill next to my barracks where the officer in charge had his office. I don't remember his name.

But I had an incident there. This may be a little bit out of time. I got a cold and was put in the hospital. They did that to prevent contagious transmission. While I was in the hospital I had applied for something – there was a program for students out of college with an engineering specialty, which you could apply for. I did that – I filled out a form. They would send you away from the barracks to a regular school – a regular university.

So you could continue your education.

But I missed that because I was in the hospital. I remember going to the captain – if he was a captain; I don't remember him at all – asking when I would get another opportunity to do this. He thought yes, I would; just to be patient. But before I got the opportunity to go to the program we were shipped to another camp. At this time we were losing the war, so they were anxious to get bodies up front.

So they sped up the process.

Yes. The camp I went to I think was in Youngstown, Ohio, or near Youngstown.

How long were you at Camp Pickett?

Not long.

Do you remember what you did there? Was it 8, 12 or 16 weeks?

Probably short – maybe eight weeks.

What did you do there?

We did the basic training, which was a lot of marching and exercising. Even though I was in the medical group we took rifle practice at the gunnery range. And I enjoyed that even though it was new to me.

You had never shot a gun before.

No. It goes back.

A long way.

You don't want to hear about it.

You said you were already destined for a medical ...

As I remember, I was in a medical detachment. So we took medical training including classes taught by doctors. We learned to name the bones in the fingers and other things like that.

How were you selected for that? Do you know?

I don't know. I don't know if I had a choice; I don't think I had a choice.

Did they look at the schooling you had and decided you would be able to handle this?

They must have, but I don't remember anything related to that.

We absorbed. There was a large group of us in basic training. Basic training consisted of exercising, rifle practice, marching – long marches – and so forth.

Was this your first time away from home?

No. I went to boys' camp, but I was much younger.

So you'd had the experience before.

I had experiences at boys' camp which helped me in basic training.

Like what?

Like sleeping in the same room with other soldiers, getting to know kids my age and so forth.

So all those social skills really helped you when you went in.

I was relatively comfortable in basic training, although at night I'd get lonely. I didn't have very good relationships with my parents. I'm an only child and I don't think they were that interested in me. That's what I remember. So I believe – I seem to remember welcoming being away from home. It was a good experience.

So you went from Camp Pickett ...

To another camp. I don't remember the name of that.

In Youngstown, Ohio.

Yes, in Youngstown, Ohio.

What was the purpose of this camp?

It was identified as the place from which we were going to be shipped overseas. We all wondered how fast this all went! What we were able to think of is we weren't winning the war, we were losing the war. So they were in a hurry to get us trained and get us overseas.

How did you hear about that? What made you think we were losing the war?

From the newspapers and from gossip. Some of the trainers in basic training were soldiers overseas who came back to educate other soldiers.

So that must have made you feel uncomfortable – the fact that we were losing and they were speeding up the training. You were still going through the training for the medical detachment, or was there something more?

I went to a specialist school for sanitary technicians. I didn't know [what] the main purpose was. I found out eventually – we were in a group to combat malaria among the combat troops overseas. There was a group put together – some of the pictures you saw. For example, there was a typewriter repairman who was part of our detachment and there were others.

I have something else which comes to mind. I had my first sexual experience in the town next to Youngstown. It was Sharon, Pennsylvania.

So your world was broadening a little bit.

Yes. I knew what to do, sexually, but I had no experience. I met this woman. She was wearing a black dress that was silky to the touch – I remember those things. And we ended up in a field where I had my first sexual experience. I feel ashamed of that. Because after it was all over I just left her.

So you were 18 at that time.

Yes. I was still 18.

This was when you were in Youngstown, Ohio. Other than that, what was your typical day like at the camp? What time were you awakened?

We would be awakened by a bugle with revile. Then we'd go off to the mess hall after we got dressed.

How much time did you have to get dressed? Did you have inspections at the barracks?

We must have, but I don't remember them.

You had breakfast.

The food was pretty good. The eggs were dry eggs which were cooked and had the texture of scrambled eggs. They were pretty good.

I got punished for something – for staying out late in the town. The punishment was to do KP – kitchen police. And here's what I remember of that. I don't know if the number is correct, but I peeled 500 hard-boiled eggs! That may be an exaggeration, but that's what comes to mind in the kitchen.

So you didn't stay out late again?

I don't think that stopped me from staying out. I don't really remember.

I learned to pick up girls. One girl I met was so young, and I wanted to go back to camp – I didn't want to be late. I found another soldier who looked like a nice guy and I turned her over to him. Sharon; Sharon, Pennsylvania.

So you were awakened by a bugle, got dressed, had breakfast. Then what? Was it exercising, classes?

This was a camp which was where soldiers were waiting to go overseas. So there was not that much basic training anymore. Instead we learned to play craps and so forth.

You learned other skills.

And we learned to go into town. There was a bus.

Did you have any responsibilities while you were there? Anything you had to do?

Aside from KP, no. I don't remember anything.

Do you remember how long you were there?

It seemed no longer than a month or two.
And from there we went by train to California.

That must have been a long train trip.

Yes, it was.

Was it all military on the train again?

Yes. It was a troop train. I remember falling asleep sitting on a seat in a railroad car and slipping to the floor so that my legs were up on the seat opposite me and my head was on the back chair – fast asleep. We got very tired.

Did you make stops along the way?

I don't remember.

I do remember coming from the town of Sharon back to camp. There was a bus – military bus – that took us. And I was holding on to a strap and fell asleep.

Standing up?

Standing up!

Leaving the States for Duty Assignments

Do you remember where you went in California – what camp it was?

I think it was Fort Mason. But I don't know if I'm remembering correctly. It was a fort, so it was relatively fancy. It was made of mason stone.

You knew you were going overseas at that point.

Yes. We were in California at the Pacific Ocean. Were we at San Francisco – I don't remember. I do remember eventually going on a troop ship.

Do you remember the name of the ship?

Yes. It was the USS Brazil – a former luxury liner.

Was it luxurious for you?

No! We slept in tiers with bunks on top of each other.

Were they bunks or hammocks?

We didn't have hammocks. We had hammocks on a bigger ship much later. I liked to sleep in the hammock.

So they were bunks like shelves.

Yes.

On that ship – the Brazil – we were right next to a latrine. There was a urinal and when we had bad weather the urinal would flood. It wasn't very comfortable.

Here's a thought that I remember. There were also enlisted men on the ship – both blacks and whites; not many blacks, but they were there. And there were officers. We ate in a big room standing up. The officers had tables with napkins and tablecloths and waiters.

At that time one of the friends I made was an Irishman who worked in a maritime union before he was drafted. It so happened the ship was run by Merchant Marines, not by the Army. And he knew some of the merchant marines. They were people he knew from the time he served in the Merchant Marines. So he was able to get us better food.

So there was a clear distinction between officers ...

Yes. And I really resented that. Politically I was always a liberal, and I thought this was unfair. I don't know what the justification was for giving these officers such luxurious accommodations compared to us. What's the justification for that?

So you ate standing up and they ate having all this wonderful service.

Right. And waiters!

Did you eat the same food?

I don't remember. I don't think so. We had to stand in line where the other soldiers would ladle out the food to you while you were standing up. And that area where we were standing would become a gambling area after the meals were finished. I remember that.

Did you have any duties while you were on the ship?

Guard duty. Believe it or not, I had a session with black soldiers who apparently were going to be truck drivers. I was assigned to guard them. As my liberal political nature came out, I made friends with these black guys. We had a good time talking. I loved jazz. My real love is classical music, but jazz. I loved jazz. Most of that was after the war. So I was able to talk about jazz with these black guys. They knew the same artists I knew. Everybody knew Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman.

How many men were on the ship?

Five-thousand is the number I remember. That's what I remember. It might not be accurate.

And where were you sailing to?

The first uncomfortable experience was a storm we hit – part of a typhoon. Everyone else on the ship was seasick except me. I just had a headache. Later on in civilian life I was a boater. I never got seasick. The whole ship – it was a huge ship – smelled of vomit. I remember soldiers vomiting in their helmets and throwing their helmets overboard. That would be punishable.

Because that was part of your gear.

We knew from gossip or whatnot that we weren't winning this war. So there was some concern – we were on a destroyer – until later on in the distance we saw this battleship. It turned out later to be a heavy cruiser, which escorted us all the way.

Did you know where you were headed?

We knew where we landed.

Where was that.

I can't remember the name of the island. It was a little island right next to Australia. I remember it being like a little New England town – Hobart was its capital. And there was a little railroad that ran. There I had my second sexual experience with a teacher who was an inhabitant of this little island.

When you landed at this island, what did you see?

As I remember we were let loose. We could leave the ship and come back at any time.

So this was just a stop-off.

Yes, on this little island. And then we went to Australia. I remember Hobart was the name of the capital of this island. We went to Fremantle, Perth, and another big town in Australia. We were in Australia for at least a month. It's where I learned to drink warm beer. I remember that.

Did you have any responsibilities while you were there?

I don't think we did.

What were your living conditions like while you were there?

Tents and cots.

Two men to a tent? Four?

Four or five, maybe more.

I'm getting a little confused in my memory, whether this happened in Australia. From Australia we went to India. I think it was in India where I experienced – it was still Bombay at the time and we stayed at a British camp. I can remember something like a scene I can see: We were escorted by two officers. Flight surgeons they were called. And there were employees of the British camp. And the British attitude was that white people don't do menial jobs. So they were done by coolies; I don't know if that's the right term for them.

And there is this scene vivid in my mind of these two flight surgeons inspecting the accommodations. There were coolies, if that's the right term; native people sitting on tables holding pieces of bread between their feet and slicing them. I remember that. And the officers, flight surgeons, objected to this kind of treatment for American soldiers, where the British thought that was normal for them. I don't remember what happened after that.

How long were you there? Was that your final destination?

This was Bombay. We were suddenly shipped out into what I considered the jungle – the interior portion of India. I didn't know until later that we were shipped out to this little town that had the name Lascarabad. That's a Muslim name, but there were Muslims in India.

The reason we shipped out was that the Japanese were threatening to break through Burma to get into India. So they shipped us out. We weren't combat troops. I don't know what we were going to do.

They wanted more bodies. How were you shipped out? Trucks?

Train. India had a bunch of trains.

So when you ended up in this town in the jungle were you in tents?

We were in tents, and we experienced a monsoon.

In a tent.

Yes. In the tents, and the tents were flooded. I can visualize combat boots floating in the tent. But two experiences I'll never forget: One was a bagpipe band by British officers while I was on guard duty. And I was in heaven listening to the bagpipes.

This was in the jungle?

This was in town. I described it as a jungle, but it was really a town, Lascarabad. And we experienced the monsoons there.

We also experienced something else, which was unique. We were looking up in the sky and there was this cloud that was coming in the opposite direction from the other clouds. They were locusts! And when they reached this town you couldn't walk without stepping on a grasshopper.

They told you were sent there because the Japanese were threatening ...

I don't know how we found out. I don't think we were told.

What did they tell you that you were supposed to do when you got there?

Just watch the bagpipers. I don't know. I don't remember anything.

How long were you there?

Maybe three or four weeks, then we shipped back.

Back to ...

Bombay.

While you were there, were you using any of the medical training they had given you?

That's an interesting question. I don't remember. Remember I told you I went to sanitary technician school. That was the malaria combat group – to do something about malaria. I don't remember getting a chance to do anything relating to malaria.

So was it just passing the time? Did you have responsibilities while you were there?

So far as I can remember, none. It was a British camp, and the British had this attitude not wanting white men do the job of brown men – the Indians. The British were awful to them.

What was your rank at this time?

At that time I got promoted to corporal, but I don't remember when that happened. Eventually I reached the rank of sergeant. That's skipping ahead.

So you were in India, listening to bagpipe music and experiencing monsoons. How long were you there?

Months – maybe a couple of months, maybe three.

How did you pass the time?

Gambling. They let us wander around. I wandered through Bombay, experiencing Indian music for the first time, which I found lovely.

And we experienced – I can't remember this guy's name, the typewriter technician. We were in town. You know, the animals walk around town, mainly cows. They're sacred. He got out in the middle of the road, bowing down and saying, "How now, brown cow." It really caused a turmoil.

We went in groups. And we witnessed, among other things, dances and music. Also, there was a group of people who whipped themselves. There's a name for that.

Self- flagellation.

Right.

Were you communicating with anyone back home?

Oh, we wrote letters and got letters back. Of course, the mail was very late. Gertrude – you saw the picture of Gertrude – I had big correspondence with her.

And Gertrude was ...

My first engagement – my first girlfriend. She lived in Bayonne, New Jersey. How did we meet her? She was with a friend, picked up by my friend and I in Central Park, New York. She came to New York to explore New York City.

So you corresponded with her quite a bit.

Yes. Long letters. Piles that thick.

Were your letters censored?

Yes, badly censored.

Were they censored both ways?

Oh, I've reached a random thought which I think is important.

This guy who was an alcoholic – Yurchak was his name. He was writing his girlfriend back home in a stenographer's notebook, which he kept. And he was a writer, so he could write very well. The censors refused to censor it, and they destroyed it. They said it was too long to censor. As I remember they destroyed it and he got very upset. As an alcoholic he really increased his drinking. Eventually he was transferred out to a hospital as an alcoholic. Al Yurchak. I remember that.

I wish I could remember the typewriter guy.

So the letters you got from home. Was anything in there censored to you?

Yes.

How did you know? Was it blacked out, or cut out?

Blacked out or scissored out.

At one time I sent a photograph of camels having sex, and the censor cut it out. He said it wasn't proper. The censors were usually officers.

I understand that mail you sent home could be censored because they didn't want anyone to know where you were.

But what they were censored coming back I don't know. I draw a blank.

You never knew what it was they had censored out.

No. You couldn't read it. I got copies of the letter from Gertrude, and it showed the censored parts.

What sort of things ...

Where we were, how many soldiers we were – every little bit of information the enemy could use would be censored.

You were in India ...

It seems to me a couple of months.

And from there, where did you go?

We got on a British freighter to go up the Persian Gulf. I remember the bread on the freighter was so damn good. I like soft, doughy bread. This was a commercial vessel – a Merchant Marine vessel. It wasn't a troop ship. And we slept in hammocks. It was my first experience sleeping in a hammock.

Were they still stacked like the shelves were?

No, they weren't stacked. We were much less populated

How many men were on the ship?

Maybe a couple of hundred. It was small.

That makes a big difference – about 10% of the size.

Yes. I don't remember much except the hammocks and the bread.

And we landed in a court in the Persian Gulf. Khurramshahr was the name of that. I mentioned that to Joe in the pictures. From there we shipped ...

At this time in our career we all had barracks bags. You'd stuff your clothes and stuff in it. They were big, and you'd lug them on your shoulder. So I remember the barracks bags from Kharramshahr being stacked, and I wondered if we'd ever see them again. But we were sent on a railroad to a camp in Iran, outside of this little city called Ahwaz. Everything was still run by the British. And we went into barracks. I was assigned to a general hospital. There was a big general hospital not too far from there. I didn't have any real medical experience. From basic training you don't expect much. I was still a sanitary technician. And I was assigned to an isolation ward in this hospital. There was a case of smallpox in this ward. I wasn't trained for this kind of thing.

I'll tell you an incident I remember. There was a nurse there – Irene Rent. How do you like that! I remember her name. She was very nice to me and I didn't have sex with her. I wanted to. But she couldn't get away. I did have privacy with her. I picked her up at the nurses' barracks. I got a jeep somehow and we went off. But we didn't have sex. I wanted to. But I was caught driving her back to the nurses' quarters by the colonel of the hospital.

He wasn't happy.

He wasn't happy. Nurses were for enlisted men. Irene Rent.

Did he give you some KP?

Yes. I got a punishment. He sent me to this medical detachment connected to a railroad battalion – the 711 railroad battalion.

He sent you to this medical detachment.

Here I had a chance to use some of my basic training.

So you had a chance to use your medical training. How did you use your medical training?

For example, we gave injections. And we'd have lines of soldiers lining up in the detachment building, and some of these big, husky guys would see us injecting. We'd inject one side and the other side at the same time.

Like a pin cushion.

And the guys would faint! Big husky guys.

Were these American soldiers?

These were American. It was an American camp. The 711 railroad battalion – maybe all the battalions – were run by Americans, not the British. That's what I seem to remember, but I may be wrong. So we had all American soldiers in this camp which was the 711 railway battalion.

What were your living conditions like at this camp.

Actually, I got promoted to the equivalent of the first sergeant of this medical detachment. That's when I had my own private digs in the back, which were unfortunately right next door to a prophylactic station. Do you know what that is?

No.

Soldiers coming back from leave having an affair with a prostitute, they would go to this station to treat themselves to hopefully avoid venereal disease.

So you were right next to that.

Yes. My private quarters, where I could hear them.

I'll tell you an incident. A sensitive incident for me – I'm Jewish, not a religious Jew, but I'm Jewish. I'm proud of being Jewish. And I hear this guy that happens to be almost a near neighbor of mine in Manhattan. He lived on Dyckman Street. I still remember that. Across from Tyron Park. There's a museum there. A religious museum. I can't remember his name. But when he came to this prophylactic station, drunk, and he cursed the Jews. I finally decided I would stop him from doing this. So I went into the room next to the station and tried to get him to stop. And I was attacked by the other soldiers in the detachment and we had a big fight.

Were they drunk too?

No, I don't think so.

I remember one guy who I was very friendly with who was a southerner. King was his name. His first name was King. He was always very friendly with me. But he thought I was going to hurt this guy. So he grabbed me from the back. I got away and started fighting. I picked up a bench. There were benches where people would wait for treatment. I picked up a bench and started swinging it.

How did the fight break up?

I don't remember. But it was bad enough that I had a broken nose. I insisted they call the lieutenant, Dillon, to look at my nose. And he was asleep by then. He came. He was a very nice guy. He was from Montana or something like that. Very tall, skinny guy with a cowboy accent. Very gentle. He had long fingers. He tended to my broken nose. It wasn't serious.

Were there any consequences to the fight?

No.

How did those guys treat you afterward? Did it affect your relationship?

I remember feeling uncomfortable. These were my comrades, and I was in charge of them being the first sergeant of the detachment. I remember feeling uncomfortable, but they seemed to forget it. I tried to tell them I wasn't going to hurt whatever his name was. I was just trying to get him to stop the anti-Semitic comments. American soldiers are pretty liberal. At least the ones I was associated with. They were sympathetic. I never experienced anything from being Jewish in the Army.

So you were in Iran ...

For two years. And was it hot! I still have a little diary I kept where I recorded the temperatures – in the 130's. It was very dry.

The desert.

Yes. And as a result of being dry, soldiers would sweat and the salt would remain in their cotton shirts. It would stink.

What did you do for dehydration?

We had a water supply. We had a water tower someplace, but I don't remember. Good question.

So you were there for two years.

We had breaks.

Were you able to go on leave somewhere?

I'll tell you. The most interesting one for me as a Jew, we had a furlough for a couple of weeks. We were still at a British camp in Israel – it wasn't Israel yet. It was a town. It wasn't a big city. It wasn't Jerusalem. It was next to the Mediterranean.

You were able to go there.

Yes. We drove there in a truck. It was Trans-Jordan in those days. We went into Basrah, Iraq. From Basrah up to Baghdad, and from Baghdad over the border to Trans-Jordan; then out into Palestine. It was named Palestine.

Right. It wasn't Israel until 1948.

That was a very pleasant trip because we had hotel rooms, not barracks. We were right on the Mediterranean and we could look right out onto the sea. I had another affair – with a Jewish prostitute. I never knew there were such things. Jews did not become prostitutes! And she invited me up to her place and we had sex. And she sent me home with an apple.

How long was the furlough that you had?

About two weeks. It was then or soon after that the war in Europe ended. And of course we celebrated.

Do you remember where you were when you heard?

It was the same place.

How did you hear the news?

We had radios and got newspapers. The famous newspaper, perhaps you know – *Yanks* – it was an Army newspaper. They printed the news. They were censored, but the parts that weren't censored were known to everyone – about the battles, who won and so forth. Then the European was over.

So you had been in the Army two years at that point?

I was in Iran two years. I was in the Army four years total.

So you heard the news ...

I want to tell you something. The European war was over. We knew there was still a war going on in the Pacific, and the Japanese were hard fighters – very hard, and cruel. So we immediately wondered what was going to happen to us. Were they going to ship us back to the States? And that's what happened. It was called the Green Project.

Returning to the States and Discharge

The Green Project?

Yes. I don't know where the 'green' came from. We were essentially flown home. American soldiers – 30,000 in the Persian Gulf command. Tel Aviv was the name of the town. I think there was an airport in Tel Aviv. And from there we flew to Cairo.

And the stupid stuff soldiers do. I had the chance to go on a tour of the pyramids. Instead we went to the bars in Cairo.

You were 19, 20?

Maybe 21. That trip home – 30,000 American soldiers, the Green Project. They were going to fly us home. They bragged later on – and I think it was worth bragging – that they didn't lose a man. We flew across the Sahara Desert in what was then DC3's – they were C47's, I think, was the designation.

I remember Oran, a town on the Mediterranean. There were these two girls with French soldiers, and they were the prettiest girls. They wore these very thin, clingy dresses. I got so jealous.

But we didn't stay in Oran. I don't know why we stopped in Oran. The eventual stopping place was Morocco. Then we transferred to another type of plane – a bigger one for more soldiers.

There were several false take-offs in Morocco – the planes had to be changed. We flew to islands off of Portugal.

The Azores?

Maybe the Azores. I can't remember. And we had luxurious flight accommodations compared to the C47. We sat on benches in the C47. I remember being able to look out the window in these other bigger planes. C54's, I think.

How long did all of this take – transferring from plane to plane?

Maybe a month.

Did you know for sure you were going home and not going to ...

By then the scuttlebutt came around that we were going to fight the Japanese. That's why we were being flown home. What else could explain this luxurious treatment on big airplanes. And we flew to the Azores, I think – I can't remember the name. I remember looking out the window and all I could see was ocean – water. And we finally landed in the Azores, if that was what it was. It seemed to be the Azores' land was level with the ocean.

And from there we flew to Newfoundland. I remember looking out the window and seeing these fish – pontoon – coming out of the water.

Porpoises? The porpoises and dolphins do that all the time – coming in and out of the water. They like to go near the ships.

I looked out the window and I could see them.

And we landed in Newfoundland. From Newfoundland there was another plane. And we went to a fort out on Long Island.

So you landed back in the United States.

Yes. We were now back in the U.S. And we were given 30-day furloughs. Was that welcome! We could go home.

By this time my parents ... Before the war I was living with them and had my own room. They rented a small apartment.

They sold the house and moved.

They rented the house. They owned the house in upstate New York, the cabin.

Did they know you were coming home?

Yes. We could write letters.

And that's when I broke up with Gertrude. You remember Gertrude. My parents had a lot of influence on that. They thought I was too young to get married, and eventually I decided I didn't want to get married.

And while I was home on the 30-day furlough they dropped the A-bomb. There was no more need to be concerned about fighting the Japanese.

So where were you ...

We were sent to a camp in Georgia which was a camp that specialized in parachute troops. I can't remember the name, but it was a town. That's where – you saw in my photographs, I can't remember her name. She was my date while I was down there, and we had sex. I was experienced by then, but still a young kid.

How did you get down to Georgia, to this camp?

It must have been a train. We didn't fly. It could have been a bus.

Was it a military train?

I don't remember. It might not have been. Because we were not that large a group.

Right. At this point everything was winding down. What were your responsibilities while you were down there?

By then I was promoted to a staff sergeant. I don't remember what I did except date what's-her-name. It was more than sex. It was a good relationship.

Were you doing teaching there?

I don't remember.

How long were you down there?

I think it was another month.

And then what?

Then we were discharged. The question came up – did we experience the same guy at Fort Lee!

I would expect that your discharge was a little bit friendlier.

Yes. But we still had the barracks bag. And I still have that barracks bag down in my basement at home. I stole somebody else's – it didn't have my name on it anymore.

So you were discharged down in Georgia.

I don't know if I was discharged there or back at Fort Lee.

So you were discharged, and then ...

Sent home.

And you were in the Army for ...

Four years.

Return to Civilian Life

When you went home, what did you do? Did you go back to college?

I enrolled back into the same college – the Pratt Institute.

Did you use the GI Bill?

Oh, yes! It took me through graduate school and whatnot until I ran out of money and had to stop. Without the GI Bill I wouldn't have done it. Maybe my father could have picked up some money – Pratt Institute was not expensive. It was in Brooklyn. It wasn't an Ivy League school.

So you finished in ...

Chemical engineering.

A graduate degree?

Then I was given a fellowship at Bucknell University where I got my masters. Did I pick up with the same girl? Toby. Yes.

So Toby was a fiancé at some point?

Yes. We were engaged. And she lost the ring.

Did you marry her?

No. I married Maggie, whom I saw yesterday. She came to visit.

I like very pretty young girls. I think she's 19 years younger than me. We didn't get married in a synagogue or church. We got married in my parents' apartment, which was in Riverdale, New York. It's part of the Bronx.

So you got married there?

Yes.

Did you settle down in New York?

Well, by then I'd already accepted a job – while I was still at Bucknell – to teach at the United States Maritime College, which is in the Bronx, also, on the south side. And I had one year there. The department head in essence fired me. He said I wasn't a good teacher. I didn't agree with him. I thought I was pretty good.

So what did you do after that?

Remember this was after the war. What I did was I applied to Columbia University. I was hired as part of the scientific staff to work on what was then the DuPont subcontract. This was related to the H-bomb. My liberalism didn't cover enthusiasm to take the job on the H-bomb. And I had to be cleared. I got Q clearance.

At the same time there was a competition for my services. I did very well at Bucknell. I had all A's.

I'll tell you what I think is an interesting story. One of the professors – his last name was Smith – was a southerner. And in the research seminar, professors were giving

talks. And he gave a talk. Right in the middle of the talk he says, “Now we come to the Nigger in the wood pile.”

My best friend then was Ed Von Holley. And we two were going to get him for that. So I don’t remember whether it was Ed or me; it was our turn to give a report on our research. I think Ed made his up. We think we said – we put into the talk – “And then came this Negro among the timbers.” And I was looking at Smith and he’s ...

And he just kept shrinking away!

And because of that – I was a very good student; he wanted me in competition with Columbia University. He was working at Maxwell House coffee or something. So I told him I applied to Columbia and hadn’t heard yet. He said, “Well, I want you down here with me. But if you want, I’ll try to intercede in your favor at Columbia.” And he did.

So eventually you ended up at Argonne National Labs.

Yes. While I was at Columbia on the scientific staff, working on Savannah River reactors – the reactors that made tritium and lithium for use in the H-bomb project. Here we had clearance and guards at Columbia. It was in a building on a derrick on 125th St. – walking distance from the shores of the Hudson. And that was an interesting job.

After that the project ran out of money. And I was hired by a company whose original name was Nuclear Development Associates of America. It was a small group. One of the big-wigs of the group I knew from meetings – professional meetings. So he offered me a job down there. It was in White Plains, New York.

Anyway, for a period I oscillated between the job in White Plains and the job at Columbia. They would hire me back and forth, back and forth, as the finances increased. Eventually I got tired of that and called another friend at Argonne and asked if there was a place for me there. He said, yes – come down. And that’s how I got to Argonne. 1962, that was.

And you retired, when ...

(inaudible)

You retired from Argonne.

Yes.

So do you have any friends you had back in the military? Have you kept in touch with anybody?

No, and I regret that. I’m not a very social person.

What about any groups? Did you join any veterans groups or participate in any veteran activities?

Liberal politics was my vent. And to me the veteran groups were too conservative and right wing. So I joined the humanist group – the Humanist Association of America. I still belong. I have friends there.

Lasting Impressions

How did your time affect your thinking about war in general; about politics?

Well, I don't think they changed that much. Because I was already a liberal, politically. I was not in favor of war.

The funny thing about that: When I was in Iran for two years, I was non-combat except for these possible Arab skirmishes. I don't know if they were really Arabs or not. I regretted that I was not in combat. I was 'macho.'

How did your military service affect your life in general – the decisions you made, the careers you went into, the choices you made?

I don't think it affected my life very much at all except to retain my liberal political leanings.

Is there anything we haven't discussed yet that you'd like to add before we finish?

I told you about the journey across the Pacific – hitting the storm. I told you about landing on the island just south of Australia. I told you all that. Spending time in Australia; learning to drink warm beer. Which I like! It brings out the flavor. I don't think I left out anything of importance.

In that case we'll finish. Thank you very much for sharing your story.

Thank you for listening to me.